

Language, Philosophy and Judaism  
in the Work of Emmanuel Levinas and Franz Rosenzweig

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“Tout parler est énigme.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Phenomenon and Enigma”, in: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, pp. 61-73, p. 69/“Énigme et Phénomène”, in: *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, pp. 283-302, p. 296.

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### Chapter III

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*für meine Eltern –  
Emma und Günter Richter*

*&*

*für Augusto*

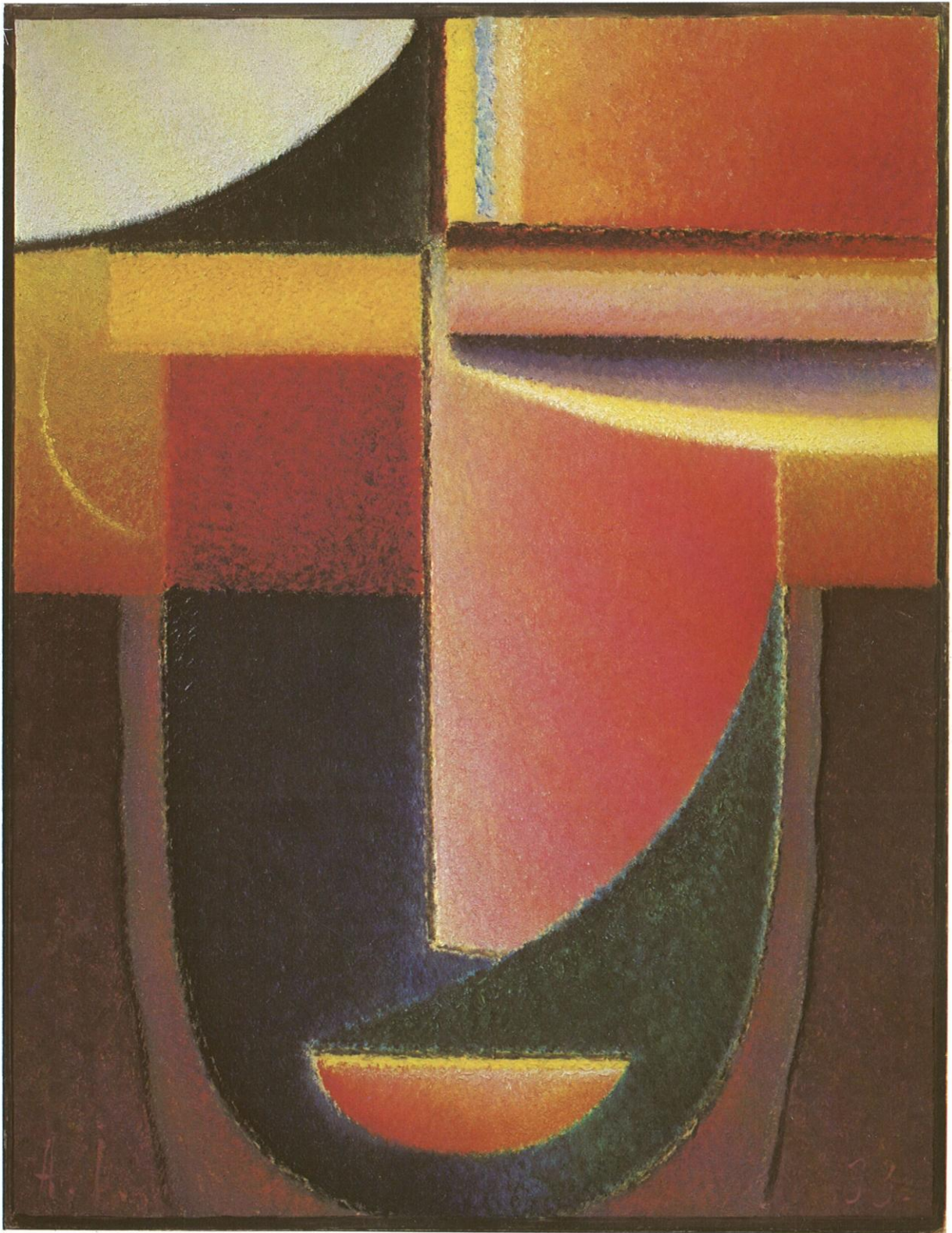


Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929)



Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995)





Alexej Jawlensky, "The word", 1933

## Introduction – The face and the beginning of language

I think that the beginning of language is in the face.  
In a certain way, in its silence, it calls you.<sup>2</sup>

In his abstract painting “The Word” (1933), reproduced on the previous page, the Russian painter Alexej Jawlensky represented a colorful face, looking frontally toward the observer.<sup>3</sup> The face is an important topic of the art of Jawlensky, who had been since his youth deeply impressed by the icon paintings of his home country. Jawlensky focused on the human face, especially in his later work: “A face is not just a face for me but the whole cosmos,” he said; “In the face the whole cosmos reveals itself.”<sup>4</sup> By elaborating this subject through endlessly different variations, the artist wanted to capture the *transcendence* of the face through the colors of his paintings. He wanted to express something that lies deeper than what eyes can see and, thus, transcends visibility: he wanted to paint the *invisible*. For Jawlensky, art is longing for God [“*Kunst ist eine Sehnsucht zu Gott.*”] and a kind of “worship” [“*Gottesdienst*”]. His paintings are “prayers with colors”,<sup>5</sup> as he said. The painting reproduced here takes this theme further by exploring the notion of the “word” and representing it through a *face* – however, it is a face that can hardly be recognized as such, being reduced to some lines and geometrical figures. In fact, this symphony of colors evokes feelings, sensations, and an *état d’âme* which go beyond what is represented.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the represented head is a sort of a *metaphysical* head that reveals the “face” of “the word”.

The connection between the “face” and the “word” lies at the center of the thought of Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995). As he points out in his article “Signature” in *Difficult Freedom*,

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<sup>2</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “The Paradox of Morality: an Interview with Emmanuel Levinas”, conducted by Tamra Wright, Peter Hughes and Alison Ainley, in: *The Provocation of Levinas. Rethinking the Other*, ed. by Robert Bernasconi and David Wood, pp. 168-180, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup> For detailed picture credits regarding the reproduced images see Table of Figures. For Jawlensky’s painting “The Word” see especially: *Alexej von Jawlensky. Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil Paintings*, Volume Two, 1914-1933, ed. by Maria Jawlensky, Lucia Pieroni-Jawlensky and Angelica Jawlensky, p. 506.

<sup>4</sup> Weiler, Clemens, *Alexej Jawlensky. Köpfe, Gesichte, Meditationen*, see illustration no. 18: “Ein Gesicht ist für mich nicht ein Gesicht, sondern der ganze Kosmos. Im Gesicht offenbart sich der ganze Kosmos.”

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, the citations can be found, after p. 26, at illustration no. 12 and no. 22, and at p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> On the topic of “the spiritual in art”, revelation and modern Jewish thought, see Braiterman, Zachary, *The Shape of Revelation. Aesthetics and Modern Jewish Thought*. Braiterman focuses on the art and art theories of Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee and Franz Marc (painters whose works are near to Jawlensky) and puts them in dialogue with the works of Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber.

“[t]he expressing of the face is language.”<sup>7</sup> In Levinas’s view it is precisely through the face that language as such becomes possible. It is the face that gives human beings the possibility of having a language and of being able to speak, as Levinas underlines in his interview with Philippe Nemo: “The face speaks. It is in this that it renders possible and begins all discourse.”<sup>8</sup> So, in a certain way, Jawlensky’s painting provides a visualization of the link between *word* and *face* that characterizes Levinas’s thought. This little detour to modern art allows us to introduce the concept of the *face*, by situating it in a broader artistic context which emphasizes the connection between face, language and transcendence. In fact, the link between art and the concept of the face goes even further, as formulated by Levinas: “Perhaps art seeks *to give a face to things*, and in this its greatness and its deceit simultaneously reside.”<sup>9</sup>

According to Levinas, the face cannot be seen as such. It is beyond representation and cannot be grasped through perception. The face is beyond visibility which makes it at first sight difficult to understand this important notion in Levinas’s work. Yet in this *beyond* of visibility lies the crucial feature of the face for Levinas, as Edith Wyschogrod points out: “Far from yielding an essence of the human or a universal moral law as a distillate of faciality [*sic*], the face transcends images, remains exterior to them.”<sup>10</sup> In this sense it can be conceived as the starting point of Levinas’s whole philosophy. It is a decisive impulse for stepping out of the framework of phenomenology, which he followed, for instance, in his doctoral thesis on Edmund Husserl (1859-1938).<sup>11</sup> Levinas explains the great significance of the face for his philosophy as follows:

The face is not the mere assemblage of a nose, a forehead, eyes, etc.; it is all that, of course, but takes on the meaning of a face through the new dimension it opens up in the perception of a being. [...] The face is an irreducible mode in which being can present itself in its *identity*.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Signature”, in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 291-295, p. 294/“Signature”, in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 405-412, p. 410.

<sup>8</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 87/*Éthique et Infini*, p. 82.

<sup>9</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Ethics and Spirit”, in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 3-10, p. 8/“Éthique et Esprit”, in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 13-23, pp. 20-21, emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup> Wyschogrod, Edith, “Corporeality and the Glory of the Infinite in the Philosophy of Levinas”, in: *Crossover Queries. Dwelling with Negatives, Embodying Philosophy’s Others*, pp. 29-44, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Levinas’s thesis on the topic *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology/La théorie de l’intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, published in 1930.

<sup>12</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Ethics and Spirit”, in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 3-10, p. 8/“Éthique et Esprit”, in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 13-23, p. 20. See further Perpich, Diane, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, chapter 2, “Singularity: The Unrepresentable Face”, pp. 50-77.

From the beginning, the face possesses for Levinas an ethical dimension which is connected to language and discourse. It is precisely through its specific physical appearance that the face holds this important *metaphysical* position in Levinas's thinking:

[...] those eyes, which are absolutely without protection, the most naked part of the human body, none the less offer an absolute resistance in which the temptation to murder is inscribed: the temptation of absolute negation. The Other is the only being that one can be tempted to kill. This temptation to murder and this impossibility of murder constitute the very vision of the face. To see a face is already to hear 'You shall not kill', and to hear 'You shall not kill' is to hear 'Social justice'.<sup>13</sup>

The face *speaks* and in its silent language it states what lies at the very basis of language and what provides the sine qua non for discourse: the commandment 'You shall not kill'. Hence, Levinas concludes that "language is not only a system of signs in the service of a pre-existing system. Speech belongs to the order of *morality* before belonging to that of theory."<sup>14</sup> These introductory remarks on the significance of the face and its connection to language outline the setting out of which Levinas's thought evolves.

In the following chapters, I will compare the notion of language and its various aspects in Levinas's work with the thought of Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929). Many essential ideas of Rosenzweig's work had a significant impact on Levinas's thought. Originally attracted to Rosenzweig's work by "the opposition to the idea of totality",<sup>15</sup> Levinas developed a thinking that is essentially influenced by Rosenzweig. The often quoted sentence of the foreword of Levinas's first major work *Totality and Infinity* (1961),<sup>16</sup> which states that Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* (1921) would be "too often present in this book to be cited",<sup>17</sup> is a highly interesting remark in this context. It underscores the fact that Levinas's discourse as a *whole* is so deeply penetrated by Rosenzweig's thought that he does not even try to separate it through quotation

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-9/p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 9/p. 21, emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, p. 28. Henceforth cited as TI/*Totalité et Infini. Essai sur l'extériorité*, p. 14, henceforth cited as Ti: "L'opposition à l'idée de totalité nous a frappé dans le *Stern der Erlösung* de Franz Rosenzweig, trop souvent présent dans ce livre pour être cité." On the critique of totality in the work of Franz Rosenzweig see further Mosès, Stéphane, "La critique de la totalité dans la philosophie de Franz Rosenzweig".

<sup>16</sup> Usually Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974) are regarded as his first and second major works because in these two writings crucial notions of his thinking are worked out in a broader context.

<sup>17</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 28/Ti, p. 14.

marks. The transitions to Rosenzweig's *Star* are thus fluent and inherent in the entire discourse of *Totality and Infinity*. In fact, as observed by Robert Gibbs, one could even say that Levinas's work would not have been possible without Rosenzweig: "Would Levinas's work be possible without Rosenzweig? No – for Rosenzweig permeates Levinas's schema and even his key concepts."<sup>18</sup>

Also in their biographies one can find remarkable parallels: for both thinkers, Judaism was not a mere private or doctrinal matter, but an element that deeply influenced their lives and thought. For example, Rosenzweig was the founder of the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt, an independent Jewish 'House of Learning' for adult education in Jewish culture, while Levinas worked many years as a teacher and director of the *École Normale Israélite Orientale* (ENIO) in Paris. Judaism was for both of them a lived experience, realized in concrete existence, and not just an abstract philosophical or theological thought. This fact is stated by Levinas in his reflections on Rosenzweig, where he points out that in *The Star of Redemption* "Jewish existence [...] itself is an essential event of being; Jewish existence is a category of being."<sup>19</sup> I will explain this important aspect, in the first chapter "Emmanuel Levinas and Franz Rosenzweig on Judaism and philosophy". This chapter deals in particular with the works Levinas dedicated to the interpretation of Rosenzweig's philosophy, i.e., two articles and a smaller text written as a foreword to Stéphane Mosès's study on Rosenzweig's philosophy *System and Revelation*.<sup>20</sup> These texts provide evidence of an ongoing confrontation with Rosenzweig's thought in Levinas's work. I analyze these texts and put them in the broader context of the discussion on the relationship between Judaism and philosophy in the work of both thinkers. This

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<sup>18</sup> Gibbs, Robert, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, p. 32. For more recently published comparative studies on Rosenzweig and Levinas, see also Fonti, Diego, *Levinas und Rosenzweig. Das Denken, der Andere und die Zeit*, and Anckaert, Luc, *A Critique of Infinity. Rosenzweig and Levinas*.

<sup>19</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "'Between Two Worlds' (The Way of Franz Rosenzweig)", in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 181-201, p. 183/"Entre deux mondes. La voie de Franz Rosenzweig", in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 253-281, p. 256, emphasis in the original.

<sup>20</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "'Between Two Worlds' (The Way of Franz Rosenzweig)", in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 181-201/"Entre deux mondes. La voie de Franz Rosenzweig", in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 253-281; "Franz Rosenzweig. A modern Jewish thinker", in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Outside the Subject*, pp. 37-50/"Franz Rosenzweig. Une pensée juive moderne", in: *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie*, Vol. 15, 1965, pp. 208-221, reprinted in: *Hors sujet*, Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1987, pp. 67-89; "Foreword", in: Mosès, Stéphane, *System and Revelation. The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, pp. 13-22. Reprinted under the title "The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig. Préface to *Système et Révélation* by Stéphane Mosès", in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *In the Time of the Nations*, pp. 135-144/"Préface d'Emmanuel Levinas", in: Mosès, Stéphane, *Système et Révélation. La philosophie de Franz Rosenzweig*, pp. 7-16.

offers the reader an overview of the spiritual connection between Rosenzweig and Levinas as the background upon which their thoughts developed.

The outlined aspects of Levinas's philosophy will be put into dialogue with Rosenzweig's work by taking into consideration the correspondence of Rosenzweig with Margrit (Gritli) Rosenstock-Huessy (1893-1959).<sup>21</sup> Gritli was the wife of Rosenzweig's friend Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (1888-1973) and had a love affair with Rosenzweig from 1918 until 1922. The extensive correspondence between Gritli and Rosenzweig was published in 2002. These letters provide a new impetus for research on Rosenzweig's philosophy and the complexity of his life. There can be no doubt that these letters are very important for adequate research into Rosenzweig's life and work; they give us the possibility to reread his oeuvre in new light.<sup>22</sup> The "Gritli"-letters offer thus a new approach to the work of Rosenzweig.

An aspect that has been less considered, but attracts more and more attention in the last decade of years, concerns the fact that Levinas's thought evolved in a twofold way: on the one hand, in his philosophical writings and, on the other hand, in his Talmudic lectures.<sup>23</sup> From the end of the fifties until late in his life, Levinas regularly held a Talmudic reading at the *Colloque des intellectuels juifs de langue française*, which were subsequently published in collections such as *Quatre lectures talmudiques* (1968) and *Du sacré au saint* (1977).<sup>24</sup> These texts, often neglected or presented as secondary to his philosophical work, are fundamental to elaborating the key notions of Levinas's philosophy. Therefore, the present thesis focuses on both text genres of Levinas's work in order to get an appropriate view of his whole work.

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<sup>21</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Die "Gritli"-Briefe. Briefe an Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy*, henceforth cited as *Gritli-Briefe*. For a review of this edition see the article of Michael Zank, "The Rosenzweig-Rosenstock-Triangle, or, What Can We Learn from 'Letters to Gritli'? A Review Essay". See also the critical review by Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, "Ein Éditionsskandal. 1053 neue Briefe von Franz Rosenzweig und viel zu viele Lücken", in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3.6.2002. Unfortunately, the letters Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy wrote to Rosenzweig have been lost or destroyed. Thus the edition can only render a partial image of their correspondence. Almost all the Gritli-letters were put on the internet by Michael Gormann-Thelen on behalf of the Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy Fund, see: <http://www.argobooks.org/gritli/index.html> (7.5.2011).

<sup>22</sup> The first significant contribution to research in this area was made by Ephraim Meir in his study *Letters of Love. Franz Rosenzweig's Spiritual Biography and Oeuvre in Light of the Gritli Letters*, published in 2006.

<sup>23</sup> See for example the studies of Nordmann, Sophie, *Philosophie et Judaïsme*, and Meir, Ephraim, *Levinas's Jewish Thought Between Jerusalem and Athens*.

<sup>24</sup> For an English translation of some of Levinas's Talmudic readings, see Levinas, Emmanuel, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. by Annette Aronowicz.

How much Levinas's Jewish and philosophical thinking are related can be further seen from his recently published notebooks, which he wrote during his captivity as a prisoner of war in the Second World War: the *Carnets de captivité* [captivity notebooks].<sup>25</sup> These notebooks provide a new view on the development of his work and, thereby, can be seen as crucial to the exegesis of Levinas's work.<sup>26</sup> This new edition provides an indispensable tool for scholars to obtain an overview of Levinas's work. In fact Levinas's seven captivity notebooks allow captivating insights into the laboratory of his thoughts.<sup>27</sup> First and foremost, a new style in Levinas's work can be found: that of aphorism, i.e. a thought in fragments, due to the circumstances of his captivity. Through its "broken" style, Levinas's thinking reflects the "reality fracture" he experienced and which he described at the beginning of his book *Existence and Existents* as "'a world in pieces' or 'a world turned upside down'".<sup>28</sup> While he later only rarely gave testimony of his experiences during the war, he described in his captivity notebooks very vividly the sufferings of monotony and the never-ending task of labor, the seeming standstill of time and the persistent feeling of being deprived of human dignity and individuality; it is above all the experience of having lost one's "face" – precisely the term that became so important in his philosophy.

In the second and third chapters, entitled "Time and Language" and "Language and Speech-Thinking", I confront the concept of speech in Rosenzweig's New Thinking (*Neues Denken*) with the notion of an 'ethical language' in Levinas's thought. Levinas elaborated the notion of an

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<sup>25</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets de captivité, suivi de Écrits sur la captivité et Notes philosophiques diverses*, henceforth cited as *Carnets*. In the following, all translations are mine, followed by the French version. For reviews of the *Carnets* see Weill, Nicolas, "Emmanuel Levinas, philosophe du désastre", in: *Le Monde*, 23.10.2009, p. 9, Richter, Silvia, "Der Weg zum Anderen beginnt in der zerbrochenen Welt", in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7.11.2009, p. 32, and Hanus, Gilles, "Recension 'Lévinas, Emmanuel, Œuvres complètes, tome 1, Paris, Grasset/IMEC, 2009'". See also the anthology *Levinas et l'expérience de la captivité*, ed. by Danielle Cohen-Levinas, which discusses various topics Levinas dealt with in the *Carnets de captivité*.

<sup>26</sup> The juridical quarrels between Levinas's children made it impossible for researchers to study and work with the unedited material of Levinas's work, which is kept at the *Institut de memoires de l'édition contemporaine* (IMEC), situated in a former abbey in Normandy in France. See the website of the Levinas archive at: [http://www.imec-archives.com/fonds\\_archives\\_fiche.php?i=LVN](http://www.imec-archives.com/fonds_archives_fiche.php?i=LVN) (7.5.2011) The publication of these writings is the merit of Michaël Levinas, the son and literary executor of Emmanuel Levinas. Under the aegis of Jean-Luc Marion, an international research team has been working together to publish the present volume, *Carnets de captivité*, which is the first volume of the collected works (*Œuvres complètes*) of Levinas. The whole edition will consist of seven volumes, three with unpublished material, and four volumes reediting the already edited writings, taking into account the unpublished, preliminary studies.

<sup>27</sup> Levinas started to write his notebooks in 1937. He continued to write them also after the war, until 1950, be it only two pages a year; cf. Calin, Rodolphe and Chalié, Catherine, "Préface", pp. 13-40, p. 13, in: *Carnets*.

<sup>28</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Existence and Existents*, p. 21. Henceforth cited as EE/*De l'existence à l'existant*, p. 25. Henceforth cited as DEE. Levinas speaks of "a world in pieces" ("monde cassé") and "a world turned upside down" ("monde bouleversé"), see EE/DEE, *ibid.*

‘ethical language’ especially in his second major work *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974), which reflects this question by using a special vocabulary such as “accusation”, “persecution”, “obsession”, “substitution” and “hostage”. These at first sight unusual philosophical terms play a crucial role in Levinas’s philosophy. By means of these notions he deploys his concept of an ethical language that attempts to express what he calls “the paradox in which phenomenology suddenly finds itself [*le paradoxe où se trouve brusquement jetée la phénoménologie*]”.<sup>29</sup> The paradox expressed here is the fact that ethical language seeks to thematize the *unthematizable*. According to Simon Critchley, “as so often in the later Levinas, it is a question of trying to say that which cannot be said.”<sup>30</sup> In order to find an adequate solution to this problem, Levinas dedicates a whole chapter in *Otherwise than Being* to the notions of the Said (*le Dit*) and the Saying (*le Dire*) and emphasizes the importance of the spoken, face-to-face word.<sup>31</sup> According to Levinas, the Said has to be broken up by means of a Saying which always allows for a new and different expression of that which has already been said. In the foreword of *Totality and Infinity* Levinas underscores this idea, emphasizing that

[...] the very essence of language [...] consists in continually undoing its phrase by the foreword or the exegesis, in *unsaying the said*, in attempting to restate without ceremonies what has already been ill understood in the inevitable ceremonial in which the said delights.<sup>32</sup>

Though the aspect of the Said and the Saying appears already in *Totality and Infinity*, it manifests its whole significance especially in the writing of *Otherwise than Being*, where Levinas emphasized the importance of language for his philosophy in a radical manner.<sup>33</sup> However, it is much debated in the research literature on Levinas whether this development of his philosophy

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<sup>29</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Substitution”, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Emmanuel Levinas. Basic Philosophical Writings*, pp. 79-96, p. 92.

<sup>30</sup> Critchley, Simon, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*, p. 185. On this topic see further Franke, William, *On What Cannot Be Said. Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts*.

<sup>31</sup> See Waldenfels, Bernhard, “Levinas on the Saying and the Said”, in: *Addressing Levinas*, ed. by Eric Nelson, Antje Kapust and Kent Still, pp. 86-97. In the following I capitalize, where necessary, “Saying” and “Said” in order to highlight the special notions of Levinas’s work. My use follows Levinas’s own writing of “Dire” and “Dit”, however differs from the English translation of *Otherwise than Being*, where one can find the use of small letters for these notions, i.e. “saying” and “said”.

<sup>32</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 30/Ti, p. 16, emphasis added.

<sup>33</sup> See Weber, Elisabeth, *Verfolgung und Trauma. Zu Emmanuel Levinas’s ‘Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence’*, and the work of Wiemer, Thomas, the German translator of Levinas’s *Otherwise than Being, Die Passion des Sagens. Zur Deutung der Sprache bei Emmanuel Levinas und ihrer Realisierung im philosophischen Diskurs*.



can be seen as partly influenced by the reception of Jacques Derrida.<sup>34</sup> The problem pointed out by Derrida in his essay *Violence and Metaphysics* highlights the question: how can one speak in the scope of a philosophical work about problems which can not be expressed in a philosophical manner?<sup>35</sup> Derrida claims that Levinas's ethical rupture with the ontological and phenomenological tradition can only be accomplished through a renunciation of the linguistic resources of that tradition. Therefore, Levinas's thought is for Derrida "consequently caught in a double bind, between belonging to the tradition and achieving a breakthrough that goes beyond the tradition."<sup>36</sup> I discuss this problem further in chapter two.<sup>37</sup>

In this context, two aspects are fundamental for Rosenzweig and Levinas: *revelation* and *language*. The latter is at the core of Rosenzweig's New Thinking, which is to be thought of as a "speech-thinking" or "speaking-thinking" [*Sprachdenken*], unlike the abstract thinking of academic philosophy, which is a thinking for no one because it speaks to no one.<sup>38</sup> In contradistinction, Rosenzweig explains that "the New Thinking's method originates out of its temporality. [...] Into the place of the method of *thinking*, as all previous philosophy developed it, steps the method of *speaking*."<sup>39</sup> The two main aspects on which this new method focuses are "[...] needing the other and, what amounts to the same, on taking time seriously."<sup>40</sup> The *living* speech is also central for Levinas's philosophy. In his view, "the banal fact of conversation [...] quits the order of violence. This banal fact is the marvel of marvels."<sup>41</sup> It is in the word spoken to a fellow man face-to-face where the idea of *peace* is realized for Levinas: "The face is what one

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<sup>34</sup> See e.g. the writings of the Levinas scholar Richard A. Cohen, who argues that Derrida's reception of Levinas's work was in fact "a total misreading" (personal communication to the author).

<sup>35</sup> Derrida, Jacques, "Violence and Metaphysics", in: *Writing and Difference*, pp. 79-153/"Violence et Métaphysique", in: *L'Écriture et la différence*, pp. 117-228. Regarding Levinas's work Derrida furthermore published "At this very moment in this work here I am"/"En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me voici" as well as *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas/Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas*. Levinas for his part argued with the philosophy of Derrida in his text "Jacques Derrida: Wholly Otherwise", in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Proper Names*, pp. 55-62/"Tout autrement", in: *Noms Propres*, pp. 81-89.

<sup>36</sup> Critchley, Simon, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>37</sup> See chapter II, 2. b), "In the heart of a chiasmus – Jacques Derrida's critique of language in Levinas's work and the problem of narrativity".

<sup>38</sup> Glatzer, Nahum N., "The Concept of Language in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig", p. 183.

<sup>39</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, "The New Thinking", in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 109-139, p. 125, emphasis added/"Das neue Denken. Einige nachträgliche Bemerkungen zum 'Stern der Erlösung'", in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *Der Mensch und sein Werk, Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. III, pp. 139-161, p. 151, henceforth cited as GS, followed by the respective volume number.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127/pp. 151-152.

<sup>41</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Ethics and Spirit", in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 3-10, p. 7/"Éthique et Esprit", in: *Difficile Liberté*, p. 19.

cannot kill, or at least it is that whose *meaning* consists in saying: ‘thou shalt not kill’.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the dialogue holds such a crucial position in his thought. According to Levinas nothing less than “the Infinite passes in the saying.”<sup>43</sup> Rosenzweig, on his part, stated the importance of the dialogue in a letter to Gritli as follows: “Word must be *response*, in order to be word.”<sup>44</sup> Since the mentioned categories, developed by Rosenzweig, also play a crucial role in the philosophy of Levinas, a close reading of both works may be helpful in shedding new light on the interpretation of Levinas’s writings, especially regarding the notions of the Said and the Saying, but furthermore also concerning the role of language and speech as such in Levinas’s thought.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, I connect these insights by drawing special attention to the phenomenon of the *voice*. In the research on Levinas’s work, the notion of the voice has been only marginally considered until now. However, this notion can nonetheless offer an interesting new approach for an innovative reinterpretation of Levinas’s later work, as I demonstrate. In this context, I rely on the recently increased research literature on the notion of the voice, which will be connected to the notion of the Saying (*le Dire*) in Levinas’s thinking in order to highlight the coming-into-being (the *mise-en-scène*) of subjectivity in his thought.<sup>45</sup> I hope my insights will give impulses for postmodern ethics.

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<sup>42</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 87/*Éthique et Infini*, p. 81. See on this topic the article by Butler, Judith “Être en relation avec autrui face-à-face, c’est ne pas pouvoir tuer”.

<sup>43</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, henceforth cited as OBBE, p. 147/*Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence*, henceforth cited as AQE, p. 188.

<sup>44</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “Gritli”-Briefe, p. 648, 26.8.1920: “Wort muss *Antwort* sein, um Wort sein zu können.” Emphasis added.

<sup>45</sup> See the works of Mladen Dolar, Dieter Mersch, Doris Kolesch/Sybille Krämer and Friedrich Kittler/Thomas Macho/Sigrid Weigel in the bibliography.

# Part I - Judaism

## Chapter I

### Emmanuel Levinas and Franz Rosenzweig on Judaism and philosophy

In spite of the years of terrible experience that already separate us from his day, [...] we recognize Rosenzweig as a contemporary and a brother.<sup>46</sup>

Contrary to appearances, one can't escape the feeling that life is not primarily an *organically incoherent* mass of phenomena, but that it has a *transcendence*.<sup>47</sup>

To start with an overview of the relationship between Franz Rosenzweig and Emmanuel Levinas, I present in the following the texts Levinas dedicated to the life and work of Franz Rosenzweig and place them in dialogue with Rosenzweig's own views on Judaism and philosophy. In order to situate Levinas's reflections on Rosenzweig in a broader framework, I begin by outlining the central themes of Levinas's early philosophical writings, e.g. *On Escape* (1935), and his views on Judaism prior to the Second World War. Special attention will be paid in this context to Levinas's statements on Judaism during his captivity in the Second World War. These aspects will then be further discussed by taking into account Levinas's text on Rosenzweig after the war.

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<sup>46</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Between Two Worlds (The Way of Franz Rosenzweig)", in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 181-201, p. 183/"Entre deux mondes. La voie de Franz Rosenzweig", in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 253-281, p. 257.

<sup>47</sup> Kertész, Imre, *Ich – ein Anderer*, p. 100: "Man wird das Gefühl nicht los, dass das Leben nicht primär eine *organisch zusammenhanglose* Masse von Phänomenen ist, wie es den Anschein macht, sondern dass es eine *Transzendenz* hat."

To provide some background information on what follows, I give a short summary of Levinas's biography. After becoming a French citizen in 1930, Levinas was called up for military service in 1939. However, shortly afterwards he came into German captivity, which he spent first in France (in Rennes, Laval and Vesoul), from 1940 until 1942, then from June 1942 until May 1945 in Germany, in Fallingbommel, a camp near Hanover in the Luneburg Heath.<sup>48</sup> Whilst Levinas survived the war, as did his wife and small daughter, who through the help of Maurice Blanchot could hide under a false name in a French monastery, his whole family in Lithuania fell victim to the Nazi persecution.<sup>49</sup> This led Levinas to the decision never again to set foot on German territory – a decision he remained faithful to throughout his life, without however abandoning the intellectual exchange with German scholars.

**1.) Levinas's early philosophical reflections on being and death in light of his  
*Carnets de captivité***

Levinas's captivity notebooks, the *Carnets de captivité*, are an impressive testimony of the difficult times he endured during his captivity and the manner in which he coped with them. In the *Carnets* one can find many statements which testify to the significance Judaism held for Levinas in these years. Further, it becomes clear that the experiences of the war and the captivity had a certain influence on his thoughts on Judaism and philosophy.<sup>50</sup> By means of the *Carnets* one can trace back to the point where Levinas's thinking begins, for example in the famous opening sentence of *Totality and Infinity*: "Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality."<sup>51</sup> This recalls the statements in the *Carnets*, where Levinas deals with the experience of the Second World War:

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<sup>48</sup> Calin, Rodolphe, "Notice sur les Carnets de captivité", in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 50. See also Malka, Salomon, *Emmanuel Levinas. La vie et la trace*, p. 80 ff.

<sup>49</sup> Malka, Salomon, *Emmanuel Levinas. La vie et la trace*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>50</sup> See Levinas's texts "Écrits sur la captivité", written shortly after the war, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, pp. 199-215, in particular "La spiritualité chez le prisonnier israélite", pp. 205-208, and "L'expérience juive du prisonnier", pp. 209-215.

<sup>51</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *TI*, p. 21/Ti, p. 5.

The real problem of the concentration camp situation is, on the one hand, the relativity of most of the peaceful values – only fools will continue to respect the peaceful values, property – health – respect; and yet, in this reversal of values, not to absolutely lose all morals. Practically, it is to conceive the possibility of a return to peace and responsibility to this peace.<sup>52</sup>

This statement, dated “déc. 1948”, can be found on the last pages of Levinas’s *Carnets de captivité*. It proves how much Levinas’s thinking was shaped as a reflection of the experience of war he endured; although it must be stated in this context that Levinas was in a labor camp and not in a concentration camp. The outlined issue is also taken up in Levinas’s philosophical notes, written during the fifties, mostly as preparatory notes for *Totality and Infinity*, where Levinas emphasizes: “War is a type of violence like no other. It destroys the entire order of morality – it is morally pure disorder.”<sup>53</sup> Hence, it seems to me that a line of thought can be drawn from his war experience to his first major philosophical work *Totality and Infinity*, published in 1961. This is a fact which had been assumed by researchers, but was only recently clearly revealed through the publication of Levinas’s *Carnets de captivité*.

However, also during the thirties Levinas’s work was influenced by political developments. He published, for example, many articles in various Jewish journals concerning the current situation of Judaism and the political situation in Europe, with special attention to the rise of European anti-Semitism. In these articles Levinas reveals an astonishing foresight into the consequences of the political changes. In his article “L’inspiration religieuse de l’Alliance”, published in 1935 in *Paix et Droit*, the journal of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, Levinas points out what it means to be Jewish against the background of National Socialism rising to power:

Hitlerism is the greatest trial – the incomparable trial – that Judaism has had to go through. [...] The pathetic destiny of being Jewish becomes a fatality. We can no longer flee it. The Jew is ineluctably

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<sup>52</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 189: “Le vrai problème de la situation concentrationnaire: d’une part la relativité de la plupart des valeurs pacifiques – seuls les imbéciles continuent à respecter les valeurs pacifiques, propriété – santé – respect; et cependant dans ce renversement des valeurs, ne pas perdre toute morale absolue. Pratiquement: concevoir la possibilité d’un retour de la paix et la responsabilité à l’égard de cette paix.”

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403: “La guerre n’est pas une violence comme une autre. Elle détruit tout l’ordre de la morale – elle est moralement le désordre pur.”

riveted to his Judaism. [...] [I]n the barbarian and primitive symbol of race [...] Hitler has reminded us, that *we cannot abandon Judaism*.<sup>54</sup>

Further, Levinas connects the historical situation with a particular state of mind: the sentiment of being riveted to one's being which one cannot escape. In his article "Martin Heidegger et l'ontologie", published in 1932, Levinas first used the French word "*rivé*" in connection with Heidegger's notion of "thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*).<sup>55</sup> According to Levinas's article, Heidegger shows "that *Dasein* is riveted [*rivé*] to its possibilities, that its 'right-there' is imposed upon it. In existing, *Dasein* is always already thrown *into the midst* of its possibilities and not positioned before them."<sup>56</sup> The simultaneous appearance in this article of Levinas's discussion of Heidegger's ontology and the first reference to the notion of "being riveted" does not occur accidentally in my view. Rather it marks the beginning of Levinas's impulse to move beyond the concepts of Heideggerian philosophy as an attempt at "getting out of being by a new path",<sup>57</sup> in the words of the concluding sentence of *On Escape*. In this way, Levinas seeks to work out nothing less than "a new definition of being".<sup>58</sup> The similar occurrence of the problem of 'being riveted' to being, on the one hand, and, 'being riveted' to Judaism, on the other hand, in Levinas's writings during the thirties is remarkable. Nonetheless it has to be underscored that these notions differ on one important point: in the first case, there is a *phenomenological* problem, in the second an *ontological*. The latter offered no chance to escape since the racial anti-Semitism of National Socialism offered no chance for the Jews to escape from 'being Jewish'. In contradistinction, Levinas outlines in his work, especially in *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise*

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<sup>54</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "L'inspiration religieuse de l'alliance", in: *Cahier de l'Herne*, ed. by Catherine Chalier and Miguel Abensour, pp. 144-146, here p. 144 and p. 146: "L'hitlérisme est la plus grande épreuve – l'épreuve incomparable – que le judaïsme ait eue à traverser. [...] Le sort pathétique d'être juif devient une fatalité. On ne peut plus le fuir. Le juif est inéluctablement rivé à son judaïsme. [...] [D]ans le symbole barbare et primitif de race [...] Hitler a rappelé que *l'on ne déserte pas le judaïsme*." Emphasis in the original.

<sup>55</sup> Heidegger develops this notion in § 29 of *Being and Time/Sein und Zeit*.

<sup>56</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Martin Heidegger and Ontology", p. 24/"Martin Heidegger et l'ontologie", p. 417: "Mais la disposition affective [*Befindlichkeit*] dont la compréhension ne se détache point nous révèle un caractère fondamental de cette dernière. Elle nous révèle le fait que le *Dasein* est *rivé* à ses possibilités, que son 'ici-bas' s'impose à lui. En existant le *Dasein* est d'ores et déjà jeté *au milieu* de ses possibilités et non pas placé devant elles." Emphasis in the original. The article has been re-edited in a slightly abbreviated and revised version in Levinas, Emmanuel, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl and Heidegger*, pp. 77-109, p. 99: "La disposition affective qui ne se détache pas de la compréhension – par laquelle la compréhension existe – nous révèle le fait que le *Dasein* est voué à ses possibilités que son 'ici-bas' s'impose à lui. [...] En existant le *Dasein* est d'ores et déjà *jeté au milieu* de ses possibilités et non pas placé devant elles." Emphasis in the original.

<sup>57</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *On escape*, p. 73/*De l'évasion*, p. 127.

<sup>58</sup> Ciaramelli, Fabio, "De l'évasion à l'exode: Subjectivité et existence chez le jeune Levinas", p. 564.

than *Being*, a possibility to escape from Being “by a new path,” as announced in *On Escape*.<sup>59</sup> By bringing Being under the wings of ethics and the infinite call of the other, which demands responsibility, Levinas presents ethics as *prima philosophia*. Ethics *precedes* ontology for Levinas. The claimed responsibility is fundamental in his eyes. Its demand cannot be rejected. Being is conceived of as being *elected* to a responsibility to which each man is called upon in his/her very own uniqueness. For this responsibility one cannot be replaced and, in this sense, man also cannot escape the responsibility imposed on him. However, the issue of being riveted to an infinite responsibility towards the other belongs to the realm of *metaphysics* for Levinas, beyond the ontological problem of ‘being riveted to being’.

The notion of being riveted to oneself is central for Levinas’s early thinking. It is present in his philosophical writings, first and foremost in his study *On Escape* (1935), but also in his articles on Judaism during the same period. Starting from “[t]he elementary truth that *there is being*”<sup>60</sup>, Levinas argues in *On Escape* that “the ground of suffering consists of the impossibility of interrupting it [being] and of an acute feeling of being held fast [*rivé*].”<sup>61</sup> He links his philosophical point of departure with a reminiscence of the First World War, emphasizing that, “[t]he being of the I [*moi*], which war and war’s aftermath have allowed us to know, leaves us with no further games [*plus aucun jeu*]. The need to be right, or justified [*d’en avoir raison*], in this game can only be a need for escape.”<sup>62</sup> Levinas characterizes this *need to escape* as “the fundamental event of our being”.<sup>63</sup> Through an analysis of need and its specific structure, Levinas intends “to renew the ancient problem of being qua being”.<sup>64</sup> In this context he defines existence as an identity which necessarily entails an *enchainment* of man to his or her identity, that is, to the fact of being one-self. Thus, to feel the need to escape lies actually at the heart of every further inquiry of being, as Levinas points out:

In the identity of the I [*moi*], the identity of being reveals its nature as enchainment for it appears in the form of suffering and invites us to escape. Thus, escape is the need to get out of oneself, that is, to

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<sup>59</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *On escape*, p. 73/*De l’évasion*, p. 127.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52/pp. 94-95, emphasis in the original.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53/p. 95.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60/p. 106.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56/ p. 99.

break that most radical and unalterably binding of chains, the fact that the I [*moi*] is one-self [*soi-même*].<sup>65</sup>

Levinas goes on, then, to analyze *pleasure* as the impulse to fulfill one's need. In order to flee oneself, man searches satisfaction in pleasure and is deeply disappointed because what he finds is precisely *not* the desired escape, but an even more intensified feeling of being held fast. In fact Levinas sees being riveted to oneself by means of pleasure as the *conditio humana* par excellence. He argues that "the satisfaction of a need does not destroy it. Not only are needs reborn, but disappointment also follows their satisfaction. [...] What gives the human condition all its importance is precisely this inadequacy of satisfaction to need."<sup>66</sup> As man finds himself in the desperate position that his desire is essentially insatiable, a feeling of *shame* arouses. It is precisely here, according to Levinas, that the human being discovers himself as such: "What shame discovers [*découvre*] is the being who *uncovers* himself [*se découvre*]."<sup>67</sup> Thus, the identity of being goes hand in hand with shame and the feeling of being held fast to oneself.<sup>68</sup>

In a second step, Levinas explains in *On Escape* the feeling of being riveted to one's existence by referring to the feeling that precedes vomiting: *nausea*.<sup>69</sup> He argues that

[...] this fact of being riveted, constitutes all the anxiety of nausea. In nausea – which amounts to an *impossibility of being what one is* – we are riveted to ourselves, enclosed in a tight circle that smothers. We are there, and there is nothing more to be done, or anything to add to this fact that we have been entirely delivered up, that everything is consumed: this is the very experience of *pure being* [...].<sup>70</sup>

By connecting nausea with the 'impossibility of being what one is' and, further, with the experience of pure being, Levinas confronts us with a paradoxical situation: this means, strictly

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 55/p. 98.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 59-60/pp. 105-106.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 65/p. 114: "Ce que la honte découvre c'est l'être qui se *découvre*."

<sup>68</sup> See Rolland, Jacques, "Sortir de l'être par une nouvelle voie", the foreword of *On escape/De l'évasion*, note 51, p. 84. Rolland notices that on the famous Renaissance fresco of Masaccio *Adam and Eva expelled from Paradise*, in the Brancacci Chapel in the church Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence, Adam covers precisely his *face*, not his genitals, because he feels ashamed of what he has done. Rolland puts this in connection with Levinas's description of nakedness as "the need to *excuse one's existence*", in: *On escape*, p. 65/*De l'évasion*, p. 114, emphasis added.

<sup>69</sup> On the topic of nausea see also the novel by Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Nausea/La nausée*, published in 1938, only three years after Levinas's *On Escape* (1935).

<sup>70</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *On escape*, pp. 66-67/*De l'évasion*, p. 116, emphasis in the original.



speaking, that being discovers itself precisely through the discovery of the *impossibility of being what one is*. The Heideggerian concept of ontology which is grounded in “*Dasein* [...] [*dem es*] *in seinem Sein um dieses Sein selbst geht*”<sup>71</sup> is revealed as insufficient with regard to the situation described by Levinas. This paradoxical situation finds an echo in the thoughts of Ernst Bloch. In fact, one of Bloch’s aphorisms in *Traces* [*Spuren*] draws attention to the uncanny feeling one has when one is all alone: “One is alone with oneself. Together with others, most are alone even without themselves. *One has to get out of both.*”<sup>72</sup> This experience reveals that it is simply “Not enough” – the title of Bloch’s aphorism – just *to be*. Bloch highlights this experience by pointing out the same *malaise* that Levinas had discovered in being:

By ourselves we are still empty. So we easily fall asleep with no external stimuli. [...] When one lies awake at night, that is hardly waking, but rather a stubborn, exhausting creeping in place. One notices then how unpleasant it is with nothing but oneself.<sup>73</sup>

However, unlike Bloch, for Levinas this situation is not just unpleasant, but impossible to support. Therefore, Levinas speaks of the “*need for escape* [*besoin d’évasion*]”<sup>74</sup> which is connected in *On Escape* with an implicit criticism of Heidegger’s notion of ontology. Although Heidegger’s work is not directly cited in the text, Levinas develops his reflections in constant discussion with his former teacher’s views. In this sense, as Jacques Rolland points out, Levinas’s statement in his introduction to *Existence and Existents* (1947) is also important a posteriori for his essay *On Escape* (1935):

If at the beginning our reflections are in large measure inspired by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, where we find the concept of ontology and of the relationship which man sustains with Being, they are also governed by a profound need to leave the climate of that philosophy, and by the conviction that we cannot leave it for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, p. 32: “*Dasein* is [...] ontically distinguished by the fact, that in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it.”/*Sein und Zeit*, p. 12

<sup>72</sup> Bloch, Ernst, *Traces*, p. 1/*Spuren*, p. 11: “Man ist mit sich allein. Mit den anderen zusammen sind es die meisten auch ohne sich. Aus beidem muss man heraus.”

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *On Escape*, p. 56/*De l’évasion*, p. 100, emphasis added.

<sup>75</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, EE, p. 19/DEE, p. 19. See also Rolland, Jacques, “Sortir de l’être par une nouvelle voie”, pp. 20-21/“Getting Out of Being by a New Path”, p. 9.

Thus, starting with his studies and articles in the thirties, namely *On Escape*, Levinas began to work out a new conception of being, which develops a notion of being ‘beyond’ the solipsism of the Heideggerian subject.<sup>76</sup>

It is noteworthy in this context that Levinas elaborates another notion during the period here analyzed, which has to be seen in connection with the above mentioned: the impossibility of dying.<sup>77</sup> This notion is conceived of as an *impossibility of not being*. Already during the thirties, in *On Escape*, where Levinas states that “*death is not the exit toward which escape thrusts us*,”<sup>78</sup> and later on in his *Carnets de captivité* and *Existence and Existents*, Levinas develops this notion. It is recurrently present in many passages of the *Carnets de captivité*, where Levinas notes: “Death is not an exit. It does not protect from the desperate engagement without return, from the fact of being absolutely devoted, of not being able to escape – which is precisely existence.”<sup>79</sup> In this context he alludes several times to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* in order to underscore an important aspect of this notion, that is, the fact that death does not free us from being: “Death is not an exit – it delivers to be, but it loses. The game is compromise. Hence the despair of Macbeth [...]”<sup>80</sup> And further, also in the *Carnets de captivité*: “Death. Not a solution by itself. 1.) The game is lost. *Macbeth*. Job cursed his birth: death would not save him.”<sup>81</sup> Levinas comes back to this aspect shortly after the war in *Time and the Other* (1947), where, alluding to *Hamlet*, he points out that “Hamlet [...] understands that the ‘not to be’ is perhaps impossible and he can no longer even through suicide, master the absurd.”<sup>82</sup> He further argues that

[t]he notion of irremissible being, without exit, constitutes the fundamental absurdity of being. Being is evil not because it is finite, but because it is without limits. According to Heidegger, anxiety is the experience of nothingness. On the contrary, if by death one means nothingness, is it not the fact that it

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<sup>76</sup> For a detailed analysis of Levinas’s discussion of Heidegger’s work see Peperzak, Adriaan, “Einige Thesen zur Heidegger-Kritik von Emmanuel Levinas”.

<sup>77</sup> On this notion see Ciaramelli, Fabio, “De l’évasion à l’exode: Subjectivité et existence chez le jeune Levinas”, pp. 556-557.

<sup>78</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *On Escape*, p. 67/*De l’évasion*, p. 116, emphasis added.

<sup>79</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 61: “La mort n’est pas une issue. Elle ne sauve pas de l’engagement sans retour et sans issue, de ce fait d’être absolument voué, de ne pas se pouvoir soustraire – qu’est l’existence.”

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 173: “La mort n’est pas une issue – elle délivre de l’être, mais on y perd. Le jeu est compromis. D’où le désespoir de Macbeth [...]” See also ibid., p. 181: “La mort n’est pas une issue.”/“Death is not an exit.”

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 173: “La mort. Pas une solution par elle-même. 1.) Le jeu est perdu. *Macbeth*. Job maudissant sa naissance: la mort ne le sauverait pas.”

<sup>82</sup> Levinas refers to Shakespeare’s plays *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* also in EE, p. 62/DEE, p. 101, and TO, p. 231/Ti, 256.

is *impossible to die*? [...] ‘To be or not to be’ is a sudden awareness of this impossibility of annihilating oneself.<sup>83</sup>

In contrast to Heidegger who emphasized in *Being and Time* the notion of a being toward death (*Sein zum Tode*) and described death as the possibility of the impossibility [“*Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein.*”],<sup>84</sup> since in death we get rid of all possibilities, Levinas characterizes death as the impossibility of the possibility of dying. This line of thought can be traced back in Levinas’s work to the time during the war, as his *Carnets* demonstrate.<sup>85</sup> It is taken up in *Totality and Infinity* (1961) in the notion of a being *against* death, in contrast to Heidegger’s being *toward* death: “To be temporal is both to be for death and to still have time, *to be against death.*”<sup>86</sup> Thereby Levinas distances himself clearly from Heidegger’s notion of a being toward death, as Marc Crépon has pointed out.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas cites again, with similar wording as in his earlier writings, the experience that ‘death is not an exit [*sortie*]’, referring to the example of *Macbeth*:

Suicide is tragic, for death does not bring a resolution to all the problems to which birth gave rise, and is powerless to humiliate the values of the earth – whence Macbeth’s final cry in confronting death, defeated because the universe is not destroyed at the same time as his life.<sup>88</sup>

In his captivity notebooks Levinas repeatedly speaks of the “impossibility of dying [*l’impossibilité de mourir*]” as well as of “the impossibility of death [*l’impossibilité de la*

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<sup>83</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Time and the Other*, pp. 50-51 and p. 73, henceforth cited as TO/*Le temps et l’autre*, p. 29 and p. 61, henceforth cited as TA: “La notion de l’être irrémisissible et sans issue, constitue l’absurdité foncière de l’être. L’être est le mal, non pas parce que fini, mais parce que sans limites. L’angoisse, d’après Heidegger, est l’expérience du néant. N’est-elle pas, au contraire, – si par mort on entend néant, – le fait qu’il est *impossible de mourir*? [...] ‘To be or not to be’ est une prise de conscience de cette impossibilité de s’anéantir.” Emphasis added. See further TO, p. 73, note 50, where the translator Richard A. Cohen points out that almost thirty-five years after *Time and the Other*, Levinas recalls again Hamlet’s famous question in the article “Bad Conscience and the Inexorable”: “To be or not to be: the question *par excellence* probably does not lie therein.” In: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Of God who comes to mind*, pp. 172-177, p. 177/“La mauvaise conscience et l’inexorable”, in: *De Dieu qui vient à l’idée*, pp. 258-265, p. 265: “Être ou ne pas être, ce n’est probablement pas là la question par excellence.”

<sup>84</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, p. 294/*Sein und Zeit*, p. 250: “Der Tod ist die Möglichkeit der schlechthinnigen Daseinsunmöglichkeit.” See further *ibid.*, p. 307/p. 262.

<sup>85</sup> See Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, pp. 61-63, p. 68 (“l’impossibilité de mourir”), p. 174, pp. 184-185 (“l’impossibilité de la mort”).

<sup>86</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 235/Ti, p. 84: “Être temporel, c’est être à la fois pour la mort et avoir encore du temps, *être contre la mort.*” Emphasis added.

<sup>87</sup> Crépon, Marc, “Vaincre la mort”, p. 39.

<sup>88</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 146/Ti, p. 155.

mort]”.<sup>89</sup> This aspect causes the horror of death for Levinas: “The horror of death is the horror of its ‘impossibility’.”<sup>90</sup> In this context the notion of the ‘lost game’ is the most important aspect for Levinas, as he underlines in the captivity notebooks: “The concept of the ‘lost game’ is for me the true concept of the impossibility of death.”<sup>91</sup> Accordingly, this entails for Levinas that death is not as strong as being:

I come back to the theme of death: The fact that death = lost game proves that *death is not as strong as being*. Even if it ends up being it does not exhaust all it [*life*] has done.<sup>92</sup>

In his studies published shortly after the war, *Time and the Other* and *Existence and Existents*, Levinas puts particular emphasis on several instances of man’s power regarding a possible “victory over death”<sup>93</sup> which he sees realized through *fecundity* or, more concretely, in “the possibility of [...] having a son”.<sup>94</sup> Levinas’s thoughts are in this context in a certain way similar to those of Franz Rosenzweig in *The Star of Redemption*, where Rosenzweig argues that “love is as strong as death”.<sup>95</sup> Hence, for both thinkers death does not have the last word. This does not mean however that death is completely unimportant. Rather it shows that for both thinkers death should not be conceived as the ultimate perspective of their works. As Levinas repeatedly notes: death is not a solution for the problem at stake which being imposes on man. Accordingly it becomes comprehensible why Levinas underlines in his later work that what is at stake is first of all the mortality of the *other* man.<sup>96</sup> It is not *my* death which frightens me but the death of the *other*. As Ephraim Meir points out

[f]rom this perspective, the encounter with death is less my time that threatens to end and that creates Heideggerian *Angst* as basis of all emotions, than the encounter with the Other, who is mortal and

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<sup>89</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 68 and pp. 184-185.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 185: “L’horreur de la mort est l’horreur de son ‘impossibilité’.”

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 184: “La notion de ‘partie perdue’ est pour moi le véritable concept de l’impossibilité de la mort.”

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 174: “Je reprends le thème de la mort: Le fait que la mort = jeu perdu prouve que *la mort n’est pas aussi forte que l’être*. Même si elle finit l’être elle n’épuise pas tout ce qu’il a fait.” Emphasis added.

<sup>93</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TO, p. 81 and p. 90/TA, p. 73 and p. 84.

<sup>94</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, EE, p. 96/DEE, p. 65.

<sup>95</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 169/*Stern*, p. 174. For the biblical reference see *Song of Songs*, VIII, 6.

<sup>96</sup> See e.g. the notion of death in *God, Death, and Time*, the last lectures Levinas held 1975-76 at the Sorbonne. I will discuss the notion of death outlined in these lectures in greater detail in chapter II, 1. b), “Death – Eros – Creation and the role of language”.

absolutely other, and whose mortality provokes my responsibility and causes an emotion, which is the source of intentionality.”<sup>97</sup>

This underlines further how the early works of Levinas, namely *On Escape* with its profound critique on Heidegger’s concept of ontology, already outline key notions, such as death, of his later works.

Another important aspect regarding the impossibility of dying is that it is derived from the idea that existence is not the experience of freedom as profiled in affirmation. Rather it is what we seek to evade in a movement of flight, what simply reveals paradoxically how deeply riveted we are to existence. Namely in *Existence and Existents* Levinas cites the notion of the “impossibility of dying” and illustrates it with a scene from the theater piece *Phaedra* (1677) of the French dramatist Jean Racine (1639-1699).<sup>98</sup> In his *Carnets de captivité*, Levinas elaborates at length on this scene, which he sees as the central passage of *Phaedra*, and connects it as an illustration to his philosophical argumentation.<sup>99</sup> It becomes clear from the notes in his *Carnets de captivité* that the aspect of the impossibility of dying plays a crucial role for the development of Levinas’s thinking, as he points out:

Besides, the ‘not-being-an-end’ of death does not mean the ‘future life’. The second part of the monologue *to be or not to be* is too precise and can have only a meaning as an image. As the desperation of Phaedra who found his father in the region of death. It is the fact that ‘the game is lost’. It is in the order of fulfillment – ‘everything is used up’ – that death is not an exit. To dissect this order of fulfillment – that’s the methodological side – the philosophical plan – of my philosophy.<sup>100</sup>

To conclude my illustrations of this notion, it is noteworthy that, alongside the example of *Phaedra*, Levinas quotes also several times in his *Carnets de captivité* a Biblical example in this context, which demonstrates the interweaving of literary and Biblical sources in his thinking: it is

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<sup>97</sup> Meir, Ephraim, *Identity Dialogically Constructed*, pp. 136-137.

<sup>98</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, EE, p. 62/DEE, p. 102. On this literary topic in relation to Levinas’s work see also the article of Critchley, Simon, “I Want to Die, I Hate My Life – Phaedra’s Malaise”.

<sup>99</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, pp. 61-63.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 62: “D’ailleurs le ‘ne-pas-être-une-issue’ de la mort ne signifie pas la ‘la vie future’. La deuxième partie du monologue *to be or not to be* est trop précise et ne peut avoir qu’une signification d’image. Comme le désespoir de Phèdre qui retrouve son père dans la région de la mort. C’est le fait que ‘le jeu est perdu’. C’est dans l’ordre de l’accomplissement – ‘tout est consommé’ – que la mort n’est pas une issue. Dégager cet ordre de l’accomplissement – c’est le côté méthodologique – le plan philosophique – de ma philosophie.”

the figure of Jonas which is outlined as an archetype of one who tries to flee and to hide before his destiny.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, the problem in this context is not *death* but *being*, according to Levinas, as he underlines in *On escape*: “[b]eing is ‘imperfect’ inasmuch as it is *being*, and not inasmuch as it is finite.”<sup>102</sup> It is precisely for this reason that Levinas develops a sense which goes beyond the pleasure of the satisfaction of personal needs through which man tries to escape from being: “A sense which is not a finality. *For there is no end, no term*. The desire of the absolutely other will not, like need, be extinguished in a happiness.”<sup>103</sup> In the notion of the *metaphysical desire*, nourished by the other and unfulfillable in its very essence, Levinas outlines at the beginning of *Totality and Infinity* a concrete possibility of escaping being:

The metaphysical desire tends toward *something else entirely*, toward the *absolutely other*. [...]; it desires beyond everything that can simply complete it. It is like goodness – the Desired does not fulfill it, but deepens it.<sup>104</sup>

This shows how Levinas elaborated concretely a way of getting out of being in his later works.

Coming back to *On Escape*, Levinas characterizes the main problem of being as a “condemnation to be oneself”, which reveals a being “driven back to the problem of one’s origin”.<sup>105</sup> It has been pointed out by Jacques Rolland that this central issue in *On Escape*, besides the influence of the Heideggerian notion of *Geworfenheit*<sup>106</sup>, has also another origin: “Jewishness – in the sense in which Nazi anti-Semitism was able to brutally unveil, during these years, its precisely non-remittable quality.”<sup>107</sup> He cites Levinas’s article “L’inspiration religieuse de l’Alliance”, published in 1935, in order to highlight the striking similarities in Levinas’s discourse. However, Rolland sees a clear difference between ‘being-riveted-to-being’ and ‘being-riveted-to-Judaism’: the latter is conceived of as an *election* in a positive sense, i.e. a service

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 62, p. 79 and p. 100. The example of *Phaedra* is also cited by Levinas in *Existence and Existents*, see EE, p. 67/DEE, p. 115, which underlines the continuity of this notion in Levinas’s thinking throughout the years.

<sup>102</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *On Escape*, p. 69/*De l’évasion*, p. 120, emphasis added.

<sup>103</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Meaning and Sense”, in: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, pp. 75-127, p. 127/“La Signification et le Sens”, in: *Humanisme de l’Autre Homme*, pp. 17-63, p. 63, emphasis added.

<sup>104</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, pp. 33-34/Ti, pp. 21-22, emphasis in the original.

<sup>105</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *On Escape*, p. 70/*De l’évasion*, p. 121

<sup>106</sup> Heidegger develops this notion in § 29 of *Being and Time/Sein und Zeit*. Levinas explains this notion as follows: “Heidegger fixe par le terme de *Geworfenheit* ce fait d’être jeté et de se débattre au milieu de ses possibilités et d’y être abandonné. Nous le traduirons par le mot déréluction.” In: “Martin Heidegger et l’ontologie”, in: *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl and Heidegger*, pp. 77-109, p. 99/“Martin Heidegger and Ontology”, p. 24.

<sup>107</sup> Rolland, Jacques, Annotations, in: *On Escape*, p. 74/*De l’évasion*, p. 131.

toward the other man and, in this sense, it is in fact the metaphysical identity of all men, according to Levinas.<sup>108</sup> Although Rolland's distinction seems appropriate to me, it does not however explain the striking similarities between Levinas's article "L'inspiration religieuse de l'Alliance" and his study *On Escape*, both published in 1935. It is in my view not a coincidence that Levinas elaborates on the same subject, i.e. the notion of being *riveted* to oneself, in his philosophical texts as well as in his articles on Jewish subjects in the same period. The notion of the impossibility of dying, which figures as a leitmotif in the early work of Levinas, holds a crucial place in this context. In his *Carnets de captivité* Levinas clearly gives the notion of the impossibility of dying a higher significance in his thinking than the Heideggerian notion of *Geworfenheit*, as he emphasizes: "What is important for me, is precisely the plan of the *il y a*. It is not the inexplicability of existence – the *Geworfenheit* – but the impossibility of dying."<sup>109</sup> To set aside for a moment the concept of the *il y a* (*there is*), on which I elaborate in detail in the following chapter,<sup>110</sup> prominent here is the aspect of *timelessness* and the fact of an existence beyond history. In this context, one has to think not only of Hermann Cohen's famous sentence "But we are eternal!" ["*Aber wir sind ewig!*"], but moreover to focus on Franz Rosenzweig's concept of time. Rosenzweig cites Cohen's dictum in *The Star of Redemption* with the highest respect for his teacher:

This triumphant 'but' – 'but we are eternal' – our great master proclaimed as the final word of his wisdom, when he spoke for the last time before a crowd about the relationship of his We with his world. The We's are eternal; before this triumphant cry of eternity, death is hurled down into the nothing. Life becomes immortal in the eternal song of praise of Redemption. This is the eternity in the moment.<sup>111</sup>

However, the notion of eternity is used throughout *The Star* with different accentuations: there is the notion of the eternity of the Jewish people, to which the cited statement of Hermann Cohen refers. In Part II, entitled "The path or the *ever renewed world*", eternity is seen as the 'fullness of time' which transforms the silent Self of Creation into a soul, which loves and is loved: "Eternity

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<sup>108</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *On Escape*, p. 76/*De l'évasion*, p. 133.

<sup>109</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 68: "Ce qui est important chez moi, c'est le plan même de l'*il y a*. Ce n'est pas l'inexplicabilité de l'existence – la *Geworfenheit* – mais l'impossibilité de mourir." Emphasis added.

<sup>110</sup> See chapter II, 1. a), "'When the world disappears' – night, death, and the discovery of the *there is* (*il y a*)".

<sup>111</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 271/*Stern*, p. 281. See also Meir, Ephraim, *Letters of Love*, p. 110, who elaborates on this notion in the context of Rosenzweig's letters to Gritli and his war experience. Meir points out that "[i]n the midst of a life-threatening war, Rosenzweig discovered the dimension of eternity."

is not a very long time, but a tomorrow that just as well could be today. Eternity is a future, which, without ceasing to be future, is nevertheless present. Eternity is a today that would be conscious of being more than today.”<sup>112</sup> This idea is further reflected in Part III in the notion of an eternal life beyond time, as expressed in the blessing after the lecture of the Thora: “Blessed be He who has planted eternal life in our midst.”<sup>113</sup> Rosenzweig’s notion of eternity is mirrored in a broader philosophical context in Levinas’s notion of the impossibility of dying. Although the latter has a negative connotation, as discovery of the “condemnation to be oneself,”<sup>114</sup> whereas Rosenzweig gives his notion of eternity a positive significance, both notions correspond in the experience of *timelessness*, i.e. in the fact of being-beyond-time. We cannot stop time, that is to say *die*, since there is no ‘time’ in eternity. For Levinas we cannot escape being, unless we bring being under the wings of ethics, as I have outlined above referring to Levinas’s notion of metaphysical desire. In the metaphysical desire we respond to the infinitely demanding call of the always exterior other. For Rosenzweig the notion of eternity, as realized e.g. in the eternity experienced in the Jewish community, is also a life beyond time and beyond history. Rosenzweig inverts the metaphor of the ‘wandering Jew’, in contrast to the Christian who has already found in Jesus the Redeemer, by emphasizing that the Jews, the “people of eternity [*das ewige Volk*],”<sup>115</sup> are *already* living beyond time, in a historical timelessness: “Its peoplehood is already at that place to which the peoples of the world only aspire. Its world is at the goal.”<sup>116</sup> The impossibility of dying becomes in this sense a positive connotation: it is conceived of as the eternity of the Jewish people. Furthermore, regarding the single human being, Rosenzweig links death and love in the way that we cannot escape death as we cannot escape the ‘commandment of love’.<sup>117</sup> As Diego Fonti points out, death and love are radical experiences for the subject, according to Rosenzweig, and are both linked to exteriority in *The Star of Redemption*.<sup>118</sup> For Levinas also we cannot escape the being, unless we bring being under the wings of ethics, which

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<sup>112</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 241 /*Stern*, p. 250.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355, see also p. 317/p. 372, see also p. 331. On the different notions of eternity in *The Star* see further Meir, Ephraim, “Le ‘très bien’ et la finitude de l’existence selon Rabbi Méir, la Kabbale et Rosenzweig”, p. 221.

<sup>114</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *On Escape*, p. 70/*De l’évasion*, p. 121

<sup>115</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 348/*Stern*, p. 364.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348/p. 365.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 189-191/pp. 195-197, Rosenzweig describes here the event of “the call” from outside, the “listening” of the I and the answer, which is “the commandment of love”. Regarding the connection of death and eros see further *ibid.*, p. 80/p. 77. I discuss in more detail Rosenzweig’s notion of the commandment of love in chapter IV, 2.

<sup>118</sup> Fonti, Diego, *Levinas und Rosenzweig. Das Denken, der Andere und die Zeit*, chapter two, pp. 157-215, “Der Tod und die Weisheit der Liebe: Unterbrechung und Überwindung des homogenen Seins”.



precedes ontology and links being to the *infinitely* demanding call of the other. Rosenzweig's notion of eternity can be seen therefore in connection to Levinas's notion of infinity.

## 2. a) "The mysterious voices of the blood" – The redemption of time and the presence of Jewish existence

Regarding the above outlined problem of being riveted to oneself, Levinas's article "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism" is of great importance. As Miguel Abensour points out, this small article, published in 1934, finds its completion in the longer study *On Escape* (1935).<sup>119</sup> In "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism", Levinas describes the dangers brought on by German National Socialism which "questions the very principles of [...] civilization."<sup>120</sup> The article has to be seen in the context of Levinas's discovery that his teacher, Martin Heidegger, was openly affiliated with Adolf Hitler's party, a fact that shocked Heidegger's former Jewish students who were deeply influenced by his thinking.<sup>121</sup> Against the background of the political changes in Germany and the irrevocable turn of Heidegger's thinking, the issue at stake was then how to further conciliate two mutually exclusive facts: to be "a Jew and a Heideggerian".<sup>122</sup> In an article published in 1987, entitled "As If Consenting to Horror", Levinas reflected on this problem and his difficulty in coping with it:

I learned very early, perhaps even before 1933 and certainly after Hitler's huge success at the time of his election to the Reichstag, of Heidegger's sympathy toward National Socialism. It was the late

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<sup>119</sup> Abensour, Miguel, "Le Mal élémental", p. 65.

<sup>120</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism", p. 64/*Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'hitlérisme*, pp. 7-8. The article first appeared in the French journal *Esprit. Revue Internationale*, Vol. 3, no. 26, November 1934, pp. 199-208, which was founded by the Catholic intellectual Emmanuel Mounier in 1930. For detailed information on the journal and its spiritual background see Winock, Michel, *Histoire politique de la revue 'Esprit', 1930-1950*, pp. 81-90.

<sup>121</sup> See for example Wolin, Richard, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse*. For Heidegger's engagement during the Nazi era, see his texts regarding this matter and other documents in *Nachlese zu Heidegger: Dokumente zu seinem Leben und Denken*, ed. by Guido Schneeberger. For an English translation of these texts see *German Existentialism*, ed. by Runes, Dagobert. See also Ott, Hugo, *Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zu einer Biographie* and Farías, Victor, *Heidegger et le nazisme*.

<sup>122</sup> Moyn, Samuel, *Origins of the Other. Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics*, p. 89. See further *ibid.*, chapter 3 "Nazism and Crisis. The interruption of a trajectory", pp. 88-112.

Alexandre Koyré who mentioned it to me for the first time on his return from a trip to Germany. I could not doubt the news, but took it with stupor and disappointment, and also with the faint hope that it expressed only the temporary lapse of a great speculative mind into practical banality. It cast a shadow over my firm confidence that an unbridgeable distance forever separated the delirious and criminal hatred voiced by Evil on the pages of *Mein Kampf* from the intellectual vigor and extreme analytical virtuosity displayed in *Sein und Zeit*, which had opened the field to a new type of philosophical inquiry.<sup>123</sup>

Levinas further points out that Heidegger, when confronted with the crimes of the Nazis, remained silent about what had happened, which reveals in his eyes “a soul completely cut off from any sensitivity”.<sup>124</sup> However, Levinas emphasizes that Heidegger was not *completely* silent, because:

There is a statement in a fine book on Heidegger by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe that Professor Miguel Abensour has pointed out to me. Martin Heidegger made it clear during one of the unpublished lectures from the cycle of four talks given in Bremen on technology in 1949, but it is quoted in the book by Wolfgang Schirmacher, *Technik und Gelassenheit*<sup>125</sup>: ‘Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry. As for its essence, it is the same thing as the manufacture of corpses in the gas chambers and the death camps, the same thing as the blockades and the reduction of countries to famine, the same thing as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs.’<sup>126</sup>

Levinas resumes in some sense his attitude to his former teacher, by concluding this passage with the following meaningful statement: “This stylistic turn of phrase, this analogy, this progression, are [*sic*] beyond commentary.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “As If Consenting to Horror”, p. 485/“Comme un consentement à l’horreur”, in: p. 48. See further Moyn, Samuel, “Judaism against Paganism. Emmanuel Levinas’s Response to Heidegger and Nazism in the 1930s”, pp. 27-29.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 487/pp. 48-49.

<sup>125</sup> Schirmacher, Wolfgang, *Technik und Gelassenheit. Zeitkritik nach Heidegger*, p. 25. For the original citation see Heidegger, Martin, *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge, 1. Einblick in das was ist (Bremer Vorträge 1949), 2. Grundsätze des Denkens (Freiburger Vorträge 1957)*, p. 27: “Ackerbau ist jetzt motorisierte Ernährungsindustrie, im Wesen das Selbe wie die Fabrikation von Leichen in Gaskammern und Vernichtungslagern, das Selbe wie die Blockade und Aushungerung von Ländern, das Selbe wie die Fabrikation von Wasserstoffbomben.” The citation is taken from part two of the *Bremer Vorträge*, entitled “Das Ge-stell”, pp. 24-45.

<sup>126</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “As If Consenting to Horror”, p. 487/“Comme un consentement à l’horreur”, p. 49.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. As a late echo of his former considerations, Levinas ends this article with a reflection on the attraction of diabolical thought: “The diabolical is endowed with intelligence and enters where it will. To reject it, it is first necessary to refute it. Intellectual effort is needed to recognize it. Who can boast of having done so? Say what you will, the diabolical gives food for thought.” See *ibid.*, p. 488.

Returning to Levinas's situation in the thirties, his article "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism" is of utmost interest. The text reflects on the spiritual background of National Socialism and analyzes its sources within the philosophical setting of the popular mentality at that time. It is neither an historical nor a sociological or ideological analysis of Hitlerism. Rather, it seeks to demonstrate by virtue of phenomenological observations, to unveil the world view which finds its expression in Hitlerism. The modest title "some reflections" (*quelques réflexions*) indicates that Levinas does not intend to give a complete analysis of the phenomenon at stake, rather he wants to work out some essential hints to grasp the *Stimmung* (attunement, mood) of Hitlerism. The notion of *Stimmung* holds a crucial place in Martin Heidegger's philosophy.<sup>128</sup> In *Being and Time* (1927) he underscores the great significance of this notion by pointing out that "in every case Dasein always has some mood [*gestimmt ist*]."<sup>129</sup> He develops further the notion of *Stimmung* in detail in his lectures on "The fundamental concepts of metaphysics" (1929/30) where he explains that "[a]ttunement belongs to the being of man."<sup>130</sup> According to Heidegger

[a]ttunements are *not side-effects*, but are something which determine in advance our being with one another. [...] An attunement is a way, not merely a form or a mode, but a way [*Weise*] – in the sense of a melody that does not merely hover over the so-called proper being at hand of man, but that sets the tone for such being, i.e., attunes and determines the manner and way [*Art und Weise*] of his being.<sup>131</sup>

Referring to the commentary of Miguel Abensour on Levinas's article "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism", I would agree that it is the concept of a certain *Stimmung* of Hitlerism, which Levinas seeks to demonstrate.<sup>132</sup> In his argumentation, the *bodily* aspect of man is particularly emphasized: "The body is not only a happy or unhappy accident that relates us to the implacable world of matter. *Its adherence to the Self is of value in itself*. It is an adherence that

<sup>128</sup> See Wetz, Franz Josef, "Stimmung", in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Wetz points out that the notions *Stimmung*, *Gestimmtsein* and *Befindlichkeit* overlap in Heidegger's work, *ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>129</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, p. 173/*Sein und Zeit*, p. 134: "[...], dass das Dasein je schon immer gestimmt ist".

<sup>130</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics. World, Finitude, Solitude*, p. 63/*Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt, Endlichkeit, Einsamkeit*, p. 96, emphasis in the original: "*Die Stimmung gehört zum Sein des Menschen.*"

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67/pp. 100-101: "Die Stimmungen sind *keine Begleiterscheinungen*, sondern solches, was im vorhinein gerade das Miteinandersein bestimmt. [...] Eine Stimmung ist eine Weise, nicht bloß eine Form oder ein Modus, sondern eine Weise im Sinne einer Melodie, die nicht über dem sogenannten eigentlichen Vorhandensein des Menschen schwebt, sondern für dieses Sein den Ton angibt, d.h. die Art und das Wie seines Seins stimmt und bestimmt." On the notion of *Stimmung* see further Bollnow, Otto Friedrich, *Das Wesen der Stimmungen*.

<sup>132</sup> Abensour, Miguel, "Le Mal élémental", pp. 38-39.

one does not escape [...].”<sup>133</sup> It is obvious that Levinas elaborates here on previously discussed topics. As outlined above, he first uses the notion of “being that is ‘riveted’”<sup>134</sup> in his article “Martin Heidegger and ontology” in 1932. This issue is elaborated in a new context in Levinas’s article “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism”, taking into consideration the particular ideology of Nazism. In this context, the notion of the *body* is of prime importance, as Levinas points out:

The importance attributed to this feeling for the body [...] is at the basis of a new conception of man. The biological, with the notion of the inevitability it entails, becomes more than an *object* of spiritual life. It becomes its heart. The mysterious voices of the blood, the appeals of heredity and the past for which the body serves as an enigmatic vehicle, lose the character of being problems that are subject to a solution put forward by a sovereignly free Self.<sup>135</sup>

Furthermore, Levinas underlines the inextricability of *body* and *soul* by highlighting the specific bodily connection of being:

Man’s essence no longer lies in freedom, but in a kind of bondage [*enchaînement*]. To be true to oneself does not mean taking flight once more above contingent events that always remain foreign to the freedom of Self; on the contrary, it means becoming aware of the ineluctable original chain that is unique to our bodies, and above all accepting this chaining.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism”, p. 68/*Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l’hitlérisme*, p. 18.

<sup>134</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Martin Heidegger and Ontology”, p. 24/“Martin Heidegger et l’ontologie”, in: *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’étranger*, May-June 1932, pp. 395-431, p. 417: “[...] le Dasein est rivé à ses possibilités, que son ‘ici-bas’ s’impose à lui.” In a later version of this article, published in *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl and Heidegger*, Levinas wrote: “[...] le Dasein est voué à ses possibilités que son ‘ici-bas’ s’impose à lui.” See “Martin Heidegger et l’ontologie”, in: *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl and Heidegger*, pp. 77-109, p. 99, emphasis added.

<sup>135</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism”, p. 69/*Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l’hitlérisme*, pp. 18-19. I modified the English translation of the last phrase of the citation from “The mysterious urgings of the blood [...]” to “The mysterious voices of the blood [...]”, because in the original French version Levinas wrote: “Les mystérieuses voix du sang [...]”, p. 19. The voice plays an important role in this context, which I discuss later, see e.g. chapter IV, “The phenomenon of the voice in Rosenzweig and Levinas”.

<sup>136</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism”, p. 69/*Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l’hitlérisme*, p. 19.

The aspect of the body is a key notion in this context which leads Levinas later on, during the war, to the link between *escape* and *transcendence*, as underlined in the *Carnets de captivité*: “The fact of the body. Hence the need to escape, a real way out of oneself, a transcendence.”<sup>137</sup>

Considering issues similar to those in *On Escape* and in the *Carnets de captivité* (i.e. the ineluctable bondage to being and the impossibility to flee one’s body), Levinas connects important topics of his early thinking with what he called the ‘philosophy’ of Hitlerism. In the following, I show that Levinas’s argumentation has some astonishing similarities with the thoughts of Rosenzweig – even though the latter is not directly mentioned in the text.<sup>138</sup> However, also in *Totality and Infinity* Rosenzweig is not cited in the main text, only in the foreword in order to point out somewhat paradoxically that Rosenzweig is “too often present [...] to be cited”.<sup>139</sup> Hence the absence of Rosenzweig’s name might not be considered as a guarantee that he is completely absent from this text. The only two philosophers to whom Levinas refers by name are Socrates and Nietzsche. That the latter occur in this context is not surprisingly since there was given much attention at that time in France to Nietzsche’s work with respect to National Socialism. The journal *Acéphale* even dedicated a special issue in January 1937 to Nietzsche, with the telling title “Nietzsche and the Fascists – a reparation [*Nietzsche et les fascistes – une réparation*]”. Levinas’s article is extensively cited in the leading article “Nietzsche and the Fascists” by Georges Bataille.<sup>140</sup> Regarding Rosenzweig, Levinas stated in an interview with François Poiré that he had read Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption* around 1935, i.e. around the time he wrote “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism” (1934).<sup>141</sup> Yet as the article obviously echoes themes of Rosenzweig’s work, it can be assumed that he read Rosenzweig even earlier, i.e. around 1934. This becomes evident when taking a closer look at how Levinas

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<sup>137</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 56: “Le fait même du corps. D’où nécessité de l’évasion, d’une vraie sortie de soi, d’une transcendance.”

<sup>138</sup> In my interpretation of Rosenzweig’s influence on Levinas’s article I refer in the following to the comments of Frank Miething and Christoph von Wolzogen which accompanied their German translation of “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism”, in: Frank Miething and Christoph von Wolzogen, “Anmerkungen der Übersetzer”.

<sup>139</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *TI*, p. 28/*Ti*, p. 14.

<sup>140</sup> Bataille points out that Levinas’s interpretation of Nietzsche is a misreading: “Lévinas, who introduces (without attempting to justify it) the identification of the Nietzschean attitude with the racist attitude, in fact limits himself to providing (without having attempted it) a striking demonstration of their incompatibility and even of their nature as opposites.” In: Bataille, Georges, “Nietzsche and the Fascists”, p. 192/“Nietzsche et les fascistes”, p. 462. For an overview of the relationship between Levinas and Nietzsche, see further Stegmaier, Werner, “Levinas’ Humanismus des anderen Menschen – ein Anti-Nietzscheanismus oder ein Nietzscheanismus?”.

<sup>141</sup> Poiré, François, *Emmanuel Levinas – essai et entretiens*, p. 147. This date is also indicated by Cohen, Richard A., *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, p. 237 and note.

determines the relationship of man's physical presence in connection with time and, in particular, the way he refers to Judaism in this context. Starting his argumentation with the remark that the notions of political freedom "do not exhaust the content of the spirit of freedom",<sup>142</sup> he goes on to explain that "[t]rue freedom, the true beginning would require *a true present*, which, always at the peak of a destiny, forever recommences that destiny."<sup>143</sup> This 'true beginning' is demonstrated by Judaism, as Levinas underlines:

*Judaism bears this magnificent message. Remorse – the painful expression of a radical powerlessness to redeem the irreparable – heralds the repentance that generates the pardon that redeems. Man finds something in the present with which he can modify or efface the past. Time loses its very irreversibility. It collapses at the feet of man like a wounded beast. And he frees it.*<sup>144</sup>

The interpretation of time developed in this passage has much in common with the temporal concept Rosenzweig elaborates in *The Star of Redemption*. To illustrate this, let me quote at length the passage in which Rosenzweig argues that simultaneity is realized only in eternity and that it is through brotherliness and through the intersubjective relations among men that man receives access to eternity.

Simultaneousness is something that does not exist at all in temporality. [...] But in eternity there is simultaneousness. That from the shore, all time is simultaneous goes without saying. But even time that, as eternal way, leads from eternity to eternity admits of simultaneousness. For only insofar as it is the center between eternity and eternity is it possible for people to meet in it. He who therefore beholds himself on the way is at the same point, namely the exact central point of time. The brotherliness is that which transposes men into this central point. *Time is already laid conquered at its feet*; only love has still to fly over the separating space.<sup>145</sup>

The simultaneous occurrence of the metaphor of 'conquered time lying at the feet of man' in Levinas's and Rosenzweig's text is eye-catching. Further, both refer in this context to the role of Judaism. For Rosenzweig, time and death are conquered by love, which is stronger than death.

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<sup>142</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism", p. 64/*Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'hitlérisme*, p. 8.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 65/p. 9.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., emphasis added.

<sup>145</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 366-367/*Stern*, pp. 383-384.

This means that with regard to time, not death, but love and its power to infinitely *renew* the work of Creation has the final word. Rosenzweig emphasizes with regard to love that

[...] the whole world of the Creation [...] is placed at its feet, conquered; death, the conquerer of all, and Orcus, who jealously holds onto all that is mortal, collapses before its strength and the violence of its ardor; the mortal cold of the frozen past as the object is warmed up again by its glowing embers and its divine flames.<sup>146</sup>

The similarities with Levinas's argumentation are evident in my view. The outlined line of thought can be traced back also during the period of war, where one can find the remarkable note in Levinas's captivity notebooks: "Revelation without creation, without a link to the origin. Paganism."<sup>147</sup> This shows that Levinas, like Rosenzweig, considers the relationship between Revelation and Creation as important and sees paganism as the outcome if this relationship is not realized.

The idea of revelation as renewal of the world is also mirrored in another aspect of Levinas's article: the interpretation of presence in the above cited passage.<sup>148</sup> This passage obviously hints at the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) and the three states of reversal (*tschuvah*) by emphasizing *remorse*, *repentance* and *pardon*. Levinas points out that even if history represents a kind of "fundamental limitation"<sup>149</sup> for man, because time is an irreparable condition of human existence, man is nevertheless "renewed eternally in the face of the Universe. Speaking absolutely, he has no history."<sup>150</sup> Levinas's interpretation echoes in some way Rosenzweig's views of the Jewish people developed in *The Star of Redemption*, where Rosenzweig points out that the Jew

[...] possesses already [...] in the annual cycle, the immediateness of all individuals to God in perfect mutual participation of everyone with God, he no longer needs to win in a long march of a world

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 217/p. 226.

<sup>147</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*: "Révélation sans création, sans lien avec l'origine. Paganisme", p. 454. On Levinas's discussion of Heidegger's philosophy in the context of paganism and Judaism with respect to Rosenzweig, see Moyn, Samuel, "Judaism against Paganism. Emmanuel Levinas's Response to Heidegger and Nazism in the 1930s", pp. 47-48.

<sup>148</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism", p. 65/*Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'hitlérisme*, p. 9, emphasis added.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

history. The Jewish people are themselves already at the goal toward which the people of the world are just setting out.<sup>151</sup>

Living in this sense ‘beyond history’, the Jewish people have access to the experience of eternity in time. The act of Creation is renewed in *every* instance for Rosenzweig. Accordingly, he highlights that Creation did not

[...] [take] place once and for all, but *momentarily*; it is, of course, universal providence, but one that is renewed in every tiniest particular moment, for all existence of the sort that God ‘renews from day to day the work of the beginning’. This providence renewed every morning is thus what is really meant in the idea of the creature.<sup>152</sup>

This idea is taken up in similar words by Levinas in *Time and the Other* by pointing out the power of time to create a constant renewal in every moment: “More than the renewal of our moods and qualities, *time is essentially a new birth*.”<sup>153</sup> This is also expressed in *Existence and Existents*: “Each instant is a beginning, *a birth*.”<sup>154</sup> The idea that man is in his very essence timeless echoes the Jewish idea of the renewal of time as an everlasting presence.<sup>155</sup> This thought is taken up by Rosenzweig in his own words in *The Star of Redemption* where he begins and ends Book one of Part III with the same motif: “The seed of eternal life has been planted [...]. [...] Blessed be He who has planted eternal life in our midst.”<sup>156</sup>

Hence the issue at stake in the present arguments of Levinas and Rosenzweig is the relationship between *eternity* and the *body* and how the latter, although forced by nature to vanish within time, can be living in a certain relationship with eternity, or infinity, to draw on a Levinasian term. This relationship highlights a paradox because it connects two elements, the perishing body and eternity, which are obviously mutually exclusive. Levinas elaborates on this aspect in his article “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism” by pointing to the problem of seeing the body as value. In one of the central passages of his article Levinas’s argues:

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<sup>151</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 351/*Stern*, p. 368.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133/p. 135, emphasis added. See also Krochmalnik, Daniel, “Variationen zum Anfang in der jüdischen Tradition”.

<sup>153</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TO, p. 81/TA, p. 72.

<sup>154</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, EE, p. 76/DEE, p. 130, emphasis added.

<sup>155</sup> See Lamentations, V, 21: הַשִּׁבְנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנָשׁוּב (וְנִשְׁבָּחָה), הַדְּשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם

<sup>156</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 355, see also p. 317/*Stern*, p. 372, see also p. 331. See also in the Aggadoth of the Babylonian Talmud, Ber. 58a.



What does it mean to traditional interpretations to have a body? It means tolerating it as an object of the external world. It weighs on Socrates like the chains that weigh him down in the prison at Athens; it encases him like the very tomb that awaits him. The body is an obstacle. It breaks the free flight of the spirit and drags it back down to earthly conditions, and yet, like an obstacle, it is to be overcome.<sup>157</sup>

Against this traditional point of view, Levinas outlines another aspect of the body: the fact that the body undeniable belongs to man. It is through the body that we first discover ourselves and constitute our identity, as Levinas emphasizes:

But the body is not only something eternally foreign. [...] The body is not only a happy or unhappy accident that relates us to the implacable world of matter. *Its adherence to the Self is of value in itself.* It is an adherence that *one does not escape* [...].<sup>158</sup>

This echoes the topics discussed in Levinas's *On Escape*, published one year after "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism", and indicates an ongoing discussion of the *bodily* presence of man, e.g. through a reflection of notions like nausea, insomnia, being riveted, etc. Further, the aspect of religion is examined in "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism" emphasizing that Hitlerism "questions the very principles of a civilization. [...] Christianity itself is threatened [...]".<sup>159</sup> Regarding Judaism, Levinas further outlines that

[m]an is renewed eternally in the face of the Universe. Speaking absolutely, he has no history. [...] *True* freedom, the *true* beginning would require a true *present*, which, always at the peak of a destiny, forever recommences that destiny. *Judaism* bears this magnificent message.<sup>160</sup>

This underscores that Levinas attributes to Judaism an important role in the relationship of eternity, conceived of as timelessness and infinity, and the human body. Through Judaism a specific message comes into the world that shows man a path to a life connected to a transcendence, i.e. to a *beyond* being. This message is endangered by Hitlerism, as Levinas

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<sup>157</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism", p. 67/*Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'hitlérisme*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68/ p. 16 and p. 18, emphasis in the original.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64/p. 8.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65/pp. 8-9.

demonstrates in his article in 1934 – a danger not only for Judaism, but for civilization as such and for “the very humanity of man”.<sup>161</sup>

In a different context, Rosenzweig also discusses the relationship between eternity and the concrete body of man by pointing out that the Jewish community represents “the people of eternity [*das ewige Volk*]”.<sup>162</sup> According to Rosenzweig, the Jewish community is based on a ‘community of the same blood’ [*Blutsgemeinschaft*] as he points out: “The community of the same blood alone feels even today the guarantee of its eternity running warmly through its veins.”<sup>163</sup> Although for today’s readers the notion of a *Blutsgemeinschaft* is a suspect term, Rosenzweig wanted in no way to highlight a biologically funded racism. Hence Stéphane Mosès argues that the term ‘blood community’ is in this regard “a poor choice of words because of its racist connotations, completely alien to his thought.”<sup>164</sup> Mosès emphasizes that “the term ‘blood community’ must be understood to mean what we would now call an *ethnic* community.”<sup>165</sup> However, as I will show, this interpretation is revised in up to date research literature. Further, it must be noted in this context that Rosenzweig precisely neglects the most important aspect of the racial theories of the Nazi ideology, i.e. the soil [*Boden*], and on the contrary, highlights the eternal and timeless existence of the Jewish people through a community based on “blood without soil”.<sup>166</sup> This marks a profound difference between the Jewish people and other people of the world, as Rosenzweig goes on to explain:

Among the peoples of the earth, is, the Jewish people is [*sic*], as on every Sabbath, that high point of its life, it calls itself: the one people. The peoples of the world cannot be satisfied with a community made up of the same blood; they put forth their roots into the night of the earth, itself dead yet life-bestowing, and appropriate from its permanence a guarantee of their own permanence. Their will to eternity clings to the soil and to the soil’s dominion, the territory. The blood of their sons flows round the earth of the homeland; for they do not have confidence in *the living community of blood*, which

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 71/p. 24.

<sup>162</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 348/*Stern*, p. 364.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 317/p. 332. On the notion of ‘blood’ in the context of German-Jewish writing see further Battegay, Casper, *Das andere Blut. Gemeinschaft im deutsch-jüdischen Schreiben 1830-1930*.

<sup>164</sup> See Mosès, Stéphane, *System and Revelation. The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 177/*Système et Révélation. La philosophie de Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 183.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 177/p. 184.

<sup>166</sup> This expression is taken from Biale, David, *Blood and Belief. The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians*, p. 199ff.

would not be anchored in the solid ground of the earth. [...] For this reason, the tribal legend of the eternal people begins otherwise than with indigenoussness.”<sup>167</sup>

Without putting them in any way on the same footing, it can be noted that Rosenzweig’s idea of a “living community of blood” of the Jewish people and the conception of a *consanguinity* of “German Blood” postulated by the Nazi ideology overlap in the discourse about ‘blood’ and consanguinity. It is thus in no way surprising that the issue of blood in Rosenzweig’s work has attracted increasing attention in recent research literature, as is pointed out by Peter Eli Gordon, who emphasizes that the idea of a Jewish ‘blood-community’ is “perhaps one of the most troubling aspects of Rosenzweig’s philosophy [...]”<sup>168</sup> I will elaborate on this aspect in more detail in the following section. In this context I only wish to point out a reference to Levinas’s article “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism”, which also emphasizes in particular the significance of the *bodily* presence of man:

Do we not affirm ourselves in the unique warmth of our bodies long before any blossoming of the Self that claims to be separate from the body? Do these links that blood establishes, prior to the birth of intelligence, not withstand every test? [...] A society based on *consanguinity* immediately ensues from this concretization of the spirit. And then, *if race does not exist, one has to invent it!*<sup>169</sup>

Hence, Levinas concludes that the concept of racism is the last resort of the notion of man in Hitlerism. The consanguinity of its society is attached by the Nazi ideology to the German territory as well as to the conquest of *Lebensraum* (living space).<sup>170</sup> Thus, as this concept of consanguinity places its relevance to a specific *territory*, it is precisely opposed to Rosenzweig’s non-territorial concept of a Jewish ‘community of blood’. Obviously, these two concepts of consanguinity remain diametrically opposed to each other. However, the appearance of the same notion in the analysis of Levinas’s ‘philosophy of Hitlerism’ and in Rosenzweig’s discourse on ‘blood’ in *The Star of Redemption* is striking. The issue of a society based on consanguinity, as

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<sup>167</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 318-319/*Stern*, pp. 332-333, emphasis added.

<sup>168</sup> Gordon, Peter Eli, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger. Between Judaism and German Philosophy*, p. 210ff.

<sup>169</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism”, pp. 68-69/*Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l’hitlérisme*, pp. 16-17 and pp. 19-20. Because of the importance of this aspect, I cite the French original passage: “Une société à base *consanguine* découle immédiatement de cette concrétisation de l’esprit. Et alors, *si la race n’existe pas, il faut l’inventer!*”, *ibid.*, pp. 19-20, emphasis added.

<sup>170</sup> On the notion of *Lebensraum* (living space) and the opposition of Levinas’s philosophy towards this notion, see the interview with Levinas, conducted by Ephraim Meir and Jacob Golomb, published in the Hebrew translation of Levinas’s *Ethique et Infini*, see “Ra’aion im Levinas be-1992” [in Hebrew], ed. by Ephraim Meir and Jacob Golomb, in: *Ethika ve-ha’einsofi. Sichot im Philippe Nemo*, pp. 89-97, especially pp. 89-90.

raised by National Socialism, was thus by no means a marginal question, but one for which Judaism itself offered an alternative as can be seen in Rosenzweig's line of argument. It is plausible that Levinas, who read *The Star of Redemption* precisely in the mid-30s, when Hitler rose to power and confronted the Jews with "the greatest trial – the incomparable trial – that Judaism has had to go through,"<sup>171</sup> as Levinas underlines, was inspired by Rosenzweig's concept of the Jewish people. It opened up to him a new horizon in the intellectual landscape of that time. Furthermore, it offered him an alternative to Heidegger, who became an official representative of the world view of the 'philosophy of Hitlerism', criticized by Levinas. Heidegger's world remained henceforth inaccessible for Levinas, as he noted in his *Carnets de captivité*: "The nation as access to reality. World of Heidegger."<sup>172</sup>

The lack of transcendence in Hitlerism becomes an important topic in the articles of Levinas from this period. In a way similar to that of Rosenzweig, Levinas highlights the fact that the Jew *never* experiences in the same way as others the feeling of 'being at home' in the world. This is the fundamental difference of the Jewish existence towards a pagan mentality. One year after his article "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism", Levinas points out this aspect in his article "The actuality of Maimonides" [*L'actualité de Maïmonide*], published in 1935: "The Jew has not the definitive foundations in the world like the pagan has. In the midst of the most complete confidence in things he is plagued by a gnawing worry."<sup>173</sup> Furthermore, the mentality of Hitlerism must be seen, according to Levinas, in connection with *paganism* as he points out: "The Judeo-Christian civilization is challenged by an arrogant barbarism installed in the heart of Europe. With an unmatched boldness, paganism raises his head, [...]. [...] *Paganism is a radical inability to escape the world.*"<sup>174</sup> In contradistinction, Levinas highlights the ability of the Jew to

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<sup>171</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "L'inspiration religieuse de l'alliance", p. 144: "L'hitlérisme est la plus grande épreuve – l'épreuve incomparable – que le judaïsme ait eue à traverser".

<sup>172</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 105: "La nation comme accès au reel. Monde de Heidegger." See also *ibid.*, p. 75: "Partir du *Dasein* ou partir du Judaïsme." The notion *Dasein* obviously refers in this context to Heidegger.

<sup>173</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "L'actualité de Maïmonide", in: *Emmanuel Levinas. Cahiers de l'Herne*, ed. by Catherine Chalié and Miguel Abensour, pp. 142-144, p. 144: "Le juif n'a pas dans le monde les assises définitives du païen. Au milieu de la plus complète confiance accordée aux choses il est rongé par une sourde inquiétude." It is noteworthy in this context that Jacob Gordin, who worked at the library of the *Alliance Israélite Orientale* in Paris, an institution for which Levinas too worked at that time, wrote an article on Maimonides with the same title "Actualité de Maïmonide", which appeared just one year earlier than Levinas's article, in: *Les Cahiers juifs*, Vol. 10, June-July 1934, pp. 6-18. Reprinted in: Gordin, Jacob, *Écrits. Le renouveau de la pensée juive en France*, pp. 123-144.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, "La civilisation judéo-chrétienne est mise en cause par une barbarie arrogante installée au coeur de l'Europe. Avec une audace encore inégalée, le paganisme relève la tête, [...]. [...] *Le paganisme est une impuissance radicale de sortir du monde.*"

experience the wonder of the miracle of Creation in every moment anew – through the Jew’s essential alienation towards the world that surrounds him. In his article “The meaning of religious practice”, published in 1937, Levinas describes the relation of the Jew towards the concept of wonder as a fundamental aspect of Jewish existence. It is through religious ritual that the Jew remains outside the flow of time because the ritual constantly marks a pause within time and a sudden stop: “Before accomplishing an elementary gesture such as eating, the Jew pauses to give a blessing. Before entering a house, he stops to kiss the ‘mezuzah’.”<sup>175</sup> This constantly interrupted relation to the world through ritual creates a feeling of an always renewed *wonder* about what exists and what surrounds the Jew. As a consequence, according to Levinas, the Jew constantly experiences the wonder of Creation anew:

At the bottom, the world never appears to the practicing Jew as a natural thing. Others feel themselves immediately at home there, immediately at ease. [...] For the Jew, by contrast, nothing is entirely familiar, entirely profane. To him, the existence of things is something infinitely surprising. It strikes him as a miracle. He experiences wonder at every instant at the fact – so simple and yet so extraordinary – that the world is here. The belief in creation – the basis of Judaism – is nothing other than this wonder. It is not an abstract dogma of theology.<sup>176</sup>

Similar to Rosenzweig’s argument in *The Star of Redemption*, Levinas emphasizes that the belief in the wonder of Creation is not a dry subject of theology, but the concrete living experience of the Jew. Levinas sees the ritual as an “event”<sup>177</sup> which has the power to *renew* time ever anew. In this context, he rehabilitates the notion of mystery as being a *sine qua non* for realizing the ritual and giving it its profound meaning, as he explains:

We have become accustomed to giving the word mystery a *negative* meaning. The mystery is the hidden and the incomprehensible. We neglect the fact that it originally designates divine worship [*un culte*] and, above all, that part of worship that allows the religious man to master the very order of space and time. Do not the mysteries have the power always to repeat over again, and in their initial inspiration [*leur originalité première*], the events of holy history?<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “The Meaning of Religious Practice”, p. 288.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

Thus, in conclusion, it seems plausible that the concepts of time and transcendence which Levinas worked out with respect to Judaism in his articles on Jewish topics during the thirties were most likely inspired by his reading of Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*.

**b) “Language is yet more than ‘blood’...” – From a ‘community of blood’ [Blutsgemeinschaft] to a ‘community of language’ [Sprachgemeinschaft]**

In this context, the question of what Rosenzweig precisely meant by ‘blood’ and ‘blood-community’ in *The Star of Redemption* is of great importance. As I have emphasized in the previous section, former interpretations of this issue are partly outdated. For example, revising Stéphane Mosès's reading of the term ‘blood community’ as a mere ‘ethnic community’,<sup>179</sup> the Israeli researcher Haggai Dagan puts forward the hypothesis that Rosenzweig provides the notion ‘blood’ with a “metaphorical meaning”.<sup>180</sup> This metaphorical meaning must be seen in a far broader sense than as a simple biologicalization or ethnicization of Judaism. According to Dagan, blood is “a symbol of life and continuity,”<sup>181</sup> a metaphor for the inescapable existence, which is always tied to a particular existence. The motif of blood would be in this sense used by Rosenzweig especially to reject the idea of the primacy of the ‘spiritual’ in idealism. Unlike the romantic tradition, which connects blood and people with the land, i.e. the territory, Rosenzweig strictly separates the Jewish people and the territory they live in. This gives his discourse an anti-nationalist character, as he argues: “We alone have put our trust in the blood and parted with the land [...]”<sup>182</sup> However, according to Dagan, the eternity of Judaism is not an eternity *beyond* life because Rosenzweig focuses precisely on an “eternity [...] that flows from life itself; eternity that is none other than life itself, or to be more precise, the *essence of life* itself, cut off from every extraneous thing associated with it (soil, spirit).”<sup>183</sup> In contrast to the interpretation of Dagan, I would not claim a difference in this regard between the thought of Levinas who, according to

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<sup>179</sup> Mosès, Stéphane, *System and Revelation. The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 177/*Système et Révélation. La philosophie de Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 184.

<sup>180</sup> Dagan, Haggai, “The Motif of Blood and Procreation in Franz Rosenzweig”, p. 247.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 318/*Stern*, p. 332.

<sup>183</sup> Dagan, Haggai, “The Motif of Blood and Procreation in Franz Rosenzweig”, p. 247.

Dagan, “bases Jewish existence on ethics” (as Hermann Cohen), and that of Rosenzweig who on the contrary “emphasizes pure existence (as expressed in blood and propagation) which he places before ethics and reason.”<sup>184</sup> For Rosenzweig there is a profound connection between the commandment “Thou shalt love!” which he puts at the center of *The Star of Redemption*, and the Jewish existence, realized through “the living community of blood”.<sup>185</sup> The ethical claim finds its concrete expression in Jewish existence, realized through the religious laws, as Michael Mack points out: “By keeping the law, the Jew, in Rosenzweig’s view, enacts love [...]. Law, which helps to set limits to violence, constitutes the rationality of *caritas* [...]”<sup>186</sup> Hence the concept of blood and the relation of love and law are deeply connected in Rosenzweig’s thinking. Rosenzweig underlines this connection by emphasizing that “[i]n the Law [...] all created existence is already immediately endowed with life and soul for becoming content of the world to come.”<sup>187</sup>

It must be noted in this context that for Rosenzweig the essence of the Jewish existence is a nationality without territory, i.e. the experience of an exile which is physically embodied by the Jews. In this sense, blood always entails a *political* dimension. The view of Judaism as an organic body from which it is impossible to separate oneself from being a Jew finds an echo in the revealing remark of Levinas in his *Carnets de captivité*: “The nothingness of the assimilated.”<sup>188</sup> In this context, the above outlined paradox of how to realize eternity through a body that vanishes in time finds a concrete solution according to Rosenzweig in the existence of the Jewish people, because “in the natural propagation of the *body* it has the guarantee of its *eternity*.”<sup>189</sup> In this sense, blood is a key term in understanding the specific temporality of the Jewish people, which finds its expression, as Rosenzweig outlines, in “the creating of *its own eternity* out of the *obscure sources of blood*.”<sup>190</sup> This connection is also emphasized at the beginning of Book one of Part III of *The Star*, entitled “The Fire or Eternal Life”. Here Rosenzweig identifies Judaism with the fire that burns in the middle of *The Star*, i.e. the *Magen David* (“Shield of David”) which

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., pp. 248-249.

<sup>185</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 318/*Stern*, p. 332.

<sup>186</sup> Mack, Michael, “Franz Rosenzweig’s and Emmanuel Levinas’s Critique of German Idealism’s Pseudotheology”, pp. 77-78.

<sup>187</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 428/*Stern*, p. 451. See also Mack, p. 76.

<sup>188</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 111: “Le néant de l’assimilé.”

<sup>189</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 318/*Stern*, p. 332, emphasis added.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 323/p. 338: “[...] im Schöpfen der eigenen Ewigkeit aus den dunklen Quellen des Bluts”, emphasis added.

serves as a guiding symbol for the structure of his argumentation throughout the book, and Christianity with the rays of light that emerge from this fire. With regard to Judaism, Rosenzweig underlines its particular temporality, which is eternity, as he points out:

The fire must beget its own time. It must beget itself eternally. It must make its life eternal in the succession of generations, each of which begets the following one, as it itself again will bear witness to the preceding one. The bearing witness takes place in the begetting. [*Das Bezeugen geschieht im Erzeugen.*] In this connection with the double meaning and single effect of begetting and bearing witness, eternal life becomes real.<sup>191</sup>

Hence, it seems obvious to me that a connection between a specific kind of ‘Jewish’ temporality and the concept of a Jewish ‘blood-community’ can be deduced in the thoughts of Rosenzweig. In this sense, I would follow the interpretation of Peter Eli Gordon, who points out in his study *Rosenzweig and Heidegger* that throughout Rosenzweig’s explanations

[...] on the Jewish role in redemption, there is significant linkage between the concept of blood and a specifically ‘Jewish’ sort of temporality. [...] As a fluid rather than static medium, blood captures the idea that philosophy must move within the temporal flow of life. [...] Accordingly, blood might be regarded as a name for the Jew’s *special temporality* as against the normal temporality of the world.<sup>192</sup>

The “rooted unrootedness”<sup>193</sup> of the Jewish existence finds a temporal anchor in the cyclical and ritually repeated structure of its specific temporality, which I would assume when following Gordon’s interpretation is in fact the deeper meaning behind the notion of blood. This is also in accordance with Levinas’s view regarding the concept of blood in Rosenzweig, as he points out in his article “Between Two Worlds” in *Difficult Freedom*:

Rosenzweig uses the dangerous term of an eternity of blood, which we must not take in the racist sense, for at no moment does this term signify a naturalist concept, justifying a technique of racial

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 317/p. 331. The translator indicates in a note that she has translated the German verb *bezeugen* with “bearing witness” and *erzeugen* with “begetting”.

<sup>192</sup> Gordon, Peter Eli, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger. Between Judaism and German Philosophy*, p. 212.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 213.



discrimination; on the contrary, it signifies a *strangeness* throughout the course of history, a *rootedness within oneself*.<sup>194</sup>

Yet, this specific Jewish temporality entails at the same time the consequence that the Jew never feels like being “entirely at home”.<sup>195</sup> As Gordon goes on to explain, Rosenzweig argues that “to be Jewish is to be ontologically unlike all other peoples of the world.”<sup>196</sup> As I argue in the coming section, Rosenzweig’s point of view outlined by Gordon is not at all “an extreme sort of Jewish chauvinism”,<sup>197</sup> because the ‘community blood’ is transcended into a ‘community of language’ in which, according to Rosenzweig, all people can (and should) participate. Furthermore, I wish to highlight the continuity of this argument by pointing out that it is precisely this idea of ‘Judaism as a category of *being*’ which is readopted in Levinas’s reception of Rosenzweig’s thought.<sup>198</sup>

Before elaborating on this point in the following section, I would like to focus on a letter Rosenzweig wrote only some months before his death and which seems to me to be of great importance in this context:

Dear Mother, on ...’s word, I ask myself. My German identity would be exactly what it is, even if there was no longer a German Reich. Language is yet more than ‘blood’... [*Liebe Mutter, über ...’s Wort wundre ich mich. Mein Deutschtum wäre doch genau was es ist, auch wenn es kein Deutsches Reich mehr gäbe. Sprache ist doch mehr als ‘Blut’...*]<sup>199</sup>

The letter is dated 6<sup>th</sup> October 1929, i.e. it was dictated roughly two months before Rosenzweig’s death on 10<sup>th</sup> December the same year. It must be kept in mind that since 1923 Rosenzweig had been unable to write by himself.<sup>200</sup> It is therefore remarkable that despite his almost complete

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<sup>194</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “‘Between Two Worlds’ (The Way of Franz Rosenzweig)”, in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 181-201, pp. 193-194/“Entre deux mondes. La voie de Franz Rosenzweig”, in: *Difficile Liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1963, pp. 253-281, p. 270.

<sup>195</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 319/*Stern*, p. 333.

<sup>196</sup> Gordon, Peter Eli, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger. Between Judaism and German Philosophy*, p. 214.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> For further explanation on the notion ‘Judaism as a category of *being*’ see chapter I, 3. a), “A new aspect of ontology: Judaism as a ‘category of being’”.

<sup>199</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *GS*, I, p. 1230, emphasis added.

<sup>200</sup> From spring 1922 Rosenzweig had great difficulty speaking and moving his hand. Hence he began to write letters by dictating them, especially with the help of his wife Edith. From 1923 onwards he wrote on a manual typewriter until he was also no longer able to use the typewriter. Later, from the end of 1923 onwards, Rosenzweig indicated with a finger, then only with an eye-blink, the letters which his wife showed him on a plate and which were afterwards constructed into words. Rosenzweig’s doctor Richard Koch described vividly in a letter to Eugen Rosenstock in December 16, 1929, shortly after Rosenzweig’s death, this peculiar scene of writing and the impact of

paralysis and the great efforts required to dictate a letter, he gave much energy to place the word ‘blood’ in quotation marks. This indicates that he especially wanted to highlight a distinction from the normal use of the word ‘blood’ and, in contrast, emphasize that he intended to point out with the term ‘blood’ the implicated ideas and concepts that I have discussed above. Additionally, in order to correctly evaluate the temporal context of Rosenzweig’s statement, one has to take into consideration the historical circumstances of the year 1929. Since the assassination of the German foreign minister Walther Rathenau in June 1922, which was preceded by persisting anti-Semitic propaganda against him,<sup>201</sup> it was obvious that the Weimar Republic had to face open anti-Semitism among the German population that burdened its political decisions. “About these things I do not like to talk”, Rosenzweig stated in a letter to Rudolf Hallo in January 1923,

since the assassination of Rathenau even less than before. Our work will be rewarded by Germany, at the most, posthumously; nevertheless we do it, as long as we do it in Germany, for Germany. [...] And *The Star* will indeed – and rightly so – be seen a gift, which the German spirit owes to its Jewish enclave.<sup>202</sup>

In the cited letter to his mother in 1929, Rosenzweig alludes to this context by pointing out that even if the German Reich were not to exist for him anymore – a situation which would indeed be realized some years later by the expulsion and persecution of the Jews by Nazi Germany – his German identity would remain intact, since it is bound neither to the German territory nor to the concept of German ‘blood’. In taking his distance from these bodily centered identity concepts, Rosenzweig in contrast emphasizes that for him *language* is “yet more than blood” and thus underlines a profound conviction in the cultural heritage which is conveyed through the German

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Rosenzweig’s wife Edith: “His wife became his organ of expression. One could no longer distinguish what he and what she contributed to the understanding.” In: *Richard Koch und Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. by Frank Töpfer and Urban Wiesing, p. 68: “Seine Frau war sein Ausdrucksorgan geworden. Man konnte nicht mehr unterscheiden was er und was sie zur Verständigung beitrugen.” See further the testimonies of Rosenzweig’s last years given by his friends and colleagues in *Franz Rosenzweig. Eine Gedenkschrift*, ed. by Eugen Mayer.

<sup>201</sup> To provide an illustration of the anti-semitism of that time, I would like to mention that the right-winged *Freicorps* sang a popular song frankly in the streets with the words: “*Knallt ab den Walther Rathenau, die gottverdammte Judensau!*” [“Kill Walther Rathenau, the goddamn Jewish swine!”]. The German-Jewish writer Ernst Toller (1893-1939) describes vividly the anti-semitic atmosphere of these days in his autobiography *I was a German – an Autobiography*, p. 270/*Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, p. 219, the original German version was published in 1933 in Amsterdam. See also Brenner, Wolfgang, *Walther Rathenau – Deutscher und Jude*, p. 447ff. and p. 454.

<sup>202</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, I, 2, pp. 885-888, p. 887: “Über diese Sachen rede ich nicht gern, seit dem Rathenaumord noch weniger gern als vorher. Unsere Arbeit wird uns von Deutschland höchstens posthum honoriert, aber darum tun wir sie doch, solange wir sie in Deutschland tun, für Deutschland. [...] Und der Stern wird wohl einmal und mit Recht als ein Geschenk, das der deutsche Geist seiner jüdischen Enklave verdankt, angesehen werden.”

language. The word “yet” [*doch*] deserves special attention in this context: “Language is *yet* more than blood.”<sup>203</sup> This can be read as a statement against racial theories of ‘German blood’, as Rosenzweig’s letter alludes to this context by referring to the question of what his ‘German identity’ [*Deutschtum*] essentially consists of. Further, by putting the word ‘blood’ in quotation marks, Rosenzweig differentiates this use from that in *The Star of Redemption*, where ‘blood’ never appears in quotation marks; this is further to be seen in contrast to his early use of this notion, e.g. in his article “Atheistic Theology” from 1914, where ‘blood’ is set in quotation marks.<sup>204</sup> By using the mode of improper speech, the quotations marks indicate in any case a distance of the author from the word. Emphasizing that “language is yet more than ‘blood,’” Rosenzweig clearly highlights the primacy of language over identity concepts centered on the notion of blood. His statement expresses his conviction in the power of language, which he attributes to be “the organon of Revelation”<sup>205</sup> in *The Star of Redemption*:

For language is truly the wedding gift of the Creator to humanity; and yet at the same time the mutual possession of the children of men, in which each has his particular share and finally *the seal of humanity in man*. It is whole from the beginning, *man became man when he spoke*; and all the same there is until this day *no language of humanity*, on the contrary this will be only at the end.<sup>206</sup>

This desired goal of a ‘language of humanity’ is not a question of nationality, because the essence of language stays the same in each and every language, “for it is possible for many languages to exist, but there is only *one* language.”<sup>207</sup> Moreover what is important for Rosenzweig in language is the *face to face* interaction of spoken language and the actual act of speaking between men. He emphasizes this aspect in a letter to Eugen Rosenstock in October 1917: “But seriously, language must be neither German nor un-German but *face to face*.”<sup>208</sup>

‘Blood’ can thus be seen as a metaphor in *The Star* for a specific kind of Jewish temporality, i.e. eternity. It refers to the ‘beyond of history’ of the Jewish people. On the

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<sup>203</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, I, 2, p. 1230, emphasis added.

<sup>204</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “Atheistische Theologie”, in: GS, III, pp. 687-697, p. 691/“Atheistic Theology”, in: *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 10-24, p. 17.

<sup>205</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 120/*Stern*, p. 122.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159/p. 164, emphasis added.

<sup>208</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, I, 1, pp. 468-469, p. 469: “Aber im Ernst: die Sprache muß weder deutsch noch undeutsch sondern *von Angesicht zu Angesicht* sein.”

contrary, language is time-bound [*zeitgebunden*] and time-nourished [*zeitgenährt*], as Rosenzweig explains in his essay, *The New Thinking*.<sup>209</sup> It needs *time* to be expressed and, equally importantly, it needs the other person for its realization. In language there is the possibility of naming and describing the world and thus, as a way of understanding the world in communication with fellow men, man holds the key to Creation in his hands. The experience of this power is what Rosenzweig calls *Revelation*, which is not conceived of as a mystical notion. “It is faith, looked upon not as a theological notion but as a fact of origin, as a *lived experience* [...],”<sup>210</sup> as Stéphane Mosès emphasizes. Even if it must also be underscored that Revelation has to be accepted “primarily in the context of a philosophical discourse”,<sup>211</sup> the reference to the *transcendental* dimension of Revelation is important. Rosenzweig points out that in his conception of a *New Thinking* the method of thinking is replaced by the “method of speaking”, which he calls *Sprachdenken* (speaking thinking), which clearly reveals the importance of language for his thought.<sup>212</sup> Furthermore, Rosenzweig argues in *The Star of Redemption* that language and Revelation are closely connected because

[...] language [...] only awakens to its real life in Revelation. And so there is nothing new in the miracle of Revelation, nothing of a magical intervention in the created Creation; on the contrary, it is entirely sign, entirely a making visible and a becoming audible of the Providence originally hidden in the mute night of Creation, entirely – Revelation.<sup>213</sup>

Although everything has been created in the universal act of Creation it is nonetheless only through *language* that things really become alive. This power of language is bound to love because

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<sup>209</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “Das neue Denken”, in: GS, III, pp. 139-161, p. 151/“The New Thinking”, in: *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 109-139, pp. 125-126.

<sup>210</sup> Mosès, Stéphane, *System and Revelation. The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 34/*Système et Révélation. La philosophie de Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 29.

<sup>211</sup> Fricke, Martin, “Offenbarung und Verantwortung. Ein Kapitel nach Franz Rosenzweigs Philosophie der Offenbarung”, p. 821: “[...] Rosenzweigs Offenbarungsbegriff [ist] also primär im Kontext eines philosophischen Diskurses, nicht eines religiösen Bekenntnisses zu verorten.”

<sup>212</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “Das neue Denken”, in: GS, III, pp. 139-161, p. 151/“The New Thinking”, in: *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 109-139, p. 125.

<sup>213</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 120-121/*Stern*, p. 123.

[...] in the love, the soul awakens and begins to *speak*, but it only gains being, a being visible to its own eyes, when it is *loved*; [...]. [...] The *mute Self* comes of age under the love of God to become *speaking soul*: it was here that we had recognized Revelation.<sup>214</sup>

Love, language and revelation are thus closely connected, particularly in Book two of Part II, which is central in *The Star of Redemption*. In this sense, language is indeed ‘more than blood’, as Rosenzweig stated, because it opens a new horizon to a ‘*speaking community*’ (*Sprachgemeinschaft*) and, through the spoken word and face to face interaction, provides the condition for creating something like a *society* amongst people.

The outlined concept of the Jewish ‘community of blood’ transcends itself through the spoken word into a ‘speaking community’, in which all people can and must participate in order to realize redemption. This does not mean that ‘blood’ somehow loses its importance for Rosenzweig’s argument, but simply underlines that it is through *language* that the ‘guarantee of eternity’, i.e. blood, of the Jewish people is actually realized in the world. Language is the *sine qua non* for the ‘coming into being’ of man and, thereby, is connected to being as such for Rosenzweig. In the following I work out how these connections are related to Judaism and in which way they have inspired the work of Levinas.

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 196 and p. 213/p. 202 and p. 221, emphasis added.

### 3. a) A new aspect of ontology: Judaism as a “category of being”

In the following I will focus on the impact Rosenzweig’s thought had on Levinas during the thirties. Taking into account the time during the war through a close-reading of Levinas’s notebooks during his captivity, the *Carnets de captivité*, I further connect my analysis with Levinas’s writings on Rosenzweig after the war.<sup>215</sup> In the second part of this section, I will demonstrate how Levinas’s interpretations on Rosenzweig also influenced his own philosophy, namely his views on the issues at stake here, i.e. being, language and Judaism.

The philosophical reflections of Levinas on Rosenzweig after the war come in fact as no surprise. In his *Carnets de captivité* Levinas clearly points out that Rosenzweig is amongst the main subjects of his interest in terms of his future work. In the fashion of an agenda Levinas lists the following points of interest: “My work to come: Philosophically: 1.) Being and Nothingness, 2.) Time, 3.) Rosenzweig, 4.) Rosenberg [...]”<sup>216</sup> As can be seen from the various texts he dedicated to Rosenzweig, what probably attracted Levinas the most in the work of Rosenzweig was the role of Judaism or, in a broader sense, the critique of totality elaborated by means of a new approach to religion. In the “system of philosophy,”<sup>217</sup> as Rosenzweig called *The Star of Redemption*, religion is not an attitude which one can adopt or not. On the contrary, it is right from the very beginning a concrete element of human reality. This can be derived from the system Rosenzweig outlines in *The Star*, which I briefly refer to here: “the All” (*das All*) consists of three elements – God, World and Man, which according to Rosenzweig exist individually and are yet profound in terms of how they are interwoven. Hence in the act of *Creation*, which is

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<sup>215</sup> Although references to Rosenzweig’s work can be found throughout his writings, Levinas in particular dedicated the following three texts to the work of Rosenzweig: “‘Between Two Worlds’ (The Way of Franz Rosenzweig)”, in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 181-201/“Entre deux mondes. La voie de Franz Rosenzweig”, in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 253-281; “Franz Rosenzweig. A modern Jewish thinker”, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Outside the Subject*, pp. 37-50/“Franz Rosenzweig. Une pensée juive moderne”, in: *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie*, Vol. 15, 1965, pp. 208-221, reprinted in: *Hors sujet*, Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1987, pp. 67-89; “Foreword”, in: Mosès, Stéphane, *System and Revelation. The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, pp. 13-22. Reprinted under the title “The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig. Préface to *Système et Révélation* by Stéphane Mosès”, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *In the Time of the Nations*, pp. 135-144/“Préface d’Emmanuel Levinas”, in: Mosès, Stéphane, *Système et Révélation. La philosophie de Franz Rosenzweig*, pp. 7-16.

<sup>216</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 74: “Mon oeuvre à faire: Philosophique: 1.) L’être et le néant 2.) Le temps 3.) Rosenzweig 4.) Rosenberg. [...]”

<sup>217</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “Das neue Denken”, in: GS, III, pp. 139-161, p. 140/“The New Thinking”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 109-139, p. 110.

conceived by Rosenzweig as the relation of God to the world, *Revelation*, i.e. the relation between God and Man, is already announced:

In the flash of light that shines from the moment of the lived miracle of Revelation, it is a past preparing for and anticipating this miracle that becomes manifest; the Creation which becomes visible in Revelation is Creation of Revelation. [...] The historicity of the miracle of Revelation is not its content – this content is and remains its present actuality – but its ground and its guarantee. It is only in this its [*sic*] historicity, this ‘positivity’, that personally experienced faith finds the highest certitude available to it [...].<sup>218</sup>

Thus, right from his creation man is, according to Rosenzweig, in a relationship with God, although this relationship becomes *present* only in the event of revelation. I have outlined that language plays a crucial role in this context as it provides assurance of the possibility for man to experience revelation. Language is thus seen by Rosenzweig as the “seal of humanity in man” and “truly the wedding gift of the Creator to man”.<sup>219</sup>

It is obvious that Levinas was impressed by the strong significance Rosenzweig attached to religion. He underlines in several instances the specific role of religion in Rosenzweig’s thought. In the article “Franz Rosenzweig: A modern Jewish thinker”, published in 1965, Levinas points out:

Religion is not here a ‘confession’, but the texture or drama of being, prior of philosophy’s totalization. [...] Judaism and Christianity, analyzed in this inner signification and these ‘sociological’ manifestations, take on the meaning of *primordial ‘structures’*.<sup>220</sup>

The lived experience of religion is thus anchored in the center of life itself and not just a marginal fact. It is not a decision that one can choose or a way of life that one can either adopt or renounce. In contrast, life itself is the source and the *raison d’être* of religion, as Levinas emphasizes in his

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<sup>218</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 197-198/*Stern*, pp. 203-204.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120/p. 122.

<sup>220</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Franz Rosenzweig: A modern Jewish thinker”, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Outside the Subject*, pp. 37-50, p. 43 and p. 45, emphasis added/“Franz Rosenzweig: Une pensée juive moderne”, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Hors sujet*, pp. 67-89, p. 77 and p. 81. The article appeared originally in *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie*, Vol. 98, 1965. See further Schlegel, Jean-Louis, “Levinas and Rosenzweig”, pp. 52-54.

interpretation of Rosenzweig: “Life, miracles of miracles, the original fact of religion!”<sup>221</sup> In this context it is interesting to point out that, in terms of the concept of religion which man cannot adopt or refuse, *responsibility* is, in a similar way for Levinas, not something which man can adopt or refuse as one pleases, but which is inscribed in being as such. As Levinas emphasizes in *Totality and Infinity*, metaphysics precedes ontology.<sup>222</sup> Thus, he grounds responsibility not in freedom or reason, as has been done in Western thought throughout the centuries, but in *sensibility* and *vulnerability*, that is to say, on our essential openness towards our fellow human beings.<sup>223</sup> According to Levinas, just as the lived religious experience conceived by Rosenzweig, responsibility is not an attitude which one can adopt or refuse. It has to be seen rather as a *mode of being*, i.e. a beyond-being in the being, which one cannot choose, as it is prior to any conclusion of an agreement taken consciously. As Levinas pointed out with respect to Rosenzweig’s notion of religion, responsibility is in this sense a *primordial structure* of consciousness.

In this context, the notion of Judaism as a *category of being* is a very important aspect which is mentioned several times in Levinas’s texts on Rosenzweig. Judaism, Levinas points out for instance in “Franz Rosenzweig: A modern Jewish thinker”, is not conceived by Rosenzweig “as an archeological given or as an opinion among opinions, but as an inevitable moment in the general economy of Being and thought, as a *category*.”<sup>224</sup> Similarly, in a lecture on Rosenzweig given in September 1959 on the *Colloques des intellectuels juifs de langue française* [Colloquia of French-speaking Jewish Intellectuals],<sup>225</sup> Levinas points out with regard to *The Star of Redemption*:

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<sup>221</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Franz Rosenzweig: A modern Jewish thinker”, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Outside the Subject*, pp. 37-50, here pp. 42-43/“Franz Rosenzweig: Une pensée juive moderne”, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Hors sujet*, pp. 67-89, p. 77.

<sup>222</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, pp. 42-48/Ti, pp. 32-39.

<sup>223</sup> On this central aspect of Levinas’s philosophy in relation to current biomedical issues, see the ground-breaking studies of Corine Pelluchon, *L’autonomie brisée. Bioéthique et philosophie* as well as *Éléments pour une éthique de la vulnérabilité. Les hommes, les animaux, la nature*.

<sup>224</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Franz Rosenzweig: A modern Jewish thinker”, p. 38/“Franz Rosenzweig: Une pensée juive moderne”, p. 66, emphasis added.

<sup>225</sup> The French branch of the World Jewish Congress has sponsored annual colloquia for Jewish intellectuals in France since 1957. Levinas participated with lectures on Talmudic texts at some of these colloquia. His lectures, brilliantly merging contemporary philosophy and ancient Jewish thought, had a remarkable repercussion on Jewish intellectual life, see Friedlander, Judith, *Vilna on the Seine*, p. 23.



Yet this book of general philosophy is a Jewish book, which founds Judaism in a new way. Judaism is no longer just a teaching whose theses can be true or false; *Jewish existence* [...] *itself is an essential event of being; Jewish existence is a category of being.*<sup>226</sup>

The important aspect lies in the fact that Judaism is attributed here a *categorical* function. Far from being a mere attribute of Rosenzweig's thinking, it is characterized by Levinas as decisive impulse which influences Rosenzweig reflections on being as such.

To fully grasp the whole extent of the notion of 'Judaism as a category of being', it seems to me helpful to illustrate briefly the importance of Judaism for Rosenzweig through some biographical remarks, especially in order to outline *why* Judaism plays such an important role in the development of his intellectual biography. Rosenzweig was tempted to convert to Christianity in 1913 just before the First World War broke out. Even though, as Stéphane Mosès points out, "Rosenzweig does not mention explicitly this experience in any of his writings" it is "without a doubt [...] the decisive event of his spiritual biography."<sup>227</sup> The global crisis and the war in Europe were reflected in the difficult personal situation Rosenzweig went through during this period. By that time nearly all of Rosenzweig's friends and intellectual peers were either Christians or Jews who had converted to Christianity, e.g. his cousins Hans and Rudolf Ehrenberg and his close friend Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. They tried to convince him also to convert.<sup>228</sup> Thus Rosenzweig found himself in an intellectual crisis which became more and more difficult and even led him to the threshold of suicide.<sup>229</sup> After an intensive discussion with Rudolf Ehrenberg and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy in Leipzig during the the night of the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> of July 1913, the so-called *Leipziger Nachtgespräch*, Rosenzweig finally agreed to convert.

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<sup>226</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "'Between Two Worlds' (The Way of Franz Rosenzweig)", in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 181-201, p. 183/"Entre deux mondes. La voie de Franz Rosenzweig", in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 253-281, p. 256: "Ce livre de philosophie générale est un livre juif, qui fonde le judaïsme d'une façon nouvelle: le judaïsme n'est plus seulement un enseignement, dont les thèses seraient vraies ou fausses, *l'existence juive* [...] *elle-même est un événement essentiel de l'être, l'existence juive est une catégorie de l'être.*"

<sup>227</sup> Mosès, Stéphane, *System et Revelation*, p. 35/*Système et Révélation*, p. 30.

<sup>228</sup> There is up to now no comprehensive biography on Franz Rosenzweig. This remains a desideratum as Reinhold Meyer and Inken Rühle point out in their article "Schwerpunkte zukünftiger Beschäftigung mit Rosenzweig", p. 81. See also Meineke, Stefan, "A Life of Contradiction: The Philosopher Franz Rosenzweig and his Relationship to History and Politics". Important elements for such a biography are to be found in Rivka Horwitz's introduction to the Hebrew edition of Rosenzweig's letters, see Horwitz, Rivka, *Franz Rosenzweig – A Selection of Letters and Diary Fragments* [in Hebrew], as well as in Meir, Ephraim, *Star from Jacob – The Life and Work of Franz Rosenzweig* [in Hebrew] and Rühle, Inken, *Gott spricht die Sprache des Menschen. Franz Rosenzweig als jüdischer Theologe – eine Einführung*.

<sup>229</sup> Meir, Ephraim, "The Relevance of the *Gritli-Letters* to the Clarification of Key Concepts and Central Ideas in Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*", p. 5, note 9.

However, he wanted to convert as a *Jew* and therefore decided to attend for the last time an office of Yom Kippour (Day of Atonement) in a small Orthodox synagogue in Berlin. He left the synagogue as a changed person and a few days later on October 31<sup>st</sup> 1913, he wrote his famous letter to Rudolf Ehrenberg with the often-cited statement: “*Ich bleibe also Jude.*” [“I remain thus a Jew.”].<sup>230</sup> Another person who played a crucial role for Rosenzweig was Margrit (Gritli) Rosenstock-Huessy, the wife of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. Rosenzweig met Gritli in Kassel in 1917 and became her lover for several years. The dialog on Judaism and Christianity and the question of conversion, which were at stake in the letters between her husband Eugen and Franz Rosenzweig, continued via the love letters of Franz and Gritli.<sup>231</sup> Whereas Rosenstock frankly stated his wish to persuade Rosenzweig to renounce Judaism and to accept conversion, Gritli on the contrary encouraged him to follow his own way by affirming: “*Franz, ich suche dein jüdisches Herz.*” [“Franz, I am searching for your Jewish heart.”].<sup>232</sup> Their correspondence provides an impressive example of the appreciation of the otherness of the fellow man. It is further remarkable that it was by means of his love for Gritli, a *Christian* woman, that Rosenzweig managed to completely overcome the idea of conversion and found the inspiration to compose a masterpiece of modern *Jewish* thought, i.e. *The Star of Redemption*. Furthermore, the decision not to convert to Christianity was by no means a marginal fact or a nice anecdote in his biography as it has often been treated.<sup>233</sup> Instead it was the turning point of his whole existence and the starting point of what Rosenzweig later called the “New Thinking”. As Bernhard Casper points out,

[...] the necessity for Rosenzweig to reflect on philosophy from Ionia to Jena arose just as much from personal conflicts. The question of how reality is to be understood was for Rosenzweig certainly a question for thought. But it was for him simultaneously a highly personal, existential question –

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<sup>230</sup> Franz Rosenzweig in a letter to Rudolf Ehrenberg on October 31<sup>st</sup> 1913, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, I, 1, p. 133.

<sup>231</sup> See *Judaism Despite Christianity. The “Letters on Christianity and Judaism” between Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenstock*, ed. by Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. See further, Stahmer, Harold, “Rosenzweig’s Correspondence on ‘Judaism and Christianity’ with Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy – 1916”, in: Stahmer, Harold, “*Speak That I May See Thee!*” *The Religious Significance of Language*, pp. 159-168.

<sup>232</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Die “Gritli”-Briefe: Briefe an Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy*, henceforth cited as *Gritli-Briefe*. Cf. also the online edition: <http://www.argobooks.org/gritli/index.html> (21.02.2011). Rosenzweig met Gritli for the first time in June 1917 in Kassel. They soon became lovers and their affair lasted from 1918 until 1922, see Meir, Ephraim, *Letters of Love. Franz Rosenzweig’s Spiritual Biography and Oeuvre in Light of the Gritli Letters*, p. xi.

<sup>233</sup> Among the rare exceptions see Horwitz, Rivka, “Warum ließ Rosenzweig sich nicht taufen?” and Meir, Ephraim, “Muss ein Jude Christ werden, um zu Gott zu kommen? Die Bedeutung Franz Rosenzweigs für den jüdisch-christlichen Dialog”.

namely in the encounter with Eugen Rosenstock. Implied in Rosenzweig's much considered decision to remain a Jew is his remark to Rosenstock: 'Recognize that there is the other.'<sup>234</sup>

This issue was indeed fundamental for Rosenzweig, who himself wrote from the threshold of death via his (non)conversion into life (*ins Leben*) – the words with which *The Star of Redemption* ends. It was a matter of life and death as Nahum Glatzer, a friend and colleague of Rosenzweig emphasizes: "The story of Franz Rosenzweig is the story of a conversion."<sup>235</sup> This is also proved through Rosenzweig's own statements concerning this crucial event of his life which is further echoed in his letters of later years. On August 27, 1919, after a difficult night of discussion concerning his Judaism, he wrote to Eugen Rosenstock for example: "I cannot forget the night when you suddenly wanted to 'exterminate' my roots, not thinking that this would be my death (for the *Spiritus qui me vivificat* rises in me from this root)."<sup>236</sup> In this letter Rosenzweig talked very directly by clearly emphasizing his Jewish identity against his Christian friend and underscoring that

I know and feel as alive (in my mind) only to the unspeakable disgust towards Christ; and equally the inexpressible happiness to be a Jew and to have to search for the truth not through the medium of the lie.<sup>237</sup>

It is thus nothing but consequent when Rosenzweig conceived his magnum opus *The Star of Redemption* as "a Jewish book", as he underscored in a letter to Martin Buber.<sup>238</sup>

Secondly, to understand what is meant by Levinas's notion of 'Judaism as a category of being', it is necessary to stress the historical development of this statement: it is already used in

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<sup>234</sup> Bernhard Casper in an interview with Levinas, "Judaism and Christianity after Rosenzweig", in: *Is it righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins, pp. 255-267, p. 261. For the German version see "Judentum und Christentum nach Franz Rosenzweig. Ein Gespräch", in: *Zeitgewinn. Messianisches Denken nach Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. by Gotthard Fuchs and Hans Hermann Henrix, pp. 163-183, p. 172.

<sup>235</sup> Glatzer, Nahum N., "Franz Rosenzweig: The story of a conversion", p. 230.

<sup>236</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Gritli-Briefe*, pp. 402-405, p. 403: "Ich kann die Nacht nicht vergessen, wo Du plötzlich meine Wurzel 'ausrotten' wolltest und nicht bedachtest, dass das mein Tod wäre (denn der *Spiritus qui me vivificat* steigt in mir auf aus dieser Wurzel)." Emphasis added.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 402: "Ich weiss und fühle als lebendig (in meinem Geist) nur den unaussprechlichen Ekel gegenüber Christus. Und das ebenso unaussprechliche Glück, Jude zu sein und die Wahrheit mir nicht auf dem Umwege über die Lüge suchen zu müssen." See also Jospe, Raphael/Meir, Ephraim, "Franz Rosenzweig's Inexpressible Joy", p. 54.

<sup>238</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Letter to Martin Buber*, undated (presumably end of August 1919), in: GS, I, 2, pp. 643-645, p. 644. See also Amir, Yehoshua, "Das spezifisch Jüdische im Denken Rosenzweigs".

fact in Levinas's captivity notebooks, his *Carnets de captivité* and, thereby, anticipates what he writes after the war on Rosenzweig's work. In his *Carnets*, Levinas first works out the notion of "Judaism as category".<sup>239</sup> He explains it as follows: "Judaism as category: where the individual salvation becomes collective – has but only one collective form: The 'I' in the 'We'."<sup>240</sup> Hence Levinas reflected already during the war on the concept of Judaism as a *category*. As I have tried to show, Rosenzweig's interpretation of Judaism, which Levinas became acquainted with during the thirties through his reading of *The Star of Redemption*, offered him an innovative philosophical perspective. It opened a new horizon beyond Heidegger's philosophy centered on ontology. When, after the war, Levinas challenges Hamlet's famous question – "To be or not to be – the question *par excellence* probably does not lie therein"<sup>241</sup> –, this can be seen as an echo of Rosenzweig's idea of the eternity of the Jewish people, beyond history and also as an echo of Hermann Cohen's dictum: "But we are eternal! [*Aber wir sind ewig!*]"<sup>242</sup> Since Judaism is conceived by Rosenzweig and Cohen as an *eternal* existence, it relates to an existence beyond 'Being and Time', i.e. beyond the Heideggerian approach of philosophy centered in ontology. It refers to a being "otherwise than being"<sup>243</sup> [*autrement qu'être*] which renders being as such ultimately meaningful. Taking into consideration the reflections that Judaism is beyond time, i.e. *eternal*, and transports thereby a message *beyond* being, it becomes comprehensible why Levinas argues that 'to be or not to be' is precisely *not* the question. The negation of this question appears like a leitmotif also in his later works, e.g. in *Otherwise than Being* where Levinas writes at the opening pages: "To be or not to be is not the question where transcendence is concerned."<sup>244</sup> Obviously, this issue touches in a certain sense the nerve of Levinas's conception of metaphysics.

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<sup>239</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 75: "Judaïsme comme catégorie."

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 86: "Judaïsme comme catégorie: où le salut individuel devient collectif – n'a qu'une forme collective. Le 'je' dans le 'nous'." On the term 'the I in the We' see also Honneth, Axel, *Das Ich im Wir. Studien zur Anerkennungstheorie*.

<sup>241</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "The Bad Conscience and the Inexorable", in: *Of God who comes to mind*, pp. 172-177, p. 177/"La mauvaise conscience et l'inexorable", in: *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, pp. 258-265, p. 265: "Être ou ne pas être, ce n'est probablement pas là la question par excellence." Levinas takes up this idea again in an interview in 1982, "The Philosopher and Death", conducted by Christian Chabanis: "'To be or not to be' is not the ultimate alternative and, in any case, not the ultimate nor the most urgent question," in: *Is it righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins, pp. 121-129, p. 125/"Le philosophe et la mort", in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Alterité et transcendance*, pp. 157-170, p. 163.

<sup>242</sup> See Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 271/*Stern*, p. 281.

<sup>243</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 4/AQE, p. 13.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p. 3/p. 14.

These views are equally reflected in Levinas's harsh critique of Western philosophy. He defines the latter in *Totality and Infinity* as an "egology",<sup>245</sup> finding its best expression in the ideal of the Socratic truth which "rests on the essential self-sufficiency of the same, its identification in ipseity, its egoism."<sup>246</sup> This critique expresses Levinas's profound opposition to the common tradition of philosophy from which he clearly distances himself. In his view,

Western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being. This primacy of the same was Socrate's teaching: to receive nothing of the Other but what is in me, as though from all eternity I was in possession of what comes to me from the outside [...].<sup>247</sup>

Beyond the limits of this traditional concept of philosophy, Levinas points out that "metaphysics precedes ontology,"<sup>248</sup> which means there is something 'beyond being' and beyond ontology, which gives sense to this very being and which finds its expression precisely through *language*. Similarly to Rosenzweig, Levinas emphasizes in *Totality and Infinity* that "*thought consists in speaking*."<sup>249</sup> In the next sentence, immediately after this statement about language, he goes on to develop his notion of *religion* which he conceives as an opposition to totality: "We propose to call 'religion' the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality."<sup>250</sup> This development of Levinas's thinking can be traced back to the time of his captivity during the war. In this period he discusses his conflict with a philosophy centered in the primacy of ontology, as represented by Heidegger's philosophy. In his *Carnets de captivité* Levinas succinctly sums up the issue at stake as follows: "Departing from Dasein or departing from Judaism."<sup>251</sup> It seems that he gave himself the answer by defining the framework of his future work for which he emphasizes the importance of Judaism, in contrast to the influence of Heidegger's philosophy of *Dasein*:

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<sup>245</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *TI*, p. 44/Ti, p. 35.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43/pp. 33-34.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43/p. 33.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40/p. 30, emphasis in the original.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>251</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 75: "Partir du *Dasein* ou partir du Judaïsme."

An essential element of my philosophy – that by which it differs from the philosophy of Heidegger – is the importance of the Other. *Eros* as the central moment. On the other hand it follows the rhythm of Judaism [...].<sup>252</sup>

The accentuation of the profound relationship between his thinking and Judaism is repeated in nearly the same words at several points in his *Carnets*. By trying to give a definition of his philosophy, key notions of Levinas's later work emerge in this context and provide an impressive insight into the development of his thought:

My philosophy – is a philosophy of face-to-face. Relationship with others, without any intermediary. *That is Judaism*. God has spoken. Prophets – the language, those who speak against their will – total transparency.<sup>253</sup>

Judaism is conceived of by Levinas as a possible solution for a way out of the impact Heidegger's thinking exerted on him in order to attain an original philosophical point of view. It is plausible in my view that his reception of Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* in the thirties plays an important role in this context.

The outlined intellectual development of Levinas can also be seen from his various philosophical notes [*Notes philosophiques diverses*] published recently in the volume *Carnets de captivité*. In these notes Levinas deals with the question:

Heidegger – extension of Greek thought – to oppose him Judaism? But his mind is completely Christianized. Löwith opposes him the Greek world. But Heidegger argues an extension of Greek thought. Whatever the concepts are with which we want to discuss with Heidegger, Heidegger denounces them as devoid of thought because not yet revised in light of his thought. – *What is needed is a new perspective*.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., p. 134: “Un élément essentiel de ma philosophie – ce par quoi elle diffère de la philosophie de Heidegger – c'est l'importance de l'Autre. *Eros* comme moment central. D'autre part elle suit le rythme du judaïsme [...].”

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., p. 186: “Ma philosophie – est une philosophie du face-à-face. Relation avec autrui, sans intermédiaire. *C'est cela le judaïsme*. Dieu a parlé. Prophètes – le langage, ceux qui parlent malgré eux – transparence totale.”, emphasis added.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., p. 467: “Heidegger – prolongement de la pensée grecque – Lui opposer le judaïsme? Mais sa pensée est entièrement christianisée. Löwith lui oppose le monde ~~grecque~~ {grec}. Mais Heidegger se dit prolongement de la pensée grecque. Quels que soient les concepts à l'aide desquels on voudrait discuter avec Heidegger, Heidegger les dénoncerait comme dépourvus de pensée parce que encore non révisés à la lumière de sa pensée. – *Ce qu'il faut, c'est un point de vue nouveau*.”, emphasis added.

This note is dated approximately from the period 1956-1963. It shows how Levinas was concerned by defining his own philosophical point of view as opposed to the thought of Heidegger. In his captivity notebooks Levinas anticipates a possible answer to this question as he explains that this new perspective is found through language, or more precisely, through *expression*. He even puts this aspect at the basis of his future philosophy:

The transcendence that I place at the basis of my philosophy – that is neither the transcendence to the object – the transcendence to the future – or the transcendence to love – but *the transcendence of the expression*.<sup>255</sup>

As expression and language are connected (because each expression is automatically a sort of communication, also unintentionally), Levinas implicitly underlines the transcendence of language as one of the key notions of his thinking.<sup>256</sup>

From this statement during the war, a connection can be drawn to his article “Is Ontology fundamental?”, published in 1951. In this article Levinas argues that *language precedes ontology*. Language and reason are mutually dependent and complement one another. In this context, Levinas clearly explains the differentiation of his thought to that of Heidegger:

To Heidegger, being-with-the-other-person – *Miteinandersein* – thus rests on the ontological relation. We reply: Is our relation to the other a *letting be*? Is not the independence of the other achieved through his or her role as one who is addressed? Is the person to whom we speak understood beforehand in his being? Not at all. The other is not first an object of understanding and then an interlocutor. The two relations are merged. In other words, addressing the other is inseparable from understanding the other.<sup>257</sup>

Language and knowledge and particularly the knowledge that we can achieve of another person are thus deeply connected to one another. Hence Levinas draws the conclusion: “To understand a

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid., p. 195: “La transcendance que je pose à la base de ma philosophie – c’est ni la transcendance vers l’objet – la transcendance vers l’avenir – ni la transcendance vers l’amour – mais *la transcendance de l’expression*.” Emphasis added.

<sup>256</sup> In chapter IV. 1, I elaborate in detail how the *transcendence of expression*, which Levinas sees as fundamental for his thought, finds its expression in the phenomenon of voice and its specific *phonetical* expression.

<sup>257</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Is Ontology fundamental?”, in: *On Thinking-of-the-Other. Entre nous*, pp. 1-11, p. 6/“L’ontologie est-elle fondamentale?”, in: *Entre nous. Essais sur le penser-à-l’autre*, pp. 12-22, p. 17. The article first appeared in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, January 1951. See also Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, pp. 45-48/Ti, pp. 36-39.

person is already to speak to him.”<sup>258</sup> It is important to stress that for Levinas ‘knowing’ is not first of all objectifying, that is to say a question of reason, but first and foremost an act of *recognition* and of approaching the other. The notion of proximity is of great importance in this context. It is linked with the face as Levinas explains in *Totality and Infinity*:

The dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face. [...] It is here that the Transcendent, infinitely other, solicits us and appeals to us. The proximity of the Other, the proximity of the neighbor, is in being an eluctable moment of the revelation of an absolute presence [...], which expresses itself.<sup>259</sup>

Therefore, what is at stake in a face-to-face conversation for Levinas is not the mere content of the communication, but the *presence* of the other, that is to say the presentation of his being through language:

The primordial essence of expression and discourse does not reside in the information they would supply concerning an interior and hidden world. In expression a being *present* itself [...] and consequently appeals to me.<sup>260</sup>

Levinas’s conception of expression and understanding differs thus from those concepts that emphasize the rational accentuation of language seen as an exchange of information between two beings. Language and moreover precisely the face-to-face of spoken language establishes for Levinas a relationship among men which is ‘otherwise than being’ and otherwise than what ontological concepts contain. Speaking goes hand in hand with getting acquainted with the other, in getting to know him, through proximity. According to Levinas, there can be no knowledge of the other without language and without speaking to the other face-to-face. It is in fact through language that a new conception of *consciousness* is developed by Levinas as he points out:

Speech delineates an original relation. The point is to see the function of language not as subordinate to the consciousness we have of the presence of the other, or of his proximity, or of our community with him, but as a condition of that conscious realization.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Is Ontology fundamental?”, in: *On Thinking-of-the-Other. Entre nous*, pp. 1-11, p. 6/“L’ontologie est-elle fondamentale?”, in: *Entre nous. Essais sur le penser-à-l’autre*, pp. 12-22, p. 17.

<sup>259</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 78/Ti, p. 76.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200/p. 218.



That means that in perceiving the other I am already in expressive relation to the other. Even by ignoring him, I nonetheless *express* to him this ignoring. In this sense Levinas emphasizes that

[m]an is the only being I cannot meet without my *expressing* this meeting to him. [...] In every attitude toward the human being there is a greeting – even if this is the refusal of a greeting. [...] This impossibility of approaching the other without speaking means that here thought is inseparable from expression.<sup>262</sup>

Thus, the encounter with a fellow man and moreover, the verbal expression of this encounter represents an ethical recognition which *precedes* the ontological cognition. Hence, in his article “Is ontology fundamental?” Levinas stresses the fact that ontology plays a subordinate role in the encounter with the other:

The relation to the other is therefore not ontology. This bond with the other is not reducible to the representation of the other, but to his invocation, and in which invocation is not preceded by an understanding, I call *religion*. The essence of discourse is prayer.<sup>263</sup>

This remarkable statement connects discourse, i.e. language, with religion and thereby shows the interference of religious notions, e.g. the one of prayer, in Levinas’s views on language. It is noteworthy that this statement appears in one of Levinas’s *philosophical* argumentations and not in one of his Talmudic readings. Levinas goes on to point out in “Is ontology fundamental?” that with the word ‘religion’ he does not want to express any mystical concept whatsoever:

No theology, no mysticism is concealed behind the analysis I have just given of the meeting with the other, the formal structure of which I felt it was important to stress. [...] ‘Religion’ remains the relationship to a being as a being.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Is Ontology fundamental?”, in: *On Thinking-of-the-Other. Entre nous*, pp. 1-11, p. 6/“L’ontologie est-elle fondamentale?”, in: *Entre nous. Essais sur le penser-à-l’autre*, pp. 12-22, p. 17.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7/p. 19.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8/p. 19.

This means that the primordial concept of ‘fundamental ontology’ as outlined by Heidegger is substituted by Levinas with an innovative concept of ‘religion’ conceived of as a “*relationship to a being as a being*”.<sup>265</sup>

This means further that the truth which is worked out through discourse and language is experienced according to Levinas first and foremost in the face-to-face relationship towards the other. Rosenzweig too stresses the fact that truth is essentially *experienced*. In the New Thinking only those truths are accepted which are well-proven [*bewährt*] in **life**; notwithstanding the fact that there may be many other truths equally proven scientifically. However, these truths represent a specific ‘scientific’ category of truth which cannot as such provide a meaning to human life (even if it is able to explain many parts of human living). As Levinas underlines, religion takes part in ‘the drama of being’,<sup>266</sup> in the relationship to the other. Furthermore, in Rosenzweig’s view, religion requests man to live a life in dialogue with the other religions, rather than being concentrated only on one’s own truth. This dialogical symbiosis is however reduced in *The Star of Redemption* to two religions: Judaism and Christianity. Levinas points this out in the last text he dedicated to Rosenzweig: the foreword he wrote for Stéphane Mosès’s study *System and Revelation* in 1982. In this small but very revealing text regarding Levinas’s reception of Rosenzweig, he describes the close relationship of truth, religion and the structure of being in Rosenzweig’s work as follows:

Truth does not anymore mean statements and affirmations but rather an event and an *eschatological drama* in the process of unfolding.<sup>267</sup> [...] The absolutely true splits up, on account of its truth itself, into Judaism and Christianity and is played out in their dialogue.<sup>268</sup> It is a life in common. But Judaism, thus brought to its *ontological dignity*, thenceforth demands of its followers not a distracted attendance at a few services but all of the dimensions of the Torah that they knew at the times of their isolation.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., emphasis added.

<sup>266</sup> See on this topic the article of Caruana, John, “The Drama of Being: Levinas and the History of Philosophy”.

<sup>267</sup> On the notion *eschatological drama* see further chapter II, 2. a), “Language and eschatology in the work of Levinas”.

<sup>268</sup> For an example of an inspiring dialogue between Judaism and Christianity see Chalier, Catherine/Faessler, Marc, *Judaïsme et Christianisme. L’écoute en partage*.

<sup>269</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Foreword”, in: Mosès, Stéphane, *System and Revelation. The philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, pp. 13-22, p. 17/“Préface”, in: Mosès, Stéphane, *Système et Révélation. La philosophie de Franz Rosenzweig*, pp. 7-16, p. 11, emphasis added. Henceforth cited as “Foreword”/“Préface”.

Similarly to the way he characterizes Judaism in Rosenzweig's thinking, Levinas, in an article of the same period, "Demanding ontology" (1980), works out a notion of a *biblical ontology* – in contrast to the ontological notion of the subject outlined by Idealism:

God holds you without letting you go, but without enslaving you: a relation in which, despite the subordination it formally outlines, the difficult freedom of man arises. It is even for this reason that God is God and not some logical term, and that the *biblical ontology* of the person departs from the subjectivity of the idealistic subject.<sup>270</sup>

The repercussions of Rosenzweig's influence on Levinas's thinking can be thus traced back from the mid-thirties up to Levinas's articles in the eighties, which prove an ongoing discussion with Rosenzweig's work. This influence is implicitly mirrored in Levinas's writings throughout his work, in particular with respect to the notions of *language*, *being* and *religion*. Further, in Levinas's refusal of any *theological* dimension of the word 'religion',<sup>271</sup> another aspect relating to Rosenzweig is highlighted. In fact, in *The Star of Redemption* the word 'religion' is not the center of attention, but moreover the lived experience of religion as an outcome of true spirituality. Religion is in this sense an umbrella term for different religious experiences which find their worldly expressions in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and so on, even though, among these religions, Judaism and Christianity play the central role in *The Star*. Rosenzweig succinctly makes clear that he did not first and foremost focus on religion in *The Star*: "God did not create religion, but instead the world. [*Gott hat eben nicht die Religion, sondern die Welt geschaffen.*]"<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Demanding Judaism", in: *Beyond the Verse. Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, pp. 3-10, p. 9/"Exigeant Judaïsme", in: *L'au-delà du verset: lectures et discours talmudiques*, pp. 17-25, p. 24, emphasis added. The article first appeared in the French journal *Le Débat*, 1980, Vol. 5, pp. 11-19.

<sup>271</sup> See Levinas, Emmanuel, "Is Ontology fundamental?", in: *On Thinking-of-the-Other. Entre nous*, pp. 1-11, p. 8/"L'ontologie est-elle fondamentale?", in: *Entre nous. Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre*, pp. 12-22, p. 19: "No theology, no mysticism is concealed behind the analysis I have just given of the meeting with the other, the formal structure of which I felt it was important to stress. [...] 'Religion' remains the relationship to a being as a being."

<sup>272</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, III, p. 153. See also Meir, Ephraim, *Letters of Love*, p. 13.

**b) Levinas's "awakening of consciousness" as a new mode of being – at the intersection of Judaism, being and language**

Coming back to the notion of 'Judaism as a category of being' one can now better evaluate the influence of Rosenzweig's thought on Levinas and also why the latter dwelled in such a detailed manner on the notion of 'Judaism as a category of being'. In my view this aspect marks a central aspect of Levinas's reception of Rosenzweig. In highlighting the *categorical* aspect of Judaism as a category of being, Levinas develops a notion of being in which being is essentially transformed in a *being-for-the-Other*. This is worked out in a radical manner in *Otherwise than Being* where Levinas conceives subjectivity as a "hostage" and "substitution".<sup>273</sup> However, the line of thought which leads to this particular notion of being begins to take shape in fact very early in Levinas's thinking. This can be seen in his captivity notebooks, where Levinas concisely points out the issue at stake: "Departing from Dasein or departing from Judaism."<sup>274</sup> It is noteworthy to stress this continuity in his work by citing again the remarkable notes Levinas wrote during his captivity: "My philosophy – is a philosophy of face-to-face. Relationship with others, without any intermediary. *That is Judaism*."<sup>275</sup> This shows how early Levinas worked out key notions of his thinking and how they differ from the philosophy of his teachers (Husserl and Heidegger) as well as about the important role of Judaism for his thinking. Furthermore one can read in Levinas captivity notebooks: "An essential element of my philosophy – that by which it differs from the philosophy of Heidegger – is the importance of the Other. *Eros* as the central moment. On the other hand it follows the rhythm of Judaism [...]."<sup>276</sup> The impact of Rosenzweig is remarkable in this context in my view. Levinas's searching for a new way to develop his work by taking into account Judaism can be seen as inspired by Rosenzweig; e.g. in his captivity notebooks Levinas notes: "Itinerary of coming back – starting from the fact that one is Jewish – and not from doctrine."<sup>277</sup> As Gilles Hanus points out, this note, though small, proves that

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<sup>273</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *OBBE*, pp. 126-127/AQE, pp. 200-201.

<sup>274</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 75: "Partir du *Dasein* ou partir du Judaïsme."

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186: "Ma philosophie – est une philosophie du face-à-face. Relation avec autrui, sans intermédiaire. *C'est cela le judaïsme*. Dieu a parlé. Prophètes – le langage, ceux qui parlent malgré eux – transparence totale." Emphasis added.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134: "Un élément essentiel de ma philosophie – ce par quoi elle diffère de la philosophie de Heidegger – c'est l'importance de l'Autre. *Eros* comme moment central. D'autre part elle suit le rythme du judaïsme [...]."

<sup>277</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 58: "Itinéraire du retour – on part du fait qu'on est juif – et non pas de la doctrine."

Levinas was reflecting on issues Rosenzweig dealt with.<sup>278</sup> The topic of ‘being Jewish’ became an important issue for Levinas, not only for daily life but also as an issue for philosophy. This is mirrored for instance in Levinas’s article “Being Jewish” (1947). Through his reception of Rosenzweig’s work in the mid-thirties, Levinas gets in fact a decisive impulse to develop a new concept of consciousness and, furthermore, a new concept of being which is essentially related to Judaism, e.g. by emphasizing key notions of Judaism, like *election*, as characterizing human subjectivity.<sup>279</sup>

This development can be traced back to his later writings. In his previously mentioned essay “Demanding Judaism” (1980), Levinas develops his views on being and Judaism by elaborating a new concept of consciousness related to the notions of *insomnia* and *continued revelation*. Let me quote at length an important passage of this article in order to place it later on in the context of my interpretation of Levinas’s notion of Judaism as a mode of being linked to transcendence. In the mentioned article Levinas gives an interpretation of Jewish consciousness which he outlines as follows:

*As if Jewish destiny were a crack in the shell of imperturbable being and the awakening to an insomnia in which the inhuman is no longer covered up and hidden by the political necessities which it shapes, and no longer excused by their universality. As a prophetic moment of human reason where every man – and all of man – ends up re-finding one another, Judaism would not mean simply a nationality, a species in a type and a contingency of History. Judaism, rather, is a rupture of the natural and the historical that are constantly reconstituted and, thus, a Revelation which is always forgotten. It is written and it becomes Bible, but the revelation is also continued [*révélation continuée*]; it is produced by way of Israel: the destiny of a people that is jostled and jostles through its daily life that which, in this life, is content with its natural or ‘historical’ meaning.<sup>280</sup>*

In the following I seek to show how the two crucial notions in this passage, i.e. *insomnia* and *continued revelation*, can be seen as central aspects regarding the interweavement of Judaism, being and language in Levinas’s thought. At stake in this passage is nothing less than an innovative interpretation of consciousness constructed through a specific definition of Judaism.

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<sup>278</sup> Hanus, Gilles, “Recension ‘Lévinas, Emmanuel, Œuvres complètes, tome 1, Paris, Grasset/IMEC, 2009’”, p. 415.

<sup>279</sup> On the notion of election (*élection*) and being chosen (*être élu*) see Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, pp. 52-53, pp. 56-57, p. 123, p. 141/AQE, pp. 88-90, p. 95, p. 196, p. 222.

<sup>280</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Demanding Judaism”, in: *Beyond the Verse. Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, pp. 3-10, p. 4/“Exigent Judaïsme”, in: *L’au-delà du verset: lectures et discours talmudiques*, pp. 17-25, p. 18, emphasis added.

By defining it as a “prophetic moment of human reason,”<sup>281</sup> Levinas attributes to Judaism a universal significance for humankind. As a constant rupture of the historical and natural, it points at something ‘beyond being’, a *transcendence* which is realized through the presence of Judaism. This aspect of a *universal* importance of Judaism was also emphasized by Levinas in a roundtable discussion with theologians and other scholars where he stated frankly: “Do not be shocked by this, but what is genuinely human is that part of being which is being-a-Jew, an echoing in the particular. [*Das echt Menschliche ist das Judesein im Menschen [...]*”<sup>282</sup> Indeed, as Hilary Putnam points out, “Levinas is universalizing Judaism. To understand him, one has to understand the paradoxical claim implicit in his writing that, in essence, *all human beings are Jews*.”<sup>283</sup> This link between *being* (in general) and *Judaism* (in particular) is an important aspect. Nonetheless it has often been neglected in interpretations on the philosophy of Levinas in order to blind out a correlation between his confessional and philosophical writings. However, it is no longer unknown today that the two types of writings obviously overlap with regard to many of the key issues of Levinas’s thinking. Up-to-date research literature increasingly takes into account the fact that the “Judaic heritage [...] is crucial for a proper understanding of Levinas’s work” and tries to work out “an interpretation of Levinas’s philosophy from the sources of Judaism”.<sup>284</sup> In my view, this is essential for an adequate evaluation of his work.

As I have shown above through a discussion of Levinas’s articles from the thirties, dealing with the Jewish situation in the face of the dangers of Nazism, the idea of a connection between being and Judaism can be traced back to the inter-war period. Shortly after the war Levinas took up again this idea. In his article “Being Jewish” (1947) he investigates the question “in what Jewish existence consists. Without claiming a theology, by simply analyzing the Jewish will to

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> “Judaism and Christianity after Franz Rosenzweig”, in: *Is it righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins, pp. 255-267, p. 257/“Judentum und Christentum nach Franz Rosenzweig. Ein Gespräch”, in: *Zeitgewinn. Messianisches Denken nach Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. by Gotthard Fuchs and Hans Hermann Henrix, pp. 163-183, p. 167. The conversation with Levinas was originally conducted in German.

<sup>283</sup> Putnam, Hilary, “Levinas and Judaism”, p. 34, emphasis added.

<sup>284</sup> Fagenblat, Michael, *A Covenant of Creatures. Levinas’s Philosophy of Judaism*, p. xii. See also Meir, Ephraim, *Levinas’s Jewish Thought. Between Jerusalem and Athens*, and Nordmann, Sophie, *Philosophie et Judaïsme. H. Cohen, F. Rosenzweig, E. Levinas*. For an early approach of this topic see also Ciaramelli, Fabio, “Le rôle du judaïsme dans l’oeuvre de Levinas”. For a general overview on this topic see further Levy, Ze’ev, *Between Yafeth and Shem. On the Relationship between Jewish and General Philosophy*, as well as the article of the same author, “Does It Make Sense to Speak about Jewish Ethics?”, in: Levy, Ze’ev, *From Spinoza to Lévinas. Hermeneutical, Ethical, and Political Issues in Modern and Contemporary Jewish Philosophy*, pp. 111-126.

be, which posits itself anew.”<sup>285</sup> In linking the experience of the Jews in their confrontation with the Nazi Anti-semitism to a universal human experience, Levinas ties (once again) the general issue of *being* to a reference of the experience of *being Jewish*:

The recourse of Hitlerian anti-Semitism to racial myth reminded the Jew of the irremissibility of his being. Not to be able to flee one’s condition – for many this was like vertigo. Granted this is a human situation, and in this the human soul is perhaps naturally Jewish.<sup>286</sup>

It is striking that a general connection between being as such (i.e. the human soul) and being Jewish is outlined. Furthermore, Levinas points out that “to be Jewish is [...] to feel for oneself *a place in the economy of being*.”<sup>287</sup> This statement echoes obviously Levinas’s thoughts on ‘Judaism as a category of being’ in his captivity notebooks. It is further noteworthy that in Levinas’s argumentation ‘being Jewish’ is linked *a priori* to a certain reference to religion. He defines the characteristics of the Jewish people as introducing a religious sphere into the world, whether the single Jew defines himself as religious or not. This aspect is clearly emphasized in Levinas’s article: “[...] the Jew is the very entrance of the religious event into the world; better yet, he is the impossibility of a world without religion.”<sup>288</sup> Aside from the self-assessment of the single Jew, in terms feeling Jewish or not, this fact is experienced by the Jew according to Levinas through the concrete “feeling that he exists *metaphysically*.”<sup>289</sup> In Levinas’s view, even “[t]he least rag-seller who thinks himself ‘liberated’, the intellectual who thinks himself an atheist, breathes still the mystery of his creation and his election [...]”<sup>290</sup> When taking a closer look at what is meant by Levinas’s statement “to exist metaphysically”, it comes to the fore that the pivotal issue of his argumentation in this article is the notion of ‘election’. The coming-into-being of the subject as an *election* opens the path for Levinas’s interpretation, e.g. in *Otherwise than Being*, to conceive being as linked to an ‘otherwise than being’. By borrowing the notion ‘election’ from a Jewish context Levinas links general notions of his philosophy, i.e. being, subjectivity, etc., to a Jewish background. To become a personality, that is to say a human being *tout court*, means for Levinas to be *elected*, to be unique and irreplaceable. The Jewish people as

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<sup>285</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Being Jewish”, p. 208/“Être Juif”, p. 103. The article was originally published in the French journal *Confluences*, Vol. 7, no. 15-17, 1947, pp. 253-264.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid, p. 205/p. 99, emphasis added.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, p. 209/p. 104.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid, p. 210/p. 105, emphasis added.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

the chosen people, as outlined in the biblical stories of the Old Testament, represent an archetype of this experience. Levinas stresses that the notion of ‘election’ in his philosophy is in no way to be understood as a privilege or a preferential treatment:

The meaning of election, and of revelation understood as election, is not to be found in the injustice of a preference. [...] Thus, Jewish election is not initially lived as pride or particularism. It is the very mystery of personhood.<sup>291</sup>

Election and personality are thus linked together in his interpretation. Levinas concludes his article by underscoring that the Jewish existence expresses, in this sense, a general fact of human existence: “Jewish existence is thus the fulfillment of the human condition as fact, personhood and freedom.”<sup>292</sup> A description of Jewish being is thus elaborated in this article through an interpretation of being in general.

This early exegesis of Judaism as linked to being in general, as conducted in the article “Being Jewish” (1947), is extremely important. It points the way to Levinas’s further interpretations of subjectivity, responsibility and language. His argumentation outlines the background for his works to come, in which the notion of *election* or *vocation*,<sup>293</sup> especially in connection to responsibility, can be found throughout as a common theme. The article “Being Jewish” is in my view a pivotal point between Levinas’s studies and articles in the thirties, namely *On Escape*, and his later writings, published after the Second World War. In order to give an interesting example in this context, I would like to emphasize that after the war Levinas outlines another mode for an ‘escape from being’ realized through *religion* or more precisely, through the Jewish religion, i.e. *Judaism*. In an article on the Jewish writer Samuel Joseph Agnon (1888-1979) published in 1973, Levinas describes this line of thought as follows:

Religion (or, more precisely, *Judaism*) would be the way in which a *de-substantiation of being* is of itself procured, of itself possible – an excluded middle in which the limits between life and non-life disappear. This modality is diametrically opposed to the reality of the substrata, sculpture-being, architecture and structure-being, solid being, each term of which begins in its own causality, and,

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid., pp. 209-210/p. 105.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid, p. 210/p. 105.

<sup>293</sup> The notions *election* and *vocation* are used similarly, see e.g. Levinas, Emmanuel, “God and Philosophy”, in: *Of God who comes to mind*, pp. 55-78/“Dieu et la philosophie”, in: *De Dieu qui vient à l’idée*, pp. 93-127.



nucleate, sustains itself. The symbolism of the rite, like the enigma of the Hebraic mode of expression [*dire*], de-nucleates ultimate solidity beneath the plasticity of forms, as taught by Western ontology.<sup>294</sup>

Judaism is presented here as an alternative to the ontological conceptions of Western thought. The ‘solid being’ de-nucleates itself through an impact of religious transcendence. This statement refers to the mentioned article from 1947, “Being Jewish”, where Levinas states that Judaism introduces the religious into the world and that the Jew signifies “the impossibility of a world without religion.”<sup>295</sup> Given this background, it is no surprise that in his article on Agnon in 1973, Judaism is said to have the power of a “de-substantiation of being”. Furthermore, this elucidates what is at stake in the introductory citation of Levinas’s article “Demanding Judaism”, where the Jewish being is portrayed as “a crack in the shell of imperturbable being”.<sup>296</sup> The philosophical elaboration of a concept of being as linked to Judaism has to be seen as an outcome of Levinas’s general critique of a philosophy focused in ontology, represented e.g. in Heidegger’s concept of ‘fundamental ontology’ or in the Socratic ideal of truth, as he points out in *Totality and Infinity*:

Western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being. This primacy of the same was Socrates’s teaching: to receive nothing of the Other [*sic*] but what is in me, as though from all eternity I was in possession of what comes to me from the outside – to receive nothing or to be free.<sup>297</sup>

It is obvious that Judaism holds in this line of thought a remarkable place as a counterweight against the traditional concepts of ontology. It is further noteworthy that the article on Agnon is not a part of Levinas’s confessional texts, e.g. his Talmudic readings, but appeared in one of his philosophical anthologies on secular topics.

To come back to the above cited passage of his article “Demanding Judaism”, Levinas connects his interpretation of the relationship between being (in general) and a being linked to Judaism (in particular), i.e. the Jewish existence, to the notion of *insomnia*. The latter is a very

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<sup>294</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Poetry and Resurrection: Notes on Agnon”, in: *Proper Names*, pp. 7-16, p. 10/“Poésie et résurrection: Notes sur Agnon”, in: *Noms propres*, pp. 13-25, p. 18. The article first appeared in *Les Nouveaux Cahiers*, Vol. 9, 1973, pp. 39-43.

<sup>295</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Being Jewish”, p. 209/p. 104.

<sup>296</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Demanding Judaism”, in: *Beyond the Verse*, pp. 3-10, p. 4/“Exigeant Judaïsme”, in: *L’au-delà du verset*, pp. 17-25, p. 18.

<sup>297</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 43/Ti, pp. 33-34.

important notion of Levinas's thinking which I would like to point out in more detail in the following and to place it further into context to the aforementioned. On various occasions Levinas explained what he meant by 'insomnia', a term that is at first sight rather exceptional for a philosophical context. In an interview he gave in 1987, entitled "On the Usefulness of Insomnia", Levinas stated that this experience, far from being a marginal phenomenon, is in fact a crucial event for every human being:

Awakening is, I believe, that which is proper to man. The search, on the part of the one who has been awakened, for a new sobering, more profound, philosophical. The encounter with texts which result from the conversations between Socrates and his interlocutors calls us to wake up, but so too does the encounter with the other man.<sup>298</sup>

In his article "Philosophy and Awakening" (1976) Levinas furthermore outlines a notion of insomnia conceived as a *sobering up*. He refers to Husserl in his argumentation and points out that "Husserl's theory of the Inter-subjective Reduction describes the astonishing or traumatizing (*trauma*, not *thauma*) possibility of a sobering up in which the *I*, facing the Other, is freed from itself, and awakens from the dogmatic slumber."<sup>299</sup> Similarly in another article of this period, Levinas emphasizes this aspect succinctly: "One must not sleep, one must philosophize."<sup>300</sup> In his article "Philosophy and Awakening" he admits to have borrowed this notion of a 'sobering up' from Heidegger's philosophy. However Levinas obviously uses it in an independent and innovative way by raising the following rhetorical questions:

And is not ethical relation to the other that event in which this *permanent revolution* of sobering up is concrete life? [...] An *awakening to consciousness*, the truth of which is not the consciousness of that awakening? An awakening that remains a first movement toward the other, the traumatism of which is revealed in the Inter-subjective Reduction, a traumatism secretly striking the very subjectivity of the subject?<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> "On the Usefulness of Insomnia", in: *Is it righteous to be?*, ed. by Jill Robbins, pp. 234-236, p. 234/"De l'utilité des insomnies", entretien avec Bertrand Révillon, in: *Les imprévus de l'histoire*, pp. 177-180, p. 177. Originally published in the French journal *La Croix – L'Événement*, 10.6.1987, p. 18.

<sup>299</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Philosophy and Awakening", in: *On Thinking-of-the-Other. Entre nous*, pp. 77-90, p. 87/"La philosophie et l'éveil", in: *Entre nous. Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre*, pp. 86-99, p. 96.

<sup>300</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "From Consciousness to Wakefulness. Starting from Husserl", in: *Of God who comes to mind*, pp. 15-32, p. 15/"De la conscience à la veille. A partir de Husserl", in: *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, pp. 34-61, p. 35. The article was firstly published in French in the Dutch journal *Bijdragen*, Vol. 35, 1974.

<sup>301</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Philosophy and Awakening", in: *On Thinking-of-the-Other. Entre nous*, pp. 77-90, p. 88/"La philosophie et l'éveil", in: *Entre nous. Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre*, pp. 86-99, p. 97, emphasis added.

As an answer, Levinas succinctly adds after these questions, the crucial notion in this context: “*Transcendence*: this term is used without any theological presupposition. It is, to the contrary, the excess of life that is presupposed by theologies.”<sup>302</sup> This *permanent revolution* that Levinas speaks of can also be seen as a continued revelation in which the mode of transcendence occurs in concrete life – not in heaven or some lofty theological sphere. The event of transcendence is conceived as an event taking place *among* people. In this sense I respectfully disagree with the interpretation of Samuel Moyn who sees a contrast in Levinas and Rosenzweig by emphasizing that “for Rosenzweig, divinity is the only alterity; for Levinas, humanity is.”<sup>303</sup> Since the relation of man to God is reflected in the inter-human relationship among people, divinity and humanity are fundamentally connected to each other in the philosophy of both thinkers.<sup>304</sup>

As a result of his critique on the concept of consciousness, Levinas strives to outline in the same period a new concept of rationality. In his article “From Consciousness to Wakefulness” (1974) he argues against “precisely [an] ontological interpretation of reason”, a concept which had already been implicitly criticized in his argument that ‘language precedes ontology’ in his article “Is Ontology fundamental?” from 1951, in order to pave the way “toward a reason understood as *watchfulness* or *vigil*”.<sup>305</sup> Levinas’s critique of reason starts by pointing out that reason is always an “act of identification”<sup>306</sup> through which self-consciousness is produced – “[...] and if it is a sobering up, then it is a sobering up in the Same, a coming-back-to-onself.”<sup>307</sup> Referring to Husserl’s phenomenological analysis and his notions of “sleep” and “sleeplessness” [*veille*], Levinas intends in this article to go beyond Husserl and to sketch a new mode of consciousness by means of such terms like “awakening”, “insomnia” and “vigilance”. These notions are used by Levinas with regard to a special relationship of the I to the other:

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid., p. 88/pp. 97-98.

<sup>303</sup> Moyn, Samuel, *Origins of the Other. Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics*, p. 17.

<sup>304</sup> Regarding Rosenzweig I want to clarify that although transcendence emerges first and foremost out of the relation of man to God (and not man to man), it is fully realized however only in Part III of the *The Star of Revelation*, i.e. the part in which life in the community and among people is described.

<sup>305</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “From Consciousness to Wakefulness. *Starting from Husserl*”, in: *Of God who comes to mind*, pp. 15-32, p. 187 (the notes of the article are at the end of the book), note 1/“De la conscience à la veille. A partir de Husserl”, in: *De Dieu qui vient à l’idée*, pp. 34-61, p. 35, note 1.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., p. 17/p. 37.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid. As the terms used in this context are very significant for his discourse, I cite also Levinas’s original French text: “La raison, c’est l’identité qui se pose comme Moi: identité qui s’identifie – qui retourne à soi – par la force de sa forme. [...] L’énergie du retour à soi de l’identification – cette *vis formae* – est l’activité de tout acte et, si dégrisement, dégrisement dans le Même, un revenir-à-soi.”, p. 37.

Transcendence in immanence, the strange structure (or the *depth*) of the psyche as a soul within the soul; it is the awakening that always recommences in sleeplessness itself; the *Same* infinitely carried back in its most intimate identity to the *Other*. [...] In awakening, between the Same and the Other there is shown a relationship irreducible to adversity and conciliation, alienation and assimilation. [...] This is a heteronomy of freedom that the Greeks have not taught us.<sup>308</sup>

Thereby, the autonomy of the I is “torn out of [his] rootedness.”<sup>309</sup> Levinas expresses this relationship to the other with a paradoxical notion that underscores being “[i]n oneself, liberation of self.”<sup>310</sup> In this context the notion of insomnia is of crucial importance because it indicates precisely the “scission of identity” and the “enucleation of the very atomicity of the one”, which is the aim of Levinas’s analysis.<sup>311</sup> Contrary to “attention”, which is directed toward objects, “vigilance” is “absorbed in the rustling of unavoidable being” and “anonymous”.<sup>312</sup> In its irreducibility to a namable subject of consciousness, this “vigilance” shakes up the phenomenological terminology within which Levinas is working. The innovative concept of identity Levinas outlines, leads him also to a new definition of reason and furthermore, to a rupture with the conventional concept of ontology:

A sobering up always yet to be further sobered, a wakefulness watchful for a new awakening, the Same always awakening from itself – Reason. [...] The frame of ontology is here broken, with the subject passing from the Same – excluding or assimilating the other – to the awakening of the Same by the other, sobering up from its identity and its being.<sup>313</sup>

In *Otherwise than Being*, the second major work of Levinas which appeared in the same year (1974) as the cited article “From Consciousness to Wakefulness”, Levinas connects this line of thought with the notion of *substitution*.<sup>314</sup> The latter is also of central importance for his philosophy. It indicates the point to which his argumentation culminates in a certain sense: “The vigilance – as the waking up in awakening – signifies the defection of identity. This is not

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid, p. 24/pp. 47-48.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., p. 26/p. 52.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., p. 26/p. 51.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26/pp. 50-51.

<sup>312</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, EE, p. 65/DEE, p. 110.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., p. 30/p. 57.

<sup>314</sup> See Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, chapter IV, pp. 99-129/AQE, pp. 156-205.

identity's extinction but its *substitution for the neighbor*.<sup>315</sup> The aspect of a 'substitution' for the other as the ultimate consequence of a radical responsibility is further elaborated by Levinas in his article "God and philosophy" (1975). Here the connection of the mentioned notions becomes evident: "The referring to another is awakening [*éveil*], awakening to proximity, which is responsibility for the neighbor to the point of substitution for him."<sup>316</sup> Furthermore, in this article Levinas speaks of "[i]nsomnia as a category" that "comes out of the logic of the categories, prior to all anthropological attention and dullness".<sup>317</sup> He speaks similarly in his article on Rosenzweig of the fact that, for Rosenzweig, the "*Jewish existence [...] itself is an essential event of being; Jewish existence is a category of being*."<sup>318</sup> Likewise, as I stated above, Levinas speaks in his *Carnets de captivité* of "Judaism as category"<sup>319</sup>. Insomnia also has to be understood as a category of Levinas's thinking as he emphasizes:

This is precisely *the insomnia* that one cannot state otherwise than by these words, which have a *categorical* signification. [...] An irreducible category of the difference *at the heart* of the Same, which pierces the structure of being, in animating or inspiring it.<sup>320</sup>

Hence, a certain connection of the notions *insomnia* and *Judaism* can be pointed out here and linked to Levinas's concept of human consciousness. What is furthermore at stake in this new concept of reason and consciousness is, according to Levinas, nothing less than a rediscovering of life, a question "of reanimating – or of reactivating – this life in order to reach, under the name of indubitable being, the living presence. *It is a question, in presence, of rediscovering life*."<sup>321</sup> Rosenzweig too was concerned in the *Star of Redemption* with life as such, as Amos Funkenstein emphasizes: "Zest for life is the deepest drive in the *Stern der Erlösung*. It was also the secret of his ability to suffer and work throughout his debilitating illness. The point can be made briefly,

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<sup>315</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "From Consciousness to Wakefulness. *Starting from Husserl*", in: *Of God who comes to mind*, pp. 15-32, pp. 31-32/"De la conscience à la veille. A partir de Husserl", in: *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, pp. 34-61, p. 60, emphasis added.

<sup>316</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "God and Philosophy", in: *Of God who comes to mind*, pp. 55-78, p. 68/"Dieu et la philosophie", in: *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, pp. 93-127, p. 113. The article first appeared in the French journal *Le Nouveau Commerce*, Vol. 30-31, Spring 1975, pp. 97-128.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58/p. 98.

<sup>318</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "'Between Two Worlds' (The Way of Franz Rosenzweig)", in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 181-201, p. 183/"Entre deux mondes. La voie de Franz Rosenzweig", in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 253-281, p. 256.

<sup>319</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 75: "Judaïsme comme catégorie."

<sup>320</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "From Consciousness to Wakefulness. *Starting from Husserl*", in: *Of God who comes to mind*, pp. 15-32, p. 25/"De la conscience à la veille. A partir de Husserl", in: *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, pp. 34-61, p. 50.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27/p. 53.

yet it is more important [...] than all our theoretical considerations hitherto.”<sup>322</sup> Levinas too focuses ultimately not merely on *theoretical* questions of philosophy, but on a question concerning *life* as such: how to outline a new mode of consciousness that adequately takes into account the presence of the fellow human being. Against the background of the outlined explanations it becomes clearer now what Levinas meant by his aforementioned statement that “[r]eligion (or, more precisely, *Judaism*) would be the way in which a *de-substantiation of being* is of itself procured, of itself possible – an excluded middle in which the limits between life and non-life disappear.”<sup>323</sup> At the intersection of *being* and *Jewish being* as linked to a beyond the ‘here and now’, Levinas’s concept of being becomes itself a ‘beyond-of-being’. Because the ethical dimension which takes place in the face-to-face relationship of an everyday encounter and is linked to everyday being, is according to Levinas something ‘beyond being’. Therefore, Levinas’s thinking is not centered in the philosophy of being, but in the exploration of the significance of a ‘beyond of being’, i.e. metaphysics and transcendence. Therefore *ethics* precedes ontology and being. In his article “God and Philosophy” Levinas underlines this aspect as follows: “Ethics is not a moment of being, it is otherwise and better than being; the very possibility of the beyond.”<sup>324</sup>

Another important aspect of Levinas’s new interpretation of consciousness is the notion of a *continued revelation*, cited at the beginning of this section in the aforementioned passage of his article “Demanding Judaism”. It is noteworthy to point out that this line of thought is close to that of Rosenzweig: for the latter revelation was also not something that happened *only once* at Mount Sinai and then never again. As Rivka Horwitz demonstrates, Rosenzweig “*denies that prophecy ever stopped*. [...] There is no difference apparent in his writings between revelation in classical prophecy (on the basis of which religion is established) and revelation in later generations.”<sup>325</sup> Revelation is thus conceived as a “continuous creation of believers”<sup>326</sup> which requires the active participation of man in order for it to be realized as revelation. This underlines that revelation is in fact a mutual event between God and man; that is to say man’s *acknowledgment* of God and

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<sup>322</sup> Funkenstein, Amos, “An Escape from History: Rosenzweig on the Destiny of Judaism”, p. 125.

<sup>323</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Poetry and Resurrection: Notes on Agnon”, in: *Proper Names*, pp. 7-16, p. 10/“Poésie et résurrection: Notes sur Agnon”, in: *Noms propres*, pp. 13-25, p. 18.

<sup>324</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel „God and Philosophy“, in: *Of God who comes to mind*, pp. 55-78, p. 69/“Dieu et la philosophie”, in: *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, pp. 93-127, p. 114.

<sup>325</sup> Horwitz, Rivka, “Franz Rosenzweig on Language”, p. 405.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*

God's *being* are interwoven. With reference to a rabbinical citation, Rosenzweig points out this aspect in *The Star of Redemption* as follows: "When the soul confesses before the face of God and with this confesses and thus attests God's being, then only does God, too, the manifest God, acquire being: 'When you confess me, then I am.'"<sup>327</sup> Levinas refers to the movement of a 'continued revelation' which occurs in the relationship of man to God in his last text on Rosenzweig, published as a foreword in Stéphane Mosès's study *System and Revelation*. Here Levinas highlights the specific connection of a continued revelation and love in Rosenzweig's thought: "God's coming out toward man locked into his selfhood: Revelation that is a presence *always renewed*, that is, love."<sup>328</sup> He further demonstrates that it is through *language* that "the shattering of the enclosure"<sup>329</sup> of the self takes place in Rosenzweig's system: "Language, a coming out movement, is also the event of ex-is-tence."<sup>330</sup> According to Levinas, language, love and ontology are thus connected in Rosenzweig's system. Levinas highlights that revelation creates nothing new, but connects an event at the intersection of the triad *language, sociability and love*: "The entering-into-relation by Revelation *establishes* nothing; it binds that which cannot be added up; it binds with a tie whose language or sociability or love would be the originary metaphor."<sup>331</sup> This underscores the importance Levinas attributes to language with regard to *The Star of Redemption* and defines it as a key notion required to understand the whole of Rosenzweig's system.

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<sup>327</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 196/*Stern*, p. 203. See also *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana. R. Kahana's Compilation of Discourses for Sabbaths and Festal Days*, trans. from Hebrew and Aramaic by William G. (Gershon Zev) Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982, Chapter XII, 6, pp. 232-233, referring to Jesaja 43:12.

<sup>328</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Foreword", p. 15/"Préface", p. 9.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20/p. 14.

#### 4. Between Judaism and philosophy – Rosenzweig’s influence on Levinas’s thinking

To briefly sum up the references to Judaism regarding the development of Levinas’s and Rosenzweig’s philosophy, it can be emphasized first of all that Judaism obviously served as a motor of their reflections and not just as one matter among others.<sup>332</sup> The fact that Levinas attributes Judaism to be ‘a category of being’ can be seen, in my view, on the one hand as a result of his reception of Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*; on the other hand it is a reflection which mirrors his experiences during his captivity in the Second World War, which had thrown him back on his Judaism in a radical way. Moreover, it is also an outcome of Levinas’s search for an alternative to Heidegger’s philosophy, compromised through its adherence to Nazism. In giving Judaism the state of an *ontological category*, ‘being Jewish’ is conceived of not as a mere accidental fact of an existence but as of a categorical significance. This is how Levinas described the fact of ‘being Jewish’ in his captivity notebooks as well as shortly after the war in his article “Being Jewish” (*Être Juif*).<sup>333</sup> Being Jewish is conceived of in these writings as an important figure of being as such. Thereby it points out the way towards a concept for an innovative ‘mode of being’, which took shape in Levinas’s later work, e.g. in *Otherwise than Being*. In the latter, Levinas develops the concept of a being as ‘otherwise than being’, i.e. as substitution, election and radical responsibility – notions that were ignored by Western concepts of ontology.

Nonetheless it should not remain unmentioned that the relationship of Judaism and philosophy in Levinas’s work is a controversial topic of discussion. As I pointed out, the up-to-date research literature on Levinas (mostly) takes into account the influence of Judaism and Jewish sources on Levinas’s thinking. However, one must also face the fact that Levinas himself openly denied any theological aspirations. He claims that the starting point of his philosophy is “absolutely non-theological” and points out: “I insist upon this. It is not theology that I am doing,

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<sup>332</sup> Nordmann, Sophie, *Philosophie et Judaïsme. H. Cohen, F. Rosenzweig, E. Levinas*, p. 153: “[...] le judaïsme – non comme simple *objet*, mais comme véritable *moteur* de la réflexion philosophique.” Emphasis in the original.

<sup>333</sup> See further also Levinas’s texts “Écrits sur la captivité”, written shortly after the war, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, pp. 199-215, in particular “La spiritualité chez le prisonnier israélien”, pp. 205-208, and “L’expérience juive du prisonnier”, pp. 209-215.



but philosophy.”<sup>334</sup> On another occasion, in a conversation 1975 with scholars of the University of Leyden, Levinas further argues: “I think that in spite of everything, what I do is *phenomenology*, [...] even if all of the Husserlian methodology is not respected.”<sup>335</sup> In the same discussion, Levinas emphasized on the other hand: “There is no choice: philosophy is spoken in Greek. [...] My concern everywhere is precisely to translate this non-Hellenism of the Bible into Hellenic terms [...]”<sup>336</sup> When considering the key notions of Levinas’s thought, one is thus confronted with notions and concepts apparently borrowed from biblical contexts. Levinas elucidates for example his notions of *illegitimacy* and *trace* with a reference to Exodus 33.<sup>337</sup> Further he explains in *Otherwise than Being* the central notion ‘to-be-obsessed’ by the other with a reference to the *Song of Songs*: “I am sick with love.”<sup>338</sup> To explain this interweaving of Biblical citations in his philosophical texts some scholars have stressed Levinas’s Jewish origins by pointing out that his “criticism of the occidental way of life and thought would probably have been impossible if he had not been educated as a Jew.”<sup>339</sup> In contradistinction to this notion, other scholars pointed out the particular impact of contemporary philosophical trends on Levinas’s intellectual development; e.g. Samuel Moyn underscores:

Levinas’s conception of ethics as interpersonal encounter [...] is quite simply unthinkable except against the modern recasting of revelation as subjective experience and the Weimar-era understanding of revelation as interpersonal encounter. [...] The origins of the other occurred [...] through the transplantation of theology into phenomenology.<sup>340</sup>

While I agree with the importance of the influence that contemporary philosophy had on Levinas’s thinking, I think that Moyn’s interpretation falls short of the active impact Judaism had

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<sup>334</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Transcendance et Hauteur”, in: *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie*, Vol. 56, 1962, pp. 89-111, p. 110: “[...] mon point de départ est absolument non théologique. J’y tiens beaucoup. Ce n’est pas de la théologie que je fais, mais de la philosophie.” Reprinted in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Liberté et commandement*, pp. 59-123, p. 116.

<sup>335</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Questions and Answers”, in: *Of God who comes to mind*, pp. 79-99, p. 87/“Questions et réponses”, in: *De Dieu qui vient à l’idée*, pp. 128-157, p. 139-140, emphasis added.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85/p. 137. See further Wright, Tamra, *The Twilight of Jewish Philosophy. Emmanuel Levinas’ Ethical Hermeneutics*, chapter 5 (“Translating the Bible into Greek – Levinas’ Ethical Hermeneutics”), pp. 141-172.

<sup>337</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Revelation in the Jewish Tradition”, in: *Beyond the Verse*, pp. 127-147, here pp. 141-142/“La Révélation dans la tradition juive”, in: *L’au-delà du verset*, pp. 158-181, here pp. 174-175.

<sup>338</sup> *Song of Songs* 5:8; see the citation in Levinas, Emmanuel, *OBBE*, p. 142 and p. 198, note 5 (the reference is unfortunately wrongly cited as “*Song of Songs* 6:8” (it also appears notably in 2:5)/AQE, p. 222 and *ibid.* note.

<sup>339</sup> Peperzak, Adriaan, “Emmanuel Levinas: Jewish Experience and Philosophy”, p. 298. See also Banon, David, “Penseur Juif ou Juif qui pense?”, p. 223; and Meir, Ephraim, “Judaism and Philosophy: Each Other’s Other in Levinas”, as well as of the same author *Levinas’s Jewish Thought between Jerusalem and Athens*.

<sup>340</sup> Moyn, Samuel, *Origins of the Other*, pp. 12-13.

on Levinas's life and work.<sup>341</sup> It is remarkable in this context that Levinas placed his active professional life after the war in the service of Judaism, as being the director of the *Ecole Normale Israélite Orientale* (ENIO), a Jewish school devoted to educating teachers for the Maghreb region.<sup>342</sup> Levinas's work at the ENIO "was more than a job; it was a return to Jewish culture [...],"<sup>343</sup> and a clear decision to support and reconstruct Jewish life after the catastrophe of the Shoah.

Another aspect of the relationship between Judaism and philosophy in Levinas's thinking lies in the fact that the influence he gained through his annual Talmudic readings at the *Colloques des intellectuels juifs de la langue française* [Colloquia of French-speaking Jewish Intellectuals] is somewhat disproportionate to the actual training he had with regard to the Talmud, as Ethan Kleinberg underlines: "Levinas was not trained as a Talmudic scholar and the errant assumption that he was is the 'myth' of Emmanuel Levinas."<sup>344</sup> Calling himself a "*talmudiste de dimanche*,"<sup>345</sup> that is to say "an 'amateur Talmudist'", Levinas was engaged in studying the Talmud only at a certain age, in contrast to the education regarding the Bible he received. In an interview he described his intellectual development as follows:

I learnt Hebrew and biblical texts, and studied modern Hebrew from my childhood. From the age of 6 we had a special teacher for this purpose. But that was the Bible. I didn't know anything about the background of the Talmud and the Rabbinic commentaries. I took this seriously only at a very much later stage, and it was in Paris that I undertook study in this area, privately, and I made contact with a teacher of exceptional skill, quite remarkable, and I often describe our encounter.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> See also the critique of Michael Fagenblat regarding Moyn's interpretation in: Fagenblat, Michael, *A Covenant of Creatures. Levinas's Philosophy of Judaism*, pp. xxiiiiff.

<sup>342</sup> See Malka, Salomon, *Emmanuel Levinas. La vie et la trace*.

<sup>343</sup> Kleinberg, Ethan, "The Myth of Emmanuel Levinas", p. 210. See also Kleinberg, Ethan, *Generation Existential. Heidegger's Philosophy in France 1927-1961*, chapter I, pp. 19-45.

<sup>344</sup> Kleinberg, Ethan, "The Myth of Emmanuel Levinas", p. 202.

<sup>345</sup> Levinas Emmanuel, "The Name of God according to a few Talmudic Texts", in: *Beyond the Verse*, pp. 115-126, p. 116/"Le nom de Dieu d'après quelques teste talmudiques", in: *L'au-delà du verset*, pp. 143-157, p. 144.

<sup>346</sup> Emmanuel Levinas in an interview conducted by Raoul Mortley, in: *French Philosophers in Conversation. Levinas, Schneider, Serres, Irigaray, Le Doeuff, Derrida*, ed. by Raoul Mortley, pp. 10-23, p. 13. The teacher Levinas mentions in this context was known only under the name "Monsieur Chouchani". On Chouchani see further, Malka, Salomon, *Monsieur Chouchani: l'énigme d'un maître du XX siècle*, as well as the account of Elie Wiesel, who was also a student of Chouchani, see: Wiesel, Elie, *Legends of Our Time*, pp. 87-109. Wiesel writes about the relationship to Chouchani: "No one knew his name or his age: perhaps he had none. He wanted no part of what ordinarily defines a man, or at least places him."

Despite this late interest, Levinas was deeply impressed by Talmudic thinking; as he goes on to explain:

The essential thing was the invitation to *think* that I found in these documents. Among my publications there is a whole series of works drawn from this, but I never run together my general philosophy with what I call the more confessional writing. [...] *But there's certainly some infiltration from one side to the other.*<sup>347</sup>

Hence it seems to me inadequate to blind out the confessional writings from a general interpretation of Levinas's philosophy.

Levinas further plays an important role in the so-called movement of the 'renouveau-juif' in post-war intellectual France.<sup>348</sup> As one protagonist of the phenomenon Judith Friedlander called 'Vilna on the Seine', Levinas doubtlessly had a certain impact on the contemporary Judaism of his time.<sup>349</sup> It therefore seems to me problematic to characterize Levinas's Judaism as a pure "*invention*",<sup>350</sup> as Samuel Moyn argues. Surely Levinas had in fact "to reinvent Judaism, for himself and others, and he did so within philosophy."<sup>351</sup> However, I would rather call it a *re-actualization* of Jewish sources within a philosophical framework. This was a highly creative act and in this sense outstanding in the intellectual landscape of post-war France. If it had not been so innovative, Levinas's work would have hardly gained the interest it earned among the post-war generation of Jews in France, who were (mostly) politically left-wing and hardly attracted by religious thoughts. In my view, this innovative approach of Levinas's work, merging Jewish thought and contemporary philosophy, led to the effect of the delayed reception of his work. Caught between two stools, the subtle construction of Judaism and philosophy requires a multi-layered reading, which reveals the whole ingenuity of Levinas's thinking. In terms of Levinas's influence on the 'renouveau Juif' in France, the impact of Rosenzweig cannot be overestimated. Even though in recent scholarship it has been pointed out that Rosenzweig's work is partly

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<sup>347</sup> *French Philosophers in Conversation*, ed. by Raoul Mortley, p. 13, emphasis added.

<sup>348</sup> Krochmalnik, Daniel, "Emmanuel Levinas und der *Renouveau Juif*". See further, Simon-Nahum, Perrine, "Une herméneutique de la parole. Emmanuel Levinas et les Colloques des intellectuels juifs", and Halpérin, Jean, "Emmanuel Levinas et les Colloques des intellectuels juifs de langue française". For a more personal approach see Finkielkraut, Alain, *La sagesse de l'amour*.

<sup>349</sup> See Friedlander, Judith, *Vilna on the Seine*, especially chapter 5, pp. 80-106.

<sup>350</sup> Moyn, Samuel, *Origins of the Other*, p. 17, emphasis added.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

obscured through the tendency to see his work *exclusively* culminating in Levinas's interpretation of him,<sup>352</sup> Rosenzweig has had a significant impact on contemporary Jewish thought precisely via Levinas. This is apparent first of all by the fact that the questions and problems raised by Rosenzweig remained highly important to the shaping of a new Jewish identity after the Second World War and the catastrophe of the Holocaust, in which Levinas holds a crucial place. Apart from the conceptual differences between both thinkers, Levinas clearly acknowledged the aspect of the *contemporary* importance of Rosenzweig's work. In his article "Franz Rosenzweig: A modern Jewish thinker" (1965) he points out that Rosenzweig "*was quick to have a premonition of the dangers facing Europe, of which Hegel's philosophy remains a remarkable expression.*"<sup>353</sup> By elaborating a counter-philosophy to Hegel, Rosenzweig outlined a possible philosophical escape from the totality of Hegel's dialectic system: "To an existence frozen into a system of which it becomes a moment, Rosenzweig opposes 'the individual in spite of it all' and the inexhaustible newness of life's instants."<sup>354</sup> It is a philosophy of lived experience rather than abstract thinking. Hence Levinas concludes that "*The Star of Redemption [...] introduces a new and profound concept into the consciousness of modern Judaism.*"<sup>355</sup> This concept was taken up and further elaborated in Levinas's work, as I have sought to show by elaborating Levinas's concept of an "awakening of consciousness". The latter parts from Husserl, however goes beyond phenomenological analysis, inspired by Rosenzweig's reflections on a new concept for the consciousness of modern Judaism. Levinas brings Rosenzweig's views in a fruitful discussion with his own philosophical concepts and opened in this way his thinking to the Jewish sources. Repercussions of Rosenzweig's influence can be found, as I have worked out, in Levinas's later work, e.g. in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974), and in his other articles of that period.

Furthermore, Rosenzweig's work remains to the present day up to date in the context of the *Teshuvah* movement. Through his biographical experience, Rosenzweig showed a way to live with the Jewish identity in the modern world without ignoring modernity but, on the contrary, by

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<sup>352</sup> See e.g. Batnitzky, Leora, *Idolatry and Representation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered* and Gordon, Peter Eli, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy*.

<sup>353</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Franz Rosenzweig: A modern Jewish thinker", in: *Outside the Subject*, pp. 37-50, p. 38/"Franz Rosenzweig: Une pensée juive moderne", in: *Hors sujet*, pp. 67-89, p. 70, in italics in the original text. For a critical account of Levinas's philosophy with respect to Hegel see Simhon, Ari, *Levinas Critique de Hegel*.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41/p. 74.

<sup>355</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Foreword", p. 17/"Préface", p. 10, emphasis added.

actively participating in it. Levinas points out that the experience of a return to Judaism, for which Rosenzweig stands as an outstanding example, marks in fact a central event for modern Judaism:

The question was of a universal order, the answer, Jewish. [...] What characterizes contemporary Jewish thought after Rosenzweig is that special new thrill of the Return. [*Ce qui marque la pensée juive contemporaine par-delà Rosenzweig, c'est ce frisson particulier du Retour.*]<sup>356</sup>

This experience was reflected not only in the works and the spiritual path of well-known Jewish scholars who were inspired by Levinas – the work of Benny Levy<sup>357</sup> is of particular interest in this regard –, but also via the numerous Jewish students of Levinas's work at the ENIO, whose life was shaped by the experience of learning with Levinas. One of them is Ariel Wizman, today a well-known DJ and French TV performer, who explains this experience and the repercussions it made on his life recently in an inspiring book of interviews:

One feels Jewish in reading Levinas [...]. [...] One can be a Jew who reads Plato, but one cannot feel Jewish while reading Plato. In the philosophy of Levinas, on the contrary, there is an integration of the history of philosophy, there is a philosophical project and this project is Jewish. [...] I find myself in this project. This is why I have almost a physical link with Levinas.<sup>358</sup>

In this philosophical project described by Wizman in which Levinas was engaged, Rosenzweig holds a remarkable place. As Levinas emphasizes, for modern Judaism Rosenzweig “remains our great contemporary”<sup>359</sup> because he “opened the path to new research and new solutions.”<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Franz Rosenzweig: A modern Jewish thinker”, in: *Outside the Subject*, pp. 37-50, p. 38-39/“Franz Rosenzweig: Une pensée juive moderne”, in: *Hors sujet*, pp. 67-89, p. 71.

<sup>357</sup> See Levy, Benny, *Être juif. Étude lévinassienne*. For Benny Levy see furthermore the article of Herzog, Annabel, “Benny Levy versus Emmanuel Levinas on ‘Being Jewish’”.

<sup>358</sup> Wizman, Ariel, *Sept entretiens... et un peu de philosophie*, p. 93: “On se sent juif en lisant Levinas [...]. [...] On peut être un Juif qui lit Platon, mais on ne peut pas se sentir juif en lisant Platon. Dans la philosophie de Levinas, par contre, il y a une intégration de l’histoire de la philosophie, il y a un projet philosophique, et ce projet est juif. [...] Je trouve que je suis dans celui-là. C’est pourquoi j’ai un lien presque physique à Levinas.” See *ibid.* chapter 5, “Levinas”, pp. 85-109. Wizman reflects in this book upon how his years with Levinas shaped his later life as an artist and TV performer.

<sup>359</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Franz Rosenzweig: A modern Jewish thinker”, in: *Outside the Subject*, pp. 37-50, p. 40/“Franz Rosenzweig: Une pensée juive moderne”, in: *Hors sujet*, pp. 67-89, p. 73.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39/p. 72.

## Part II – Philosophy

### Chapter II

#### Time and Language

##### 1. Language, time and death in Levinas and Rosenzweig

There is no remedy for death; not even health.<sup>361</sup>

The importance of death for the thought of Franz Rosenzweig is obvious right from the beginning of *The Star of Redemption*, which opens with the impressive scenario of the following remarks:

From death, it is from the fear of death that all cognition of the All begins. Philosophy has the audacity to cast off the fear of the earthly, to remove from death its poisonous sting, from Hades his pestilential breath. All that is mortal lives in this fear of death; every new birth multiplies the fear for a new reason, for it multiplies that which is mortal.<sup>362</sup>

By putting the emphasis where it affects most deeply man's existence, i.e. the inevitable fact of death, Rosenzweig points out that philosophy has no remedy to fulfill its promise to rescue man from the fear of death. The "poisonous sting" of death will not lose its danger since "philosophy refutes these earthly fears" and leaves man alone, threatened by an "unimaginable annihilation".<sup>363</sup> Instead of offering a solution, philosophy "smiles its empty smile", pointing to "a world beyond", from which man wants to know nothing at all: "For man does not at all want to escape from some chain; he wants to stay, he wants – **to live**."<sup>364</sup> Rosenzweig alludes to

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<sup>361</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, p. 103/*Das Büchlein vom gesunden und kranken Menschenverstand*, p. 116. Henceforth cited as *Understanding/Büchlein*.

<sup>362</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 9/*Stern*, p. 3. See further Marx, Werner, "Die Bestimmung des Todes im 'Stern der Erlösung'".

<sup>363</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 9/*Stern*, p. 3.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

Goethe's *Faust* when he describes the existential solitude of the human being. However, this is seen by Rosenzweig as a necessary experience man has to cope with, as he points out: "It is, of course, necessary that man step out one day in his life; he must one day devoutly fetch down the precious vial; in his dreadful poverty, he must have felt at some time lonely and adrift from the whole world, standing for a night facing the nothing."<sup>365</sup> The Faustian man is all alone in this world which is hiding its secrets before him. Rosenzweig anticipates in this sense what Heidegger writes about anxiety in § 40 of *Being and Time* (1927) as well as in "What is Metaphysics?" (1929).<sup>366</sup> The parallel of their points of view becomes particularly transparent in Heidegger's phrasing, emphasizing the link of *night* and *nothing*: "In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of beings as such arises: that they are beings – and not nothing."<sup>367</sup>

Hence already in these first pages one can find the red thread which conducts the whole discourse to come. The impetus of Rosenzweig's book, however, changes its center of gravity from page to page – from *death*, in the opening pages, "into *life*", the words by which *The Star of Redemption* ends.<sup>368</sup> Some biographical experiences have to be mentioned in this context: firstly, the impressions of the First World War which profoundly marked the life and work of Rosenzweig.<sup>369</sup> He wrote *The Star of Redemption* during only six months, from August 23, 1918 to February 16, 1919, mostly at the front in the Balkans, by sending his text via field postcards to his mother, but also during several vacation stays in Freiburg, Kassel and Säckingen.<sup>370</sup> In fact *The Star* is born out of the merging of two experiences: Rosenzweig's war experience, on the one hand, and his love for Margrit (Gritli) Rosenstock-Huessy (1893-1959), the wife of his friend

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid., p. 10/p. 4. See also Görtz, Heinz-Jürgen, *Tod und Erfahrung. Rosenzweigs "erfahrende Philosophie" und Hegels "Wissenschaft der Erfahrung des Bewusstseins"*.

<sup>366</sup> See Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, pp. 228ff./*Sein und Zeit*, p. 184ff.

<sup>367</sup> Heidegger, Martin, "What is Metaphysics", p. 105/*Was ist Metaphysik?*, p. 37. For a comparison of the thinking of Heidegger and Rosenzweig with respect to death see Birkenstock, Eva, *Heißt philosophieren sterben lernen? Antworten der Existenzphilosophie: Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Rosenzweig*, especially chapter 4 on Rosenzweig, pp. 217-280. Regarding the similarities between Rosenzweig and Heidegger on this aspect, see further Meir, Ephraim, "How to Think Death from Time and not Time from Death", in: *Identity Dialogically Constructed*, pp. 136-142, here pp. 140-141: "Rosenzweig's introductory remarks in *Star* on the fear of death are strongly reminiscent of Heidegger's *Angst* of the *Dasein-zum-Tode*." Ibid., p. 141, note 241. On the relationship between Heidegger and Rosenzweig see further Löwith, Karl, "M. Heidegger and F. Rosenzweig, or, Temporality and Eternity" and Gordon, Peter Eli, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger. Between Judaism and German Philosophy*.

<sup>368</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 472/*Stern*, p. 447, emphasis added.

<sup>369</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *His Life and Thought*, ed. by Nahum Glatzer, p. 32ff.

<sup>370</sup> Meyer, Reinhold, "Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des *Stern der Erlösung*", in: *Rosenzweig als Leser. Kontextuelle Kommentare zum "Stern der Erlösung"*, ed. by Martin Brassler; see further also Meir, Ephraim, *Letters of Love*, p. 29.

Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (1888-1973), on the other hand.<sup>371</sup> Further, the book can be seen as Rosenzweig's response to the deep intellectual crisis into which European thought had sunk, as well as a response to his own intellectual and personal crisis and the overwhelming force of love he experienced. Just at the time when he was as close to death as never before in his life, Rosenzweig was as much in love as ever before – a fact that can be seen by the letters he wrote to his beloved Gritli. In these letters of love, death is not absent. In fact Rosenzweig openly confessed to Gritli the fear of death he experienced, e.g. on March 2, 1918 he wrote: “Of mere mortality I tremble in all my limbs. Help me, if you can.”<sup>372</sup> In the previous chapter I further pointed out that Rosenzweig was tempted to convert to Christianity and that this led him to a deep personal crisis and even to the threshold of suicide. This spiritual experience, besides his war experience, is reflected in *The Star of Redemption*, where death holds an important place.<sup>373</sup> Some interpreters, like Elliot Wolfson for example, consider the topic of death even as the *leitmotif* of the whole book. According to Wolfson, the *Star* seeks to show first and foremost how “to overcome death” and to demonstrate throughout its argumentation “the victory of eternity over time”.<sup>374</sup> Rosenzweig's starting point in the *Star* is the statement that “the nothing of death is a something, each renewed nothing of death is a new something that frightens anew, and that cannot be passed over in silence, nor be silenced. [...] The nothing is not nothing, it is *something*.”<sup>375</sup> In the following, I elaborate some central aspects of this “something”, that is to say *death*, in the works of Rosenzweig and Levinas. I will focus, firstly, on Levinas's work in order to explain how the notion of death is connected with his early philosophical writings and his notion of the *there is (il y a)*. In a second step, I argue how Levinas's notion of death is connected to his views on creation and eros and how this relates to Rosenzweig's notion of death, outlined here in the introductory pages.

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<sup>371</sup> Meir, Ephraim, “The Relevance of the *Gritli-Letters* to the Clarification of Key concepts and Central Ideas in Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*”, p. 4: “Rosenzweig wrote himself ‘*ins Leben*’”. See also Meir, Ephraim, *Letters of Love*, p. 98.

<sup>372</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Gritli-Briefe*, p. 50: “Denn ich bebe an allen Gliedern vor lauter Sterblichkeit. Hilf du mir, wenn du es kannst.” See also Meir, *Letters of Love*, p. 109.

<sup>373</sup> See Rühle, Inken, “Leben im Angesicht des Todes. Zum Verständnis des Todes im *Stern der Erlösung*”, in: *Rosenzweig als Leser. Kontextuelle Kommentare zum “Stern der Erlösung”*, ed. by Martin Brassler, pp. 369-393.

<sup>374</sup> Wolfson, Elliot R., “Facing the Effaced: Mystical Eschatology and the Idealistic Orientation in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig”, p. 39. See further Braiterman, Zachary, “‘Into Life’?! Franz Rosenzweig and the Figure of Death”.

<sup>375</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 11/*Stern*, p. 5, emphasis added.



a) **“When the world disappears...” – Night, death, and the discovery of the *there is (il y a)***

In the following, I discuss Levinas’s notion of the *there is (il y a)* with a special focus on how it relates to the notions of the night and death in his thinking. In conclusion, I outline briefly the influence of Maurice Blanchot’s (1907-2003) work on Levinas’s development of the *there is*.

It is remarkable that Levinas, just like Rosenzweig, was deeply impressed by the war with respect to his thinking about death. One of his first philosophical writings, *Existence and Existents*, written for the most part in captivity during the Second World War and published shortly afterwards in 1947, develops for the first time his philosophical considerations on death.<sup>376</sup> However, unlike Rosenzweig, whose thinking starts with the experience of the fear of *death*, Levinas, on the contrary, was rather shocked by the “horror of *Being*”.<sup>377</sup> Thus, he does not begin his argumentation with the fear of death, but with the *fear of Being*, as he points out at the beginning of *Existence and Existents*:

Is not anxiety over Being – horror of Being – just as primal as anxiety over death? Is not the fear of Being just as ordinary as the fear *for* Being? It is perhaps even more so, for the former may account for the latter. Are not Being and nothingness [...] phases of a more general state of existence, which is nowise constituted by nothingness? We shall call it the fact that *there is*. [...] It is because the *there is* has such a complete hold on us that we cannot take death and nothingness lightly, and we tremble before them.<sup>378</sup>

In a previous section I have demonstrated the notion of the ‘impossibility of dying’ in Levinas’s early thinking and how it is connected to the development of his later work.<sup>379</sup> This notion remains an important aspect also in this context since it is linked with the notion elaborated here: the *il y a (there is)*. In *Existence and Existents* Levinas argues that the central concept of his study is that of an “*anonymous existence*”.<sup>380</sup> To illustrate this concept, he gives the following example and, thereby, gives a definition of the *there is*:

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<sup>376</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, EE, p. 15/DEE, p. 10.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., p. 20/p. 20, emphasis added.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., emphasis added.

<sup>379</sup> See chapter I, 1., “Levinas’s early philosophical reflections on being and death in light of his *Carnets de captivité*”.

<sup>380</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, EE, p. 51/DEE, p. 80, emphasis added.

Let us imagine all beings, things and persons, reverting to nothingness. [...] Something would happen, if only night and the silence of nothingness. [...] This impersonal, anonymous, yet inextinguishable ‘consummation’ of being, which murmurs in the depths of nothingness itself we shall designate by the term *there is*. The *there is*, inasmuch as it resists a personal form, is ‘being in general’.<sup>381</sup>

Hence, in contrast to Rosenzweig, for Levinas the ‘horror of being’ is the starting point of his reflections: “The rustling of the *there is*... is horror. [...] Horror is nowise an anxiety over death.”<sup>382</sup> In a very similar way Levinas introduces this concept of anonymous being and the notion of the *there is* also in his book *Time and the Other*.<sup>383</sup> So, already in the introductory pages of *Existence and Existents*, Levinas explains the concept of the *there is*. He links it, in the following pages, to a concrete experience which he sees in the absence of life and world:

For where the continual play of our relation with the world is interrupted we find neither death nor the ‘pure ego’, but the anonymous state of being. [...] For *the Being which we become aware of when the world disappears* is not a person or a thing, or the sum total of persons and things; it is *the fact that one is*, the fact that *there is*.<sup>384</sup>

However, the question remains how one should imagine this happening, which Levinas describes with the words: ‘when the world disappears’? What does he mean by this? In this context, a look in his captivity notebooks can help to illustrate this statement. It further helps us to better understand Levinas’s meaning of the “absence of world” that (nevertheless) apparently continues in some way. Already in the first pages of his captivity notebooks, Levinas mentions “the laziness of Being”,<sup>385</sup> and “the fact of breathing”,<sup>386</sup> which is in fact the last movement a totally paralyzed body experience. A few pages afterwards, he goes on to describe more precisely the impressions and effects the captivity made upon him:

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid., p. 57/p. 93.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-61/pp. 98-99.

<sup>383</sup> See Levinas, Emmanuel, TO, p. 25-26/TA, p. 46-47. This comes as no surprise as the book collects lectures Levinas held in Paris 1946/47 at the *Collège Philosophique*, organized by Jean Wahl, i.e. at the same time as the publication of *Existence and Existents*.

<sup>384</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, EE, p. 21/DEE, p. 26, emphasis added.

<sup>385</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 56: “La paresse d’exister.”

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., p. 56: “Le fait de respirer.”

This captivity – with the long leisure hours it has provided, the books we would have never read – like a period of school where grown-up men find themselves, where exercise becomes essential, where one discovers that there were a lot of superfluous things – in relations, eating, occupations.<sup>387</sup>

It is noteworthy to refer in this context to Levinas's short article "Captivity", written shortly after the war and published only recently together with his captivity notebooks. In this article Levinas reflects upon the experience he had during his captivity as a new rhythm of life:

We have come to learn the little space and the few things necessary for living. We have learned freedom. These are the real experiences of captivity. Suffering, despair, grief – certainly. But above all this: *a new rhythm of life*. We had set foot on another planet, breathing another atmosphere of an unknown mixture and handling a material that no longer weighed.<sup>388</sup>

This new rhythm of life was filled first and foremost with boredom and the absence of any meaningful activities, as Levinas notes further: "The fatigue of rest – boredom. Time without activity. Hence the emptiness of boredom. Return to the time of the *there is*."<sup>389</sup> From this passage, it becomes evident that Levinas uses the term of the *there is* already in his captivity notebooks to describe a certain kind of experience.<sup>390</sup> However, it is only in his philosophical writings after the war that he gives a clear definition of this complex notion. Hence, for a reader with little knowledge of Levinas's early work, the notes in his captivity notebooks must remain opaque. Nevertheless, what Levinas describes in the cited passages allows us to imagine and illustrate the background of his thinking. This helps to understand what he had in mind when he reflects in his early works upon an experience in which "the world disappears".

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid., p. 70: "Toute cette captivité – avec les longs loisirs qu'elle a procurés, les lectures qu'on n'aurait jamais faites – comme une période de collège où les hommes mûrs se trouvent, où l'exercice devient l'essentiel, où l'on découvre qu'il y avait beaucoup des choses superflues – dans les relations, dans la nourriture, dans les occupations."

<sup>388</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Captivité", in: *Carnets*, pp. 201-203, p. 203, my emphasis: "Nous avons appris le peu d'espace et le peu de choses qu'il faut pour vivre. Nous avons appris la liberté. Voilà les vraies expériences de la captivité. Souffrances, désespoirs, deuils – certes. Mais par-dessus tout cela, *un rythme nouveau de vie*. Nous avons mis le pied sur une autre planète, respirant une autre atmosphère d'un mélange inconnu et manipulant une matière qui ne pesait plus." See also Levinas's article "Nameless", in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Proper Names*, pp. 119-123/"Sans nom", in: *Nom propres*, pp. 177-182.

<sup>389</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 71: "La fatigue du repos – l'ennui. [...] Temps sans activité. D'où le vide de l'ennui. Retour au temps de l'il y a."

<sup>390</sup> See also *ibid.*, p. 103 and p. 67.

The experience of the captivity also had an impact on Levinas's questioning of *being*. In his early philosophical writings he describes being as *strangeness* and as an alien experience, e.g. in *Existence and Existents* where he argues:

The questioning of Being is an experience of Being in its strangeness. It is then a way of taking up Being. That is why the question about Being – *What is Being?* – has never been answered. There is no answer to Being. [...] Being is essentially alien and strikes against us. We undergo its suffocating embrace like the night, but it does not respond to us. There is a pain in Being. [*Il est le mal d'être.*]<sup>391</sup>

This corresponds with the notes Levinas wrote down during his captivity. In his captivity notebooks he mentions the strangeness of reality he experienced, e.g. he notes: “The meaning of nightmare. Reality motionless – absolutely strange. Night in broad daylight.”<sup>392</sup>

The experience of the *night* is very important in this context. It holds a key position in *Existence and Existents*, where Levinas links it with the central notion of the *there is (il y a)*:

We could say that the night is the very experience of the *there is*, if the term experience were not inapplicable to a situation which involves the total exclusion of light. When the forms of things are dissolved in the night, the darkness of the night, which is neither an object nor the quality of an object, invades like a presence. In the night, where we are riven to it, we are not dealing with anything. But this nothing is not that of pure nothingness. There is no longer *this* or *that*; there is not ‘something’. But this universal absence is in its turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence.<sup>393</sup>

In fact, the term ‘night’ is one of the key notions in *Existence and Existents*, where Levinas even distinguishes “different forms of night that occur right in the daytime”.<sup>394</sup> The experience of the night is connected further to ‘being *exposed*’ – a term that becomes especially important in his later work, e.g. in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* – and the experience of being turned over to being as he explains in *Existence and Existents*: “One is exposed. [...] nocturnal space delivers us over to being.”<sup>395</sup> An echo of the horrible experience of the night can be also found in Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1958). The experience of the first night after the author's arrival at the

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<sup>391</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, EE, pp. 22-23/DEE, p. 28.

<sup>392</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 87: “Le sens du cauchemar. Réalité immobile – absolument étrangère. Nuit en plein jour.”

<sup>393</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, EE, p. 58/DEE, p. 94.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59/p. 97.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59/p. 96.

concentration camp Auschwitz impressed him so deeply that he later named his entire account precisely after this event – *Night*:

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. [...] Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.<sup>396</sup>

Putting aside the difference that Levinas was in a labor camp whereas Wiesel was in an extermination camp, it is remarkable that both describe in their accounts the night as an outstanding experience.

The ‘night’ has to be seen further in context with silence and the absence of discourse and speech. Levinas even speaks of a ‘*voice of the silence*’,<sup>397</sup> which does not respond to man’s fear and thereby denies man’s existence. It confronts him with his existential solitude, leaving him nowhere to turn to and no escape from the *there is* of being:

There is no discourse. Nothing responds to us, but this silence; the voice of this silence is understood and frightens like the silence of those infinite spaces Pascal speaks of. [...] *There is* is an impersonal form, like it rains, or it is warm. Its anonymity is essential.<sup>398</sup>

The aspect of the ‘silence of space’ is particularly important for Levinas. He cites it on various occasions, referring to the famous expression of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662): “The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me.”<sup>399</sup> The absence of language is frightening because it deprives man of contact with his fellow beings and thereby reveals to him his solitude as an essential human reality.<sup>400</sup> Levinas alludes to the quotation from Pascal in the *Carnets de*

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<sup>396</sup> Wiesel, Elie, *Night*, p. 32.

<sup>397</sup> This corresponds with the idea of “the sound of silence”. This metaphor can be traced back to the Biblical source in I Kgs.19:12. See Garb, “Powers of Language in Kabbalah: Comparative Reflections”, p. 237.

<sup>398</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, EE, p. 58/DEE, p. 95.

<sup>399</sup> Pascal, Blaise, *Pensées and Other Writings*, p. 73/“Pensées”, p. 1113: “*Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m’effraie.*”

<sup>400</sup> See Levinas, Emmanuel, TO, p. 42/TA, p. 21: “One can exchange everything between beings except existing. In this sense, to be is to be isolated by existing. Inasmuch as I am, I am a monad.”, *ibid.*

*captivité* – where he notes, e.g., “The ear that is tired of scrutinizing the silence”<sup>401</sup> –, and takes it up in *Existence and Existents* as well as later on in *Totality and Infinity*.<sup>402</sup> It expresses an idea that pervades Levinas’s entire work and finds a late echo in Levinas’s *God, Death, and Time* (1993), where he connects it with the silence of death: “Death is the *no-response* [*sans réponse*].”<sup>403</sup> In a way, Levinas’s notion of an ‘eternal silence’ corresponds with the silence to which the figure of the ‘tragic hero’ in Part I of *The Star of Redemption* is condemned.<sup>404</sup>

In this universal void, however, something remains, against all odds:

Being remains, like a field of forces, like a heavy atmosphere belonging to no one, universal, returning in the midst of the negation which it puts aside, and in all the powers to which that negation may be multiplied. There is a nocturnal space, but it is no longer empty space [...]. Darkness fills it like a content; it is full, but full of the nothingness of everything.<sup>405</sup>

Obviously the experience of anonymity and namelessness in the camp had a considerable impact on Levinas. He was profoundly impressed by it, as can be seen in his captivity notebooks: “This way of counting men *without seeing* them.”<sup>406</sup> The monotony of labor and the standstill of time were burdening and hard to accept for Levinas. He lived in fear for the life of his wife and his little daughter and, furthermore, was troubled by the worry of developing his philosophical work. He felt the lost time as paralyzing his forces, as he writes: “Envy for people [...] who don’t have restlessness for lost time as I have; the concern for an *oeuvre*.”<sup>407</sup> Given the difficult circumstances of the captivity, especially regarding the exhausting work Levinas was forced to do as a forester, it is astonishing that he was nevertheless able to have the time and the quiet to

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<sup>401</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 196: “L’oreille qui se fatigue à scruter le silence.”

<sup>402</sup> See Levinas, Emmanuel, *TI*, p. 190/Ti, pp. 207-208: “The silence of infinite spaces is terrifying. The invasion of this there is does not correspond to any representation. We have described elsewhere its vertigo.”

<sup>403</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *God, Death, and Time*, p. 9/*Dieu, la mort et le temps*, p. 17. See also Jankélévitch, Vladimir, *La mort*, p. 53ff.

<sup>404</sup> I discuss this topic in more detail in chapter IV, 2. b), “Love and the silent Self of Creation, or: how to become ‘a soul that speaks’”.

<sup>405</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *EE*, p. 58/DEE, p. 95. Regarding the notion of “being as a ‘field of forces’” see also Levinas, *TO*, p. 48/TA, p. 26.

<sup>406</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 85, emphasis added: “Cette manière de compter les hommes *sans les voir*.”. Every new prisoner that arrived in the camp was handed over a small tag with a number, which designated his new “identity” as a prisoner, see Salomon Malka, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>407</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 81: “Envie pour les gens [...] qui n’ont pas l’inquiétude du temps perdu comme moi; le souci d’une œuvre.” See also the foreword of Rodolphe Calin, *ibid.*, p. 24.

write such extensive notebooks. The prisoner camps, though, did sometimes have abundant libraries where the prisoners could spend their spare time reading.<sup>408</sup>

As one can see from the notes of his captivity notebooks, the monotony of his existence in this period had surely encouraged Levinas to focus on the development of the notion of the *there is*. Hence, in *Existence and Existents*, Levinas describes the subject as being exposed to the *there is* and, thereby, submerged by the totality of its own existence which it cannot escape: “The I does not turn to its existence; it is enthralled by it. One possesses existence, but is also possessed by it.”<sup>409</sup> Against the background of an all-encompassing being with neither beginning nor end, which Levinas identifies as the *there is*, he describes the coming into being of the subject as a *hypostasis*.<sup>410</sup> It is the manner in which the subject posits itself in the world: “The event by which the existent contracts its existing I call *hypostasis*.”<sup>411</sup> The connection between the *there is* and hypostasis is very close; in fact, the former is the place where the latter takes places. Hence, the two notions are deeply interwoven in Levinas’s thinking, as he emphasizes: “This existing without existents, which I call the *there is*, is the place where hypostasis will be produced.”<sup>412</sup> In Levinas’s captivity notebooks the term *hypostasis* is mentioned only once, though in a very similar context to that used shortly afterwards in his philosophical writings: “Hypostasis – as a term by which I will be able to replace the notion of subjectivity.”<sup>413</sup> Thus, a close reading of Levinas’s captivity notebooks and his early philosophical writings illustrates the fact that key notions of his early thinking were developed during his captivity. This difficult period of his life, the five years of captivity, can be seen, in terms of the development of his work, not as an interruption, but rather as an intensification of his thinking.

In order to give an adequate definition of the *there is* and the event that Levinas described with the words “when the world disappears”, it is necessary to refer to the influence of Maurice

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<sup>408</sup> See Durand, Yves, *Prisonniers de guerre dans les stalags, les oflags et les kommandos, 1939-1945*, chapter XI “Richesse de la vie culturelle et spirituelle des camps”, pp. 173-188.

<sup>409</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, EE, p. 47/DEE, p. 73.

<sup>410</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TO, p. 51ff./TA, p. 31ff.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43/pp. 22-23.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50/p. 28.

<sup>413</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 146: “Hypostase – comme terme par lequel je pourrai remplacer la notion de subjectivité.”

Blanchot on Levinas's work.<sup>414</sup> The long-standing ties of friendship between the two thinkers were established during their common years as students at the University of Strasbourg.<sup>415</sup> They shared a life-long friendship which was also reflected in their works and articles they dedicated to each other.<sup>416</sup> This close relationship is also mirrored in the development of the notion of the *there is*. In *Existence and Existents* Levinas points out that in Blanchot's novel *Thomas l'Obscur* (1941/1950)<sup>417</sup> [*Thomas, the Obscure*, 1995] one can find a precise description and excellent illustration of what he himself intends to state with the *there is*: "The presence of absence, the night, the dissolution of the subject in the night, the horror of being, the return of being to the heart of every negative moment, the reality of irreality are there [in *Thomas, the Obscure*] admirably expressed."<sup>418</sup> Indeed, Georges Bataille emphasizes very early, in his review article "From Existentialism to the Primacy of Economy" [*De l'existentialisme au primat de l'économie*"] published in 1947, that Levinas and Blanchot are using the term *there is* in a similar way.<sup>419</sup> Furthermore, the influence of Blanchot's work on Levinas has been clearly pointed out by Levinas himself. In his interview with Philippe Nemo, Levinas characterized it as follows:

[The *there is*] is a theme I found in Maurice Blanchot. [...] [H]e speaks of the 'rumpus' [*remue-ménage*] of being, of its 'clamour', of its 'murmur'. A night in a hotel room where, behind the partition, 'there's endless moving about'; 'there's no way of knowing what they're doing next door'. This is something very close to the *there is*.<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> Among the many studies and anthologies which discuss in comparative manner the works of Blanchot and Levinas, I would like to cite only the following: *Emmanuel Lévinas-Maurice Blanchot, penser la différence*, ed. by Eric Hoppenot and Alain Milon; Cools, Arthur, *Langage et subjectivité. Vers une approche du différend entre Maurice Blanchot et Emmanuel Lévinas*; Wall, Thomas Carl, *Radical Passivity. Levinas, Blanchot and Agamben*; Mole, Gary D., *Levinas, Blanchot, Jabès. Figures of Estrangement*; Libertson, Joseph, *Proximity. Levinas, Blanchot, Bataille and Communication*.

<sup>415</sup> Regarding the history of their friendship see e.g. Hansel, Georges, "Maurice Blanchot, son ami, son allié", in: *Emmanuel Lévinas-Maurice Blanchot, penser la différence*, ed. by Eric Hoppenot and Alain Milon, pp. 285-297; Bident, Christophe, *Maurice Blanchot, partenaire invisible. Essai biographique*, pp. 38-48; Lescourret, Marie-Anne, *Emmanuel Levinas*, pp. 64-69.

<sup>416</sup> See the articles Emmanuel Levinas published in his book, *Sur Blanchot*, as well as the texts of Blanchot published in his book, *L'entretien infini/The Infinite Conversation*, written after the publication of Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*.

<sup>417</sup> The book appeared in two versions, first in 1941, and then in 1950, both published by Gallimard in Paris. For the English version see *Thomas the Obscure*. See especially the description of the night in chapter two.

<sup>418</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, EE, p. 63, note 1/DEE, p. 103, note 1. See also Levinas's notes on Blanchot in *Carnets*, p. 188, and Levinas's two citations of Blanchot's novel *Aminadab* [Paris: Gallimard, 1942] to illustrate his argument, in TO, p. 56 and 83/TA, p. 37 and p. 75. Regarding the title of Blanchot's novel, it is noteworthy that Levinas's youngest brother was called Aminadab.

<sup>419</sup> Bataille, Georges, "De l'existentialisme au primat de l'économie", pp. 279-306/"From Existentialism to the Primacy of Economy", pp. 155-180.

<sup>420</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Ethics and Infinity*, pp. 49-50/*Éthique et Infini*, pp. 39-40. For further discussion of Blanchot's influence on Levinas see Critchley, Simon, "Il y a – Holding Levinas's Hand to Blanchot's Fire"; Davies,



Similarly, in another interview, Levinas highlights further the particularity of Blanchot's work:

In his magnificent and strange work, Maurice Blanchot thinks death starting from this impossibility of breaking off. And there lies – upon the mystery of death – a profound and obsessional view. *Ontology as obsession*. In the anguish of death, the impossibility of nothingness. An impossibility of 'stopping the music' or interrupting the 'hustle-bustle' of existence! And yet an impossibility of continuing.<sup>421</sup>

In the recent scholarly literature it has been thus stated that the *there is* would be a common discovery of both thinkers, Levinas and Blanchot.<sup>422</sup> However, it has also been pointed out by researchers that Blanchot's views on Levinas's work have been in some sense limited to the notion of the *there is*, disregarding the development of Levinas's thinking in his later works. In this sense, I would agree to characterizing Blanchot's relationship to Levinas's thinking as a slightly "regressive one, seeking as it does to hold Levinas to his initial version of the experience of the *there is* and so in effect hold his thinking back."<sup>423</sup>

As I have shown, the *there is* is connected to the impossibility of "stopping the music",<sup>424</sup> as Levinas states, and to escape from being; however, it is nonetheless equally bound to a certain experience of death. In fact in Blanchot's thinking death holds a noteworthy place.<sup>425</sup> It is even connected to the event of writing as such, as Blanchot points out in *The Writing of the Disaster* (1983):

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Paul, "A Fine Risk: Reading Blanchot Reading Levinas"; Iyer, Lars, "The Unbearable Trauma and Witnessing in Blanchot and Levinas".

<sup>421</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "The philosopher and death", in: *Is it righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins, pp. 121- 129, p. 123/"Le philosophe et la mort", entretien avec Christian Chabanis en 1982, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Altérité et transcendance*, pp. 157-170, p. 160, emphasis added.

<sup>422</sup> See Bident, Christophe, *Maurice Blanchot, partenaire invisible*, p. 47.

<sup>423</sup> Holland, Michael, "Let's Leave God Out of This'. Maurice Blanchot's Reading of Totality and Infinity", p. 92.

<sup>424</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "The philosopher and death", in: *Is it righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins, pp. 121-129, p. 123/"Le philosophe et la mort", entretien avec Christian Chabanis en 1982, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Altérité et transcendance*, pp. 157-170, p. 160.

<sup>425</sup> Although a discussion of death can be found throughout the multilayered work of Blanchot – see e.g. chapter IV "The Work and Death's Space"/"L'oeuvre et l'espace de la mort", in: Blanchot, Maurice, *The Space of Literature*, pp. 85-160/*L'espace littéraire*, pp. 103-209 –, I want to refer in particular to his short story *The Instant of my Death*. The story ends with an impressive description of the influence of death upon the life of the protagonist: "All that remains is the feeling of lightness that is death itself or, to put it more precisely, the instant of my death henceforth always in abeyance." In: Blanchot, Maurice, *The Instant of my Death*, p. 11.

To write is no longer to situate death in the future – the death which is always already past; to write is to accept that one has to die without making death present and without making oneself present to it. To write is to know that death has taken place even though it has not been experienced, and to recognize it in the forgetfulness that it leaves [...].<sup>426</sup>

Levinas refers to this approach in his essay on Blanchot, “The Poet’s Vision”, describing the impact it had on Blanchot’s way of writing:

To write is to die. To Blanchot, death is not the pathos of the ultimate human possibility, the possibility of the impossibility, but ceaseless repetition of what cannot be grasped, before which the ‘I’ loses its ipseity. [...] Death is not the end, it is the never-ending ending.<sup>427</sup>

It is remarkable in this context that Levinas very early, well before Blanchot’s mentioned citation from *The Writing of the Disaster*, expressed very similar ideas on the connection of writing and dying. In his philosophical notes, written approximately between 1949-1950, one can find the following note: “The text is always a testament – not only in the sense of testimony – but as a last word, saying of a dead person. Writing – Dying.”<sup>428</sup> This shows that the line of thought connecting death and writing, which is an important concept for Blanchot, appears very early also in Levinas’s work and is by no means of merely marginal interest for his thinking.

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<sup>426</sup> Blanchot, Maurice, *The Writing of the Disaster*, p. 66/*L’écriture du désastre*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>427</sup> See Levinas, Emmanuel, “The Poet’s Vision”, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Proper Names*, pp. 127-139, p. 132/“Le regard du poète”, in: Levinas Emmanuel, *Sur Maurice Blanchot*, p. 16.

<sup>428</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 296: “Le texte est toujours testament – pas seulement au sens de témoignage – mais comme dernier mot, parole d’un mort. Écrire – mourir.” See also Levinas, Emmanuel, “L’Écrit et l’Oral”, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Parole et Silence*, pp. 199-229, p. 211: “Tout écrit est testament, parole de mort et dernier mot.”

## b) Death – Eros – Creation and the role of language

Put me like a seal over your heart,  
Like a seal on your arm;  
for love is as strong as death.<sup>429</sup>

Coming back to Rosenzweig's critique portrayed at the beginning of this chapter, I elaborate in the following in more detail a comparison between Levinas and Rosenzweig with respect to their thinking of death, linked to the notions of eros and creation.

The topics of death and time are significant for the development of Levinas's work, as Ze'ev Levy underscores: "The concepts of 'death' and 'time' manifest the continuity of his philosophical thought but at the same time also illustrate his gradual progression from ontology to ethics."<sup>430</sup> These notions play thus a key role in Levinas's thinking. A pervasive analysis of death, in constant discussion with Heidegger, can be found, e.g., in Levinas's *God, Death, and Time*. The book consists of the transcripts of the two last lecture courses Levinas delivered at the Sorbonne in 1975-1976. The lectures were held shortly after the publication of his second major work, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974), and have to be seen in context with it. In these lectures, Levinas treats the death of the other with the empathy which is missed in Heidegger's thinking. He emphasizes that the I is responsible for the death of the other in the sense that the other is mortal: "It is for the death of the other that I am responsible to the point of including myself in his death. [...] The death of the other: therein lies the first death."<sup>431</sup> This approach is significant for Levinas's notion of death as well as his conception of being.<sup>432</sup> The death of the other affects the I and cannot be seen separated from it. It has a "dramatic character; it is emotion *par excellence*, affection or being affected *par excellence*."<sup>433</sup> Levinas links the experience of seeing the face of the other with the experience of death itself: "We encounter

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<sup>429</sup> *Song of Songs*, 8:6.

<sup>430</sup> Levy, Ze'ev, "Lévinas on Death and Hope", in: Levy, Ze'ev, *From Spinoza to Lévinas. Hermeneutical, Ethical, and Political Issues in Modern and Contemporary Jewish Philosophy*, pp. 155-170, p. 155.

<sup>431</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *God, Death, and Time*, p. 43/*Dieu, la mort et le temps*, p. 53.

<sup>432</sup> Meir, Ephraim, "How to Think Death from Time and not Time from Death", p. 8. I cite here and in the following note the Hebrew version of this article, which re-appeared in an English version in: Meir, Ephraim, *Identity Dialogically Constructed*, pp. 136-142.

<sup>433</sup> Meir, Ephraim, "How to Think Death from Time and not Time from Death", p. 9/p. 18.

death in the face of the other.”<sup>434</sup> This approach opens up a new perspective on death which Levinas develops in opposition to Heidegger’s notion of a ‘being toward death’ [*Sein zum Tode*].<sup>435</sup> According to Levinas, this new approach entails

[...] the possibility for man to get his identity from somewhere other than the perseverance in his being, to which Heidegger accustomed us; that is, from elsewhere than this *conatus* where death strikes its blow to the highest of all attachments, the attachment to being. Here, *on* the contrary, man is not primarily preoccupied with his being. [...] Time, here, is not pure destruction – quite the contrary.<sup>436</sup>

Unlike Heidegger, for Levinas it is not my death that frightens me the most and grounds the relationship to death, but the death of the other. This approach to death is bound to a new significance of death. Since, according to Levinas,

[...] the meaning of death does not begin in death. This invites us to think of death as a moment of death’s *signification*, which is a meaning that overflows death. We must note carefully that ‘to overflow death’ in no sense means surpassing or reducing it; it means that this overflowing has its signification, too. Expressions like ‘*love is stronger than death*’ (in fact, the Song of Songs says precisely: ‘*Love, as strong as death*’) have their meaning.<sup>437</sup>

This interpretation reveals a certain relationship of death toward *eros* and *love* which has to be taken into account. This relationship is inscribed in Levinas’s approach to death, as he points out: “The love of the other is the emotion of the other’s death.”<sup>438</sup> For Rosenzweig also the statement “Love is as strong as death [*Stark wie der Tod ist Liebe.*]”<sup>439</sup> taken from the Biblical source of the Song of Songs (8:6), is of crucial importance for the interpretation of his notion of death. It is because of *eros*, which opens up a new dimension of transcendence in the encounter with the fellow man, that death, although not surpassed, however is pushed ultimately into the background. What really is at stake for Rosenzweig and Levinas regarding death, is moreover the encounter with the other and not the fear of my personal death. Of course, death remains individual and ruptures the totality. It throws man back into his existential solitude, as

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<sup>434</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *God, Death and Time*, p. 105/*Dieu, la mort et le temps*, p. 121.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-45/pp. 52-55.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103/pp. 118-119.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104/p. 119.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105/p. 121.

<sup>439</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 169/*Stern*, p. 174.

Rosenzweig underscores: “There is no greater loneliness than in the eyes of one who is dying, [...]”<sup>440</sup> However, besides this aspect, there is also something stronger, which reveals to man that death is not the final word. In this context Rosenzweig argues that there are in fact *two* births of man: one is the physical, the other is the birth of the Self which takes place when man encounters eros for the first time:

The Self [...] this blind and mute *daimon*, enclosed in itself, which surprises man for the first time in the mask of Eros, and from then on accompanies him throughout his life up to that moment where it removes its mask and reveals itself to him as Thanatos.<sup>441</sup>

Death and eros are thus linked together for Rosenzweig. Both are a radical experience of exteriority. The experience of transcendence which man encounters through eros is not outside the human life. It is experienced inside time which indicates that death ultimately does not have the final word. In this sense, Ephraim Meir emphasizes with respect to Levinas’s lectures *God, Time, and Death* in his foreword to the Hebrew translation: “What makes time human and what makes real transcendence possible is the *beyond time in time*.”<sup>442</sup> This first correlation in Levinas’s and Rosenzweig’s approach toward death is important for the entire analysis in this paragraph.

It is further of interest in this context to cite one of Levinas’s later essays “On Death in the Thought of Ernst Bloch”, published in 1976. In words similar to Rosenzweig’s, Levinas describes in this essay the situation of man, left alone with his fear of death. Levinas points out that,

Idealism must not only console man for the violences he undergoes in reality, by assuring him of the freedom of his transcendental consciousness in which the being of the real is constituted [...]. The accord between being and man requires, beyond these consolations, the alleviation of the Ego’s inevitable anguish before death. This would not be possible unless justice and the fulfillment of Being could receive a new meaning and show a very intimate kinship, and unless the subjectivity of the subject in his relation to Being might admit an unsuspected modality *in which death loses its sting*.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> Ibid., p. 80/p. 78.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., p. 80/p. 77.

<sup>442</sup> Meir, Ephraim, “How to Think Death from Time and not Time from Death”, p. 11, emphasis added.

<sup>443</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Death in the thought of Ernst Bloch”, in: *Of God who comes to mind*, p. 35/“Sur la mort dans la pensée d’Ernst Bloch”, in: *De Dieu qui vient à l’idée*, pp. 66-67, emphasis added.

Especially the last words of Levinas's analysis recall the introductory pages of Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* with its harsh critique of the philosophy of Idealism, pretending to have "the audacity to cast off the fear of the earthly, to remove from death its *poisonous sting*",<sup>444</sup> in the long run, however, failing to do so.

Similar to Rosenzweig's critique, Levinas further points out from his early writings on that the importance of death has been underestimated in the philosophical discourse. In *Time and the Other* Levinas emphasizes:

*Death is [...] the limit of idealism.* I even wonder how the principal trait of our relationship with death could have escaped philosopher's attention. It is not with the nothingness of death, of which we precisely know nothing, that the analysis must begin, but with the situation where *something absolutely unknowable* appears.<sup>445</sup>

This 'absolutely unknowable' is represented precisely by death, according to Levinas. It is even conceived of as the main trait of death, as Levinas highlights in a late interview from 1982, where he points out:

Death is utterly unknown. It is, moreover, unknown otherwise than any other unknown. It seems to me, whatever the subsequent reactions within philosophy, and even within opinion, death is firstly the nothingness of knowledge. I do not say that it *is* nothingness. It is also the 'plentitude' of the question, but first one says, 'I do not know'. These are the first words that come, and which are fitting.<sup>446</sup>

By emphasizing the aspect of the *nothingness of knowledge* represented by death, Levinas situates his thinking on death at a similar point as did Rosenzweig: For both thinkers death is not just *nothingness*. However, while being the nothingness of knowledge, death is precisely the starting point of knowledge to come. Death has, so to speak, a double face, since it is *nothing* and precisely as nothing it is – *something*. Rosenzweig underlines this aspect by pointing out that

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<sup>444</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 9/*Stern*, p. 3, emphasis added.

<sup>445</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TO, p. 71/TA, p. 58, emphasis added.

<sup>446</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "The Philosopher and Death", in: *Is it righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins, pp. 121-129, p. 121/"Le philosophe et la mort", in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Altérité et transcendance*, pp. 157-170, p. 157.

“death is truly not what it seems, not nothing, but a pitiless something that cannot be excluded.”<sup>447</sup>

Regarding his concept of nothingness, Rosenzweig was deeply influenced by Hermann Cohen’s (1842-1918) theory on differential and infinitesimal calculus.<sup>448</sup> In the introduction of *The Star of Redemption* Rosenzweig discusses Cohen’s theory of the differential. He emphasizes his admiration for the work of his teacher, who has paved the way for his own thinking on nothingness: “The differential combines in itself the properties of the nothing and of the something; it is a nothing that refers to a something, to its something, and at the same time a something that still slumbers in the womb of the nothing.”<sup>449</sup> Hence Norbert Samuelson points out that Rosenzweig “explicitly claims that this calculus provided him with a model for constructing reality from what is practically (but not absolutely) nothing.”<sup>450</sup> Being the starting point of his thinking, the notion of the *Nichts* and of death cannot be overestimated in Rosenzweig’s thinking. On the contrary, as I have demonstrated above, it is the ‘horror of being’ and the ‘impossibility of dying’ which marks the starting point of Levinas’s philosophy.<sup>451</sup>

Levinas’s early notion of the ‘impossibility of dying’ is further developed in his work by drawing attention to the *mystery* of death which cannot be totally grasped by reason alone. For Rosenzweig as well as Levinas the *exteriority* of death is of great importance in this context. Death cannot be grasped by means of reason or knowledge. This aspect is underscored by Levinas in his article “Poetry and Resurrection: Notes on Agnon”, published in 1973, where he argues:

If everything were comprehensible in death, as a reasonable enterprise, it would fit into the limits of life. It would lose the *surplus* with which it exalts life. Life, sustaining its allegiances to the confines of

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<sup>447</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 10/*Stern*, p. 5.

<sup>448</sup> See Cohen, Hermann, *Das Prinzip der Infinitesimal-Methode und seine Geschichte. Ein Kapitel zur Grundlegung der Erkenntniskritik* (1883).

<sup>449</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 28/*Stern*, p. 23.

<sup>450</sup> Samuelson, Norbert M., “The Concept of ‘Nichts’ in Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*”, pp. 646-647. Concerning Rosenzweig’s own discussion of Hermann Cohen’s work see Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 27-28/*Stern*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>451</sup> See chapter I, 1, “Levinas’s early philosophical reflections on being and death in light of his *Carnets de captivité*”. Furthermore see Levinas, Emmanuel, *EE*, p. 20/*DEE*, p. 20.

death, thus goes *beyond its being*, its limits reaching beyond those limits; and, beyond being, it tastes the taste of the Resurrection.<sup>452</sup>

Levinas emphasizes clearly the aspect of mystery in death, in which he even sees the categorical expression of death: “[...] the word *mystery* is fitting here. Death is the site of this category: mystery.”<sup>453</sup> In the aspect of mystery, which remains opaque and cannot be fully grasped by the intellect, Levinas assumes further an analogy between death and love as well as language. He states this idea in a note of his captivity notebooks: “Verb – is made of the inability to express oneself. Love – mystery of the other – Verb mystery of myself.”<sup>454</sup> Although it has to be kept in mind that the cited phrase is only a small note in Levinas’s captivity notebooks, it reveals nonetheless that Levinas had considered at some point a certain analogy between love, language and death in the notion of mystery.

Furthermore, similarly to Rosenzweig in one of the central parts of the *The Star of Redemption*, e.g. the second Book of Part II, Levinas also stresses the importance of *eros* in the attitude of man towards his death as well as in man’s relationship with the other:

The relationship with the other will never be the feat of grasping a possibility. One would have to characterize it in terms that contrast strongly with the relationships that describe light. I think the erotic relationship furnishes us with a prototype of it. *Eros, strong as death*, will furnish us with the basis of an analysis of this relationship with mystery [...].<sup>455</sup>

Levinas’s notion of ‘eros, strong as death’, referring obviously to the Biblical source of the Song of Songs, indicates thus a mode by which one can overcome the essential solitude of the individual mortal subject by means of the encounter with the other. Although the erotic relationship represents for Levinas a “prototype” of the relationship with the other, this relationship is nonetheless not without difficulties in his eyes. He expounds the problems of the ambiguity of eros and love in *Totality and Infinity* and in fact calls the erotic “*the equivocal par*

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<sup>452</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Poetry and Resurrection: Notes on Agnon”, in: *Proper Names*, p. 7-16, p. 16/“Poésie et résurrection: Notes sur Agnon”, in: *Noms propres*, pp. 13-25, p. 25, emphasis added. The article first appeared in *Les Nouveaux Cahiers*, no. 32, 1973.

<sup>453</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “The Philosopher and Death”, in: *Is it righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins, pp. 121-129, p. 123.

<sup>454</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*: “Verbe – est fait de l’impossibilité de s’exprimer. Amour – *mystère* d’autrui – Verbe *mystère* de moi-même”, p. 143, emphasis added.

<sup>455</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TO, p. 76/TA, p. 63, emphasis added.



excellence.<sup>456</sup> Furthermore, the erotical relationship is not the only mode in which the relationship with the other takes place since language too plays a crucial part in this context. In the movement of overcoming death and the essential human solitude by means of the encounter with the other, however, one can see similar approaches in Rosenzweig's and Levinas's thinking since both emphasize the aspect of love and the erotical.

Eros is further connected in Levinas's thought to the notion of fecundity and creation.<sup>457</sup> This allows us to trace a line of thought from Levinas's early writings to his later works. E.g. in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas takes up the thought of the *there is* again and connects it further with the notion of creation:

The absolute indetermination of the *there is*, an existing without existants, is an incessant negation, to an infinite degree, consequently an infinite limitation. Against the anarchy of the *there is* the existent is produced, a subject of what can happen, an origin and commencement, a power.<sup>458</sup>

Hence the process of coming-into-being is linked to the notion of *creation* in Levinas's view and, implicitly, to the notion of fecundity. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas goes on to explain his notion of fecundity, by emphasizing that it is not a solution to escape death for the I in the sense of a possibility given to the I. Levinas points out that

[I]f life flows on in a dimension of its own where it has meaning, and where a triumph over death can have meaning. This triumph is not a new *possibility* offered after the end of every possibility – but a resurrection in the son in whom the rupture of death is embodied. Death – suffocation in the impossibility of the possible – opens a passage toward descent. Fecundity is yet a personal relation, though it be not given to the 'I' as a possibility.<sup>459</sup>

Regarding the relationship between death and eros, *fecundity* holds thus a crucial place. It is seen by Levinas as a "personal relation", however, it is not a property of the I. How then fecundity has

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<sup>456</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 255/Ti, p. 286. I discuss this issue in more detail in chapter IV, 2. b), "Love and the silent Self of Creation, or: how to become 'a soul that speaks'".

<sup>457</sup> See Katz, Claire Elise, *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine. The Silent Footsteps of Rebecca*, especially chapter two, "The Time of Creation", pp. 22-34.

<sup>458</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 281/Ti, p. 313.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid., pp. 56-57/pp. 49-50. See also *ibid.*, p. 267ff/p. 299ff.

to be conceived if it is not realized as a capacity of the I? Does the possibility of “having a son”, as Levinas states, not entail a certain personal ability of the I?

To fully understand Levinas’s notion of fecundity, a more detailed examination of the notion of *creation* is necessary. This notion appears at several crucial points throughout Levinas’s work. Already in his study *On Escape* (1935), Levinas introduces the concept of creation as a symptom of the need to overcome ontological categories: “The urge toward the Creator expresses a taking leave of being.”<sup>460</sup> In this sense, at the end of his study *Existence and Existents* (1947) he goes on to elaborate on the notion of fecundity as follows: “Asymmetrical intersubjectivity is the locus of transcendence in which the subject, while preserving its subject, has the possibility of not inevitably returning to itself, the possibility of being fecund and [...] having a son.”<sup>461</sup> However it is only in his other writings, e.g. *Time and the Other* and *Totality and Infinity*, where respectively a whole sub-chapter is devoted to fecundity, that the notion of fecundity is outlined in more detail. Levinas explains it as follows:

The relation with such a future, irreducible to the power over possibles, we shall call fecundity. Fecundity encloses a duality of the Identical. It does not denote all that I can grasp – my possibilities; it denotes my future, which is not a future of the same – not a new avatar: not a history and events that can occur to a residue of identity, an identity that holding on by a thread, an I that would ensure the continuity of the avatars. And yet it is my adventure still, and consequently my future in a very new sense, despite the discontinuity.<sup>462</sup>

In his study *Time and the Other*, Levinas even speaks of a “victory over death”<sup>463</sup> with respect to fecundity. This is indicated in the relationship between a child and his parents, as Levinas emphasizes: “Paternity is the relationship with a stranger who, entirely while being Other, is myself; the relationship of the ego with a myself who is nonetheless a stranger to me. [...] I began with the notions of death and the feminine, and ended with that of the son.”<sup>464</sup> This demonstrates that in Levinas’s line of thought the feminine, death and fecundity, that is to say the possibility of having a child, are connected.

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<sup>460</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *On Escape*, p. 72/*De l'évasion*, p. 97: “L'élan vers le Créateur traduisait une sortie en dehors de l'être.”

<sup>461</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, EE, p. 96/DEE, p. 165.

<sup>462</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, pp. 267-268/Ti, p. 300.

<sup>463</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TO, pp. 90-91/TA, pp. 84-85.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., pp. 91-92/p. 85 and p. 87.

It thereby becomes obvious that Levinas implicitly emphasizes the function of *eros*, which plays a crucial role in this context. According to Levinas, one would utterly fail “if one wants to characterize the erotic by ‘grasping’, ‘possessing’ or ‘knowing’. But there is nothing of all this, or the failure of all this, in *eros*. If one could possess, grasp, and know the other, it would not be the other.”<sup>465</sup> In *Time and Other* he goes on to explain his specific notion of *eros*, in contrast to the wide spread views of *eros*:

[...] the relationship with the other is generally sought out as a fusion. I have precisely wanted to contest the idea that the relationship with the other is fusion. The relationship with the Other is the absence with the other, not absence pure and simple, not the absence of pure nothingness, but absence in a horizon of the future, an absence that is time. This is the horizon where a personal life can be constituted in the heart of the transcendent event, what I called above the ‘*victory over death*’.<sup>466</sup>

Thus, *eros* ultimately links the three aspects: death, fecundity and the feminine.<sup>467</sup> The erotical relationship with the other is not conceived of as a fusion, yet in a paradoxical manner as a relationship with ‘an absence that is time’. The other remains essentially absent in the sense that he remains exterior to the I. However, the temporal perspective of the future allows us to draw up a common life among men ‘in the heart of the transcendent event’, as Levinas points out. This possibility of having a future *beyond* our personal life, e.g. through the possibility of having children, is thus what he calls the ‘*victory over death*’.

However, the cited passages allude not only to the biological sense of fecundity, i.e. the production of a child through the parents. Fecundity has to be understood ultimately in a broader sense, according to Levinas: “The biological structure of fecundity is not limited to the biological fact.”<sup>468</sup> In an interview, Levinas further explains this aspect of fecundity in more detail, pointing in particular to its connection to responsibility:

The father-son relationship, for example, should not be thought of only in biological terms. The father-son relationship can exist between beings who, biologically, are not father and son. Paternity

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<sup>465</sup> Ibid., p. 90/p. 83.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid., p. 90/pp. 83-84.

<sup>467</sup> See Chanter, Tina, *Time, Death, and the Feminine*.

<sup>468</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 306/Ti, p. 243.

and filiality, the feeling that the other is not simply someone I've met, but that he is, in a certain sense, my prolongation, my ego, that his possibilities are mine – the idea of responsibility for the other can go that far.<sup>469</sup>

In this sense, fecundity, according to Levinas, is found in relations between one person and another, as well as between the I and itself.<sup>470</sup>

In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas takes up his concept of creation again and links it with a critique of Western philosophy, which has developed a too restrictive view of creation, in Levinas's view. In the chapter "Substitution", "the germ of [the] work",<sup>471</sup> as Levinas underlines, he links his concept of creation with his theory of subjectivity outlined in this work:

Western philosophy [...] remains faithful to the order of things and does not know the absolute passivity, beneath the level of activity and passivity, which is contributed by the idea of creation. Philosophers have always wished to think of creation in *ontological terms*, that is, in function of a preexisting and indestructible matter.<sup>472</sup>

In the enclosed note Levinas explains furthermore: "This freedom enveloped in a responsibility which it does not succeed in shouldering is *the way of being a creature*, the unlimited passivity of a self, the unconditionality of the self."<sup>473</sup> Unlike most of the theories of creation worked out by Western philosophies, Levinas's concept of creation, as it is for the most part elaborated in *Totality and Infinity*,<sup>474</sup> is a creation *ex nihilo*, which has to be conceived as an absolute upsurge. This creation as *ex nihilo* is accomplished, for example, in fecund production, e.g. the production of a child who, though the father's issue, is nonetheless absolutely other than the father – a creation *ex nihilo*, a true other.<sup>475</sup> This idea had been originally elaborated by Levinas already in *Time and the Other*, where he clearly points out: "How can the ego become other to itself? This

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<sup>469</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "The Paradox of Morality: an Interview with Emmanuel Levinas", conducted by Tamra Wright, Peter Hughes and Alison Ainley, in: *The Provocation of Levinas. Rethinking the Other*, ed. by Robert Bernasconi and David Wood, pp. 168-180, here pp. 179-180.

<sup>470</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 247/Ti, p. 277.

<sup>471</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 193, note 1/AQE, p. 156, note 1.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., p. 110/p. 174, emphasis added.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid., p. 195, note 13/p. 174, note 1, emphasis added.

<sup>474</sup> See TI, p. 63, p. 104, pp. 293-294/Ti, p. 58, p. 108, pp. 325-327.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., p. 63/p. 58.

can happen only in one way: through paternity.”<sup>476</sup> However, as I have shown, in his later works, Levinas extends his notion of fecundity also beyond the biological structures of paternity.

It comes thus as no surprise that notions like eros and desire occupy in this context an important role in Levinas’s thinking. Levinas characterizes “desire in its positivity” as “affirmed across the idea of creation *ex nihilo*”, which opens up “the possibility of a *sabbatical existence*”.<sup>477</sup> Desire is conceived by Levinas as a *metaphysical* desire which cannot be fulfilled by satisfaction and which is, on the contrary, nourished and even augmented by its very realization.<sup>478</sup> It is in fact “desire for the *invisible*”,<sup>479</sup> as Levinas explains: “To die for the invisible – this is metaphysics.”<sup>480</sup> The significant issue, in this context, is that Levinas conceives being, in the sense of a creation *ex nihilo*, as a *separated* being which breaks with the totality of ontological systems. Beyond these ontological structures, the being as a creation *ex nihilo* entails a *transcendent* structure which open up the idea of Infinity for Levinas, and which is realized through language. In this resistance of the separated I to be subsumed by ontological systems, one can see a parallel to Rosenzweig’s idea of the human self, which is left alone with its mortal fear by philosophy and which, after all systems have been worked out, is still *there* – regardless of the system: “I, a completely common private-subject, I fore- and surname, I dust and ashes. I am still there,” Rosenzweig emphasizes in his famous letter in 1917 to his cousin Rudolf Ehrenberg (1884-1969), called the “Urzelle” of his later major work *The Star of Redemption*.<sup>481</sup> In a similar sense, Levinas explains that his concept of creation is based upon “a being outside of every system”, similar to Rosenzweig’s silent Self of creation, which is left outside by the philosophical systems. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas argues that

[...] the idea of creation *ex nihilo* expresses a multiplicity not united into a totality; the creature is an existence which indeed does depend on an other, but as a part that is separated from it. Creation *ex nihilo* breaks with system, posits a being outside of every system, that is, there where its freedom is possible. [...] What is essential to created existence is its separation with regard to the Infinite. This

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<sup>476</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TO, p. 91/TA, p. 85.

<sup>477</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 104/Ti, p. 107, emphasis added.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid., pp. 33-34/pp. 21-22. For a critical inquiry about the notions of desire and need in the work of Levinas in the context of Greek philosophy see Achtenberg, Deborah, “The Eternal and the New: Socrates and Levinas on Desire and Need”, pp. 30-31.

<sup>479</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, Ti, p. 33/Ti, p. 21, emphasis added.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid., p. 35/p. 23.

<sup>481</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “‘Urzelle’ to the *Star of Redemption*”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 48-72, p. 53.

separation is not simply a negation. Accomplished as psychism, it precisely opens upon the idea of Infinity.<sup>482</sup>

It is noteworthy in this context to point out that Levinas's reflections upon death evolve during the decades. This can be seen from his captivity notebooks. Whereas Levinas here notes that the only real point of contact between life and eternity is death, which highlights the *tragic* dimension of death – “The tragedy of death – the only situation where there is a communication between time and what may be called eternity”<sup>483</sup> –, he continues in his later works to point out, on the contrary, that there is a certain solution for man to overcome the tragic aspect of death. This solution, according to Levinas, is located in *fecundity*, as I have shown.

For Rosenzweig, the relationship between death and eros holds a crucial place in *The Star of Redemption*. Although it is obvious that the end of creation is death, it is nonetheless precisely in the event of death that the miracle of creation is announced according to Rosenzweig. He explains this with a Talmudic citation of Bereshit Rabba 40, where the word “very” in the phrase “behold, it was very good!” (Gen. 1:31) is interpreted as “death”. Referring to the Biblical description of creation, Rosenzweig points out that, among all creatures, it is only after the creation of man that the Bible mentions that it is said not only “good” but “*very good*” (in Hebrew: *tov me'od*). In the word “very” (*me'od*) the Talmudic explanation Rosenzweig cites, an allusion to the word “death” (in Hebrew: *mot*) can be seen.<sup>484</sup> He explains this as follows in *The Star of Redemption*:

Within the framework of the universal Yes of Creation which carries all the singular on its broad back, a domain is delimited which receives a different Yes, a Yes qualified by ‘very’, different from everything else, something that, while in the Creation points beyond Creation. This ‘very’ which announces a trans-creation right within Creation, within the world, a beyond of the world, something other than life while belonging to life and only to life, created at the same time as life, as its ending point, and yet allowing life to have an inkling of a fulfillment beyond it: this is death.<sup>485</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, pp. 104-105/Ti, p. 108. See also Petrosino, Silvano, “L’idée de création dans l’oeuvre de Lévinas”, p. 104.

<sup>483</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 129: “Le drame de la mort – la seule situation où il y a une communication entre le temps et ce qu’on peut appeler l’éternité.”

<sup>484</sup> Meir, Ephraim, *Letters of Love*, p. 109. See further Rühle, Inken, *Gott spricht die Sprache des Menschen. Franz Rosenzweig als jüdischer Theologe – eine Einführung*, pp. 225-226, on death in general *ibid.*, pp. 238-247.

<sup>485</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Stern*, p. 173/*Star*, p. 168. For a fuller explanation see Meir, Ephraim, “Le ‘très bien’ et la finitude de l’existence selon Rabbi Méir, la Kabbale et Rosenzweig”.

That means that only human beings, who are conscious of their death and live their lives in the awareness of their coming deaths, possible at each moment, are therefore the only creatures on earth capable of experiencing *transcendence*, i.e. a beyond of life – realized not only through death, but also through love.<sup>486</sup> The superlative ‘very good’ indicates a trans-creation within the very heart of creation, i.e. within the world there is indicated a *beyond* the world. Death belongs to every creature but it announces also the capacity of the creature to experience transcendence and revelation, as Ephraim Meir points out.<sup>487</sup> Only mortal human beings are able to experience revelation according to Rosenzweig. This defines man’s destiny in contrast to the existence of animals, which had been pointed out poetically by the German poet Rilke in the eighth elegy of his *Duino Elegies*: “Death leaves beasts free. Only we foreknow it. Animals keep death behind them, and before them, God. And when a beast passes, *it passes in eternity*, as rivers run...”<sup>488</sup> Levinas underlines this specific human destiny in the following words: “To be conscious is to have time [...]. [*Etre conscient, c’est avoir du temps.*]”<sup>489</sup> In contradistinction to animals, for man *time* is the guarantee of his mortality since it brings him closer with each moment to the moment of his death. Levinas underlines this by pointing out that the process ‘to die’ is not *beyond time*, but realized in time and deeply connected to life:

To die, for *Dasein*, is not to reach the final point of one’s being but to be close to the end at every moment of one’s being. Death is not a moment of one’s being. It is not a moment, but *a manner of*

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<sup>486</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Stern*, p. 174/*Star*, p. 169.

<sup>487</sup> Meir, Ephraim, “Le ‘très bien’ et la finitude de l’existence selon Rabbi Méir, la Kabbale et Rosenzweig”, pp. 220-221.

<sup>488</sup> Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Duino Elegies. A Bilingual Edition*, pp. 64-65: “Mit allen Augen sieht die Kreatur das Offene. Nur unsere Augen sind wie umgekehrt und ganz um sie gestellt als Fallen, rings um ihren freien Ausgang. Was draussen *ist*, wir wissens aus des Tires Antlitz allein; denn schon das frühe Tier wenden wir um und zwingens, dass es rückwärts Gestaltung sehe, nicht das Offene, das im Tiergesicht so tief ist. Frei von Tod. *Ihn* sehen wir allein; das freie Tier hat seinen Untergang stets hinter sich und vor sich Gott, und wenn es geht, *so gehts in Ewigkeit*, so wie die Brunnen gehen.” Emphasis added. As Rosenzweig had a stupendous knowledge of German literature, e.g. he frequently cites Goethe in *The Star of Redemption* (see e.g. Meir, Ephraim, “Goethe’s Place in Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*”), it may be that he had Rilke’s citation on his mind in this context while referring to the Talmudic citation. Just like Levinas, who cites Shakespeare, Blanchot, et al. alongside Biblical references in his work, Rosenzweig merges in *The Star of Redemption* secular literature (e.g. Goethe) and religious sources (Bible and Talmud).

<sup>489</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *TI*, p. 237/*Ti*, p. 264. As I consider this phrase as very important in this context, I cite also the original French version in brackets in the text. See further in the Talmud, *Pirkei Avot*, IV, 29 [22]: “[Do not make yourself any illusions in the hope that the grave will be a refuge for you], because it is in spite of yourself that you were created, it is in spite of yourself that you were born, it is in spite of yourself that you die, it is in spite of yourself, finally, that you will one day render account of your actions before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.” **ד, כה** [כב] ששל כורחך אתה נוצר, ועל כורחך אתה נולד, ועל כורחך אתה חי, ועל כורחך אתה מת, ועל כורחך אתה הוּא. עתיד ליתן דין וחשבון לפני מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא.

*being*<sup>490</sup> of which *Dasein* takes charge as soon as it is, such that the expression ‘to have to be’ also signifies ‘to have to die’.<sup>491</sup>

This means that death is inscribed in being as such – *media vita in morte sumus* – since “*Dasein* in fact dies, inasmuch as it exists [...]”<sup>492</sup> The fact of being mortal gives man the possibility of experiencing transcendence *within* life and of having sense of what is *beyond* life. In this sense, as the *sine qua non* of experiencing transcendence, death holds a crucial place for Levinas’s thinking.

In a similar way, Rosenzweig points out at the end of his treatise *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy* that every true human life lives face-to-face with death at every moment, accepting death as the veritable “brother of life”. Rosenzweig emphasizes that in the long run life falls silent before death, which asks: “Do you finally recognize me? I am your brother.”<sup>493</sup> However, in time, there lies also the capacity for man to be born and, thereby, to conquer death. Levinas points this out as follows: “More than the renewal of our moods and qualities, *time is essentially a new birth*. [...] Vanquishing death is not a problem of eternal life. Vanquishing death is to maintain, with the alterity of the event, a relationship that must still be personal.”<sup>494</sup> This *personal* relationship can be seen as realized through language, i.e. in the face-to-face encounter with the other person. This encounter entails language since the face *as such* is language, as Levinas emphasizes: “The face speaks.”<sup>495</sup> Therefore, language as a mode of transcendence must be seen in connection with the notions of death, creation and eros.

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<sup>490</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>491</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *God, Death, and Time*, p. 43/*Dieu, la mort et le temps*, p. 53.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48/p. 58.

<sup>493</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, p. 103/*Büchlein*, p. 116.

<sup>494</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *TO*, p. 81/*TA*, pp. 72-73, emphasis added.

<sup>495</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *TI*, p. 66/*Ti*, p. 61.



## 2. a) Language and eschatology in the work of Emmanuel Levinas

In the following, I elaborate on the above mentioned aspects by focusing more deeply on Levinas's work and, in particular, on the relationship between *time* and *language* in his thinking. Speaking is profoundly connected to time. Speech is developed through and in time and, thus, cannot be seen independently from it. In order to draw an important parallel between the relationship of time and language in the work of Levinas, I focus in the following on the relation between language and one specific mode of time: *eschatology*.

At first sight eschatology seems to play a minor role in Levinas's thought because when we look at his first major work, *Totality and Infinity*, eschatology appears, apart from the foreword, only one more time in the entire work.<sup>496</sup> However in the foreword it holds nonetheless a remarkable position, because it is through eschatology that the totality and with it the "ontology of war" is broken up.<sup>497</sup> This function of eschatology expresses a crucial point in Levinas's philosophy. It is linked to the fundamental notions of the face as well as to language, because eschatology appeals to

[...] existents [*étants*] that can speak, rather than lending their lips to an anonymous utterance of history. *Peace is produced as this aptitude for speech.* The eschatological vision breaks with the totality of wars and empires in which one does not speak."<sup>498</sup>

Since eschatology is realized through language, it is strongly linked to the notion of the face because it is the foremost characteristic of the face to speak: "It *expresses itself*,"<sup>499</sup> as Levinas states. But it is a silent speech which is expressed by the face, a speech without words or, moreover, beyond the articulation of words. It is precisely for this reason that it opens up "the very possibility of eschatology, that is, the breach of the totality, the possibility of a signification

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<sup>496</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 241/p. 270: "History is not an eschatology." Since this notion is cited almost exclusively in the foreword, only a few studies are concerned with the aspect of eschatology, among which, for instance, are Theodore de Boer, "Beyond Being, Ontology and Eschatology in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas" and Graham Ward, "On Time and Salvation: The Eschatology of Emmanuel Levinas".

<sup>497</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *TI*, p. 22/Ti, p. 6.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23/p. 8, emphasis added.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51/p. 43.

without a context.”<sup>500</sup> It is inevitable that the face expresses itself through a so-called “signification without a context” because it expresses the idea of infinity, which, as Levinas argues, cannot be “stated in terms of experience, for infinity overflows the thought that thinks it.”<sup>501</sup> The function of eschatology lies exactly in the realization of this relationship of the same to the other, manifested in the experience of being faced by the other which relates the Same to a beyond of history: “Eschatology institutes a relation with being *beyond the totality* or beyond history.”<sup>502</sup> But – and this is the crucial point in Levinas’s notion of eschatology regarding its role for history and politics – this beyond “is reflected *within* the totality and history, *within* experience.”<sup>503</sup> So although eschatology and history with respect to totality are fundamentally different categories for Levinas, they are nevertheless linked together in an experience all of us have nearly every day: the encounter with another person face-to-face.

Furthermore, Levinas points out in his Talmudic interpretations that there are different concepts of eschatology: “[E]schatology possesses a number of styles and genres, and it was the Jewish Bible which probably discovered the one which consists in feeling responsible in the face of the future one hopes for others. Yet ever *since the creation*, it was to be found in the humanity of man. It cannot be the cause of wars.”<sup>504</sup> Levinas draws a parallel here between the biblical heritage and the notion of eschatology, from which it can be derived that for him one aspect of eschatology is rooted in the Jewish tradition. An idea strongly related to this statement can be found in *Totality and Infinity*, where Levinas states: “Of peace there can be only an eschatology.”<sup>505</sup> Hence it can be seen that the concepts of eschatology overlap in Levinas’s philosophical and Jewish writings.<sup>506</sup> The aspect of various concepts of eschatology can also be found in Levinas’s Talmudic interpretation published in his book *Difficult Freedom* under the

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<sup>500</sup> Ibid., p. 23/p. 8.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., p. 25/p. 10.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., p. 22/p. 7.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid., p. 23/p. 7.

<sup>504</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, p. xv/L’*Au-delà du verset. Lectures et discours talmudiques*, p. 12: “Cependant, *l’eschatologie a plusieurs styles et genres* et celle qui consiste à se sentir responsable devant l’avenir qu’on espère pour les autres a probablement été découverte par la Bible juive. Elle se trouvait cependant, *depuis la création*, dans l’humanité de l’homme. Ce n’est pas elle qui peut être cause des guerres.” Emphasis added.

<sup>505</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 24/Ti, p. 9.

<sup>506</sup> This aspect of Levinas’s work has been discussed in various studies. See for example the Ph.D. thesis of David Plüss, *Das Messianische. Judentum und Philosophie im Werk Emmanuel Levinas’s*. The author tries to build a bridge between the two genres of Levinas’s oeuvre – the confessional and the philosophical writings – by elaborating on the figure of the “messianic” in both of them.

title “Messianic Texts.” In this text eschatology is linked to the notion of a messianic subjectivity, which seems to mark the central aspect of ontology for Levinas as he postulates:

Messianism is no more than this apogee in being, a centralizing, concentration or twisting back on itself of the Self [*Moi*]. And in concrete terms this means that each person acts as if though he were the Messiah. Messianism is therefore not the certainty of the coming of a man who stops History. It is my power to bear the suffering of all. It is the moment when I recognize this power and my universal responsibility.<sup>507</sup>

Hence the notion of eschatology is not a static idea in the thought of Levinas, but has to be considered as a dynamic configuration through which it manifests itself in different concepts and at different places in Levinas’s work. Through these various concepts Levinas tries to describe the idea of Infinity in its realization to temporality. Therefore, the notion of eschatology and of messianic peace is highly important also for Levinas’s views on politics, because the deeds of men which are realized through temporality and manifest themselves in history, since politics is the actual form of history.<sup>508</sup> However, in this context the role of language is of crucial importance, as Levinas emphasizes: “Language is perhaps to be defined as the very power to break the continuity being or of history.”<sup>509</sup>

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<sup>507</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Messianic Texts”, in: *Difficult Freedom*, p. 90/“Textes Messianiques”, in: *Difficile Liberté*, p. 130.

<sup>508</sup> See Critchley, Simon, “Five Problems in Levinas’s View of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to Them”. Critchley states that there is “a deduction of politics from ethics”, p. 177. For an account of Jacques Derrida regarding the relation of politics and eschatology in the work of Levinas see also Bernasconi, Robert, “Different Styles of Eschatology: Derrida’s Take on Levinas’s Political Messianism”.

<sup>509</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *TI*, p. 195/Ti, p. 212.

**b) “In the heart of a chiasmus” – Jacques Derrida’s critique of language in Levinas’s work and the problem of narrativity**

As Simon Critchley points out, Jacques Derrida stresses a central problem at the heart of Levinas’s philosophy by emphasizing the aspect of language in his essay *Violence and Metaphysics* (1964).<sup>510</sup> Derrida’s study is not only one of the earliest important receptions of Levinas’s first major work *Totality and Infinity* (1961), but is also of great influence for the reception of Levinas’s thought as such, which, aside from some small academic circles, was not very popular at the time. The problem Derrida points out is concerned with the question: How can one speak in the scope of a philosophical work about problems which cannot be expressed in a philosophical manner? This is a central problem for Levinas because in his philosophy he wants to get rid of what he calls the ‘language of ontology’. Instead, he wants to reveal the ‘ethical’ sense of language. Levinas gets his motivation from his conviction that the thinking of the totality, the so-called *Totalitätsdenken*, which is focused on ontology and uses for its thinking an ontological language, has failed. After the Shoah, one could no longer philosophize as before and Levinas tries to integrate this into his thinking by trying to elaborate a new approach to philosophy which does not focus primarily on ontology, but on the primacy of ethics. In this sense he stated in an interview: “My critique of the totality has come in fact after a political experience that we have not yet forgotten.”<sup>511</sup> According to Levinas, ‘ontological’ language tries to capture every phenomenon, as well as the fellow man, by means of thematization within its discourse and a subordination of the Saying (*le Dire*) to that what is finally Said (*le Dit*).<sup>512</sup> The Said and the Saying are central notions of the later philosophy of Levinas. Jacob Meskin summarizes these terms very concisely:

Levinas calls the formulated ideas, sentences, propositions – in short the discourse – of philosophy ‘the said’. [...] Levinas argues that philosophy has almost totally ignored the enigmatic yet profound reality through which and in which the said comes into being. Levinas calls this the ‘saying’. [...] The

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<sup>510</sup> Critchley, Simon, “Eine Vertiefung der ethischen Sprache und Methode: Levinas ‘Jenseits des Seins oder anders als Sein geschieht’”, p. 648. Derrida’s essay first appeared in two parts in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, Vol. 69, 1964, no. 3, pp. 322-54 and no. 4, pp. 425-73. Some minor changes were made for its republication in 1967.

<sup>511</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Ethics and Infinity*, pp. 78-79/*Éthique et Infini*, p. 73.

<sup>512</sup> On the topic of the Saying and the Said in Levinas see the article of Waldenfels, Bernhard, “The Saying and the Said”.

saying produces the said, whether in speech or in writing. The said can by definition always be synchronized, included in an encompassing totality of space and time; it is always part of a narrative. The saying, by contrast, is *not* included in the said; it is not by definition, something that can be synchronized, nor is it part of a narrative.<sup>513</sup>

According to Derrida, Levinas has necessarily failed in his attempt to situate transcendence *within* his discourse because in *Totality and Infinity* he still uses ontological language and determinations of which his philosophy wants to discard. The central remark of Derrida's critique lies in the fact that violence emerges at the same time as articulation. Hence, language, and moreover speaking itself, is deeply infected with violence, as Derrida states: "Violence appears with *articulation*."<sup>514</sup> Derrida claims that Levinas's ethical rupture with the ontological and phenomenological tradition can only be accomplished through a renunciation of the linguistic resources of that tradition. Thus, Levinas's thought is for Derrida "consequently caught in a double bind, between belonging to the tradition and achieving a breakthrough that goes beyond the tradition."<sup>515</sup> According to Derrida, language is of fundamental importance for the philosophy of Levinas because it is here that he deals with that which literally cannot be said, but which nevertheless marks the point where meaningful discourse breaks through to its inner silence. This *inner silence* that can never be conquered by words provides, paradoxically, precisely the motivation for writing and speaking. For this methodological problem Derrida proposes a solution in *Violence and Metaphysics* by formulating the idea of closure. The word closure, or *clôture*, and moreover the aspect of a *closure of metaphysics*, signifies the problem of finding an *ethical* language in an *ontological* context. A language focused on ontology, trying to grasp the essence of what it is talking about by naming it, is inadequate for the claim of Levinas's philosophy. Given that the latter focus first and foremost on doing justice to the infinite demand of the recognition of the other, it requires a new kind of philosophical expression which takes into account the mentioned linguistic problem.

There is no doubt about the fact that Levinas indeed changes his way of writing in his second major work *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974) by expressing his thought in a manner that undermines the Said (*le Dit*) for the sake of the Saying (*le Dire*) at every moment.

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<sup>513</sup> Meskin, Jacob, "Toward a New Understanding of the Work of Emmanuel Levinas", pp. 90-91.

<sup>514</sup> Derrida, Jacques, "Violence et Metaphysics", p. 185/"Violence et Métaphysique", p. 219.

<sup>515</sup> Critchley, Simon, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, pp. 69-70.

He even dedicates a whole chapter to this aspect of *The Said and the Saying*.<sup>516</sup> However, a similar idea can already be found before Derrida's critical essay in the foreword of *Totality and Infinity* where Levinas states that

[...] the very essence of language [...] consists in continually undoing its phrase by the foreword or the exegesis, in *unsaying the said*, in attempting to restate without ceremonies what has already been ill understood in the inevitable ceremonial in which the said delights.<sup>517</sup>

However, the idea that the essence of language consists in the continual unsaying of the said, manifests its whole significance in *Otherwise than Being*, where Levinas emphasizes the importance of language for his philosophy in a very radical manner.<sup>518</sup> This aspect can be further considered as a basic development of Levinas's thought, which Derrida metaphorically compares in *Violence and Metaphysics* with the crashing of a wave on a beach, which is always the same wave, but every time expressed *otherwise*. In this sense, Derrida argues that

[...] in *Totality and Infinity* the thematic development is neither purely descriptive nor purely deductive. It proceeds with the infinite insistence of waves on a beach: return and repetition, always of the same wave against the same shore, in which, however, as each return recapitulates itself, it also infinitely renews and enriches itself. Because of all these challenges to the commentator and the critic, *Totality and Infinity* is a work of art and not a treatise.<sup>519</sup>

In fact, Levinas had ambitions to be a writer and in the beginning wanted to evolve his work twofold, literarily and philosophically, like Sartre did for example. This can be seen from his captivity notebooks where he drew up scenes for two novels he had in mind, which however remained uncompleted after the war.<sup>520</sup> Further, the many literary sources Levinas cites throughout his philosophical texts – e.g. *Totality and Infinity* begins with a citation of Rimbaud's

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<sup>516</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, pp. 5-7/AQE, pp. 16-20.

<sup>517</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 30/Ti, p. 16, emphasis added.

<sup>518</sup> See Weber, Elisabeth, *Verfolgung und Trauma*, and the work of the German translator of Levinas's *Otherwise than Being* Thomas Wiemer, *Die Passion des Sagens*.

<sup>519</sup> Derrida, Jacques, "Violence and Metaphysics", p. 398, note 7/"Violence et Métaphysique", p. 124, note 1, emphasis added. See also Critchley, Simon, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 4.

<sup>520</sup> By means of Levinas's captivity notebooks two novels can be reconstructed: *La Dame de chez Wepler* and *Triste opulence*, later named *Eros*. Especially for the latter, Levinas worked out many sketches. It begins in May 1940 when the male protagonist is sent as a military translator at the front, describing further his captivity in Rennes, then in Germany, and ends with descriptions of his return to his French home town after five years. See Calin, Rodolphe and Chaliel, Catherine, "Préface", in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, pp. 13-40, especially pp. 14-16.

*Une saison en enfer* and ends with one of Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal* – indicates that literature was not at all a marginal source of inspiration for his thinking. It is by no means far fetched that this affinity for literature is reflected in his style of writing. Furthermore, the particular way of writing in Levinas's philosophy has to be seen in connection to the content of his philosophy, as Tina Chanter points out: "There is an intricate relationship between the way in which Levinas's language works, and what he wants to say."<sup>521</sup> By emphasizing this point she stresses a central aspect, which Levinas himself underlines in *Otherwise than Being* as "the very *ambiguity* of every said."<sup>522</sup> Therefore, I agree with Chanter's suggestion that there is "a necessary *betrayal* involved in the very attempt to do philosophy, and that this betrayal concerns the very function of language as *thematization*."<sup>523</sup>

Nevertheless, thematization in philosophy is "inevitable"<sup>524</sup> for one wants to state at least something. Levinas points out this aspect when he concedes that "the saying calls for the said."<sup>525</sup> In emphasizing the Saying and the importance of the spoken word face-to-face, Levinas underlines the importance of the dialogue between human beings for ethics. For him "the banal fact of conversation [...] quits the order of violence. This simple fact is the marvel of marvels."<sup>526</sup> It is through language that the relationship of the I to the other is created: "The claim to reach and to know the other is realized in the relationship with the other that is cast in the relation of language [...]."<sup>527</sup> However, the other for Levinas can be neither thematized in a philosophical discourse nor grasped by means of defining and describing language. The other endlessly escapes a language that would encapsulate it in a narrative. The only adequate way to approach the other lies in the saying itself, because in the saying the subject gives itself away through its breathing – and it gives away nothing less than *itself*. As one has to breathe while one speaks, one gives through one's speech one's breath to the other and, hence, gives away that which is actually the most valuable for oneself, i.e. one's time, and thereby one's life which passes away like the breath of one's spoken words. In this sense the core aspect of language is first conceived by

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<sup>521</sup> Chanter, Tina, "The Betrayal of Philosophy. Emmanuel Levinas's 'Otherwise Than Being'", p. 65.

<sup>522</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 152/AQE, p. 237, emphasis added.

<sup>523</sup> Chanter, Tina, "The Betrayal of Philosophy. Emmanuel Levinas's 'Otherwise Than Being'", p. 67, emphasis added.

<sup>524</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 151/AQE, p. 237.

<sup>525</sup> Chanter, Tina, "The Betrayal of Philosophy. Emmanuel Levinas's 'Otherwise Than Being'", p. 67.

<sup>526</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Ethics and Spirit", in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 3-10, p. 7/"Éthique et Esprit", in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 13-23, p. 19.

<sup>527</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 69/Ti, p. 65.

Levinas in the saying itself, i.e., in the *gesture* of saying in which the subject offers itself to the non-thematizable other. However, as the saying escapes the philosophical discourse by passing away after being said, the problem remains of how this *gesture of saying* could find an adequate narration within the scope of a philosophical text.

**3. a) The notion of an ‘ethical language’ in Levinas’s thought – breathing, voice and the saying of “things that can’t be said”<sup>528</sup>**

Breathing, you invisible poem!<sup>529</sup>

As we have seen, the relation between ‘Saying’ and ‘Said’, and further also the problem of narrativity, is fundamental for the work of Levinas, as he searches for an adequate language for his thought. Therefore, in his later work, especially in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas develops the conception of a so-called ‘ethical language’ (*langage éthique*), which focuses on the importance of the saying before anything which is actually *said*.<sup>530</sup> This ‘ethical language’ is not to be understood as an empirical language and therefore cannot be compared to any written or spoken language according to the common sense. Levinas defines it as a speaking that indeed does not say anything at all because the meaning *exceeds* the language. The meaning overflows the words which try to express it; the act of speaking overflows the capacity of the intentional mind. Phenomenologically *noëma* is no longer in correlation with its *noësis* but goes beyond the borders of intentionality and phenomenology. Thus, the act of speaking attains its importance for Levinas’s notion of ethical language because it opens up the subject in a radical manner towards the other.

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<sup>528</sup> Allusion to Woolf, Virginia, *Jacob’s Room*, p. 39: “There are things that can’t be said.” On this topic see further *Was sich nicht sagen lässt. Das nicht-begriffliche in Wissenschaft, Kunst und Religion*, ed. by Joachim Bromand and Guido Kreis.

<sup>529</sup> Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Sonnetts to Orpheus*, p. 57/*Die Sonette an Orpheus*, second part, first piece, p. 695: “Atmen, du unsichtbares Gedicht! Immerfort um das eigne/ Sein rein eingetauschter Weltraum. Gegengewicht/ in dem ich mich rhythmisch ereigne”.

<sup>530</sup> On the notion of an ‘ethical language’ see Bruckmann, Florian, “Gut und Gabe. Ethisch Sprechen als Geburt des Subjekts bei Emmanuel Levinas (Autrement qu’être)”.



Furthermore, Levinas characterizes this relationship between the I to the other as *proximity*, which adds a *sensual* or *physical* aspect to the ethical language:

This relationship of proximity, this contact unconvertible into a *noetico-noematic* structure, in which every transmission of messages, whatever be those messages, is already established, is the original language, a language without words or propositions, pure communication.<sup>531</sup>

But how is this ‘pure communication’ to be conceived when it is ‘without words and sentences’? At first, this statement seems strange when it speaks of an original language *without words*. Nevertheless, it leads us to the key notion of an ‘ethical language’, which is based on the notion of the Saying (*le Dire*). The Saying has to be conceived of as a radical *exposure* to the other: “[...] an exposure without holding back, exposure of exposedness, expression, saying. [...] [S]aying uncovering itself, that is, denuding itself of its skin, sensibility on the surface of the skin [...] *wholly sign*, signifying itself.”<sup>532</sup> It is “not an act at all, but a modality of passivity which in substitution is beyond even passivity. To be oneself [...] as a pure withdrawal of oneself [...]”<sup>533</sup> Strictly speaking, it is therefore not the communication of the *said* which immediately covers and extinguishes the said,

[...] but saying holding open its openness, without excuses, evasions or alibis, delivering itself without saying anything said. [...] It is to exhaust oneself in exposing oneself, to make signs by making oneself a sign [...], the saying of this very saying, a statement of the ‘*here I am*’ which is identified with *nothing but the very voice* that states and delivers itself, the voice that signifies.<sup>534</sup>

In this context the aspect of the *voice* assumes an important role not only for the conception of an ethical language, but for the entirety of Levinas’s later writings. This aspect, however, has received little attention in the scholarly literature to date. This is surprising because the phenomenon of the voice and the simple act of addressing another person within language doubtlessly plays a crucial role in the everyday encounter with the other. It is through its voice – which is shaped out of nothing else than its own breath – that the subject conveys itself to the

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<sup>531</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Language and Proximity”, in: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, pp. 109-126, p. 119/“Langage et proximité”, in: *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, pp. 303-330, p. 319.

<sup>532</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 15/AQE, p. 31. See also Greef, Jan de, “Skepticism and Reason”, p. 172: “Ethical language is not an exposition but an *exposure* [...], an asymmetrical structure between the subject and the other.”

<sup>533</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 138/AQE, pp. 216-217.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143/pp. 223-224, emphasis added.

other and bears witness to the other's existence. It interrupts its own being-for-itself in turning its attention to the other. The subject is driven out of itself through the voice of the other. And, finally, it is through his voice that the other is exposed to me and shows his or her unique meaning in the saying. As I have cited, saying is characterized as being *wholly sign*, signifying nothing but itself. This saying is commensurate for Levinas with the biblical statement 'Here I am' (Gen. 22:1), הִנְנִי (*hinnei*) in Hebrew, which he identifies with the voice.<sup>535</sup> Thus, the subjectivity of the subject is realized for him through the voice: "'Here I am' as a witness of the Infinite, but a witness that does not thematize what it bears witness of [...]. It is by *the voice of the witness* that the glory of the Infinite is glorified."<sup>536</sup> It has to be noticed here that the Infinite takes place in the everyday encounter, in every saying that happens in daily life among people. By using a biblical citation for highlighting his conception of subjectivity, the religious connotation of Levinas's thinking becomes evident. He brilliantly merges the biblical phrase with his understanding of the saying. In this context the voice is so to say the dress of the body for the saying to bear witness to the glory of the Infinite. But it is even *more* than a dress. Behind its role as a pure transmitter of a bodily expression, the voice has a body as such: a body of *pure breath*. This is the naked skin through which the saying exposes and expresses itself – "breathing is transcendence in the form of opening up."<sup>537</sup> Therefore, *breathing* can be seen as the kernel of subjectivity in Levinas's thought and furthermore as the inherent aim of philosophical language:

[...] in reducing the said to the saying, philosophical language reduces the said to *breathing*, opening to the other and signifying to the other its very signifyingness. This reduction is then an incessant *unsaying of the said* in which the meaning shows itself, eclipses and shows itself.<sup>538</sup>

The impetus for discourse is engendered in "human breathing, in its everyday equality" because it brings out the "breathlessness of an inspiration [...]. an inspiration by the other, an inspiration that is already expiration [...]. It is the longest breath there is – *spirit*."<sup>539</sup> Out of this spirit, which in its core is nothing but *breath*, philosophical discourse has evolved. How deep these notions are interwoven can also be seen, if we reverse our view of the process, tracing the way back from the

<sup>535</sup> See Meir, Ephraim, *Levinas's Jewish Thought between Jerusalem and Athens*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>536</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 146/AQE, p. 229, emphasis added.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid., p. 181/p. 278.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid. See further the detailed study of Rychter, Ewa, *(Un)Saying the Other. Allegory and Irony in Emmanuel Levinas's Ethical Language*.

<sup>539</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, pp. 181-82/AQE, p. 278.

thought to the voice, as Giorgio Agamben points out: “The search for the voice in language, this is what is called thought”<sup>540</sup> – it is “the search for what exceeds language and meaning.”<sup>541</sup>

The act of breathing entails pure passivity in that it subjects the subject in every moment to the exigencies of respiration. It is the *sine qua non* of living:

The approach of the neighbor is a fission of the subject beyond lungs, in the resistant nucleus of the ego, in the undividedness of its individuality. It is a fission of self [...]. That the breathing by which entities seem to affirm themselves triumphantly in their vital space would be a *consummation*, a *coring out of my substantiality*, that in breathing I already open myself to my subjection to the whole of the invisible other, that the beyond or the liberation would be the support of a crushing charge, is to be sure surprising. It is this wonder that has been the object of the book proposed here.<sup>542</sup>

Against the background of this quote, which appears in the last chapter of *Otherwise than Being* entitled *Outside*, I am inclined to say that the whole discourse of this book clings to the notion of breathing which takes shape in the voice. Perhaps the notion of the *voix* is of similar importance for the development of Levinas’s conception of the subject in *Otherwise than Being* as the notion of the *face* in *Totality and Infinity*. Just as the face appears as a singular trace of alterity, a unique aura is inherent in the voice, which somehow makes it analogous to the face.<sup>543</sup> Like the *face* of the other, the *voix* possess the power to call me to my responsibility and to disrupt my being-for-myself into a being-for-the-other. Levinas illustrates this aspect through the fate of Robinson Crusoe who, in the beautiful tropical landscape of his island, experiences the greatest event of his life in his encounter with the man he calls Friday. It is an experience “in which a man who speaks replaces the ineffable sadness of echoes.”<sup>544</sup> There is no doubt that the phenomenon of the voice plays a crucial role in the encounter with another person. It is through the voice that the other is exposed to me and shows his or her unique meaning in the saying: “Only the meaning of the other is irrecusable, and forbids the reclusion and reentry into the shell of the self. *A voice comes*

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<sup>540</sup> Agamben, Giorgio, “La recherche de la voix dans le langage, c’est cela la pensée”, cited after Nancy, Jean-Luc, *À l’écoute*, p. 45.

<sup>541</sup> Dolar, Mladen, *A Voice and Nothing More*, p. 11.

<sup>542</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *OBBE*, pp. 180-81/AQE, pp. 276-277, emphasis added.

<sup>543</sup> This idea is taken from an article written by Dieter Mersch which focuses on the relation between presence, ethics and the voice; see Mersch, Dieter, “Präsenz und Ethizität in der Stimme”, p. 220. For an account on the relation of the face and voice with regard to sound/music, see also Mallet, Marie-Louise, “Écouter un visage?”.

<sup>544</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “The Transcendence of Words: On Michel Leiris’s *Biffures*”, in: *Outside the Subject*, pp. 113-117, p. 116/“La transcendence des mots. À propos des Biffures”, in: *Hors sujet*, pp. 195-203, p. 202.

*from the other shore*. A voice interrupts the saying of the already said.”<sup>545</sup> As Levinas points out in his essay *Proximity and Language*, the very essence of the ethical language is realized by speaking, which consists basically in *contact*: “The contact in which I approach the neighbor is not a manifestation or knowledge, but the ethical event of communication which is presupposed by every transmission of messages [...]”<sup>546</sup> It is remarkable that the ethical language Levinas speaks of is not based in a kind of moral experience, but in the *approach* to the other:

The ethical language we resort to does not proceed from a special moral experience [...]. It comes from the very meaning of approach, which contrasts with knowledge, of the face which contrasts with phenomena. Phenomenology can follow the reverting of thematization into ethics in the description of a face. Ethical language alone succeeds in being equal to the paradox in which phenomenology is abruptly thrown [...].<sup>547</sup>

Regarding the question of how an ethical language is to be realized in the scope of philosophical discourse, it must be conceded that the saying can be grasped by philosophical language only ephemerally in what Levinas calls a “*trace* of saying”.<sup>548</sup> Hence, one may object that the possibilities of philosophical writing according to Levinas are extremely limited. However, Levinas still seems to be confident about the abilities of philosophical speaking, as he tries to realize the conception of an ethical language in his later writings: “The philosophical speaking that betrays in its said the proximity it conveys before us still remains, as a saying, a proximity and a responsibility.”<sup>549</sup> In this context, I accede to the conclusion drawn by Jan de Greef that the discourse, in which the saying resonates, “cannot close itself and have the last word; for in addressing itself to someone, it once again breaks open its own totality. [...] *The final word therefore is that there is no final word.*”<sup>550</sup> Words follow words endlessly since the word, in order to be a word, always requires a *response*. According to the communication theories of Habermas and Apel, in the very moment a total consensus between two interlocutors had been reached, this endless succession of words would actually collapse into *silence*, because if one consents

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<sup>545</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 183/AQE, p. 280. See also Blanchot, Maurice, “Après coup”, p. 100, which ends with the mentioned citation of Levinas. I would like to thank Sarah Clift for bringing Blanchot’s text to my attention.

<sup>546</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Language and Proximity”, in: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, pp. 109-126, p. 125/“Langage et proximité”, in: *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, pp. 303-330, p. 329.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid.

<sup>548</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 168/AQE, p. 261. On the notion of the trace see Levy, Ze’ev, “Die Rolle der Spur in der Philosophie von Emmanuel Levinas und Jacques Derrida”.

<sup>549</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 168/AQE, pp. 261-262.

<sup>550</sup> Greef, Jan de, “Skepticism and Reason”, p. 165.

completely with the other, one does not have to say anything any more.<sup>551</sup> This absolute harmony and notion of an *absolute peace*, which corresponds to an absolute silence, has been rejected by Derrida in *Violence and Metaphysics* as illusory. Instead of this absolute or pure silence, Derrida highlights the notion of a “certain silence” in which an eschatological peace is produced: “Peace is made only in a *certain silence*, which is determined and protected by the violence of speech.”<sup>552</sup>

## b) Ethics of representation: Language, poetry and narrativity

Because, what is left of the representable if the  
essence of the object is to evade the representation?  
It remains to represent the conditions of this evasion.”<sup>553</sup>

This apparently impossible and paradoxical assignment, which Derrida elaborates on in regard to the philosophy of Levinas, was formulated in a similar way more than a decade previously by Jean-Paul Sartre in his essay *Black Orpheus* [*Orphée noir*] (1948), where he discusses the works of the literary movement *Négritude*.<sup>554</sup> Although his thinking is quite far from the essential claim of Levinas’s philosophy, Sartre points out in this essay an aspect that relates to the above mentioned aporia in Levinas’s thought when he states that “because we cannot remain silent, we have to create *silence within language* [...]”<sup>555</sup> Indeed one of the main characteristics of the modern poem may be seen in this paradoxical notion of a *silence within language*. This idea is also taken up by another French philosopher, the contemporary leftist thinker Alain Badiou, who argues in his essay *Language, Thought, Poetry* that “[f]olded and reserved, the modern poem harbours a central silence. This pure silence interrupts the ambient

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<sup>551</sup> See Hörisch, Jochen, *Der Sinn der Sinne. Eine Geschichte der Medien*, p. 33.

<sup>552</sup> Derrida, Jacques, “Violence and Metaphysics”, p. 148/“Violence et Métaphysique”, p. 220, emphasis added. See also Bernasconi, Robert, “The Violence of the Face. Peace and Language in the Thought of Levinas”, p. 91 and p. 87.

<sup>553</sup> Beckett, Samuel, “Peintres de l’empêchement”, p. 136: “Car que reste-t-il de représentable si l’essence de l’objet est de se dérober à la représentation? Il reste à représenter les conditions de cette dérobade.”

<sup>554</sup> Sartre’s essay was written as a preface to Leopold Senghors anthology *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, published in 1948, through which the works of the *Négritude* writers became popular also in Europe.

<sup>555</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, “Orphée noir”, p. 247, emphasis added: “[...] puisque nous ne pouvons pas nous taire, il faut faire du silence avec le langage [...]”

cacophony. The poem injects silence into the texture of language.”<sup>556</sup> Furthermore, in his essay Sartre highlights the “self-destruction of language [*autodestruction du langage*]” as the basic impetus of French modern literature “from Mallarmé to the Surrealists.”<sup>557</sup> Where language ends, poetry begins. What cannot be said, “poetry *signifies*.”<sup>558</sup> This ‘certain silence’, of which Derrida speaks, is therefore in my opinion best represented in the silence created through a poetic language which states always *more* than it states. This *surplus* is expressed through the *sound* of the voice as Levinas underlines: “It all goes back to a past concerning which we are justified in wondering whether it could ever be contained within a present, and whether today it can be represented. Poetry *signifies* it, but not in its theme. It signifies it as *song*.”<sup>559</sup> This citation can be seen in connection to the paradox of the saying which remains inexpressible, i.e., beyond words. In fact the saying renders the subject without words. Although saying, it is incapable of actually say anything other than the fact of this *saying* itself. Levinas highlights this paradox at the end of his essay *Proximity and Language* as follows:

The first word says the saying itself. It does not yet designate beings, does not fix themes and does not mean to identify anything. [...] Otherwise communication and proximity would reduce to the logical function of language and would again presuppose communication.<sup>560</sup>

In order to situate the problem of an adequate language for Levinas’s philosophy within a broader context, I would like to cite some examples of literary texts. As shown above, the problem of integrating the saying, the centerpiece of ethical language according to Levinas, into a narrative is linked to the problem of thematization. In Virginia Woolf’s novel *Jacob’s Room* (1922) the narrator wants to adequately describe the protagonist of the novel, and in describing him, he also gives an account of his failure to do so. In effect, what Woolf’s novel attempts to enact is the literary expression of “an ethics of representation that does not totalize the object it is

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<sup>556</sup> Badiou, Alain, “Language, Thought, Poetry”, p. 234.

<sup>557</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, “Orphée noir”, p. 247: “De Mallarmé aux Surréalistes, le but profond de la poésie française me paraît avoir été cette *autodestruction du langage*. Le poème est une chambre obscure où les mots se cognent en rond fous. Collision dans les airs: ils s’allument réciproquement de leurs incendies et tombent en flammes.”

<sup>558</sup> Mallet, Marie-Louise, “Écouter un visage?”, p. 188: “Ce qui ne peut se dire ‘la poésie’ le *signifie* – mais non pas dans son thème. Elle le signifie comme chant.”

<sup>559</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Poetry and Resurrection – Notes on Agnon”, in: *Proper Names*, pp. 7-16, p. 8/“Poésie et Résurrection. Notes sur Agnon”, in: *Noms propres*, pp. 13-25, p. 16, emphasis added.

<sup>560</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Language and Proximity”, in: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, pp. 109-126, pp. 125-126/“Langage et proximité”, in: *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, pp. 303-330, p. 329.

narrating, but rather opens up through absence the possibility for an ethics of representation.”<sup>561</sup> In this sense, Woolf draws attention to *absence* as a locus for positing ethical representation.<sup>562</sup> Furthermore, the novel requires that readers consider “their own attitudes and reactions to an *unseen narratorial voice*.”<sup>563</sup> In relation to the notion of the voice elaborated above, this narrative voice has to be conceived, in this context, as a *voice without any bodily appearance* because it does not appear as an actor itself in the narration. This highlights the different modes the voice can adopt within language. Just like the mythological figure of the nymph *Hχώ* (echo), who receives the punishment of existing as a voice that can only repeat the last words spoken, but does not have a voice of her own, the narrative voice of Woolf’s text only renders images of the past, i.e., reflections of her protagonist about which situations might have been. Hence, the narrator concludes: “Nobody sees any one as he is [...]. It is no use trying to sum up people. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, not yet entirely what is done [...].”<sup>564</sup> At the limits of narrative representation, *absence* shines through the words of what is actually said: “There are things that can’t be said.”<sup>565</sup>

The difficulties of thematization, and of writing itself, are apparently not only a problem for Levinas, but belong to any literary and artistic expression. To cite only two examples in this context, let me quote firstly a writer who was personally close to Levinas, Maurice Blanchot, who gives the following definition of the act of writing in *The Space of Literature*:

To write is to enter the affirmation of the solitude in which fascination threatens. It is to surrender to the risk of time’s absence, where eternal starting over reigns. It is to pass from the first to the third person, so that what happens to me happens to no one, is anonymous insofar as it concerns me, repeats itself in an infinite dispersal. To write is to let fascination rule language.<sup>566</sup>

In Blanchot’s description the act of writing takes place in a sort of *no man’s land*, where the ‘I’ of the author is faded out and stripped of of any ego-centrism in order to cede all its skills to the power of language which rules with a fascination independent of the author’s will. The

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<sup>561</sup> Nicholson-Weir, Rebecca, “‘There are things that can’t be said’: Levinas and the Ethics of Representation in Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room*”, p. 3.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>564</sup> Woolf, Virginia, *Jacob’s Room*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>566</sup> Blanchot, Maurice, *The Space of Literature*, p. 33/*L’espace littéraire*, p. 31.

subjectivity of writing consists thus in pure passivity, in letting *to be* writing. Blanchot's account depicts writing as a *gift*, something that comes essentially from *outside* the author's power and which cannot be commanded, only accepted. This aspect of the 'impossibility of writing' as an intentional act becomes even more clear from the following citation from Margeruite Duras' essay *Writing* which reflects in its own manner on the pitfalls of any narrative act:

To write. I can't. No one can. We have to admit: we cannot. And yet we write. It's the unknown one carries within oneself: writing is what is attained. It's that or nothing. One can speak of a writing sickness. What I'm trying to say isn't easy, but I believe we can find our way here, comrades of the world. There is a madness of writing that is in oneself, an insanity of writing, but that alone doesn't make one insane. On the contrary. Writing is the unknown. Before writing one knows nothing of what one is about to write. And in total lucidity. It's the unknown in oneself, one's head, one's body. Writing is not even a reflection, but a kind of faculty one has, that exists to one side of oneself, parallel to oneself: another person who appears and comes forward, invisible, gifted with thought and anger, and who sometimes, through his own actions, risks losing his life. If one had any idea what one was going to write, before doing it, before writing, one would never write. It wouldn't be worth it anymore. Writing is trying to know beforehand what one would write if one wrote, which one never knows until afterward; that is the most dangerous question one could ever ask oneself. But it's also the most widespread. Writing comes like the wind. It's naked, it's made of ink, it's the thing written, and it passes like nothing else passes in life, nothing more, except life itself.<sup>567</sup>

For Duras the act of writing apparently somehow goes *beyond* the possibility of writing. In her view writing is somehow a rationally inexplicable phenomenon which in fact nobody *can* do, literally speaking, though the writer does it nonetheless. In her complex work Duras tried to cope with this paradox which corresponds with Levinas's aporia that the saying goes always beyond what is said, i.e. the *noëma* overflows the *noësis*.<sup>568</sup> In reference to this paradoxical experience that goes beyond the borders of logic and rationality, Adorno states in his study *Aesthetic Theory*: "All artworks – and art altogether – are enigmas [...]. That artworks say something and in the same breath conceal it expresses this enigmaticalness from the perspective of language."<sup>569</sup> The enigma of the artwork ["*Rätselcharakter der Kunst*"] is one of the main characteristics of art for Adorno: Good art is always rationally inexplicable, not entirely comprehensible, and it is

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<sup>567</sup> Duras, Marguerite, *Writing*, pp. 32-33/*Écrire*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>568</sup> For an ethical approach to Duras's literary writing see Crowley, Martin, *Duras, Writing and the Ethical: Making the Broken Whole*.

<sup>569</sup> Adorno, Theodor. W, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 120.



precisely for this reason that it is so fascinating.<sup>570</sup> Therefore, it seems to me appropriate to take a closer look in the following on the relation of art and rational intentionality, in particular the conception of a non-intentional artwork formulated by John Cage.

***Excursus: At the crossroads of music, poetry and ethics – poethics in the thought of Levinas and John Cage***

To Thee silence is praise.<sup>571</sup>

All the arts, even the sonourous ones, create silence.<sup>572</sup>

Do not oppose silence and noise. They operate in relentless relay.<sup>573</sup>

In the following section the above mentioned aspects are further elaborated by reference to the writings of John Cage (1912-1992). Cage is usually regarded as one of the most innovative musicians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His widespread work consists not only of musical pieces, but also of many essays, poems, visual art works, as well as numerous interviews. In an interview given to Richard Kostelanetz, Cage points out that his most important legacy for the upcoming generations would be to have “shown the practicality of making works of art nonintentionally.”<sup>574</sup> The question what Cage means by ‘non-intentional’ works of art leads us to the core of his conception of art. Within the limited scope of this chapter, however, I can only outline some aspects of his highly complex aesthetic views. Undoubtedly, one of his main goals is to “allow the experience of sounds as perceived in themselves, ‘in their suchness’, rather than as a means of communication, expression, or emotional arousal or as subordinate elements in a structure.”<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 183: “The more intensively one seeks to comprehend Bach, the more puzzling is the gaze he returns, charged as it is with all the power that is his.”

<sup>571</sup> Psalms 65:2. I am indebted to Yeyohada Amir for bringing this biblical reference to my attention.

<sup>572</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “The Transcendence of Words: On Michel Leiris’s *Biffures*”, in: *Outside the Subject*, pp. 113-117, p. 116/“La transcendance des mots. À propos des Biffures”, in: *Hors sujet*, pp. 195-203, p. 201.

<sup>573</sup> Jabès, Edmond, *The Book of Shares*, trans. by Rosmarie Waldrop, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 52.

<sup>574</sup> Kostelanetz, Richard, *Conversing with Cage*, p. 26.

<sup>575</sup> MacLow, Jackson, “Cage’s Writings up to the Late 1980s”, p. 211.

This is as relevant for his writings as it is for his music, as Cage states: “I have more and more written my texts in the same way I write my music.”<sup>576</sup> Indeed, Cage is the author of

[...] several hundred pages worth of essays and lectures [...] [and] these writings are not to be regarded as mere peripheral supplements to his music, art or poetry, but as the central means to the comprehension of [his] works. [...] Cage’s texts [...] are nothing less than the keys into his world.<sup>577</sup>

Relating Cage’s ideas to the problem of ethics and narrativity in the work of Levinas, the main point of interest lies in the fact that Cage tries to break up the syntax of the written language, and to allow the words to become what they basically are – *sound*.<sup>578</sup> This is especially true for the poems he wrote from 1967 to 1992, “most of which are an alogical and ‘asyntactical’ collage, word-strings of language elements.”<sup>579</sup> It is poetry totally “freed from ‘the arrangement of an army’, which Norman O. Brown told him was the original meaning of ‘syntax’, derived from the Greek word σύνταξις.”<sup>580</sup> At the beginning of his work *Empty Words* Cage relates to this by formulating his intention as follows: “Language free of syntax: demilitarization of language. [...] Opening doors so that anything can go through.”<sup>581</sup>

In my view, this *demilitarization* of language is similar to the Levinasian project of abandoning the language of ontology and finding a new way of philosophical narrativity that takes into account the ethical demand of the other. This ‘ethical language’ finds its expression, as I have been arguing, in the saying. Actually, this mode of *saying* is precisely what Cage tries to realize through his poems and writings as Dieter Mersch points out: “Cage does not want to demonstrate anything. He just speaks.”<sup>582</sup> Hence, Cage realizes something similar to an ‘ethical language’ in his poems by using the *saying* emphasized by Levinas in his own particular way. Through the saying the identity is broken up. The subject makes itself a sign purely through its

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<sup>576</sup> Cage in the foreword of his book *X*, the last collection of writings he supervised, cited after Patterson, David W., “Words and Writings”, p. 91.

<sup>577</sup> Patterson, David W., “Words and Writings”, p. 85 and p. 99.

<sup>578</sup> On the relationship between music and language, see further Wellmer, Albrecht, *Versuch über Musik und Sprache*, pp. 9-124; with respect to the work of John Cage, see *ibid.*, chapter V, “John Cage und die Befreiung des Klangs: Fluchtlinien einer musikalischen Moderne jenseits des europäischen Konstruktivismus”, pp. 219-269.

<sup>579</sup> MacLow, Jackson, “Cage’s Writings up to the Late 1980s”, p. 211. On the conception of Cage’s poetry see also Bormann, Hans-Friedrich, *Verschwiegene Stille. John Cages performative Ästhetik*, pp. 35-46.

<sup>580</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>581</sup> Cage, John, *Empty Words. Writings ’73-’78*, p. 11. See also Zeller, Hans Rudolf, “Entmilitarisierung der Sprache – Musik” and Mahrt, Jürgen, “Die Temperatur der Sprache. Zu Texten von John Cage”.

<sup>582</sup> Mersch, Dieter, “Jenseits des Zeichens. Einige sprachphilosophische Reflexionen zu John Cages Textkompositionen”, p. 18: “Cage will nichts sagen. Er spricht.”

voice: “Nameless identity. It says *I* which is identified with nothing that presents itself, if not *the very sound of its voice*. [...] [P]ure sign made to others, sign made of the very donation of the sign, the messenger being message [...], outside the acquired, outside civilization.”<sup>583</sup> In Levinas’s view, the very sound of the *voice* is the placeholder of identity and it has this power only because it disappears in its representation. This aspect of the saying also coheres with the function of poetry. As Badiou points out: “The poem does not consist in communication. The poem has nothing to communicate. It is only a saying, a declaration that draws authority from itself alone.”<sup>584</sup> In this sense, *non-intentional* art works require that the author be as passive as possible in the creation of his work, referring to the Levinasian subject which is centered in *une passivité plus que passive*, as he states in *Otherwise than Being*: “Subjectivity [...] comes to pass as a passivity more passive than all passivity.”<sup>585</sup>

It is noteworthy to highlight in this context, that Cage, in his most famous musical piece *4’33’’*, the so-called silent piece, the only *intentional* sound he “created” was silence. Through the absence of any intentional sound, he tries to show in a musical manner the *passivity* of subjectivity Levinas speaks of by letting sounds emerge out of pure silence. The recognition of sound as such demands a great deal of an audience because creates a ruptures in our habits and usual views on music, as Cage emphasizes: “There are people who say, ‘If music’s that easy to write, I could do it.’ Of course they could, but they don’t.”<sup>586</sup> Similarly, Levinas has tried to break with our usual views on communication by elaborating in his philosophical works an ‘ethical language’ to make room within his narrativity for the *au-delà* of being and the ethical approach to the other. Just as, for Cage, music is present in any sound, the recognition of the other is realized for Levinas in any saying. However, beyond this structural analogy, one may legitimately ask whether Cage shares Levinas’s concern for the ethical demand originating from the other. In other words: Is there an ethics implicit in Cage’s conception of poetry? According to Cage, there is no such thing as pure silence. He demonstrates this in his score *4’33’’*, which offers to the listener not only the experience of a particular duration of silence, but moreover that

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<sup>583</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Foreword”, in: *Humanism of the Other*, pp. 3-8, here pp. 7-8/“Avant-propos”, in: *Humanisme de l’autre homme*, pp. 9-16, p. 16, emphasis added. See further Cage’s description of his work *Empty Words* as an “uncultivated gift” in note 62, and the article of Mersch, Dieter, “Jenseits von Schrift. Die Performativität der Stimme”.

<sup>584</sup> Badiou, Alain, “Language, Thought, Poetry”, p. 233.

<sup>585</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *OBBE*, p. 14/AQE, p. 30.

<sup>586</sup> Cage, John, *Silence. Lectures and Writings*, p. 72.

silence is never simply so – indeed, that the sounds in which we are immersed can be perceived as art.<sup>587</sup> The experience of 4'33'' makes us realize that we are always surrounded by sounds, we just have to listen to them. Or, as Blanchot puts it in his philosophical essay *The Writing of the Disaster* which reflects on the notion of the disaster as a key issue for modern metaphysical philosophy: “[...] without language, nothing can be shown. And to be silent is still to speak. Silence is impossible. That is why we desire it.”<sup>588</sup>

For Levinas also there is always the unfulfillable demand of the other which endlessly escapes any discourse, i.e. the power of narrativity and the said, and to whom one has to answer again and again always anew with the saying – without having the choice to close his ears or to look away. One is always in demand. In this context, Levinas states at the beginning of *Otherwise than Being* that he focuses in his philosophy not on being, i.e., the heart of ontology, but instead on a so-called “disinterest”<sup>589</sup> (*désintéressement*) of being. Levinas emphasizes a detachment of the ego from being and instead highlights a being as pure *gift* and as a commitment to the other, before any option to choose. He further conceives of language as a gift, as a “speech-gift”.<sup>590</sup> The gift is also an important notion for Cage, e.g. he describes his work *Empty Words* as an “uncultivated gift” to his readers.<sup>591</sup> Arguably, it seems plausible to me to characterize Cage’s work as a whole as a *Zeit-Gabe*, a gift of time.<sup>592</sup> Furthermore, Cage’s texts offer their readers the possibility to *experience* what Cage is trying to state – rather than just giving an account of it: “My intention has been often to say what I had to say in a way that would exemplify it; that would, conceivably, permit the listener to *experience* what I had to say rather than just hear about it.”<sup>593</sup> The notions discussed within the previous sections, i.e., *voice* and *breathing*, play a crucial role in the experience of Cage’s artworks.

The ‘ethical language’ as a pure *saying*, a saying beyond words and significations which transforms itself into a *sign*, is indeed very close to the conception of poetry John Cage wants to

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<sup>587</sup> Williams, Alastair, “Cage and Postmodernism”, p. 232.

<sup>588</sup> Blanchot, Maurice, *The Writing of the Disaster*, p. 11/*L’écriture du désastre*, p. 23.

<sup>589</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 3/AQE, p. 13.

<sup>590</sup> Robbins, Jill, *Altered Reading. Levinas and Literature*, p. 7. See also Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 76/Ti, p. 74: “Language [...] offers things which are mine to the Other.”

<sup>591</sup> Cage, John, *Empty Words. Writings '73-'78*, p. 11. On the notion of the gift see also Patterson, David W., “Words and Writings”, p. 89.

<sup>592</sup> Mersch, Dieter, *Ereignis und Aura. Untersuchungen zu einer Ästhetik des Performativen*, p. 280.

<sup>593</sup> Cage, John, *Silence. Lectures and Writings*, p. ix, emphasis added.

realize in his work: “I have nothing to say and I am saying it and that is poetry as I need it.”<sup>594</sup> This self-reference of poetry is similar to Levinas’s view that the essence of poetry comes from poetic expression and not any particular content that the poem may express: “Poetry *signifies* [...] not in its theme. It signifies [...] as song.”<sup>595</sup> Levinas’s view that the process of saying is ostensibly unending, that what has already been said requires once again a saying, can be further clarified by a passage from the beginning of Cage’s *Lecture on nothing*: “I am here, and there is nothing to say. If among you are those who wish to get somewhere, let them leave at any moment. What we require is silence; but what silence requires is that I go on talking.”<sup>596</sup> The impossibility of remaining silent lies at the heart of communication. Even if there is “nothing to say” this has to be said because we cannot remain silent toward each other. This paradoxical feeling is stated by Levinas in the experience that “[m]an is the only being I cannot meet without my expressing this meeting itself to him. [...] In every attitude toward the human being there is a greeting – even if it is the refusal of a greeting.”<sup>597</sup> The saying and the recognition of the other are tied together even beyond rational discourse, beyond knowledge. Even if we cannot (or never fully) understand a man, we have to recognize him as such.<sup>598</sup>

I have offered in the preceding section a comparison of Levinas and Cage concerning the notions of ‘saying’ and poetry. In this context I pointed out that one may legitimately ask if there is an ethics implicit in Cage’s conception of poetry. In order to approach this question in more detail, I would like to elaborate in the following on the notion of *poethics*, as formulated by Gerald Bruns and Joan Retallack. The latter author relates the notion of poethics to the intention of Cage’s work:

For John Cage the significance of art lay, not in the production of artifacts, but in the making of meaning in an active collaboration with medium, performers, and audience. So the work that John Cage has left behind can be seen as just that – *work* that has always to be done [...]. What I mean to

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<sup>594</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>595</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Poetry and Resurrection – Notes on Agnon”, in: *Proper Names*, pp. 7-16, p. 8/“Poésie et résurrection: Notes sur Agnon”, in: *Noms propres*, pp. 13-25, p. 21: “La poésie *signifie* poétiquement la résurrection qui la porte: non pas dans la fable qu’elle chante, mais par son chanter même.”

<sup>596</sup> Cage, John, *Silence. Lectures and Writings*, p. 109.

<sup>597</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Is Ontology fundamental?”, in: *On Thinking-of-the-Other. Entre nous*, pp. 1-11, p. 6/“L’ontologie est-elle fondamentale?”, in: *Entre nous. Essais sur le penser-à-l’autre*, pp. 12-22, p. 18.

<sup>598</sup> This is in particular the case with people suffering from Alzheimer’s or other neurological diseases. For a discussion of Levinas philosophy in the context of current biomedical issues see Pelluchon, Corine, *L’autonomie brisée. Bioéthique et philosophie*.

say is that what we call the work of John Cage exists entirely in the form of [...] invitations to realization [...] of our aesthetic potential in a *poethics* (a practice or form of life in which ethics and aesthetics come together) of everyday life.<sup>599</sup>

The innovative idea behind Cages artworks lies in the fact that ethics and aesthetics can be tied together in the intersection of what can be called *poethics*. The concept of poethics realizes art as a “living experience, rather than a simulation or mimesis.”<sup>600</sup>

Hence, Cage’s art requires an audience that is open to a wholly new experience of art, letting it be involved in the creation of meaning rather than being merely passive consumers of what the artist has presented. Cage’s art requires a responsive and *responsible* audience that thinks independently, because the author does not give any answers in his work, but rather leaves the audience on its own: “[...] [I]t is the poethical work of the audience to make [...] meaning – the responsibility of imaginative collaboration that this kind of art requires. It is the work of the composer (or artist of any kind) only to create the occasion for the making of meaning.”<sup>601</sup> Cage’s art is demanding and it may be exactly this highly demanding aspect that keeps people from his work, or simply encourages them to make fun of a score such as *4’33’’*. “People have great difficulty paying attention to what they do not understand,”<sup>602</sup> Cage states. The tendency to understand and to capture each phenomenon under a subsuming concept of knowledge is a persistent human desire. In our struggle to survive we are forced to subsume even unusual events and the most exceptional phenomena under a cognitive scheme. Levinas underlines this by pointing out the human attitude to attach to every sound a certain meaning, i.e. the significance of a word: “The sounds and noises of nature are words that disappoints us. To really hear a sound is to hear a word. Pure sound is the word. [*Le son pure est verbe.*]”<sup>603</sup> This means, that according to Levinas sound is essentially linked to a certain signification, to a word which has a specific meaning. Perceiving sounds is thus always also a cognitive act for Levinas and not only a pure aesthetic sensation. However, on the other hand, Levinas points out that one never captures the fellow human being adequately by means of a cognitive approach, and it is precisely this

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<sup>599</sup> Retallack, Joan, “Poethics of a Complex Realism”, p. 243.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid., “Poethics of a Complex Realism”, p. 245.

<sup>602</sup> Cage, John, *Autobiographical Statement*, cited after Retallack, Joan, “Poethics of a Complex Realism”, p. 262.

<sup>603</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “The Transcendence of Words: On Michel Leiris’s *Biffures*”, in *Outside the Subject*, pp. 113-117, p. 116/“La transcendance des mots. À propos des *Biffures*”, in: *Hors sujet*, pp. 195-203, p. 201.

experience that such a conception of poetry outlined by Cage gives access to. The other escapes our understanding and transcends it, as Levinas states: “To meet a man is to be kept awake by an enigma.”<sup>604</sup> It is this enigma which inspires the work of both Levinas and Cage. In this sense, Gerald Bruns speaks of

[...] Cage’s aesthetics of disturbance or (borrowing from Levinas) of ‘restlessness’, in which the artist allows chance to recompose the order and fixity in which we otherwise frame things, not simply to undo this order, but to set free what it tries to contain (or, much to the same point, to let in what it tries to exclude).<sup>605</sup>

In regard to the Levinasian concept of a totally passive subject, a real *sub-iectum* vis-à-vis the demand of the other, I agree with Bruns, that the subject is also unsettled in Cage’s art. It can be conceived as “an I-think turned inside out by what is refractory, irreducible, uncontainable, anarchic. It would be not too much to speak of the Cagean I as the subject of the ethical, that is, the non-egological ego [...]”<sup>606</sup> Besides the different frameworks of their works, this *non-egological ego* highlighted by Bruns in regard to Cage’s art is close in my view to the Levinasian concept of an I which finds itself under the demand of an “*anarchic* situation of responsibility”<sup>607</sup> and which identity lies in nothing other than the very sound of its voice which blows away and disappears in its representation.

The works of Cage and Levinas in regards to the problem of ethics and narrativity overlap in a certain approach to performance.<sup>608</sup> Obviously, the musician Cage and the philosopher Levinas do not explicitly have common concerns. Yet, they share the problem of narrativity, i.e., the concern how to express something which is beyond words and beyond music, something that escapes the philosophical discourse as well as the borders of a score. Their specific modes of addressing that which endlessly escapes thematization lies at the intersection of aesthetics and ethics. In the event of the *performance*, ethics and aesthetics are tied together in the presence of

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<sup>604</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “The Ruin of Representation”, in: *Discovering existence with Husserl*, pp. 111-121, p. 111/“La ruine de la représentation”, in: *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, pp. 173-188, p. 173.

<sup>605</sup> Bruns, Gerald, “Poethics: John Cage and Stanley Cavell at the Crossroads of Ethical Theory”, p. 216.

<sup>606</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>607</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Humanism and An-archy”, in: *Humanism of the Other*, pp. 45-57, p. 53/“Humanisme et An-Archie”, in: *Humanisme de l’autre homme*, pp. 65-82, p. 77, emphasis added.

<sup>608</sup> On the notion of the performance see the essential study of Fischer-Lichte, Erika, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, especially pp. 219-227 on the topic of the voice in the context of performance.

the representation (of *sound* or *saying*) which is acknowledged as such – no matter what it actually contains. According to Levinas, “everything shows itself and is said in being for justice [*Mais tout se montre pour la justice.*].”<sup>609</sup> Hence the performance cannot be separated from a certain ethical approach to the other, which is addressed by the performance itself. The other is involved in the event of the performance and is concerned as a person and not just as a mere spectator. Thus, the other addressed in the work becomes an undeniable part of it. As a result this realizes an ethical approach in the way one creates music respectively philosophy, at least if one has the claim to realize *poethical* art, open for the other. In this sense, Dieter Mersch speaks of an “aesthetics of the performance” (*Ästhetik des Performativen*) in his captivating study *Ereignis und Aura* and argues that Cage’s art of the event (*Eventkunst*) is one of the best expressions of what is at stake in the notion of poethics: “Vom Anderen her zu denken, statt auf es zu.”<sup>610</sup> It is a thinking based on the inspiration of the other which takes place in a radical openness towards him. It does not want to subsume the other under its proper thinking but rather let itself be inspired by something which is forever *outside*. The recognition of the other is realized precisely through this *openness*. In this sense, one can indeed find astonishing methodological similarities between the oeuvres of Levinas and Cage; just to point out one more example with Gerald Bruns:

Levinas speaks of a ‘radical non assemblable diachrony [that] would be excluded from meaning’, where meaning means something like ‘undisturbed, uninterrupted, uninvaded self-identity (*Otherwise than Being*, p. 135). A ‘non assemblable diachrony’ describes very well Cage’s anarchic *Mureau* (1970), which is a mix of letters, syllables, words, phrases, and sentences [produced] by subjecting all the remarks of Henry David Thoreau about music, silence, and sounds he heard that are indexed in the Dover publication of the *Journal* to a series of *I Ching* chance operations.<sup>611</sup>

Surely, at first sight it seems that an explicitly ethical thinker such as Levinas and an avant-garde musician like John Cage have little in common. Nonetheless, as I have shown, there are many analogies, in particular regarding the aspect of recognition, if one takes a closer look at the structure of their works. Indeed, the issue of an ‘ethical language’ in the work of Levinas can be illustrated by means of Cage’s aesthetic views. Due to the relevance of both thinkers in the postmodern era, the link between narrativity and ethics appears to be one of the basic problems of

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<sup>609</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *OBBE*, p. 163/AQE, p. 253.

<sup>610</sup> Mersch, Dieter, *Ereignis und Aura. Untersuchungen zu einer Ästhetik des Performativen*, p. 21.

<sup>611</sup> Bruns, Gerald, “Poethics: John Cage and Stanley Cavell at the Crossroads of Ethical Theory”, p. 217.



language in postmodern thought. Nonetheless, the question remains whether the silence and the passivity of an artistic creation are parallel with the ungraspable inspiration Levinas points out in his work. I have tried to show that a parallel can be revealed regarding Cage's and Levinas's approaches to *express* the ineffable, be it through music or through language. Cage did not expound an *ethical* concern realized in his work and did not consider ethics to be an important issue for his work. Taking up again Dieter Mersch's expression of a *Zeit-Gabe*, a gift of time, as a characterization for Cage's work, it seems to me noteworthy that in the aspect of the *giving* there resides an ethical moment – even if Cage did not highlight this aspect explicitly. Levinas, for his part, recognizes in some expressions of art an *ethical* concern. In his anthology *Proper Names* he outlines for instance the ethical concern expressed in the works of Paul Celan (1920-1970) and Joseph Agnon (1888-1979). Regarding the latter, Levinas argues that his poetry would have tried successfully to bring back into the presence of language that which cannot be represented and captured by language: “It all goes back to a past concerning which we are justified in wondering whether it could ever have been contained within a present, and whether today it can be represented. Poetry *signifies* it, but not in its theme. It signifies it as song.”<sup>612</sup> Poetry is situated in a sphere of language beyond the realm of the ordinary transmitting of information. It therefore has the capability, as Levinas emphasizes, to signify by its very *song*. In his article on Paul Celan “From Being to the Other”, Levinas further expounds on the characteristics of poetry. He particularly draws attention to the ethical moment of the giving which is expressed in the poem:

A chant rises in the giving, the one-for-the-other, the signifying of signification. A signification older than ontology and the thought of being, and that is presupposed by knowledge and desire, philosophy and libido.<sup>613</sup>

Levinas begins his article by citing a letter of Celan written on May 18, 1960 to Hans Bender: “I cannot see any basic difference [...] between a handshake and a poem.”<sup>614</sup> Levinas interprets this statement as a *recognition* of the other which is expressed in every poem because it is essentially

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<sup>612</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Poetry and Resurrection: Notes on Agnon”, in: *Proper Names*, pp. 7-16, p. 8/“Poésie et résurrection: Notes sur Agnon”, in: *Noms propres*, pp. 13-25, p. 16. See further Meir, Ephraim, *Jewish Existential Philosophers in Dialogue*, pp. 122-128.

<sup>613</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Paul Celan: From Being to the Other”, in: *Proper Names*, pp. 40-46, p. 46/“Paul Celan. De l'être à l'autre”, in: *Noms propres*, pp. 59-66, p. 66. The article first appeared in *Revue de Belles Lettres*, no. 2-3, 1972.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40/p. 59. For Celan's cited letter see Celan, Paul, *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 3, pp. 177-178: “Ich sehe keinen prinzipiellen Unterschied zwischen Händedruck und Gedicht.” *Ibid.*, p. 177.

addressed to the other – as Levinas underscores: “The poem goes toward the other. [*Le poème va vers l’autre.*]”<sup>615</sup> –, as well as in a handshake: “A gesture of recognition of the other, a handshake, a saying without a said – these things are important by their interpellation rather than by their message; important by their *attention!*”<sup>616</sup> In these gestures of recognition an act of openness toward the other is expressed. In my view, this is also what is at stake in Cage’s art, that is, the *Zeit-Gabe*, a gift of time, referred to above. The attention Levinas speaks of is realized by Cage in his basic artistic attempt to renew people’s *attentiveness* to music. In order to give music this renewed attention, beyond the borders of traditional concepts of ‘what is music’, Cage wanted to point to the everyday music that surrounds us and for which we have lost the sensitivity. To hear the world with new ears was the central issue for Cage. In a similar approach Levinas draws attention to the lost sensitivity for *otherness*, for ‘what is alterity’, which was not adequately taken into account in the traditional ontological concepts. In this sense, Cage’s musical piece *4’33’’* illustrates acoustically Levinas’s notion of a “signifying of signification”, being ‘music’ as a pure sign – nothing composed, only arranged by chance, realized in the very moment of the giving. This offers the possibility to hear anew the forgotten moment of sound – silence. Similarly, Levinas’s work has shown us the forgotten moment of being – the other.

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<sup>615</sup> Ibid., p. 41/p. 61.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid., p. 43/pp. 62-63, emphasis added.

## Part III – Language

### Chapter III

#### Language and Speech-Thinking

##### 1. On “needing the other and [...] taking time seriously” – Rosenzweig’s concept of speech-thinking (*Sprachdenken*) and Levinas’s notion of language

Speech is a vital process, without which no other life process is understandable. Biologists who study life without taking as a basis the effects of the word to every living thing, take a false basis. He who has never trembled at the call of his name, has not yet lived. Only the addressed life becomes the full life.<sup>617</sup>

Coming back to Franz Rosenzweig in this chapter, I outline his concept of the *New Thinking* (*das neue Denken*) as well as his concept of speech-thinking (*Sprachdenken*) and will set it in relation to Levinas’s views on language, in particular the notion of the ‘saying’. I will start by pointing out in which sense the model of Rosenzweig’s *New Thinking* was a novum on the philosophical scenery in his time and why it can be compared to Levinas’s views on language. The sources of Rosenzweig’s *New Thinking* and his concept of speech-thinking can be found in his biography and in his intellectual development, which I outlined already.<sup>618</sup> However, I want to add some more details here in order to provide background information for my following analyses.

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<sup>617</sup> Rosenstock-Huessy, Eugen, *Der Atem des Geistes*, p. 10: “Sprechen ist ein Lebensvorgang, ohne den kein anderer Lebensvorgang verständlich ist. Biologen, die das Leben untersuchen, ohne die Wirkungen des Wortes auf alles Lebendige zu Grunde zu legen, legen einen falschen Grund. Wen nämlich nie ein namentlicher Anruf hat erzittern machen, der hat noch gar nicht gelebt. Das angesprochene Leben wird erst das volle Leben.”

<sup>618</sup> See chapter I, 3. a), “A new aspect of ontology: Judaism as a ‘category of being’”.

Although Rosenzweig was a brilliant student, receiving his doctor's degree *summa cum laude* in 1912, and thereby designated to make an excellent academic career with the support of his mentor, the historian Friedrich Meinecke (1862-1954) – one of the most famous German professors at that time – the world of the university left Rosenzweig unsatisfied.<sup>619</sup> Even though Meinecke, in 1919, repeatedly offered him *Habilitation* and in 1921 invited him to work regularly on the *Historische Zeitschrift*, Rosenzweig invariably refused. The academic life left him unfulfilled as he discovered that he did not find what he was searching for. He explained the consequence of this fundamental spiritual change in a letter to his teacher Meinecke on August 30<sup>th</sup> 1920 as follows:

Now I only inquire when I find myself *inquired of*. Inquired of, that is, by *men* rather than by scholars or the 'scholarship'. [*Ich frage nur noch, wo ich gefragt werde. Von Menschen gefragt werde, nicht von Gelehrten, nicht von 'der Wissenschaft'*].<sup>620</sup>

Rosenzweig's letter to Meinecke is of outstanding importance for the understanding of his intellectual development. It is here that he points out the reasons for developing his concept of a New Thinking and also why he abandoned an academic career for dedicating himself to Jewish teaching as a founder and director of the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt from 1920 onward. However, Rosenzweig's sceptical attitude towards the academic life can also be found much earlier than 1920. In a diary note from November 20, 1906 Rosenzweig openly mocks the ivory tower of scholarship in which the professors live without participating in *real* life, as well as the "overestimation of their own worth" [*Überschätzung des eigenen Werts*"], describing their profession as "a world apart" [*eine Welt für sich*"].<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> Rosenzweig's doctoral thesis appeared under the title *Hegel und der Staat* in two volumes 1920. It has been recently reedited by Frank Lachmann, with an afterword by Axel Honneth, Suhrkamp 2010. In his evaluation of Rosenzweig's thesis, which can be found in the archives of the philosophical faculty of the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität in Freiburg, Professor Meinecke left no doubt about his student's exceptional talent, which he hoped to promote in the future. See Meinecke, Stefan, "A Life of Contradiction. The Philosopher Franz Rosenzweig and his Relationship to History and Politics", p. 463. For a brief sketch of Rosenzweig's intellectual development see further Mendes-Flohr, Paul, introduction to *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. by Paul Mendes-Flohr, pp. 1-14.

<sup>620</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, in: GS, I, 2, letter to Friedrich Meinecke, 30.8.1920, pp. 678-682, p. 679. I cite the English translation of Nahum Glatzer, in: *Franz Rosenzweig. His Life and his Thought*, by Nahum N. Glatzer, pp. 94-98, p. 97, with slight modification of the translation at the end of the sentence.

<sup>621</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, I, 1, p. 65, own translation as this diary note is not translated in Glatzer's anthology *Franz Rosenzweig. His Life and his Thought*.

In his letter to Meinecke, Rosenzweig traces his intellectual change back to the year 1913, which he highlights as a turning point of his existence:

In 1913 something happened to me for which collapse [*Zusammenbruch*] is the only fitting name. I suddenly found myself on a heap of wreckage, or rather I realized that the road I was then pursuing was flanked by unrealities. Yet this was the very road defined for me by my talent, and my talent only! [...] Amidst the shreds of my talents I began to search for myself, amidst the manifold for the One. It was then (one can speak of such matters in metaphors only) that I descended into the vaults of my being, to a place whither talents could not follow me; that I approached the ancient treasure chest whose existence I had never wholly forgotten, for I was in the habit of going down at certain times of the year to examine what lay uppermost in the chest: those moments had all along been the supreme moments of my life.<sup>622</sup>

There can be no doubt about the fact that that which Rosenzweig designates in this context as “the ancient treasure chest [*die alte Truhe*]” was in fact nothing other than Judaism. I have already outlined that in 1913 Rosenzweig was tempted to convert to Christianity and that he finally decided to stay a Jew.<sup>623</sup> Reflecting on the former years, he realized that this experience indeed changed his whole life. It opened his eyes for what have been for him, as Rosenzweig summarizes it, “the supreme moments of my life [*die großen Augenblicke meines Lebens*]”,<sup>624</sup> by which he means his consciousness that he cannot flee his Judaism, as became clear during the *Yamim haNoraim*, i.e. the High Jewish holidays, of 1913. As a result of this development, he explains to Meinecke that

[...] scholarship no longer holds the center of my attention, [...] my life has fallen under the rule of a ‘dark drive’, which I’m aware that I merely name by calling it ‘my Judaism’. [...] Cognition [*Erkennen*] no longer appears to me as an end in itself. It has turned into service, a service to human beings (not, I assure you, tendencies).<sup>625</sup>

As a consequence, Rosenzweig went on to build his own system of philosophy as formulated in his book *The Star of Redemption*, written in 1918-1919, published in 1921. Thus, the intellectual

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<sup>622</sup> Ibid., GS, I, 2, pp. 679-680. The cited English version is quoted from: *Franz Rosenzweig. His Life and his Thought*, by Nahum N. Glatzer, pp. 94-98, p. 95.

<sup>623</sup> See chapter I, 3. a), “A new aspect of ontology: Judaism as a ‘category of being’”.

<sup>624</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, I, 2, letter to Friedrich Meinecke, 30.8.1920, pp. 678-682, p. 680. For the English version see p. 95, in: *Franz Rosenzweig. His Life and his Thought*, by Nahum N. Glatzer, pp. 94-98.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid., pp. 680-681/pp. 96-97, in: *Franz Rosenzweig. His Life and his Thought*, ed. by Nahum Glatzer, pp. 96-97.

development which Rosenzweig describes in the cited letter to Meinecke is of fundamental importance for his whole work. Without emphasizing the role that Judaism played in it, it seems to me incomprehensible why Rosenzweig decided to set out on this new path and to develop the ideas I am going to present in the following pages. According to Rosenzweig, it must be underscored, more important than all our studying is life itself. It seems to me therefore by no means to be an overestimation to call him “a worshipper of life, life as such, life of and in the world [...]”<sup>626</sup> as Amos Funkenstein points out. Funkenstein goes on to explain in his article namely the importance of Judaism for Rosenzweig in this context. Judaism represented for Rosenzweig “pure life, the very symbol of life, meaningful and spiritual *in that* it was biological, eternal *in that* its members died but gave life. Zest for life is the deepest drive in the *Stern der Erlösung*.”<sup>627</sup> Against this background, one must also read the following explanations on the role of language in Rosenzweig’s thinking and its connection to Levinas.

In his article “The New Thinking”, written in February 1925, four years after the publication of his major work *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig points out the main characteristics of his philosophical thinking in a more concise manner.<sup>628</sup> The essay was “addressed”, as Rosenzweig later said, “to the Jewish reader.”<sup>629</sup> Unfortunately, *The Star of Redemption* did not have much success among the readers; indeed it rather “had fallen on deaf ears; it was a book known by some but read by virtually no one.”<sup>630</sup> In a letter to Hans Ehrenberg, Rosenzweig complained that his work – although it had achieved a certain reputation among the Jews [“*Das Buch ist ja bei den Juden direkt berühmt.*”]<sup>631</sup> – had been generally misunderstood: “I am amazed again and again how unknown the book is to his readers. The whole world thinks it is an admonition to eat kosher.”<sup>632</sup> It is thus understandable that he felt the need to give the reader a kind of explanation (not to be conceived of, however, as an introduction post factum), in order to understand its structure, its argument and its method. Furthermore, besides this motivation, the

<sup>626</sup> Funkenstein, Amos, “An Escape from History: Rosenzweig on the Destiny of Judaism”, p. 125.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid.

<sup>628</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “The New Thinking”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 109-139/“Das neue Denken. Einige nachträgliche Bemerkungen zum ‘Stern der Erlösung’”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, III, pp. 139-161.

<sup>629</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, I, 2, letter to Hans Ehrenberg, 11.3.1925, pp. 1025-1026, p. 1025: “An den jüdischen Leser ist es [*the essay ‘The New Thinking’*] aber wirklich geschrieben.”

<sup>630</sup> Franks, Paul W./Morgan, Michael L., introduction to chapter IV “From 1917-1925”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 84-91, p. 91.

<sup>631</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, I, 2, letter to Hans Ehrenberg, 11.3.1925, pp. 1025-1026, p. 1026.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid., p. 1026: “Ich staune immer aufs neue, wie unbekannt es bei seinen Lesern ist. Alle Welt meint, es sei eine Mahnung zum koscheren Essen.”

essay is interesting in terms of the methodological questions it deals with. In my view, the outlined aspects of Levinas's problem with philosophical thematization in chapter two<sup>633</sup> could be seen in accordance with the concept of "speech-thinking" (*Sprach-Denken*) elaborated by Rosenzweig.<sup>634</sup> Therefore, it seems to me a promising task to compare Rosenzweig's thinking to that of Levinas regarding the notion of language. There are two aspects I would like to accentuate in this context: *revelation* and *speech*. The latter is at the core of Rosenzweig's New Thinking, which is considered a "speech-thinking" – unlike the abstract thinking of academic philosophy, which is a thinking for no one because it speaks to no one.<sup>635</sup> On the contrary, Rosenzweig explains that "the New Thinking's method originates out of its temporality. [...] Into the place of the method of thinking, as all previous philosophy developed it, steps the method of speaking."<sup>636</sup> This emphasis on speaking and the living speech entails certain results for thinking as such. According to Rosenzweig, there is always an unknown side-effect in speaking that has to be taken into account, since, in "actual conversation, *something happens*; I do not know in advance what the other will say to me because I myself do not even know what I am going to say; perhaps not even whether I am going to say anything at all [...]."<sup>637</sup> An active dialogue is always a creative process with an outcome that cannot be foreseen. It is this moment of the *unpredictable* that marks not only creativity and creative thinking but, ultimately, any human relation. Taking this fact into account, Rosenzweig's New Thinking focuses essentially "on needing the other and, what amounts to the same, on taking time seriously."<sup>638</sup> In terms of Rosenzweig's biographical experience, these conditions were fulfilled through his encounter with Gritli, as Ephraim Meir points out: "In dialogue with her, language became living speech."<sup>639</sup>

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<sup>633</sup> See chapter II, 2. b), "'In the heart of a chiasmus' – Jacques Derrida's critique of language in Levinas's work and the problem of narrativity".

<sup>634</sup> See Bauer, Anna Elisabeth, *Rosenzweigs Sprachdenken im 'Stern der Erlösung' und in seiner Korrespondenz mit Martin Buber zur Verdeutschung der Schrift*, p. 21ff.

<sup>635</sup> Glatzer, Nahum N., "The Concept of Language in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig", p. 183. See further, Stahmer, Harold, "Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929): Speech Precedes Thought and Needs Time", in: Stahmer, Harold, "*Speak That I May See Thee!*" *The Religious Significance of Language*, chapter 4, pp. 148-182.

<sup>636</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, "The New Thinking", in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 109-139, p. 125/"Das neue Denken. Einige nachträgliche Bemerkungen zum 'Stern der Erlösung'", in: Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, III, pp. 139-161, p. 151.

<sup>637</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, "The New Thinking", in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 109-139, p. 126/"Das neue Denken. Einige nachträgliche Bemerkungen zum 'Stern der Erlösung'", in: Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, III, pp. 139-161, p. 151, emphasis added.

<sup>638</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127/pp. 151-152. The notion of "need" used in this context is to be understood primarily to avoid solipsism, however not as erotic love or desire. Nonetheless, desire and erotic love are not an unimportant aspect for Rosenzweig, as can be seen from his interpretation of the *Song of Songs* in the center of the *Star*, which plays a crucial role in his study.

<sup>639</sup> Meir, Ephraim, *Letters of Love*, p. xiv.

In order to draw a parallel in the following to Levinas's notion of language, it seems to me helpful in this context to highlight again briefly the central motivation of his thinking. Asked in an interview to give a definition of philosophy, Levinas placed the encounter with the other man in its center, as he points out that

[...] philosophy permits man to interrogate himself about what he says and about what one says to oneself in thinking. No longer to let oneself be swayed or intoxicated by the rhythm of words and the generality that they designate, but to open oneself to the uniqueness of the unique in the real, that is to say, to the uniqueness of the other. That is to say, in the final analysis, to love. To speak truly, not as one sings; to awaken; to sober up; to undo one's refrain.<sup>640</sup>

I have already elaborated in detail the notion of awakening, sobering up and insomnia.<sup>641</sup> However, there is more to take into account. Levinas's own definition of his philosophy is remarkable with respect to Rosenzweig's concept of a New Thinking because it highlights the central significance of the other person as well as the important role of responsibility. In the aforementioned interview, Levinas emphasized precisely the extraordinary event of the other for his thinking:

The encounter with the other is the great experience, the grand event. The encounter with the other is not reducible to the acquisition of a supplementary knowledge. Certainly I can never totally grasp the other, but the responsibility on his behalf – in which language originates – and the sociality with him goes beyond knowledge [...].<sup>642</sup>

Knowledge is thus only a *secondary* effect, caused in the encounter with the fellow man, as it does not hold the central place in Levinas's eyes. What is really at stake is the *responsibility* which is experienced through the confrontation with the face of the other and in which, according to Levinas, language finds its starting point. It is notable in this context that Levinas underlines

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<sup>640</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "On the Usefulness of Insomnia", in: *Is it righteous to be?*, ed. by Jill Robbins, pp. 234-236, p. 234/"De l'utilité des insomnies", entretien avec Bertrand Révillon, in: *Les imprévus de l'histoire*, pp. 177-180, p. 177. Originally published in the French journal *La Croix – L'Événement*, 10.6.1987, p. 18.

<sup>641</sup> See chapter I, 3. b), "Levinas's 'awakening of consciousness' as a new *mode of being* – at the intersection of Judaism, ontology and language".

<sup>642</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "On the Usefulness of Insomnia", in: *Is it righteous to be?*, ed. by Jill Robbins, pp. 234-236, p. 235/"De l'utilité des insomnies", entretien avec Bertrand Révillon, in: *Les imprévus de l'histoire*, pp. 177-180, p. 178.



the fact of ‘truly speaking’, i.e. “not as one sings”, as he says. That means *reasonable* speaking, although he emphasizes that that which is the content of speaking surpasses the structures of knowledge and logic. In this dichotomy Levinas’s notion of language is caught up. Even if I can never fully grasp the other’s existence nor fully understand him, I have to acknowledge his existence since the ethical moment precedes cognition and knowledge. Thus, for Levinas as for Rosenzweig, the act of speaking face-to face is central to their respective philosophies.

Rosenzweig’s method of speech-thinking could, in this context, offer an adequate way to get past the “said” of linear thought, which is the main problem of Levinas’s philosophical thematization, and to think in terms of “Sayings” rather than “saids”. The active act of speaking is important for Levinas. Not just what is said, but *that* (and how) it is said is important for him. The role of the speaker holds in this process a crucial place. To diminish this aspect would entail diminishing also the revealing power of language, as he emphasizes, that

[...] to make of the thinker a moment of thought is to limit the revealing function of language to its coherence, conveying the coherence of concepts. [...] The function of language would amount to suppressing ‘the other’, who breaks this coherence and is hence essentially irrational. A curious result: language would consist in suppressing the other, in making the other agree with the same! [...] this is why language institutes a relation irreducible to the subject-object relation: the *revelation* of the other. In this revelation only can language as a system of signs be constituted.<sup>643</sup>

The event of language, as realized in the face-to-face speaking, entails thus a *revelation of the other*, according to Levinas. In fact, *revelation* and *speech* are deeply connected in his thinking. This connection reflects, in my view, the two main characteristics that Rosenzweig pointed out with respect to the New Thinking as “needing the other and, what amounts to the same, on taking time seriously.”<sup>644</sup> It is interesting to trace these two mentioned aspects in Levinas’s thinking from their emergence onwards. I will go on to consider in more detail, firstly, the aspect of the need of the other person, then, in a second step, the aspect of the importance of temporality.

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<sup>643</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, pp. 72-73/Ti, p. 70, in italics in the original.

<sup>644</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “The New Thinking”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 109-139, p. 127/“Das neue Denken. Einige nachträgliche Bemerkungen zum ‘Stern der Erlösung’”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, III, pp. 139-161, pp. 151-152.

That language consists fundamentally in speaking *to* someone is a fact clearly emphasized by Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*: “Language presupposes interlocutors, a plurality.”<sup>645</sup> Knowledge emerges only among people that interact with one another, i.e. in every sort of communication between human beings. The other is essential for the formation of knowledge which comes thereby always from *outside* to the subject. It is a *surplus* gained through the process of communication realized through language. In this context, Levinas also highlights the *unpredictable* moment – that I have also pointed out with respect to Rosenzweig’s speech-thinking – which is inherent in every speech searching for real knowledge and truth:

[...] discourse is therefore not the unfolding of a prefabricated internal logic, but the constitution of truth in a struggle between thinkers, with all the risks of freedom. The relationship of language implies transcendence, radical separation, the strangeness of the interlocutors, the revelation of the other to me. [...] Discourse is thus the experience of something absolutely foreign, a pure ‘knowledge’ or ‘experience’, a *traumatism of astonishment*.<sup>646</sup>

Even though the wording of Levinas is in this context very radical, since he even speaks of a ‘traumatism’ of astonishment, the idea that language comes essentially from outside can be traced back to a much earlier period. One can see, for instance, how Levinas elaborated this idea in his philosophical notes that preceded *Totality and Infinity*; here this aspect of the *outside* of thinking, connected to language, is summarized as follows: “The essence of language: A thought received from the outside – *The outside is the essential* and not the universality – nor even the fact that I can communicate it [the outside] to a reason.”<sup>647</sup> This demonstrates how this idea took shape in his thinking and that it holds an important place in the development of his notion of language. Indeed this echoes also in the notion of language developed in *Otherwise than Being*, where Levinas underlines, that “[l]anguage is *already* skepticism”<sup>648</sup> – and it was none other than Maurice Blanchot who emphasizes this aspect in his interpretation of Levinas’s work.<sup>649</sup> Language is never sure of itself as it is always undermined by the presence of the other which it

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<sup>645</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 73/Ti, p. 70.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid., p. 73/pp. 70-71, in italics in the original.

<sup>647</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 460: “L’essence du langage: Une pensée reçue du dehors – Le dehors est l’essentiel et non pas l’universalité – ni même le fait que je peux le communiquer à une raison.” Emphasis added.

<sup>648</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 170/AQE, p. 263.

<sup>649</sup> Blanchot, Maurice, “Our Clandestine Companion”, p. 47/“Notre compagne clandestine”, p. 84. See also Hart, Kevin, *The Dark Gaze. Maurice Blanchot and the Sacred*, p. 113: “[...] Blanchot suggests that the accent should fall on the adverb: not to indicate a movement of negativity or a transgression but to remind us that language unsettles both absolute knowledge and transparent verbal communication.”

can never fully grasp. Being confronted permanently by something which is received from outside, language is always haunted by something that remains outside, which cannot be absorbed by language, and which nevertheless is the impetus of speaking. As a consequence, there is always a word which is left unsaid in every saying.

The need of the other person, in order to philosophize at all, is an idea both Levinas and Rosenzweig underline. Levinas stresses particularly the point of the *ethical* relationship of language and thinking. In an interview, he emphasized the priority of the other as a fundamental aspect which grounds humanity as such:

Our humanity consists in being able to recognize this priority of the other. Now you can better understand [...] why I have been so interested in language. Language is always addressed to the other, as if one could not think without already being concerned for the other. Always already my thinking is a saying. In the profundity of thinking, the *for-the-other* is articulated, or, said otherwise, goodness is articulated, love for the other, which is more spiritual than any science.<sup>650</sup>

In this sense, I have already pointed out in my interpretation of Levinas's article "Is Ontology fundamental?" that *language precedes ontology* in Levinas's view. Similarly, in *Totality and Infinity* he goes on to emphasize the hegemony of language over ontology: "This 'saying to the Other' – this relationship with the Other as interlocutor, this relation with an *existent* – precedes all ontology; it is the ultimate relation in Being. Ontology presupposes metaphysics."<sup>651</sup> This very radical manner to emphasize the hegemony of the 'saying' over ontology entails for Levinas, ultimately, a hegemony of the other over the I. As distinct from the views of Rosenzweig (and also, for instance, Martin Buber), the relationship between the interlocutors is not conceived as *equal* by Levinas, although it is a face-to-face situation, but as *asymmetrical*: the other dominates the I, who is troubled and, in a certain sense, 'awakened'<sup>652</sup> by the encounter with the other – an infinite awakening which never comes to an end. Since language is fundamentally linked to this awakening through the encounter of the other, it is conceived as a putting into question (*mise en question*) the I: "The calling in question of the I, coextensive with the manifestation of the Other

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<sup>650</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "On the Usefulness of Insomnia", in: *Is it righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins, pp. 234-236, p. 235/"De l'utilité des insomnies", entretien avec Bertrand Révillon, in: *Les imprévus de l'histoire*, pp. 177-180, p. 179.

<sup>651</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 48/Ti, p. 39.

<sup>652</sup> On the notion of the "awakening" in Levinas see chapter I, 3. b), "Levinas's "awakening of consciousness" as a new *mode of being* – at the intersection of Judaism, ontology and language".

in the face, we call language. The height from which language comes we designate with the term *teaching*.”<sup>653</sup> In his philosophical notes which precede the publication of *Totality and Infinity*, we can see how this idea took shape in Levinas’s mind, as he writes, for instance: “Being taught – creature’s structure,”<sup>654</sup> and also how it is connected with philosophy as such for him: “Creation and power. How does philosophical inquiry itself cease to be vision and power? How does it seize the origin without distorting it? Therefore we cannot philosophize alone. Philosophy as discussion and teaching.”<sup>655</sup> The influence of the other extends thus not only to the theoretical concept of philosophy, but also to the ontological structure of the I which is addressed in its being from the ‘height’ of the other who is ‘teaching’ him. This asymmetry between the interlocutors seems to me a fundamental difference between Rosenzweig’s method of speech-thinking and Levinas’s views on language.

Their different points of view involve also a different approach to time. Whereas for Rosenzweig the temporal background of the ‘speaking scene’ in which the method of speech thinking takes place is a *simultaneous* one, for Levinas there is a temporal deferral between the I and the other which can never be bridged by any presence. Levinas calls this situation *diachrony* and conceives it as an *immemorial* time. Whereas the synchronous time represents for him the linear time of consciousness, the diachronic time means the interference of the other, as a result of the encounter with his asynchronicity.<sup>656</sup> Diachrony is a breaking-up of synchrony, it is an awakening to an immemorial past as an obligation to be responsible prior to any meaning and freedom, prior to any agreement given by the I, as Levinas underlines: “A responsibility preceding freedom, a responsibility preceding intentionality! [...] A responsibility which, before the discourse revolving around what is said, is probably the essence of language.”<sup>657</sup> Levinas also

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<sup>653</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 171/Ti, p. 185, emphasis added.

<sup>654</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 454: “Être enseigné – structure de créature.”

<sup>655</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 443: “Création et pouvoir. Comment la recherche philosophique elle-même cesse d’être vision et pouvoir? Comment se saisit-elle de l’origine sans la fausser? C’est pourquoi on ne peut pas philosopher seul. Philosophie comme discussion et enseignement.”

<sup>656</sup> See Wenzler, Ludwig, “Zeit als Nähe des Abwesenden. Diachronie der Ethik und Diachronie der Sinnlichkeit nach Emmanuel Levinas”, p. 84ff. For a comparison of Rosenzweig’s notion of time and the diachrony Levinas outlines, see Garrido-Maturano, Angel E., “Zeit als Gebet. Eine Einführung in die phänomenologische Bedeutung der Zeitigung des Selbst in Franz Rosenzweigs *Stern der Erlösung*”, pp. 933-935.

<sup>657</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “The Name of God according to a few Talmudic Texts”, in: *Beyond the Verse*, pp. 115-126, pp. 125-126/“Le Nom de Dieu d’après quelques textes talmudiques”, in: *L’au-delà du verset*, pp. 143-157, pp. 156-157.

speaks of the *illeity*<sup>658</sup> of the other, which expresses precisely not an equal relationship – as Rosenzweig and Buber focused on in their philosophies, i.e. the method of ‘speech-thinking’ and the dialogical thinking respectively –, but designates the ‘height’ from which the other approaches me, teaches me. According to Levinas,

[t]his anteriority of responsibility must be understood in relation to freedom as the very authority of the Absolute which is ‘too great’ for the measure or finitude of presence, revelation, order and being, and which consequently, as neither being nor non-being, is the ‘excluded third party’ of the beyond of being and non-being, a third person that we have called ‘*illeity*’ and that is perhaps also expressed by the word God. A beyond being, resistant to thematization and origin – something preceding the originary: beyond non-being – an authority that orders my neighbor for me as a face.<sup>659</sup>

In this context, also the notion of the *trace* is of great importance for Levinas’s thinking: The trace represents a sign of an *absent* presence, of a presence that has *already passed*, leaving only its trace – as the present mark of its absence.<sup>660</sup> In order to explain this notion, Levinas refers to the verse in the book of Exodus where God passes in front of Moses (Ex. 34:5, *vayavor hashem al panav*) and leaves His “trace”.<sup>661</sup> His complex interpretation of the trace interweaves theological and philosophical aspects, as Ephraim Meir points out:

Such a trace does not indicate an archeological presence, or a sign of something that was materially there. God is always past presence, His absence does not ‘appear’. [...] Finally, God is not an idea, which would neutralize Him into a totality. He cannot be contaminated by the finiteness of being. Man in His ‘image’ (Gen 1:27) nonetheless bears His trace. One may conclude, therefore, that there is a sign in the human being that never reaches the signified. The signifier which does not reach the signified is the trace of God, whom one approaches through ethical living. In traditional Jewish phraseology: God’s name is ineffable.<sup>662</sup>

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<sup>658</sup> See Levinas, Emmanuel, “The Trace of the Other”, p. 356/“La trace de l’autre”, in: *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, pp. 261-282, p. 278. See also Casper, Bernhard, “Illéité”, in: Casper, Bernhard, *Angesichts des Anderen. Emmanuel Levinas – Elemente seines Denkens*, pp. 33-51.

<sup>659</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “The Name of God according to a few Talmudic Texts”, in: *Beyond the Verse*, pp. 115-126, p. 126/“Le Nom de Dieu d’après quelques textes talmudiques”, in: *L’au-delà du verset*, pp. 143-157, p. 157.

<sup>660</sup> On the notion of the trace see Levy, Ze’ev, “Die Rolle der Spur in der Philosophie von Emmanuel Levinas und Jacques Derrida”.

<sup>661</sup> Meir, Ephraim, “Judaism and Philosophy: Each Other’s Other in Levinas”, p. 356.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

The aspect of the ‘ineffable’ moment marks a difference between Levinas’s notion of language and Rosenzweig’s concept of speech-thinking, where the impossibility of synchronized, equal speaking is not highlighted. Nonetheless the ethical approach of both thinkers is similar.

For a last example concerning their different *temporal* views, I would like to draw attention to the early work of Levinas, i.e. his lectures *Time and the Other*. Levinas concludes this work with a remarkable statement about the connection between time, eros and the other, which I cite at length and will expound upon:

I have tried to find the temporal transcendence of the present toward the mystery of the future. This is not a participation, in a third term, whether this term be a person, a truth, a work, or a profession. *It is a collectivity that is not a communion*. It is the face-to-face without intermediary, and is furnished for us in the eros where, in the other’s proximity, distance is integrally maintained, and whose pathos is made of both this proximity and this duality. What one presents as a failure of communication in love precisely constitutes the positivity of the relationship; *this absence of the other is precisely its presence as other*.<sup>663</sup>

This at first sight rather paradoxical conclusion reveals all the more how Levinas’s views differ from those of Rosenzweig’s. Even if the face-to-face relationship is a very close, unique one set in time, Levinas nonetheless underlines that “distance is integrally maintained.” However, this is by no means to be understood as a negative aspect. Levinas refers in this context to the erotic relationship, which ultimately furnishes the face-to-face relationship, and points out that this *absence* of the other in love is precisely his *presence*, in a positive sense. Or, in a nutshell, precisely because we cannot grasp the other’s presence, since he remains absent and infinitely inaccessible to us, we are able to desire and to love him. Only the ungraspable stimulates the desire to touch and it is precisely this impossibility that awakens the desire. In this sense, Levinas points out, “[t]he Other is the only being that one can be tempted to kill.”<sup>664</sup> It is from this *absence* of the other, which has to be also conceived as the beginning of language in the face of the other, that the presence of love is nourished and supported. Or, as Avital Ronell once said, “if

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<sup>663</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TO, p. 94/TA, p. 89, emphasis added.

<sup>664</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Ethics and Spirit”, in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 3-10, p. 8/“Éthique et Esprit”, in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 13-23, p. 21.

we could communicate we would not need to communicate.”<sup>665</sup> We feel the need to speak, because ultimately it is impossible to fully understand each other. In fact, in a total agreement the dialogue would collapse and would end in silence. This aspect is addressed by Rosenzweig in Part III of *The Star of Redemption*, where he points out a notion of truth which is speechless or, more precisely, *beyond* speech; he deems that God is truth and associates this truth with light, concluding: “Light does not talk; but shines.”<sup>666</sup> In a certain sense, the silence outlined by Rosenzweig can be seen in connection with Levinas’s notion of the Saying, which is conceived of as an ‘ethical language’, beyond words. However, according to Levinas, it *speaks* nevertheless, as he repeatedly underlines: the face *speaks*.<sup>667</sup> An *absolute* silence, outlined by Rosenzweig at the end of *The Star*, is for Levinas thus impossible since his notion of truth is ultimately linked to a certain notion of language, conceived of as an ‘ethical language’, realized in the face-to-face encounter. The other remains the other in this encounter. Thus the fundamental *absence* of the other, which I pointed out above, has to be acknowledged. In this sense, as Ludwig Wenzler emphasized, the structure of time, realized in the encounter, is conceived by Levinas as the “proximity of an absence”.<sup>668</sup> At this point, differences between Rosenzweig and Levinas with respect to their temporal concepts and their relations to language emerge.<sup>669</sup>

Although I have outlined differences between Levinas and Rosenzweig regarding the notions of time and language, they have nonetheless a common approach to these themes. Taking up the ideas of Cage about ‘non-intentional artworks’,<sup>670</sup> one could summarize that both thinkers, Rosenzweig as well as Levinas, emphasize *speaking* as such, without a pre-fabricated intention behind the speaking and without reducing the other to a mere receiver of what is said. Like the audience required by Cage – which has to consist of more than merely passive receivers or consumers of what is represented – an entire openness of the speaker towards the other is necessary for open-minded participation in an “act of speaking” in the sense found in the work of

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<sup>665</sup> Ronell, Avital, “The Test Drive”, lecture given on October 5, 2006 at the Case Western Reserve University as a part of the Baker-Nord Series on “Information”, see:

<http://tv.case.edu/actions/tv2/tv?play=true&id=6254&filter=talking>

<sup>666</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 313/*Stern*, p. 328. I elaborate further on this topic in chapter III, 3, “‘Light does not talk; but shines.’ – Apophasis, the vision of the face and the experience of truth”.

<sup>667</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *TI*, p. 66/*Ti*, p. 61: “Le visage parle.”

<sup>668</sup> See Wenzler, Ludwig, “Zeit als Nähe des Abwesenden. Diachronie der Ethik und Diachronie der Sinnlichkeit nach Emmanuel Levinas”.

<sup>669</sup> See Habib, Stéphane, *Levinas et Rosenzweig. Philosophies de la Révélation*, especially chapter II, “L’autre dans le Même”, p. 225ff.

<sup>670</sup> See my excursus in chapter II, “At the crossroads of music, poetry and ethics – *poethics* in the thought of Levinas and John Cage”.

Levinas and Rosenzweig. An openness without limits and without intentions, which does not know where it will lead, but which is ready to inspire and to let itself be inspired by the other, in order to quit the banal order of logic and to generate not only knowledge, but something more seldom, and more precious – truth. This conception of truth has to be conceived as a *dialogic truth* which none of the interlocutors possesses alone, but which comes about through the living speech of each participant, and for which each participant is necessary in order to be achieved. This entails an *ethical* communication which is actually *in nuce* set up in the concept of an ‘ethical language’ Levinas outlined, and for which realization the need of *time* and the *other* person is evident.<sup>671</sup>

## 2. Rosenzweig’s concept of a “messianic epistemology” and his notion of truth

In order to point out another important aspect of Rosenzweig’s New Thinking, I outline in the following the concept of ‘messianic epistemology’. The term is used by Rosenzweig in his article “The New Thinking” (1924) to illustrate the specific mode of epistemology applied in the New Thinking. However, one must ask: what precisely is meant with this expression, and what is its relation to Rosenzweig’s notion of truth?

Firstly, it is interesting to note that Rosenzweig does not begin *The Star of Redemption* with epistemological considerations, but rather concludes his book with them. Convinced that from cognition (*Erkennen*) “from which something comes out, just as with a cake, something must also have been put in”, Rosenzweig starts his reflections rather with “the experience of factuality.”<sup>672</sup> In his eyes, factuality cannot be argued away by philosophy; for instance, that man has to die is a fact, and it is certainly not a coincidence that Rosenzweig starts *The Star of Redemption* precisely with this fact. He goes on to exemplify his notion of factuality with respect to three elements – world, man, and God – and sets them in relation to each other. The elements have to be

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<sup>671</sup> See Pinchevski, Amit, *By Way of Interruption. Levinas and the Ethics of Communication*.

<sup>672</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “The New Thinking”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 109-139, p. 135/“Das neue Denken. Einige nachträgliche Bemerkungen zum ‘Stern der Erlösung’”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, III, pp. 139-161, p. 158.



considered not in isolation, but rather in relation, as Rosenzweig underlines: “Only in their relations [to each other] – only as *creation*, *revelation*, and *redemption* – do they open themselves up.”<sup>673</sup> In the relation between God and world, *creation* takes place, and in the relation between God and man, *revelation*. It is only in the relation between man and the world that *redemption* ultimately occurs. In this process, *experience* holds a crucial place. It is a key notion of Rosenzweig’s thinking, since knowledge is basically gained through experience.<sup>674</sup> In this sense, Rosenzweig characterizes his New Thinking as “experiential philosophy [*erfahrende Philosophie*]”.<sup>675</sup>

Furthermore, *time* plays a crucial role for the New Thinking. Just as experience is bound to time, so too is language, which finds its expression in and through time. As the New Thinking is conceived as a ‘speech-thinking’ (*Sprachdenken*), knowledge is thus essentially bound to time. This *time-bound knowledge* is in fact the only possible knowledge for man, according to Rosenzweig, since

[...] advice comes when the time comes. This secret is the whole wisdom of the new philosophy. It teaches, to speak with Goethe, the ‘understanding at the right time’ [...]. The New Thinking knows, just like the age-old thinking of healthy human understanding, that *it cannot cognize independently of time*.<sup>676</sup>

Rosenzweig’s epistemology is thus not a static one. On the contrary, it develops *with* and *through* time, on which it also depends. It is bound to the present, but also linked to the future since it develops endlessly with every new experience gained through new encounters and intellectual exchange. As this is a dynamic process, without an end which can be foreseen, one can call it a *messianic* epistemology. In fact, since the New Thinking is realized through language, Rosenzweig even draws the conclusion that there is a ‘messianity of language’ (*Messianität der Sprache*).<sup>677</sup>

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<sup>673</sup> Ibid., p. 125/p. 150, emphasis added.

<sup>674</sup> See Wiehl, Reiner, “Experience in Rosenzweig’s New Thinking”, pp. 42-68, and Kirchner, Katrin J., *Franz Rosenzweigs Theorie der Erfahrung*.

<sup>675</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “The New Thinking”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 109-139, p. 117/“Das neue Denken. Einige nachträgliche Bemerkungen zum ‘Stern der Erlösung’”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, III, pp. 139-161, p. 144.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid., p. 123/p. 149, emphasis added.

<sup>677</sup> Di Cesare, Donatella, “Die Messianität der Sprache”, p. 862. See further Di Cesare, Donatella, “Die Grammatik der Zukunft. Ich, Du, Wir in Rosenzweigs Sprachdenken”, pp. 64-67.

Moreover, Rosenzweig develops a cyclical view of history which highlights the Jewish religious holidays as important benchmarks of the year. Through the celebration of the religious events every Jew has the possibility of participating in the eternal life of the Jewish community. Therefore, according to Rosenzweig, every individual Jew has the possibility of *experiencing* history and making it his own story: it is the change from history to *his story*. This allows the Jew to experience a universal truth in a particularistic existence. Thus the ‘re-actualization’ of history is important for Rosenzweig’s approach to the Jewish holidays, and these events are crucial with respect to his notion of time. Robert Gibbs highlights this aspect as follows:

Rosenzweig’s central claim is that to bear the full significance of eternalizing time, these events must not be merely left in a distant past. [...] The specific claim is that the Jew *lives* in the past event and does not merely *represent* a past event. The exodus is *experienced*: the celebrant was there! [...] This importation of eternity into time structures history into a cycle that repeats. [...] History in circles allows for the discontinuity of messianism to break into time, bestowing meaning and promise, without reducing the future to the past.<sup>678</sup>

This approach to history differs from the conventional views of history as a distant past, as a time far away from actual life. Rosenzweig’s notion of truth, which is connected to his notion of time as developed in his *messianic* epistemology, requires thus not just mere distant spectators of the religious event, but active participants in the *performance* of the event. Rosenzweig emphasizes that the historical memory he elaborates is “a memory always equally near, really not at all past, but *eternally present*; every individual is supposed to regard the Exodus out of Egypt as if he himself had also gone out [...].”<sup>679</sup> It is thus a re-actualization of the historical past which is important in his view.

In this context, it is interesting to recall that Levinas also underlines the aspect of the messianic structure of time and the need for a ‘re-actualization’ of creation through man. In his article “Judaism”, written for the *Encyclopaedia Universalis* in 1971 and republished in the anthology *Difficult Freedom*, Levinas highlights the specific Jewish notion of time by pointing out that messianic time is realized in Jewish thought *through* and *within* time. He explains: “The

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<sup>678</sup> Gibbs, Robert, “Lines, Circles, Points: Messianic Epistemology in Cohen, Rosenzweig and Benjamin”, p. 376, emphasis added. See also Chaliel, Catherine, “Franz Rosenzweig, temps liturgique et temps historique”, p. 30.

<sup>679</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 323/*Stern*, p. 337, emphasis added.

waiting for the Messiah marks the very duration of time.”<sup>680</sup> Hence, time as such is structured in a messianic way; and within it each tiny second represents “the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter”, as Walter Benjamin pointed out in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History”.<sup>681</sup> Further, the active part of man holds a crucial place in Levinas’s view, as is made clear in his underlining the importance of man’s active participation in the world in *Totality and Infinity*: “Man redeems creation. [*L’homme rachète la création.*]”<sup>682</sup> It is thus the task of man to redeem the world. Hence, Levinas points out, messianism “is not the certainty of the coming of a man who stops history. It is my power to bear the suffering of all. It is the moment when I recognize this power and my universal responsibility.”<sup>683</sup> Therefore, messianism has to be conceived primarily as an “interior event”,<sup>684</sup> according to Levinas, and independent from the events that occur in history. In this sense, messianism requires the full participation of man. Thus, Susan Handelman pointed out that, in the notion of ‘messianic knowledge’, key aspects of the thinking of Levinas and other Jewish thinkers, such as Rosenzweig and Benjamin, come to the fore:

This phrase, ‘messianic knowledge’, links together Levinas, Rosenzweig, Benjamin and Scholem; for despite their differences, they each confronted and reworked this ‘messianism’ in the face of the challenge of modern secular thought [...].<sup>685</sup>

But how does knowledge becomes *truth*? First of all, truth has to be *verified* [*bewährt*] in life, according to Rosenzweig.<sup>686</sup> About this concept of truth, Levinas wrote in his article on Rosenzweig “Between Two Worlds”: “*Human truth is a testimony offered by a life of the divine truth of the end of time.* Rosenzweig calls this theory of truth the ‘theory of messianic

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<sup>680</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Judaism”, in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 24-26, p. 26/“Judaïsme”, in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 43-46, p. 46: “[...] l’attente du Messie est la durée meme du temps.” The article was first published in *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, Vol. 2, 1971, pp. 520-521.

<sup>681</sup> Benjamin, Walter, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, p. 264/“Über den Begriff der Geschichte”, p. 704. For an historical and philosophical overview about the notion “messianism”, see Scholem, Gershom, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, as well as Banon, David, *Le messianisme*.

<sup>682</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 104/Ti, p. 107.

<sup>683</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Messianic Texts”, in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 59-98, p. 90/“Textes messianiques”, in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 89-139, p. 130.

<sup>684</sup> Chalier, Catherine, “The Messianic Utopia”, p. 287.

<sup>685</sup> Handelman, Susan A., *Fragments of Redemption. Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas*, p. 338. On Levinas’s Talmudic lectures see *ibid.*, the chapter “Talmudic Messianism”, pp. 306-336.

<sup>686</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 416/*Stern*, p. 437.

knowledge’.<sup>687</sup> Being a truth which is attained in the verification through one’s very life, it is first and foremost a personal truth, connected to the specific life of the individual and his experiences. It is, however, not to be understood as an arbitrary notion of truth (in the sense of ‘anything goes’), but as a part of a universal truth, generally approved. No one can claim to possess the whole truth on his own since we all in fact *share* it. With this in mind, everybody participates in his own way in the general search for truth. This process is also reflected in the rabbinical discussions in the Talmud, where it comes to the fore that

[...] interpretations are endless, for every fresh mind that reacts brings something new to perceptual experience and is bound to take something new out of it. [...] This is the nature of all human creation; it partakes of the finitude of the mind in which it is born, and what one mind will accept another will reject. But whoever has studied the Rabbinic interpretation of the Bible will find it an exemplification of a vital effort on the part of man to seek wisdom for his way in the world.<sup>688</sup>

This idea is underscored also by Levinas in his essay “Revelation in the Jewish Tradition”, where he emphasizes that a *pluralism* of different points of view are necessary in order to gain the truth in its whole dimension:

It is as if the multiplicity of persons – is not this the very meaning of the personal? – were the condition for the plenitude of ‘absolute truth’; as if every person, through his uniqueness, were the guarantee of the revelation of a unique aspect of truth, and some of its points would never have been revealed if some people had been absent from mankind.<sup>689</sup>

These reflections have to be seen as central for Levinas’s understanding of truth. It highlights the necessity of “the multiplicity of irreducible people” to achieve “the ‘Whole’ of the truth.”<sup>690</sup> This issue had been worked out in a different context also by Karl Popper who points out that a

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<sup>687</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “‘Between Two Worlds’ (The Way of Franz Rosenzweig)”, in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 181-201, p. 195/“Entre deux mondes. La voie de Franz Rosenzweig”, in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 253-281, p. 272, emphasis in the original.

<sup>688</sup> Bokser, Ben Zion, “The Time-Bound and the Timeless in Rabbinic Thought”, p. 270. For a fuller explanation of the Jewish way to interpret religious texts see Banon, David, *La lecture infinie. Les voies de l’interprétation midrachique*, and Bruckstein, Almuth Shulamit, “Der (un)endliche Text. Midrasch in den Marginalien der Philosophie”, in: Bruckstein, Almuth Shulamit, *Die Maske des Moses. Studien zur jüdischen Hermeneutik*, pp. 49-77.

<sup>689</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Revelation in the Jewish Tradition”, in: *Beyond the Verse*, pp. 127-147, p. 131/“La Révélation dans la tradition juive”, in: *L’au-delà du verset*, pp. 158-181, p. 163. On the notion of revelation with respect to Levinas’s philosophy see Meir, Ephraim, “The Jewish Notion of Revelation”, in: Meir, Ephraim, *Levinas’s Jewish Thought between Jerusalem and Athens*, pp. 167-186.

<sup>690</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Revelation in the Jewish Tradition”, in: *Beyond the Verse*, pp. 127-147, p. 131/“La Révélation dans la tradition juive”, in: *L’au-delà du verset*, pp. 158-181, p. 163.

*pluralistic* form of meaning is a basic feature of human society and moreover the sine qua non for the development of scientific and cultural progress. Let me quote at length a passage from Popper's theory of a free discussion in order to demonstrate his point of view:

It is often asserted that discussion is only possible between people who have a common language and accept common basic assumptions. I think that this is a mistake. All that is needed is a readiness to learn from one's partner in the discussion, which includes a genuine wish to understand what he intends to say. If this readiness is there, the discussion will be the more fruitful the more the partners' backgrounds differ. Thus the value of a discussion depends largely upon the variety of the competing views. Had there been no Tower of Babel, we should invent it.<sup>691</sup>

Popper's views on the development of knowledge are thus similar to those of Levinas regarding the accentuation of a *pluralism* of opinions needed to attain a progress of our knowledge.

Coming back to Rosenzweig, however, the *eternal* truth is structured first and foremost in the *Jewish* and *Christian* truth in Rosenzweig's eyes. Other religions, like Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, etc., play thereby a minor role in *The Star of Redemption*.<sup>692</sup> In order to explain Rosenzweig's notion of truth, it is important to underline also the role of *theology* in this context. To make it clear from the outset: the relationship between theology and philosophy is complex in the work of Rosenzweig. Theology speaks objectively about revelation, whereas philosophy discusses the subjective side of revelation, i.e. the experience of it. However, Rosenzweig conceives both, theology and philosophy, in fruitful symbiosis: theology needs philosophy just as philosophy requires theology. As Yehoyada Amir underlines, it is through this connection that the new rationalism of *The Star of Redemption* takes shape.<sup>693</sup> Rosenzweig points out the relationship between theological and philosophical thoughts as follows:

[...] by building knowledge on the notion of Creation, we allow it freely to deploy its own character which is to get 'to the bottom' of things. We are making faith completely into the content of knowledge, but of a knowledge that sets itself upon a fundamental principle of faith.<sup>694</sup>

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<sup>691</sup> Popper, Karl, "Public Opinion and Liberal Principles", in: *Conjectures and Refutations. The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, pp. 467-476, p. 474.

<sup>692</sup> For an overview of Rosenzweig's view's on Islam see "*Innerlich bleibt die Welt eine*": *ausgewählte Texte zum Islam*, ed. by Gesine Palmer and Yossef Schwartz.

<sup>693</sup> See Amir, Yehoyada, "Ewigkeit und Wahrheit. Die Messianische Erkenntnistheorie Rosenzweigs", p. 148, and Mendes-Flohr, Paul, "Franz Rosenzweig's Concept of Philosophical Faith".

<sup>694</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 113/*Stern*, p. 115.

Rosenzweig's views on the relationship between philosophy and theology have a certain influence also on his notion of truth. By asserting concisely that "God is truth [*Gott ist die Wahrheit*]",<sup>695</sup> in the first sentence of Book three in Part III, Rosenzweig leaves no doubt that, in his view, the source of truth is beyond the power of man to comprehend. God, as the source of truth, is conceived, as Kenneth Hart Green points out, as a "transcendent entity to which man can rise and from which [man can] attain truth"; however God is at the same time,

[...] one who also appears as ultimately beyond both words and form. Consequently, while man can attain a notion of God, the apprehension derives from a limited human experience rather than a god-like intellection, and hence he can only represent Him figuratively or symbolically rather than absolutely.<sup>696</sup>

Therefore, on the last pages of *The Star of Redemption* Rosenzweig describes how the abstract notion of truth is configured in the structure of the Star of David, which he characterizes as a countenance, i.e. a human face. This ultimately allows for an interpretation of truth which goes somehow beyond the duality of religious faith, Judaism and Christianity, which for Rosenzweig "summarizes in a quasi-paradigmatic manner the essential plurality of human experience."<sup>697</sup> In this sense, some of Rosenzweig's disciples, like Ernst Akiva Simon and Hugo Bergmann, have interpreted in their works his notion of truth beyond the scope of the duality of Judaism and Christianity.<sup>698</sup> Although the notion of truth in *The Star of Redemption* is essentially linked to Judaism and Christianity, it has been rightly pointed out by Yehoyada Amir that Rosenzweig's epistemology offers ultimately a broader perspective: "In it lies a comprehensive, ecumenical potential, which is inclined to juxtapose – at least in principle – different experiences of faith and different religious configurations of these experiences and of life in the face of the divine eternity."<sup>699</sup>

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<sup>695</sup> Ibid., p. 403/p. 423.

<sup>696</sup> Hart Green, Kenneth, "The Notion of Truth in Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption*", p. 302. See also Schwartz, Michal, *Metapher und Offenbarung. Zur Sprache von Franz Rosenzweigs Stern der Erlösung*.

<sup>697</sup> Mosès, Stéphane, *System and Revelation. The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 262/*Système et Révélation. La philosophie de Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 276. See also ibid., chapter VII "Judaism" and chapter VIII "Christianity", pp. 174-261/pp. 180-275.

<sup>698</sup> See Amir, Yehoyada, "Ewigkeit und Wahrheit. Die Messianische Erkenntnistheorie Rosenzweigs", p. 162.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid., p. 164: "In ihr steckt ein umfassendes ökumenisches Potential, das – zumindest prinzipiell – verschiedene Glaubenserlebnisse und verschiedene religiöse Gestaltungen dieser Erlebnisse und des Lebens im Angesicht der göttlichen Ewigkeit nebeneinander zu stellen bereit ist."

Rosenzweig's messianic epistemology and his notion of truth have to be seen in the broader context of contemporary religious life, if one is to consider them appropriately. As Ephraim Meir emphasizes,

[p]luralism in religion goes against absolute truth claims and exclusiveness. Although the appreciation of theological differences remains important, the common effort of the various communities with their specific languages to realize together human rights, to bring justice and peace, and to extend hospitality to each other is even more urgent.<sup>700</sup>

Meir argues in his article for an innovative approach to religious difference which highlights the notion of “trans-difference”.<sup>701</sup> He rejects the idea that religious thinking would be useless for our societies, only used as a pretext for violence and that the world would be much better off without religion, as e.g. Richard Dawkins argues in *The God Delusion*.<sup>702</sup> Based on the conviction that religions could positively contribute to the development of the modern world, Meir explains the notion “trans-difference” as follows:

‘Trans-difference’ between the three monotheistic religions expresses itself in an interaction between the religions in their functions within the broader secular society. Instead of tolerating, ghettoizing, privatizing, or demonizing religions, I propose a new and creative interaction between the secular society and religious cultures as well as a new sphere of interaction between the universal and the particular.<sup>703</sup>

This openness towards other religions, ready to acknowledge other religious ideas and truths, is important for making Rosenzweig's New Thinking useful for the present times. First and foremost, this is useful in overcoming the hegemony of the unity of reason as well as restrictive

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<sup>700</sup> Meir, Ephraim, “*Quo vadis, religio?* Religion as Terror and Violence or as Contribution to Civilization. A Plea for Trans-Difference”, in: Meir, Ephraim, *Identity Dialogically Constructed*, pp. 10-26, p. 20.

<sup>701</sup> On the notion of trans-difference see the anthology *Differenzen anders denken. Bausteine zu einer Kulturtheorie der Transdifferenz*, ed. by Lars Allolio-Näcke, Britta Kalscheuer and Arne Manzeschke.

<sup>702</sup> Meir, Ephraim, “*Quo vadis, religio?* Religion as Terror and Violence or as Contribution to Civilization. A Plea for Trans-Difference”, in: Meir, Ephraim, *Identity Dialogically Constructed*, pp. 10-26, here pp. 11-16. See further Dawkins, Richard, *The God Delusion*; Kippenberg, Hans G., *Gewalt als Gottesdienst. Religionskriege im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*, and Schmidt, Helmut, *Religion in der Verantwortung. Gefährdungen des Friedens im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*.

<sup>703</sup> Meir, Ephraim, “*Quo vadis, religio?* Religion as Terror and Violence or as Contribution to Civilization. A Plea for Trans-Difference”, in: Meir, Ephraim, *Identity Dialogically Constructed*, pp. 10-26, p. 25. On this topic see further, Amir, Yehoyada, “Religion and Religions in *The Star of Redemption*”.

religious worldviews and the idea that there is only *one* absolute truth; instead, there is the acknowledgement of a more “pluralistic thinking of reality”,<sup>704</sup> to which Rosenzweig’s work leads the way.

### 3. “*Light does not talk; but shines.*” – The vision of the face and the experience of truth

Arriving at his highest understanding, man is reduced to stillness.<sup>705</sup>

On the last pages of *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig expounds how his notion of truth is configured symbolically in the image of the *Magen David*, the Star of David. This symbol, which gave the name to Rosenzweig’s book, is characterized metaphorically by Rosenzweig as an ‘image of being’, or, more precisely, as an image of the *Jewish* being, as he points out in Book Three of Part III:

In the innermost narrows of the Jewish heart there shines the Star of Redemption. Here the Star blazes. That which is last, the innermost and the seeming narrowness and rigidity of feeling begins to flow and yields to the world-illuminating configuration, which just like in its combining of God, world, man into Creation and Revelation toward Redemption expresses the content of Judaism, now also flames up still in the core of the Jewish soul. The Star of Redemption is therefore a likeness of the essence [...]. [*Der Stern der Erlösung ist so Gleichnis des Wesens...*]<sup>706</sup>

The truth, which is expressed by Judaism, according to Rosenzweig, is thus linked essentially to the symbol of the *Star of David*, which stands as a configuration of the eternal truth. As I have outlined, the eternal truth finds its expression for Rosenzweig in Judaism and Christianity. However, what is at stake in the last pages of *The Star of Redemption* is the question of *how* this truth is finally experienced by man. At this point, an ambiguous scene becomes apparent in Rosenzweig’s system of philosophy: although it is well-known that Rosenzweig had a rather

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<sup>704</sup> Kirchner, Katrin J., *Franz Rosenzweigs Theorie der Erfahrung*, p. 46ff.

<sup>705</sup> Heschel, Abraham Joshua, *Man’s Quest for God. Studies in Prayer and Symbolism*, p. 42.

<sup>706</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 434/*Stern*, p. 457.



negative attitude toward mysticism and a “rudimentary knowledge of Kabbala”,<sup>707</sup> he nevertheless describes the ultimate experience of truth, outlined on the last pages of *The Star*, as a vision of “the shining of the divine face”.<sup>708</sup> Rosenzweig underlines clearly the primacy of the vision in this context: “In the view we grasp eternal truth. [*In der Schau erfassen wir die ewige Wahrheit.*]”<sup>709</sup> This primacy of the vision is linked to the way in which truth as such shows itself, i.e. as *light* – “God is truth. [...] God is light.”<sup>710</sup> Light as a symbol of what lies beyond words and beyond grasp of the human mind is a well-known metaphor in the history of metaphysics. Since its very beginning, metaphysics has used this metaphor of light in order to provide an appropriate expression for its last and least conceivable issues.<sup>711</sup> Describing the truth as light entails that truth appear *immediately* and does not unfold gradually in a process, as we see in language, which is formed by words and their concatenation; this needs time to be articulated. On the contrary, truth is conceived by Rosenzweig rather as a *vision* that steps out of the twilight of doubts and forces the conviction of the mind. Rosenzweig connects this ‘lightful’ truth with the human face and links the vision of the face with the configuration of the Star of David, which structure he sees mirrored in the system of *The Star of Redemption*:

In the Star of Redemption in which we saw the divine truth become configuration, nothing else lights up than the countenance that God turned shining toward us. We shall now recognize in the divine face the Star of Redemption itself as it now finally became clear for us as configuration. And only in this recognition is its cognition perfected. [...] *Only when we see the Star as countenance are we quite beyond all possibility of possibilities and simply see.*<sup>712</sup>

Hence, truth is ultimately experienced not as language, but as a vision or, more precisely, as a vision of a *configuration*.<sup>713</sup> This shows that Rosenzweig conceives truth as something beyond

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<sup>707</sup> Horwitz, Rivka, “From Hegelianism to a Revolutionary Understanding of Judaism: Franz Rosenzweig’s attitude toward Kabbala and Myth”, p. 32. For evidence of Rosenzweig’s negative attitude regarding mysticism see the references in Glatzer, Nahum N., “Was Franz Rosenzweig a Mystic?”, p. 121.

<sup>708</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 441/*Stern*, p. 465. For a detailed overview about the influence of Kabbala on Rosenzweig’s work, see Horwitz, Rivka, “From Hegelianism to a Revolutionary Understanding of Judaism: Franz Rosenzweig’s attitude toward Kabbala and Myth”.

<sup>709</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 414/*Stern*, p. 436.

<sup>710</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403/p. 423.

<sup>711</sup> Blumenberg, Hans, “Licht als Metapher der Wahrheit. Im Vorfeld der philosophischen Begriffsbildung”, p. 140.

<sup>712</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 441 and p. 445/*Stern*, p. 465 and p. 470, emphasis added. For an inspiring discussion of this passage with respect to Levinas see Schwartz, Michal, “Bahn and Bann. Figures of Temporality and Infinity in *The Star of Redemption*”, pp. 887-889.

<sup>713</sup> On the notion of *configuration* see the foreword of Benjamin, Walter, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 34/*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, p. 16. See further the discussion on “Speech and Figure” [“Sprechen und

language, which is experienced only in the vision. The complexity of the connection between truth and face has been highlighted by Stéphane Mosès: “Truth is the manifestation of the hidden essence of God, just as the human face is the way the transcendence of the other is revealed to me. It is precisely because Truth appears here in its totality that it cannot give itself within the concreteness of lived experience but only in the pure space of vision.”<sup>714</sup> The totality of truth appears to man thus only in the *vision*, in a sphere beyond language, whereas in life he can concretely experience only parts of this eternal truth.

With respect to the philosophy of Levinas, it is highly interesting in this context, that Rosenzweig connects the two notions *face* (human/divine) and *truth*. The last section of *The Star*, entitled with the heading “Gate”, since it opens up, in Rosenzweig’s view, beyond the book and leads into real life, begins in this sense as follows:

That which is eternal had become configuration in the truth. And truth is nothing other than the countenance of this configuration. Truth alone is its countenance. And take much care, for the sake of your souls: “No figure have you seen, speech only have you heard,”<sup>715</sup> – so it is said in the world of Revelation with and around us. But the word grows silent in the afterworld and supra-world, in the redeemed world, which the blessing said at the right time and in the right place, full of higher power, forces hither. Of it, complete and at peace, it is said: “May he let his countenance shine upon you.”<sup>716</sup>  
*This shining of the divine face alone is truth.*<sup>717</sup>

With respect to the philosophical approach of Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*, it must be asked if this “shining of the divine face” has to be understood as a *metaphorical* expression or if Rosenzweig refers in this context to a *mystical* experience. Therefore, before I go on to expound Rosenzweig’s vision of the face, I want to draw attention to the letters Rosenzweig wrote to his beloved Gritli. A look at these letters can give useful information in this context about Rosenzweig’s situation during the writing process, which will shed light on the mystical approach. In his letter from October 4, 1918, Rosenzweig describes to Gritli how he saw the

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Figur”] in: Schwartz, Michal, *Metapher und Offenbarung. Zur Sprache von Franz Rosenzweigs Stern der Erlösung*, pp. 77-81. For a further reading on the notion of configuration with respect to Theodor W. Adorno, see Kaufmann, David, “Correlations, Constellations and the Truth. Adorno’s Ontology of Redemption”.

<sup>714</sup> Mosès, Stéphane, *System and Revelation*, p. 284/*Système et Révélation*, p. 300.

<sup>715</sup> Deuteronomy 4:12.

<sup>716</sup> Numbers 6:25.

<sup>717</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 441/*Stern*, p. 465, emphasis added. See further Meir, Ephraim, “Le ‘très bien’ et la finitude de l’existence selon Rabbi Méir, la Kabbale et Rosenzweig”, pp. 223-224.

figure of the star before him in real life: “I saw it again with eyes and every detail in it. [*Ich sah ihn wieder mit Augen und alles Einzelne in ihm.*]”<sup>718</sup> Thus it has been pointed out by Elliot Wolfson that Rosenzweig in fact attempted “to incorporate into his system his own unique mystical experience [...]”<sup>719</sup> Rivka Horwitz has underlined how important these personal experiences had been for the writing of *The Star of Redemption*: “The book, in its entirety, was written in ecstasy, an outcome of these experiences.”<sup>720</sup> The role of his muse Gritli, who inspired Rosenzweig profoundly and encouraged him to find an adequate expression for his experiences, should not be underestimated in this process.<sup>721</sup> Only a few weeks after the above cited ‘mystical’ letter, which expresses an overwhelming experience, he wrote Gritli on November 2, 1918, that he sometimes felt like a little child who cannot write and yet wants to, and that he is only able to write because she guides his hand.<sup>722</sup> Some days later, on November 8, 1918, Rosenzweig added that “all writing is writing to you; you are looking constantly over my shoulder.”<sup>723</sup> That this was not just a temporary feeling can be seen from Rosenzweig’s statement about a year and a half later, in which he admits to Gritli: “I cannot properly write to you today; your words are missing. From what, then, do I live?”<sup>724</sup> This shows that her letters and her inspiration through love played a decisive role for Rosenzweig’s writing. In this context, the mystical experiences he had can be seen as intertwined with his strong feelings for Gritli and it is by no means an exaggeration to highlight the love he felt for her as a condition sine qua non for the writing of *The Star of Redemption*. His love for Gritli gave him the ecstatic openness for the mystical experience he underwent at this period. The exact connection between the love for Gritli and the mystical

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<sup>718</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Gritli-Briefe*, 4.10.1918, pp. 159-160, p. 159. See also the interpretation of this letter in: Pollock, Benjamin, *Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy*, Chapter V, “The All, the Star, and God’s Face: Vision and Life at the End of The Star of Redemption”, especially pp. 258-261.

<sup>719</sup> Wolfson, Elliot R., “Light Does Not Talk But Shines: Apophasis and Vision in Rosenzweig’s Theopoetic Temporality”, p. 89. See also Mosès, Stéphane, who points to “the deeply mystical tendencies underlying the whole of the system” of *The Star*, in: *System and Revelation*, p. 284/*Système et Révélation*, p. 300.

<sup>720</sup> Horwitz, Rivka, “From Hegelianism to a Revolutionary Understanding of Judaism: Franz Rosenzweig’s Attitude toward Kabbala and Myth”, p. 43.

<sup>721</sup> Indeed, this remarkable woman, Anna Margaretha (Margrit) Huessy (1893-1959), the wife of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and the beloved muse of Franz Rosenzweig, would deserve a biographical study of her own. A first, very short biographical overview, written by Freya von Moltke (the second wife of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and the widow of James von Moltke, the German resistance fighter against the Nazi regime), can be found in: Gormann-Thelen, Michael, “Franz Rosenzweigs Briefe an Margrit (Gritli) Rosenstock. Ein Zwischenbericht mit drei Dokumenten”, pp. 62-63.

<sup>722</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Gritli-Briefe*, 2.11.1918, pp. 177-178, p. 177: “Manchmal ist mir, als wäre ich ein Kind, das nicht schreiben kann und es doch gern möchte und du führtest mir die Feder.”

<sup>723</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.11.1918, pp. 178-181, pp. 178-179: “Der Stern ist jetzt freilich in einem Teil wo alles Schreiben daran Schreiben an dich ist; du siehst mir immerfort über die Schulter.”

<sup>724</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.03.1920, p. 564: “Ich kann dir heute nicht recht schreiben, mir fehlt ein Wort von dir. Wovon lebe ich denn?”

experience can be seen in the event of opening up towards a transcendent sphere, that is to say the other. Rosenzweig describes this event in *The Star* as the metamorphosis of the silent Self to a speaking soul that loves and is loved and thereby animates the world. In a certain sense, Rosenzweig himself underwent such a metamorphosis and the excited love letters he wrote nearly on a daily basis to his beloved prove this. Thus, in my view, the role of Gritli has been until now underestimated in this context.

To elaborate further Rosenzweig's mystical experience, it is important to take into consideration the ongoing discussion of Kabbala and Rosenzweig's work. As early as 1931, it has been pointed out by Gershom Scholem, *The Star of Redemption* had a strong mystical tendency: "[...] it moves from the positions of reason to a theistic mysticism and gives support to strictly mystical theologoumena [...]. [...] It was an attempt, mystical in the strictest sense, to construct that which did not allow of construction, the star of redemption."<sup>725</sup> Furthermore, Nahum N. Glatzer, a friend of Rosenzweig and participant of the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt as student and teacher, took up this line of thought from Scholem in 1979 in his article "Was Franz Rosenzweig a Mystic?". Glatzer sums up the issue at stake as follows: "[...] although he was not a mystic, Rosenzweig did reach a position of 'theistic mysticism', operating with 'strictly mystical theologoumena'. A paradoxical position? Perhaps, but one resolved by the peculiar spiritual odyssey of the man himself."<sup>726</sup> Both Scholem and Glatzer opted for a kind of *theistic mysticism* in order to characterize Rosenzweig's understanding of redemption. This tendency has been taken up again recently by Elliot Wolfson as an elaboration of the thought-provoking impulses given through the works of Glatzer and Scholem. Wolfson remarks that "the emphasis on the visual at the end of the *Star* betrays an affinity to, if not direct influence of, kabbalah [...]."<sup>727</sup> Around 1980, another Kabbalah scholar, Moshe Idel, discovered parallels between Rosenzweig and Kabbalah and wrote a pioneering paper about the similarities between both subjects. In his article, he explains that Rosenzweig was clearly influenced by the so-called Lurianic Kabbalah, i.e. the teachings of Isaac Luria (1534-1572), and that this can be traced back to the so-called germ cell (*Ur-Zelle*) of *The Star of Redemption*, a letter Rosenzweig wrote to his

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<sup>725</sup> Scholem, Gershom, "On the 1930 Edition of Rosenzweig's Star of Redemption", in: Scholem, Gershom, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, pp. 320-324, here pp. 322-323.

<sup>726</sup> Glatzer, Nahum N., "Was Franz Rosenzweig a Mystic?", p. 131.

<sup>727</sup> Wolfson, Elliot R., "Light Does Not Talk But Shines: Apophysis and Vision in Rosenzweig's Theopoetic Temporality", p. 87. See also Wolfson, Elliot R., "Facing the Effaced: Mystical Eschatology and the Idealistic Orientation in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig".

cousin Rudolf Ehrenberg on November 18, 1917.<sup>728</sup> According to Idel, this line of thought started to take shape in Rosenzweig's mind even before the First World War, as can be seen in Rosenzweig's article "Atheistic Theology". However, it is only in *The Star of Redemption* that

[...] the kabbalistic idea of unification occupies a very important place [...]. [...] The expression 'Star of Redemption' [...] is an expression of the unique way of the Jew, the kabbalistic way, leading to God and the world: the Jew in his own unique way intends to redeem God, himself and the world.<sup>729</sup>

Last but not least, in 2006 Rivka Horwitz published an inspiring essay on the topic, which resumed the outlined aspects and added new insights. According to Horwitz, "Rosenzweig anchors his theology in Kabbala, which presented him with the dynamic mythical dialogue he sought."<sup>730</sup> She further points out that, in a revealing diary note from June 30, 1922, Rosenzweig underlines: "The true predecessors of my problem are *nevertheless* in the Kabbala."<sup>731</sup> This shows not only that Rosenzweig, after having completed *The Star*, reflected further on the Kabbalah and its subjects, but that he indeed saw his own philosophical project connected to the Kabbalah in some sense. In her interpretation of this diary note, Horwitz highlights that in

[...] this fragment Rosenzweig admits for the first time that his dialectic is from the Kabbala. However, his philosophy is constructed not merely on God but also on man and the world. Each element has an inner dialectic that resembles Kabbala. In 1922 he realized that this is the Kabbala present in his work.<sup>732</sup>

To sum up the problem, Horwitz does not deny the ambivalent tendencies between, on the one hand, Rosenzweig's repudiation of mysticism and, on the other, an obvious influence of kabbalistic themes and motifs on his thinking. However, she emphasizes: "Rosenzweig wanted to hold the rope on both ends: Kabbala and life, Kabbala and the here and now, which are usually

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<sup>728</sup> Idel, Moshe, "Franz Rosenzweig and the Kabbalah", pp. 166-167. See also Rosenzweig, Franz, "'Urzelle' des Stern der Erlösung. Brief an Rudolf Ehrenberg vom 18.11.1917", in: Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, III, pp. 125-138, p. 128/"'Urzelle' to the Star of Redemption", in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 48-72, p. 57. For the influence of Isaac Luria on Levinas's thinking, see Ajzenstat, Oona, "Levinas and Luria", in: Ajzenstat, Oona, *Driven Back to the Text. The Premodern Sources of Levinas's Postmodernism*, pp. 170-199.

<sup>729</sup> Idel, Moshe, "Franz Rosenzweig and the Kabbalah", p. 165.

<sup>730</sup> Horwitz, Rivka, "From Hegelianism to a Revolutionary Understanding of Judaism: Franz Rosenzweig's attitude toward Kabbala and Myth", p. 35.

<sup>731</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, I, 2, pp. 800-801, here p. 800, emphasis in the original.

<sup>732</sup> Horwitz, Rivka, "From Hegelianism to a Revolutionary Understanding of Judaism: Franz Rosenzweig's attitude toward Kabbala and Myth", p. 42.

considered contradictory.”<sup>733</sup> This sums up adequately in my view the paradoxical position, which can be found in Rosenzweig’s work regarding the attitude to Kabbalah. In this sense, reality remains, besides all “mystical tendencies”,<sup>734</sup> ultimately decisive since it is in this sphere that the truth is verified for man in the long run, as Stéphane Mosès emphasizes: “[...] Rosenzweig’s system does not lead to a beyond of mystical contemplation but points to the reality of life.”<sup>735</sup>

Rosenzweig’s mystical approach is linked, as I have pointed out, to the figure of the Star of David and to the vision of the divine face. After having completed *The Star*, Rosenzweig sought predecessors in Kabbalah, which may have used the Star of David in a way similar to that which he used in his book. However, he did not find any Jewish thinkers who had used the symbol in this special way. Disappointed, he wrote to Gritli: “I have no forerunners with regard to the Star, – unfortunately. [...] Too bad. I really have no more respect for what I have done, if it really starts only with me.”<sup>736</sup> Indeed, Gershom Scholem has shown that “[t]he hexagram is not a Jewish symbol, much less ‘the symbol of Judaism’.”<sup>737</sup> In his article “The Star of David: History of a Symbol”, published in 1948, Scholem argues that the symbol does not originate in the Bible nor in Talmud and was in fact first used in the Middle Ages in magic formulas and practical Kabbalah.<sup>738</sup> Given the disenchantment Rosenzweig experienced in this regard, Rivka Horwitz has assumed that “as a result of this disappointing conclusion he then added in the end of the book an analysis of the Face, that is, the Face of God, which alludes to the anthropos<sup>739</sup> combined with the Jewish Star.”<sup>740</sup> Indeed, in the last section of the *The Star*, the vision of the divine face is combined with the configuration of the Star of David. Rosenzweig describes in detailed manner how this countenance is structured, what the different functions of the organs are, and in which way they can be related to the figure of the Star of David. I quote the passage of Rosenzweig’s

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<sup>733</sup> Ibid.

<sup>734</sup> Mosès, Stéphane, *System and Revelation*, p. 284/*Système et Révélation*, p. 300.

<sup>735</sup> Ibid., p. 286/p. 302. For a comparison of language and mysticism in the works of Rosenzweig and Benjamin, see further Mosès, Stéphane, “Langage et Mystique chez Walter Benjamin et Franz Rosenzweig”, in: Mosès, Stéphane, *Franz Rosenzweig, Sous l’Étoile*, pp. 131-166.

<sup>736</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Gritli-Briefe*, 12.03.1919, pp. 252-253, p. 253.

<sup>737</sup> Scholem, Gershom, “The Star of David: History of a Symbol”, in: Scholem, Gershom, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, pp. 257-281, p. 259.

<sup>738</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>739</sup> The term “anthropos”, also called “Adam Kadmon” (which means literally “original man”), appears in the Kabbalah as well as in Gnosticism to express the idea of a “primal man”.

<sup>740</sup> Horwitz, Rivka, “From Hegelianism to a Revolutionary Understanding of Judaism: Franz Rosenzweig’s attitude toward Kabbala and Myth”, p. 45.

description of the face at length, since it is central for his understanding of truth, and will help me to expound my interpretation afterwards:

Just as in the two superimposed triangles the Star reflects its elements and the collection of the elements into the one path, so too the organs of the countenance are divided into two levels. For the vital points of the countenance are after all these ones where it enters into contact with the surrounding world, be it receptively or actively. The ground level, the building blocks so to speak, of the face, the mask, is made up, is arranged according to the receptive organs: forehead and cheeks. The ears belong to the cheeks and the nose to the forehead. Ears and nose are the organs of pure receiving. The nose belongs to the forehead and it occurs in the holy language to mean the whole face. The fragrance of sacrifices applies to the nose as do the moving of the lips to the ears. Over this first basic triangle, as it is formed by the midpoint of the forehead as the dominant point of the whole face and the midpoints of the cheeks, there now lies a second triangle which is made from the organs whose action animates the rigid mask of the first one: eyes and mouth. The eyes do not as it were mimic each other identically, but whereas the left one sees more receptively and uniformly, the right one looks sharply focused on one point; only the right one ‘sparkles’ – a division of labor that frequently also eventually engraves its traces in the soft area around the eye sockets of old heads, so that then that asymmetric formation of the face becomes noticeable from the front, which otherwise is generally noticeable only in the well-known difference between the two profiles. As forehead dominates the structure of the face, so its life, all that wrinkles up around the eyes and shines out from the eyes, collects finally in the mouth. The mouth is what completes and consummates all expression of which countenance is capable: both in speech and finally in the silence behind which speech fell back: in the kiss.<sup>741</sup>

This description of the face is remarkable for two aspects: firstly, the interweavement between the *figural* dimension of the Star of David and the attribution of the *real* organs of the face (nose, eyes, mouth, etc.) to it. This correspondence is surprising, to say the least, after the many pages of rational argumentation Rosenzweig draws up in his book. The intertwining of the transcendent, *divine* sphere (the face of God) and the real, *human* sphere (the face of man) is eye-catching and requires some clarification.<sup>742</sup> I want to put this connection in relation to a letter Rosenzweig

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<sup>741</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 445-446/*Stern*, pp. 470-471.

<sup>742</sup> The depiction of “God’s mystical structure through the categories of the human body is a classical theme of Kabbalistic literature”, in: Mosès, Stéphane, *System and Revelation*, p. 285/*Système et Révélation*, p. 301. See further Scholem, Gershom, “*Schi’ur Koma*; die mystische Gestalt der Gottheit”, in: Scholem, Gershom, *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit. Studien zu Grundbegriffen der Kabbala*, pp. 7-47.

wrote in November 1924, entitled “The Commandments: Divine or Human?”<sup>743</sup> In this text Rosenzweig highlights the aspect of the *unspeakable* of the experience of truth. In his eyes,

[...] what man experiences about God [...] is incommunicable, and he who speaks of it makes himself ridiculous. [...] [I]t is man’s own experience – utterly inexpressible – that is the fulfillment and realization of utterable truth. All that is needed is – to undergo this experience.<sup>744</sup>

Thus the conundrum: how can we speak about God, if all we can express about him is evident in *performing* his commandments? Rosenzweig speaks in this context of a “theo-human reality of the commandment” [“*gott-menschliche Wirklichkeit*”] which reveals itself in the performance of the commandments. This reality is ‘permeable’ for him, since he underlines that “[...] there is no rigid boundary in the relationship between God and man. [...] [T]he only boundary lies between what can and what cannot be expressed.”<sup>745</sup> The intertwining of the divine and the human face must be seen against this background of Rosenzweig’s understanding of the *unspeakable* experience of truth as realized in the “theo-human reality of the commandment”. There is no rigid boundary in the relationship between God and man, and Rosenzweig expresses this symbolically in the superposition of the divine and the human face at the end of *The Star*. In other words, man finds an access to *human* reality through the fulfillment of the *divine* commandments. The aspect of the unspeakable (*Unsagbare*), mentioned in Rosenzweig’s letter, is further connected to the second facet to which I would like to draw attention regarding the above cited description of the ‘face’. This is Rosenzweig’s highlighting of the *silence*, realized ultimately in the kiss, which takes place beyond all language. Thus, the mouth has an ambivalent function: on the one hand, it is through the mouth that the ‘organon of revelation’, i.e. language, is proffered and, on the other, the mouth is precisely deprived of this central function when it reaches the truth; in the silence of

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<sup>743</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “The Commandments: Divine or Human?”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *On Jewish Learning*, pp. 119-124/“Den Aussprechern im Lehrhaus: *Göttlich und menschlich*”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, I, 2, pp. 1001-1005. The letter is dated November 1924 and is addressed to the “speakers in the Lehrhaus”, i.e. Martin Goldner, Nahum N. Glatzer, Hans Epstein and Lotte Fürth. With his letter Rosenzweig reacted to a report regarding discussions of Judaism at the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus*.

<sup>744</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120/p. 1002. On the related topic of ‘negative theology’ see also the article of Derrida, Jacques, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials”/“Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations”, and the discussion of Derrida’s article with respect to the philosophy of Levinas, in: Srajek, Martin C., *In the Margins of Deconstruction*, pp. 208-218.

<sup>745</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “The Commandments: Divine or Human?”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *On Jewish Learning*, pp. 119-124, p. 121/“Den Aussprechern im Lehrhaus: *Göttlich und menschlich*”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, I, 2, pp. 1001-1005, p. 1003.



the *kiss* Rosenzweig silences all discourse conclusively.<sup>746</sup> Language is attributed thus a *divine* nature. It is the primal source of knowledge, before reason, and in this sense Rosenzweig's reflections on language join in some way the critique of Enlightenment's concept of reason outlined by Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788), whose conception of language is in fact close to Rosenzweig's, as Rivka Horwitz pointed out.<sup>747</sup> Language refers for Rosenzweig (besides the actual *real* language) also to a *beyond* of language, which is underscored by Rosenzweig in his recounting the Creation: "The word of God is Revelation only because at the same time it is the word of Creation. God said: Let there be light – and what is the light of God? It is man's soul."<sup>748</sup> This comparison, taken from the Bible (Proverbs, 20:27), underlines the similarity between the soul of man and the light of God. Thereby, man has the ability to reach knowledge, although the 'whole of truth' is captured only beyond language, in a *vision*.

When the influence of Rosenzweig on Levinas's thinking is taken into account, the differences between their concepts of the "face" are conspicuous. This aspect has been pointed out by Richard A. Cohen, who summarizes the differences as follows: "Rosenzweig's description of the face on barely one page of *The Star* presents a face far more graphic and symbolic than anything found anywhere in the entire work of Levinas."<sup>749</sup> The main difference in their concepts of the 'face' lies in the fact that Rosenzweig stresses the *graphic* dimension of the face, whereas Levinas focuses on the *ethical* dimension of the face. Furthermore, the focus of Rosenzweig's description of the face lies in the *mouth* (although it becomes silent in the end), whereas Levinas's emphasizes rather the *eyes* and sight as such as the locus of transcendence in the human face, which, however, exceeds human perception in the end:

The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes! When one observes the color of the eyes one is not in social relationship with the Other. The relation with the face can

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<sup>746</sup> On this topic, see Fishbane, Michael, *The Kiss of God. Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism*, and Meir, Ephraim, "Le 'très bien' et la finitude de l'existence selon Rabbi Méir, la Kabbale et Rosenzweig", pp. 224-225.

<sup>747</sup> Horwitz, Rivka, "La conception du langage chez Hamann et Rosenzweig"; the article re-appeared also in an English version, under the title "Hamann and Rosenzweig on Language: the Revival of Myth".

<sup>748</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 121/*Stern*, p. 123.

<sup>749</sup> Cohen, Richard A., "The Face of Truth in Rosenzweig, Levinas, and Jewish Mysticism", p. 178. See also the discussion of this article by Schwartz, Michal, *Metapher und Offenbarung. Zur Sprache von Franz Rosenzweigs Stern der Erlösung*, pp. 165-166.

surely be dominated by perception, but what is specifically the face is what cannot be reduced to that.<sup>750</sup>

Despite this ambivalent nature of the face, Levinas attaches much importance to the visual dimension. In his captivity notebooks, the *Carnets de captivité*, one can find the following note, which reveals the great importance Levinas attaches to vision:

To look someone in the eyes is to see the soul. Not as a thing. But looking in the eyes is seeing oneself seeing, or even more: I see myself seeing, seeing myself seeing... Infinite repetition realized in the instant. That is the soul. Reflection, but through alternation and through others. Hence the primacy of vision. For hearing, for touch, there is nothing like this. *The soul is in the eyes.*<sup>751</sup>

However, the importance of the view was relativized by Levinas later on, in his books after the war. In this sense, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas explains: “The relationship with the Other, transcendence, consists in speaking the world to the Other. [...] Transcendence is not a vision of the Other, but a primordial donation.”<sup>752</sup> This ‘donation’ is realized in a paradoxical situation, i.e. through language, as a saying, which is focused not in that what is actually *said*, but in the ‘donation’ of the saying itself and the very signification this saying has. In his philosophical notes, written approximately in the years 1949-50, Levinas points out this *meta-aspect* of language as follows: “*Language – light in which one sees the light.*”<sup>753</sup> Besides the banal function of language, i.e. the submitting of information, a higher signification is expressed by it, according to Levinas. To cope with this ambivalence of language is one of the main tasks of philosophers, as Levinas underlines: “But the philosopher has to come back to language to translate – be it by betraying them – the pure and unspeakable.”<sup>754</sup> The indispensable importance of language for philosophy is thus for Levinas a condition sine qua non of philosophical discourse, which has to find, always anew, words for the ineffable and a language for its search for truth, even if this truth

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<sup>750</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Ethics and Infinity*, pp. 85-86/*Éthique et Infini*, pp. 79-80. See also Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*, p. 78/*Ich und Du*, pp. 31: “In the beginning is the relation – as the category of being, as readiness, as a form that reaches out to be filled, as a model of the soul; the *a priori* of relation; *the innate you.*”

<sup>751</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, pp. 103-104: “Regarder quelqu’un dans les yeux, c’est voir l’âme. Non pas comme une chose. Mais regarder dans les yeux, c’est regarder se regarder, plus encore c’est: je regarde me regarder regardant me regarder... Itération à l’infini réalisée dans l’instant. C’est l’âme. Réflexion, mais par alternance et par autrui. C’est pourquoi primat de la vision. Pour l’ouïe, pour le toucher rien de tel. *L’âme est dans les yeux.*” Emphasis added.

<sup>752</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *TI*, pp. 173-174/*Ti*, p. 189.

<sup>753</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 295: “Le langage – lumière dans laquelle on voit la lumière.” Emphasis added.

<sup>754</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Without Identity”, in: *Humanism of the Other*, pp. 58-69, p. 65/“Sans identité”, in: *Humanisme de l’autre homme*, pp. 83-101, p. 95.

remains ultimately ineffable. The eyes play a central role in this context, according to Levinas: “The eyes break through the mask – the language of the eyes, impossible to dissemble. *The eye does not shine; it speaks.*”<sup>755</sup> Thus, Levinas emphasizes precisely the contrary of what Rosenzweig expounded: The face or, more precisely, *the eyes speak*, according to Levinas, whereas for Rosenzweig, as we have seen, language is ultimately surpassed by the *silence of the vision* of the light of the divine countenance.

Although language generates knowledge and is the sine qua non for the event of revelation, truth takes place, according to Rosenzweig, in the contemplation of the divine countenance, which is elevated beyond the realm of language. Truth ‘takes place’ in the vision of the shining of the divine countenance. Being conceived as light, it is not to be understood as a sort of development or process in itself, but rather as an *event* that takes place. Aside from the process of gathering information and facts, truth is ultimately something *eternal* for Rosenzweig. It is beyond the ‘time of the clocks’, beyond history. In this sense, Rosenzweig ends *The Star of Redemption* with an outlook of the world to come, *haOlam haba*, which no eye has seen yet, and in which truth will be experienced in its whole dimension.<sup>756</sup> However, a glance of the light of truth can be experienced also in the present of the real world. In its *shining*, truth reveals itself without the need of words, as Rosenzweig emphasizes:

*Light does not talk; but shines.* It is not at all turned in on itself; it radiates not inward but outward. Yet its radiating is also not a surrendering of itself, as language is; light does not give itself away, dispose of itself as does language when expressing itself, but it is visible while abiding entirely by itself, it does not exactly radiate outward, it only goes on radiating; it does not radiate like a fountain, but *like a face*, like an eye radiates, an eye that becomes eloquent without needing to open its lips. There is a silence here that is unlike the speechlessness of the primordial world that has no words yet, but a silence that no longer needs words. It is the silence of perfect understanding. Here, a glance says everything.<sup>757</sup>

This understanding of truth has led some scholars to the interpretation that Rosenzweig elaborates a “mystical doctrine of truth”.<sup>758</sup> For our question in this context, it is however more noteworthy

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<sup>755</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 66/Ti, p. 62, emphasis added.

<sup>756</sup> Chalier, Catherine, *Pensées de l'Éternité. Spinoza, Rosenzweig*, p. 170.

<sup>757</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 313/*Stern*, p. 328, emphasis added.

<sup>758</sup> Hart Green, Kenneth, “The Notion of Truth in Franz Rosenzweig’s *The Star of Redemption*”, p. 317.

to highlight the main characteristic of Rosenzweig's experience of truth, i.e. that it is centered in *silence*. Rosenzweig clearly underscores that "there is nothing more deeply Jewish than a final suspicion of the power of the word and a heart-felt confidence in the power of silence."<sup>759</sup> This aspect of the Jewish existence is important with respect to the role of language in Rosenzweig's thinking. "In remaining silent [...] the Jew keeps himself at the very heart of language," Alexander Düttmann points out: "The Jew *is* language, he *is* the name: for this 'reason' each Jewish generation is, as such, an attestation to the name."<sup>760</sup> The "inexpressible joy of being a Jew"<sup>761</sup> Franz Rosenzweig experienced is echoed in this 'speechlessness' (*Sprachlosigkeit*) of the experience of truth, which realizes itself in the concrete *life* of the Jew – beyond the realm of language – and "can only be understood existentially, not merely cognitively; [...]"<sup>762</sup> The silence of this experience is mirrored in the silent experience of prayer which unifies the religious community. Despite the high significance of language and speech in *The Star of Redemption*, it is ultimately the common liturgical gesture which transcends language and becomes 'something more than language', as Rosenzweig highlights:

[...] the height of liturgy is not the common word, but the common *gesture*. Liturgy frees the gesture from the chains of being the clumsy maidservant of language and turns it into *something more than language*. Only in the liturgical gesture is the 'purified lip' anticipated that is promised for 'that day' to peoples always linguistically divided. In it, the arid silence of the unbelieving members becomes eloquent, the overflowing talkativeness of the believing heart grows quiet. Unbelief and belief join their prayer.<sup>763</sup>

In a similar way, Abraham Heschel elaborates this idea in *Man's Quest for God*. Heschel claims that religious truth is liturgically realized by the *community* of the congregation that sings, whereas the *individual* remains silent. Heschel claims, that Jewish liturgy is

[i]n a sense, [...] a higher form of silence. It is pervaded by an awed sense of the grandeur of God which resists description and surpasses all expression. The individual is silent. He does not bring forth

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<sup>759</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 321/*Stern*, p. 335.

<sup>760</sup> Düttmann, Alexander García, *The Gift of Language. Memory and Promise in Adorno, Benjamin, Heidegger and Rosenzweig*, p. 13.

<sup>761</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, *Gritli-Briefe*, pp. 402-405, p. 402: "Ich weiss und fühle als lebendig (in meinem Geist) nur den unaussprechlichen Ekel gegenüber Christus. Und das ebenso unaussprechliche Glück, Jude zu sein und die Wahrheit mir nicht auf dem Umwege über die Lüge suchen zu müssen."

<sup>762</sup> See also Jospe, Raphael/Meir, Ephraim, "Franz Rosenzweig's Inexpressible Joy", p. 68.

<sup>763</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 313-314/*Stern*, p. 329, emphasis added.

his own words. His saying the consecrated words is in essence an act of listening to what they convey.

*The spirit of Israel speaks, the self is silent.*<sup>764</sup>

Further, Heschel points out: “True prayer is song.”<sup>765</sup> Because it is not the logical aspect of language which counts but the expression of the voices as such: the pure song. This does not mean that the song must perforce be absurd or illogical; it just highlights the aspect that spirituality continues also beyond language. In fact, the moment of silence in prayer could represent, in this sense, a continuation of the dialogue with God ‘by other means’, so to say. Rosenzweig refers, for instance, to the use of the shofar in the ceremonies of the New Year (*Rosh Ha-Shana*) and the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) in order to highlight that language is finally abandoned in favor of a non-verbal aid: the pure sound of the shofar instrument. However, this event is already precedented, with respect to the ceremony of the Day of Atonement, by an insistent repetition of the words: “The Lord, He is God.” Thus, Steven Schwarzschild points out: “No longer is it the meaning of the words but rather their rhythm, the scream of the soul that squeezes through them, the hammering of their insistent repetition, in which we place our hope.”<sup>766</sup> The experience of *silence* as a religious expression is therefore of great importance for Rosenzweig. He underlines even the function of the word, as a mode to achieve silence: “The word itself must guide man in so that he may learn to grow mutually silent. The beginning of this education is that he may *learn to listen*.”<sup>767</sup> This highlights again the limits of language and the point of view that reality contains ultimately more than only that which can be captured by words. This may ultimately be inherent in every expression of language since a total grasp of what is said and intended by the words of others is “conceptually impossible” [*“begrifflich unmöglich”*].<sup>768</sup> It seems therefore plausible, as Almuth Bruckstein points out, that a certain alienation is, paradoxically, the very condition sine qua non for understanding as such

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<sup>764</sup> Heschel, Abraham Joshua, *Man’s Quest for God. Studies in Prayer and Symbolism*, p. 44. For Heschel see also Meir, Ephraim, “Abraham Jehoshua Heschel. Over liefde en waarheid”, in: Meir, Ephraim, *Joods denken & danken*, pp. 15-19.

<sup>765</sup> Heschel, Abraham Joshua, *Man’s Quest for God. Studies in Prayer and Symbolism*, p. 44.

<sup>766</sup> Schwarzschild, Steven S., “Speech and Silence before God”, p. 196. See also *ibid.*, note 3: “The wide-spread and rather vulgar Jewish mocking at the Roman Catholic rosary-recitation should meet its demise at this point. Franz Rosenzweig discusses silence as religious expression [...] immediately before discussing the liturgy for the Day of Atonement.”

<sup>767</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 328/*Stern*, p. 343, emphasis added.

<sup>768</sup> Rödl, Sebastian, “Grenzen der Sprache”, pp. 266-267: “Eine Durchsicht auf das Denken und Fühlen eines anderen ist unmöglich, und zwar *begrifflich* unmöglich. [...] Solange noch jemand etwas meint und denkt, liegt das, was er meint und denkt, nicht völlig am Tage. Daß jemand etwas meint und sagt, schließt ein, daß ich noch nicht durch seine Worte hindurchsehe auf das, was er meint.”

[“*Entfremdung als Bedingung des Verstehens*”].<sup>769</sup> In this process silence holds a crucial place, since it lies precisely at the intersection between singular and mutual communication and opens up the dimension of a non-verbal, silent communication between human beings. This aspect has been underscored especially by Martin Buber in a passage of his book *Between Man and Man*, entitled “Silence which is communication [*Das mitteilende Schweigen*]”: “Speech can renounce all the media of sense, and it is still speech.”<sup>770</sup> Thus, the limits of language are not to be conceived as the limits of understanding, neither by Rosenzweig nor by Buber. The latter has pointed out this experience impressively in the following description, which I would like to cite at length here, since it illustrates an important aspect which I want to outline in this paragraph:

When Saint Louis, the king of France, decided to make a pilgrimage to the holy places and heard the call of holiness of Brother Aegidius, he resolved in his heart to visit him at home. When, for this reason, he came to Perugia during his travels where he had heard that the brother resided, he went to the gate of the brothers like a poor pilgrim and unknown, and there he ardently asked for the holy brother Aegidius. The gatekeeper went and told brother Aegidius that a pilgrim at the door was asking for him. He immediately knew through the Holy Spirit who it was. Stepping out of his cell as if drunken, he came to the gate running fast, and the two fell into a wondrous embrace and kneeling, kissed one another with great fervor as if they had known one another as the oldest of friends. And when they had given one another signs of ardent love, neither spoke a word to the other, but preserving silence in every way they parted. As Saint Louis was leaving, the brothers asked one of his companions who this man was who had been in such ardent embrace with Brother Aegidius. He answered that it was Louis, the king of France, who had wanted to behold the holy Brother Aegidius on his pilgrimage. Whereupon the brothers complained and said to Brother Aegidius: ‘Oh Brother Aegidius, why did you not want to say anything to such a great king who came from France to see you and to hear a good word of you?’ Brother Aegidius replied: ‘Dearest brothers, do not be surprised that neither he could say anything to me nor I to him, for as soon as we had embraced, the light of divine wisdom revealed his heart to me and mine to him. Standing in the eternal mirror we learned with perfect consolation what he had intended to say to me and I to him, without the noise of lips and tongue and better than we could have spoken with the lips. And had we wanted to explain with vocal

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<sup>769</sup> Bruckstein, Almuth Shulamit, “Der (un)endliche Text. Midrasch in den Marginalien der Philosophie”, in: Bruckstein, Almuth Shulamit, *Die Maske des Moses. Studien zur jüdischen Hermeneutik*, pp. 49-77, here p. 77.

<sup>770</sup> Buber, Martin, “Silence which is communication”, in: Buber, Martin, *Between Man and Man*, pp. 3-5, here p. 3/“Das mitteilende Schweigen”, in: Buber, Martin, *Das dialogische Prinzip*, pp. 141-143, here p. 142: “Sprache kann sich aller Sinnenfälligkeit begeben und bleibt Sprache.” The citation is taken from Buber’s book “Dialogue”/“Zwiesprache”, reprinted in the cited books, and was originally published in 1929. For a detailed interpretation of this passage which I can only briefly mention, given the scope of this section, see: Pinchevski, Amit, *By Way of Interruption. Levinas and the Ethics of Communication*, pp. 208-211.

sounds what we felt inwardly, such speech would rather have bestowed melancholy than consolation upon us. Thus you may know that he left hence wondrously comforted.<sup>771</sup>

In conclusion, I want to emphasize with respect to my reflections on the connection between eschatology and language in the thought of Levinas,<sup>772</sup> that Levinas also repeatedly speaks of an “eschatological *vision*” in the preface of *Totality and Infinity*. He outlines his interpretation of an ‘optical approach’ to ethics as follows:

The first ‘vision’ of eschatology [...] reveals the very possibility of eschatology, that is, the breach of the totality, the possibility of a *signification without a context*. The experience of morality does not proceed from this vision – it *consummates* this vision; ethics is an optics. But it is a ‘vision’ without image, bereft of the synoptic and totalizing objectifying virtues of vision, a relation or an intentionality of a wholly different type – which this work [*Totality and Infinity*] seeks to describe.<sup>773</sup>

Since the vision of the face cannot be seized as such, it is not a *sensual* experience for Levinas, but a *transcendent* one. It is the invasion of a signification without a context that disturbs the order of the related significations (as a word/signification is related to an object). The face thus ‘speaks’ an *absolute* message, which cannot be related to something contingent (for instance, to *this* or *that* human face), but which has a universal significance beyond all significations and which gives meaning to all these significations. The interhuman relationship is in this context of crucial importance for Levinas. In his preparatory notes to *Totality and Infinity*, one can even find the following, telling sentence: “Man is God for man,”<sup>774</sup> which shows Levinas’s ongoing reflections on this subject. However, in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas clearly explains that the other is *not* God, but that it is through his or her face that man is able to experience ‘holiness’. According to Levinas, “[t]he Other is not the incarnation of God, but precisely by his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed.”<sup>775</sup> The meta-vision of the face is hence of fundamental importance for the divine experience, i.e. the revelation of God. Even if God is conceived by Levinas as invisible, He reveals Himself through the vision of the face of the other, and thus becomes accessible for man: “A God invisible means

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<sup>771</sup> Buber, Martin, *Ekstatische Konfessionen*, pp. 61-62, cited after the English translation of Schwarzschild, Steven S., in his article “Speech and Silence before God”, p. 202.

<sup>772</sup> See chapter II, 2. a), “Language and eschatology in the work of Levinas”.

<sup>773</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 23/Ti, p. 8. Just a few pages after, Levinas develops this idea further: “Already of *itself* ethics is an ‘optics’.” Ibid., p. 29/p. 15.

<sup>774</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 420: “L’homme est Dieu pour l’homme.”

<sup>775</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 79/Ti, p. 77.

not only a God unimaginable, but a God accessible in justice. *Ethics is the spiritual optics*. [...] There can be no ‘knowledge’ of God separated from the relationship with men. The Other is the very locus of metaphysical truth, and is indispensable for my relation with God.”<sup>776</sup> In this relation to the other, language plays a crucial role for Levinas. It connects people with one another and has thereby the power to create a ‘common world’ among men – the spirit of the word unites humanity in all its cultural and linguistic diversity, an aspect also emphasized in Martin Buber’s work.<sup>777</sup> This important role of language among men becomes evident from the following citation of Levinas:

Language does not exteriorize a representation preexisting in me: it puts in common a world hitherto mine. Language effectuates the entry of things into a new ether in which they receive a name and become concepts. It is a first action over and above labor, an action without action, even though speech involves the effort of labor [...]. The analyses of language that tend to present it as one meaningful action among others fail to recognize this *offering* [*offre*] of the world, this offering of contents which answers to the face of the Other or which questions him, and first opens the perspective of the meaningful. The ‘vision’ of the face is inseparable from this offering language is. **To see the face is to speak of the world.** [*Voir le visage, c’est parler du monde.*] Transcendence is not an optics, but the first ethical gesture.<sup>778</sup>

One can say, in this sense, that Levinas’s thinking is directed toward language; Rosenzweig’s thinking on the other hand ultimately leads to silence as the concluding point of his discourse. According to Levinas, as we have seen, language *begins* in the face, whereas for Rosenzweig language *ends* precisely in (the ‘vision’ of) the face. The common notion of revelation, which is located by both thinkers in language, is differently discussed with respect to their notions of the vision of the face. Nevertheless, since language will be elaborated under the aspect of the *voice* in the upcoming chapter IV, the following reflections could nevertheless provide a common approach. Language, conceived as *voice*, is ultimately a non-place. It is never really ‘here’ since

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<sup>776</sup> Ibid., p. 78/pp. 76-77.

<sup>777</sup> Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*, p. 89/*Ich und Du*, p. 41: “Spirit in its human manifestation is man’s response to his You. Man speaks in many tongues – tongues of language, of art, of action – but the spirit is one; it is response to the You that appears from the mystery and addresses us from the mystery. Spirit is word.” See further the articles by Seemann, Birgit, “‘Man redet nicht zueinander’ – Martin Buber und der interreligiöse Dialog”, and Krochmalnik, Daniel, “Dom und heiliger Sand. Ausblicke auf eine Erneuerung des christlich-jüdischen Dialogs im Anschluss an Martin Buber”.

<sup>778</sup> Ibid., p. 174/pp. 189-190, emphasis added.



it passes away and escapes the grasp in its very emerging. The place of the event of the revelation would be, in this sense, a non-place for both thinkers.

## Chapter IV

### The phenomenon of the voice in Rosenzweig and Levinas

#### 1. Presence through voice – towards a new definition of Levinas’s conception of subjectivity

A voice comes from the other shore.

A voice interrupts the saying of the already said.<sup>779</sup>

In the following, I further outline issues regarding Levinas’s concepts of the Saying and the Said and relate them to the recently expanded research literature on the phenomenon of the voice, trying to show how these new approaches to the voice could offer an innovative perspective for Levinas’s studies. Some aspects of the voice with respect to Levinas’s notion of an ‘ethical language’ (*langage éthique*) have been already worked out in an earlier chapter.<sup>780</sup> I want to take up and to further develop these aspects here while putting them in relation to the recently elaborated new interpretations of the voice.

At first, the voice seems to play a minor role in Levinas’s *Otherwise than Being*, where he elaborates the notions of the Saying and the Said. Nonetheless, it is precisely through the *voice* that the Saying, an important notion in *Otherwise than Being*, expresses itself. The voice is the instrument through which the Saying conveys itself to the other. Saying is characterized by Levinas as being wholly sign, signifying nothing but itself, and the saying of this very saying is the statement of the “Here I am”, which is identified with the very voice. All this is exactly what is realized through the voice. “‘Here I am’ as a witness of the Infinite, but a witness that does not thematize what it bears witness of. [...] It is by the voice of the witness that the glory of the

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<sup>779</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *OBBE*, p. 183/AQE, p. 280.

<sup>780</sup> See chapter II, 3. a), “The notion of an ‘ethical language’ in Levinas’s thought – breathing, voice and the saying of ‘things that can’t be said’”.

Infinite is glorified.”<sup>781</sup> In the following, I want to draw a broader parallel from Levinas’s point of view to the recently increased interest in the voice.<sup>782</sup> To start with, it is not an overestimation to characterize the voice as the pivotal point of social sciences: “The humanities are, at their core, voice arts.”<sup>783</sup> The voice constitutes the human being as a social being, a *zoon politikon*, linked through language with the other members of human society. However, before there is language, there is the voice. The function of language is founded on the transmission of the sound by the voice; otherwise it would remain a mere abstract figure without concrete existence. “The voice seems to possess the power to turn words into acts; [...] a passage to action and an exertion of authority.”<sup>784</sup> Through the voice one conveys oneself to the other, through its breath the words transport a meaning. Therefore, in many languages there is an etymological link between spirit and breath; for instance, in Hebrew the word *ruach* [רוח] means *spirit* and *wind*. So there is, on the one hand, the voice as content as such (*spirit*), and, on the other, as a medium, an instrument to convey a message, i.e. the voice as pure sound (*wind*).<sup>785</sup> The latter is, as such, nothing but air, the most fugitive of the elements; however, at a closer look, it is precisely not just air, but *breath*, i.e. the breath of a living spirit and a living body. The voice ties together these two elements, body and spirit, by constituting a unique identity of every human being: “We can almost unflinching identify a person by the voice. [...] The voice is like the fingerprint, instantly recognizable and identifiable.”<sup>786</sup> But – and this is the point to which Levinas draws attention – the spoken word also stands for itself: speaking has a meaning as such. In a similar way, this aspect has been highlighted by Jean-Luc Nancy: “Voice has nothing to do with speech. Obviously there is no speech without voice, but there can be voice without speech.”<sup>787</sup> The act of speaking implicates a physical and an abstract aspect. A spoken word manifests an ephemeral presence that flows away with the breath that is exhausted. When the performance has finished,

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<sup>781</sup> Levinas, OBBE, p. 146/AQE, p. 229.

<sup>782</sup> See for example *Voculaires de la voix*, ed. by Danielle Cohen-Levinas and Barbara Cassin; Poizat, Michel, *Variations sur la voix*; Dolar, Mladen, *A Voice and Nothing More*; Nancy, Jean-Luc, *À l’écoute; Zwischen Rauschen und Offenbarung. Zur Kultur und Mediengeschichte der Stimme*, ed. by Friedrich Kittler, Thomas Macho and Sigrid Weigel; *Medien/Stimmen*, ed. by Cornelia Epping-Jäger and Erika Linz; *Stimme. Annäherung an ein Phänomen*, ed. by Doris Kolesch and Sybille Krämer.

<sup>783</sup> Peters, John Durham, “The Voice and Modern Media”, p. 85. See also from the same author, *Speaking Into the Air. A History of the Idea of Communication*, with reference to Levinas’s thought especially pp. 20-21.

<sup>784</sup> Dolar, Mladen, *A Voice and Nothing More*, p. 55.

<sup>785</sup> On the voice as medium see Göttert, Karl-Heinz, *Geschichte der Stimme*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>786</sup> Dolar, Mladen, *A Voice and Nothing More*, p. 22. On this and the following see also Kolesch, Doris, “Die Spur der Stimme. Überlegungen zu einer performativen Ästhetik”, in: *Medien/Stimmen*, ed. by Cornelia Epping-Jäger and Erika Linz, pp. 267–81.

<sup>787</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 234.

the presence has vanished. The voice expresses itself only in this vanishing and in its “consummation”,<sup>788</sup> which is the sine qua non of its existence. Its presence is manifested by a constant withdrawal. In this sense, the Levinasian subject could be best described as a ‘presence with voice’. It is the living word, represented by the voice, that interests Levinas. However, regarding the limits of the voice, it has to be kept in mind that “no theme, *no present*, has a capacity for the Infinite,”<sup>789</sup> as Levinas states in *Otherwise than Being*. The voice consummates the presence out of which it is born and, in this way, constantly withdraws itself and rejects its presence. To sum it up briefly in a paradox: The voice is pure presence, which is never present as such – leaving its echo, “catch me if you can.”<sup>790</sup>

In this context, I want to draw attention to the concept of an *exegetical* reading, elaborated by Richard A. Cohen in his study *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy*. Exegesis is described by Cohen as a “text interpretation not through explanation derived from objective context alone, but through understanding derived from the text’s as well as the subject’s own subjective context.”<sup>791</sup> This requires an inspirational reading, which through its understanding goes beyond the borders of the text and arrives at a new horizon of meaning, unnoticed until that moment. In this sense, exegesis is seen as “the effort not to reduce transcendence,”<sup>792</sup> which seems to me one of the main assignments of Levinas’s philosophy. The “call for exegesis [*appel à l’exégèse*],”<sup>793</sup> lies at the core of the relation between the said and the saying. Levinas illustrates the complex relationship between the ‘call’ of the artwork and the exegesis as follows: “The exegesis is not something laid on to the resonance of essence in the artwork; *the resonance of essence vibrates within the said of the exegesis.*”<sup>794</sup> The task of the philosopher is therefore constantly “to awaken in the said the saying [*réveiller dans le Dit le Dire*],”<sup>795</sup> which is by its nature an ongoing project, a work-in-progress, in which the philosopher’s effort consists in “retaining an echo of the reduced

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<sup>788</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 181/AQE, p. 277.

<sup>789</sup> Ibid., p. 146/p. 229.

<sup>790</sup> See also Ward, Graham, “On Time and Salvation: The Eschatology of Emmanuel Levinas”, p. 154: “The present is never available, as such. The present ‘moment’ cannot present itself.”

<sup>791</sup> Cohen, Richard A., *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy*, p. 239.

<sup>792</sup> Mersch, Dieter, “Präsenz und Ethizität in der Stimme”, p. 226.

<sup>793</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 41/AQE, p. 71.

<sup>794</sup> Ibid., p. 41/p. 72, emphasis added.

<sup>795</sup> Ibid., p. 43/p. 74.

said in the form of ambiguity, of diachronic expression.”<sup>796</sup> In this connection exegesis can be seen, as Levinas puts it, as a sort of

[...] spiraling movement [that] makes possible the boldness of philosophy, destroying the conjunction into which its saying and its said continually enter. The said [...] thus maintains the diachrony in which, holding its breath, the spirit hears the echo of the otherwise.<sup>797</sup>

This “echo of the otherwise” calls to mind a popular song by Harry Nilsson, which in my view renders this experience in other words – *autrement dit*: “Everybody’s talking at me, I don’t hear a word they’re saying, Only *the echoes of my mind*. / People stopping staring, I can’t see their faces, Only *the shadows of their eyes*.”<sup>798</sup> This seems to be, unintentionally, a Levinasian pop song, because it picks up core aspects of Levinas’s philosophy: neither the face nor even the eyes of the other can be seen – only “the shadows of his eyes,” just as Moses is only allowed to see the trace of God’s presence, but not God’s face, since “nobody can see Me and live on.”<sup>799</sup> Furthermore, the figure of the echo – *ἠχώ* – as a voice without a body is another core aspect of what I have called ‘presence with voice’. The notion of an ‘echo in the mind’ highlights the aspect that the voice has a presence as such, transcending the actually spoken word – though, to be precise, the song reads “the echoes *of* my mind” which can be read also as a moment of solipsism.

With respect to Jacques Derrida’s criticism of the voice, as a central aspect of his general diagnosis of the ‘phono-logocentrism’ of Western metaphysics, I would like to argue that the voice is not just to be seen as a medium of meaning, but that it has a presence as such.<sup>800</sup> The subordination of the voice as a mere *significant* to a *signifié* disregards in my view the proper qualities of the voice, which lies mainly in sensuality. The performance of the voice transcends the conveyed meaning of the words. Levinas’s captivity notebooks show us that Levinas was very attentive to this proper meaning of the voice, as he argues: “We speak to children in a tone, to a soldier in a tone. Sometimes we break away from this way of speaking in a tone. We speak

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<sup>796</sup> Ibid., p. 44/p. 76.

<sup>797</sup> Ibid.

<sup>798</sup> This song from Harry Nilsson is called “Everybody’s Talkin’”.

<sup>799</sup> Exodus, 33:20.

<sup>800</sup> See Derrida, Jacques, “Speech and Phenomena: Introduction to the Problem of Signs in Husserl’s Phenomenology”/*La voix et le phénomène*.

man to man. In any case the only dignified way of speaking.”<sup>801</sup> The sensitivity Levinas developed regarding the *tone* and the *voice* – which are different notions, as Levinas clearly outlines in the citation – was most probably due to the fact that he lived through the war, to which the citation also refers (“to a *soldier* in a tone”), and moreover knew the trials of being a prisoner of war with all the humiliating experience it brings. The experience of war, in my view, had an impact on his thinking and, thereby, on his attitude toward the voice as well. The voice, besides the other ways we have to express ourselves, stands for the main medium in which we talk to each other. The particular ‘tone’ in which a voice speaks is obviously also a part of the message as such and cannot be seen independently from it. However, Levinas differentiates in the mentioned citation the *tone* and the *voice*, emphasizing that the “only dignified way of speaking” is to break away from the ‘tone’ which enables man to speak “man to man”. There are thus two different modes of speaking: on the one hand, the voice offers the possibility to speak ‘man to man’ (similarly Levinas highlights the ‘face-to-face’ and the event of looking in the eyes of the other), on the other hand, however, the tone of the voice can turn the spoken words in a blind order, telling from on high what to do without entering into a real relationship with the other. This underscores the fact that it is of utmost significance for Levinas in which *tone* we are speaking. In one of his Talmudic lectures Levinas emphasizes this aspect as essential with respect to the different meanings which can be attributed to a certain message: “It is in the nuances of the formulations, in the inflections of the speaking voice [*la voix qui énonce*], as strange as this may appear, that the abysses which separate the [...] messages open.”<sup>802</sup> Thus the different tones of the voice can modulate essentially the meaning of what is spoken. The voice *shows* in this sense always more than it states. The *mise-en-scène* of the subjectivity, which takes shape in the voice, contains something which goes beyond the meaning of the actually ‘said’. Rhetorically, this notion is expressed in the use of allegory or metaphor.<sup>803</sup> The latter is one of the main rhetorical figures of poetry. In this context it is remarkable that in central places in his work Levinas uses citations from literature and poetry, e.g. *Totality and Infinity* starts with a quotation of Rimbaud

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<sup>801</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 109: “On parle aux enfants sur un ton, à un petit soldat sur un ton. Parfois on s’arrache à cette façon de parler sur un ton. On parle d’homme à homme. En tout cas la seule façon digne de parler. {Des gens qui en sont incapables même devant la mort. Le titi parisien.} {Le ton ~~est~~ sur lequel on parle à une femme, etc. Mais qqch. de profond dans ce besoin: chant, poésie –style –}.” Underlined in the original. I have cited in the main text only the first part of the citation, which seems to me most significant in this context.

<sup>802</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, p. 78/*Quatre Lectures Talmudiques*, p. 167: “C’est dans les nuances des formulations, dans les modulations de *la voix qui énonce*, si étrange que cela puisse paraître, que s’ouvrent les abîmes qui séparent les messages.” Emphasis added.

<sup>803</sup> See Levinas’s reflections on the notion of the metaphor in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, pp. 227-242.

and ends with one of Baudelaire. In a similar way Rosenzweig constantly makes allusions to the work of Goethe throughout *The Star of Redemption*.<sup>804</sup> However, Rosenzweig does this without quotation marks, so that a reader unfamiliar with the work of Goethe does not recognize these allusions at first sight. This polyphonic effect in the text is made intentionally. It shows that a text is always a woven texture of many *voices*.<sup>805</sup> The *echo*, however, represents the part of the voice we cannot get rid of, even when we close our ears – echo, this immortal sister of the living voice, reverberates on and haunts our spirits. This facet of the voice is reflected by Levinas in his philosophical notes written during the fifties, mostly as preparatory notes for *Totality and Infinity*. Here Levinas emphasizes the aspect of the voice as being ‘outside’ of the subject that speaks. The voice is produced by the body, but it is not a bodily part as such. In its sonority and resonance it refers rather to an exteriority, i.e. to something outside the body, as Levinas points out: “It is impossible to *see* oneself as a creature. But one can *hear* oneself.”<sup>806</sup> Furthermore, in a special section of these philosophical notes, entitled “Fecundity”, Levinas connects the “hearing of the voice” with the notion of fecundity, i.e. the possibility to ‘create’ an origin of a subject by giving birth: “The knowledge of this origin, which is the unconscious, is obtained through hearing: to hear the voice.”<sup>807</sup> This shows that the voice is for Levinas connected in some sense to the ‘origin’ of the subject, which is made covert by the unconscious, i.e. a domain over which the subject does not have full control: the unconscious eludes us, it slips away like the voice slips away from us sometimes and ‘betrays’ us in letting show something which we wanted actually to hide in the speaking and to keep quiet about. (For instance, it is extremely hard to hide one’s emotions in the voice, even if we do not say a word about the emotions themselves.) In this sense, the voice ‘speaks’ for itself, beyond the message it conveys. Therefore the mere perception of the voice indicates that there is a *signification* in the voice itself, revealing its message beyond the content of the spoken words, which already contain a certain responsibility for the other. Or, as Levinas puts it: “To hear a voice speaking to you is *ipso facto* to accept obligation toward the one speaking.”<sup>808</sup> This recalls Rosenzweig’s notion of revelation, which connects also the moments of

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<sup>804</sup> See on this topic Meir, Ephraim, “Goethe’s Place in Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*”.

<sup>805</sup> For a further reading on this topic regarding Derrida, see Mersch, Dieter, “Writing and Event”, and from the same author, *Was sich zeigt. Materialität, Präsenz, Ereignis*, as well as Robbins, Jill, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature*.

<sup>806</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 448: “Il est impossible de se voir dans sa creature. Mais on peut s’entendre.” Emphasis added.

<sup>807</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388: “Le savoir de cette origine qu’est l’inconscient s’obtient par l’audition: entendre la voix.”

<sup>808</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, p. 48/*Quatre Lectures Talmudiques*, pp. 104-105: “Entendre une voix qui vous parle est *ipso facto* accepter l’obligation à l’égard de celui qui parle.”

speaking and responsibility. As Bernhard Casper underlines, “[f]or Rosenzweig the word revelation has so broad a meaning that it takes place in all serious speech in which a man really says something of his own.”<sup>809</sup> Referring to Casper’s article, Bettina Bergo emphasizes further that “responsibility and revelation prove to be interrelated”<sup>810</sup> in Rosenzweig’s thought. To give *response* to another is at the origin of the *responsibility* for Rosenzweig as well as for Levinas. The subject is put into *question* by the other. Therefore Rosenzweig refers in Book two of Part II of the *The Star*, which deals with revelation, to the Biblical account in which God seeks Adam and asks: “Where are you?” – and Adam answers: “הִנְנִי” (hineni), *here I am*.<sup>811</sup> Rosenzweig describes this process as a *call* in *The Star* “to which one cannot remain deaf, the man, totally open, totally unfolded, totally ready, totally – soul, now answers: ‘I am here.’”<sup>812</sup> This readiness is also demanded of the subject, according to Levinas: to be open for the call of the other at each moment. Levinas connects this moment with the commandment ‘You shall not kill’, which is expressed in the *face* of the other: “This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in the face, is his face, is the primordial *expression*, is the first word: ‘you shall not commit murder’.”<sup>813</sup> Rosenzweig connects the moment of the call which provokes the ‘I am here’ with another commandment: the commandment of love, “Thou shalt love”.<sup>814</sup> The appeal from outside is answered by a response – ‘hineni’, *here I am* – which entails responsibility. As Ephraim Meir points out, it is important to stress however that not only is the commandment different, but also the Self is conceived differently by Levinas and Rosenzweig.<sup>815</sup> For the latter, the Self (*Selbst*) is that which precedes the soul (*Seele*), which one receives with the divine imperative of love.<sup>816</sup> In contrast, Levinas defines the self in *Otherwise than Being* as “hostage” and “substitution”.<sup>817</sup>

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<sup>809</sup> Casper, Bernhard, “Responsibility Rescued”, p. 95. See further on this topic also Bergo, Bettina, “Is There a ‘Correlation’ between Rosenzweig and Levinas?”, p. 405.

<sup>810</sup> Bergo, Bettina, “Is There a ‘Correlation’ between Rosenzweig and Levinas?”, p. 405.

<sup>811</sup> Genesis 3:9. Franz Rosenzweig refers to this passage. See: *Star*, pp. 189-190/*Stern*, pp. 195-196. See further the interpretation of this Biblical passage by Wiesel, Elie, “Adam ou le mystère du commencement”, p. 310: “God addresses this question to every man always: Where are you? What is your place in the world? What have you done with your life?” For further passages regarding the Hebrew word *hineni*, “here I am”, in the Bible see also Genesis 22:1 and 22:7 and Isaiah 6:8.

<sup>812</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 190/*Stern*, p. 196.

<sup>813</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *TI*, p. 199/*Ti*, p. 217, emphasis in the original.

<sup>814</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 190-191/*Stern*, pp. 196-197.

<sup>815</sup> See Meir, Ephraim, “The Non-Identical Self, Autonomy and Heteronomy. Response to Hannah Hashkes”.

<sup>816</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 213/*Stern*, p. 221.

<sup>817</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *OBBE*, pp. 126-127/*AQE*, pp. 200-201. There is however a development regarding the concept of the self in Levinas’s work. In *Totality and Infinity* he outlines the self as a human being’s egoism and criticizes philosophy as such as an “egology” where truth “rests on the essential self-sufficiency of the same, its identification in ipseity, its egoism” (*TI*, p. 44/*Ti*, p. 35). However, Levinas defines the self in *Otherwise than Being* as “subjection”, which constitutes the subjectivity of the subject: “But this desire for the non-desirable, this



However, both thinkers link the moment of this call with *exteriority*, i.e. the other (in Levinas) and God (in Rosenzweig). The voice plays in my view a remarkable role in this context. It is the medium for exteriority to express itself. Hence it is not by chance that Levinas as well as Rosenzweig speak of a **call** of exteriority – and not of an image or something visible.<sup>818</sup> In fact, the face cannot be seen according to Levinas, as I have pointed out in the introduction; however, Levinas emphasizes: “I think that the beginning of language is in the face. In a certain way, in its silence, it *calls* you.”<sup>819</sup> The voice is thus for both thinkers the *medium* of the commandment to shake the self out of its ipseity.

Lastly, I want to draw attention to another mode of sensuality: the touch, or, more precisely, the caress. The musicality of the voice correlates with the caress (*la caresse*), which expresses in a similar way its reluctance regarding representation. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas underlines: “The caress consists in seizing upon nothing, in soliciting what ceaselessly escapes [...]. [...] It *searches*, it forages. It is not an intentionality of disclosure but of search: a movement unto the invisible.”<sup>820</sup> Like the hand that caresses, listening is a moment without control: to perceive from the other what he feels, what he needs is not a task which could come easily to an end, but seems rather to be an infinite process – just as *infinite* as my responsibility for the other. The caress realizes a proximity between human beings without establishing a totality between them. Moreover the difference is precisely recognized in the approach. In fact, as Ephraim Meir points out, Levinas’s particular contribution to Western philosophy lies in the special attention he gives to the caress and to eroticism in general.<sup>821</sup> Levinas’s interpretation of the caress contains also an ontological approach:

The caress is a mode of the subject’s being, where the subject who is in contact with another goes beyond this contact. [...] But what is caressed is not touched, properly speaking. [...] The seeking of

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responsibility for the neighbor, this substitution as a hostage, is the subjectivity and uniqueness of the subject” (OBBE, p. 123/AQE, p. 196).

<sup>818</sup> On the notion of the *call* see further Chrétien, Jean-Louis, *The Call and the Response/L’appel et la réponse*, who elaborates upon this issue in a phenomenological context: “Can we think of the call as the origin of speech?”. Ibid., p. 5/p. 15.

<sup>819</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “The Paradox of Morality: an Interview with Emmanuel Levinas”, conducted by Tamra Wright, Peter Hughes and Alison Ainley, in: *The Provocation of Levinas. Rethinking the Other*, ed. by Robert Bernasconi and David Wood, pp. 168-180, p. 169, emphasis added.

<sup>820</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, pp. 257-258/Ti, p. 288, emphasis added.

<sup>821</sup> Meir, Ephraim, “Eroticism in Emmanuel Levinas’s Oeuvre. Towards a Philosophy of the Caress”, p. 511.

the caress constitutes its essence by the fact that the caress does not know what it seeks. This ‘not knowing’, this fundamental disorder, is the essential.<sup>822</sup>

In this withdrawal of every *representation* the caress and the voice overlap. They can be characterized as “a contact without contact” [*Berührung ohne Berührung*].<sup>823</sup> Nothing is literally ‘touched’ by the caress – nothing is ‘said’, after the voice has faded away. Both are essentially bound to the presence. As the caress is described as a mode of being by Levinas, so the voice can be seen as a mode of subjectivity in his work – as a ‘presence through voice’, presenting and hiding the subject at the same time.

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<sup>822</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TO, p. 89/TA, p. 82.

<sup>823</sup> The term is borrowed from Antje Kapust. See further her instructive reading of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas in this context, in: Kapust, Antje, *Berührung ohne Berührung. Ethik und Ontologie bei Merleau-Ponty und Levinas*.

**2. Revelation, language and the “voice of love” in Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*, with a view to Levinas**

**a) The role of love in *The Star of Redemption* and its connection to language**

What really makes us is beyond grasping,  
it is way beyond knowing. We give in to love  
because it gives us some sense of what is  
unknowable. Nothing else matters. Not at  
the end. <sup>824</sup>

The Revelation of the divine love is the  
heart of the All. <sup>825</sup>

It is astonishing that a work such as the *The Star of Redemption*, which is profoundly marked by the experience of love and is written out of this emotion, has inspired so little analysis about the role of love in it. <sup>826</sup> Despite this fact, love is without a doubt a key issue for the whole system of *The Star* and, moreover, in particular for its central part, i.e. Book two of Part II. In this section, Rosenzweig writes an exegesis of the *Song of Songs* and expounds through this hermeneutical work his notion of revelation, thereby interweaving the philosophical discourse with the discourse on love in this central part of *The Star*. Indeed, recently published research on Rosenzweig shows that his relationship with Margrit (Gritli) Rosenstock-Huessy is of great importance for his work. <sup>827</sup> The letters they wrote each other were a profound inspiration for Rosenzweig. They probably also influenced the depiction of Christianity in *The Star* as an equal

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<sup>824</sup> Jeremy Irons in the last scene of Louis Malles film *Damage* (1992). See also Meir, Ephraim, *Levinas’s Jewish Thought between Jerusalem and Athens*, p. 6: “Every human being has a ‘surplus’ that cannot be absorbed in sameness. [...] the Other is beyond one’s comprehension, beyond one’s grasp.”

<sup>825</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 403/*Stern*, p. 424.

<sup>826</sup> One of the few exceptions to my mind are the important studies by Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, see e.g. her book *Better than Wine: Love, Poetry, and Prayer in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig*, as well as the article “Love and Reason in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig and Hermann Cohen”.

<sup>827</sup> E.g. see Moyn, Samuel, “Divine and Human Love: Franz Rosenzweig’s History of the Song of Songs”, pp. 195-196; Malka, Salomon, *Franz Rosenzweig. Le cantique de la révélation*, pp. 101-112; Meir, Ephraim, *Letters of Love. Franz Rosenzweig’s Spiritual Biography and Oeuvre in Light of the Gritli Letters*; Kornberg Greenberg, Yudit, “What Does Revelation in the *Star of Redemption* Reveal? Negotiating the Spaces between Rosenzweig’s Life and Thought”.

partner of Judaism. Both religions express, in their respective ways, the eternal truth: “Before God [...] both, Jew and Christian, are workers on the same task. He cannot dispense with either. [...] The truth, the whole truth, belongs therefore neither to them nor to us.”<sup>828</sup> Both religions, Judaism and Christianity, share in the eternal truth, which neither of them possesses alone. Therefore, although it is correct to point out that *The Star* is “a Jewish book,”<sup>829</sup> it is noteworthy to highlight that it was the love for a *Christian* woman that inspired the author to write it in the way he did. The intellectual background which was provided through their love affair is reflected especially in the section I want to focus on here, i.e. Book two of Part II, which Rosenzweig dedicated to Gritli, saying that “[i]t is not ‘for you’ – but ‘yours’. Yours –as I am. [*Es ist nicht ,Dir‘, sondern – dein. Dein – wie ich.*]”<sup>830</sup> This shows how deeply the work and the biography of Rosenzweig are connected.<sup>831</sup> Love and the event of an overwhelming erotical relationship had not only deeply affected the life of Rosenzweig, but can be found, moreover, throughout *The Star of Redemption*. From the first pages onward, the author emphasizes for example the importance of eros. He defines it as “[t]he birth date of the Self”,<sup>832</sup> that is to say the day the Self awakens to itself, as the day where it meets *eros* for the first time. The Self is conceived by Rosenzweig as a *daimon* [*Daimon*]: “[...] this blind and mute *daimon*, enclosed in itself, which surprises man for the first time in the mask of Eros, and from then on accompanies him throughout his life up to that moment where it removes its mask and reveals itself to him as Thanatos.”<sup>833</sup> Eros and death are thus interwoven in Rosenzweig’s system. Besides eros, he highlights also the significance of love and points out that the only thing that can be literally ‘said’ about love is that it is *as strong as death*:

Death is the ultimate point and the fulfilled end of Creation – and love is as strong as it is. This is the only thing that can be said about love, ex-pressed about it, re-counted about it; nothing else can ‘be’ said ‘about’ it, but only spoken by love itself. For love is completely active, completely personal, completely alive, completely – speaking language; all the true sentences relating to it must be words that came from its own mouth, words brought forth by the I. This one sentence alone, saying it is as strong as death, is an exception. In it, it is not it that speaks, rather it is the whole world of the

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<sup>828</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 438/*Stern*, p. 462. See also the chapters on “Judaism” and “Christianity” and their role in the system of *The Star*, in Mosès, Stéphane, *System and Revelation*, pp. 174-217 and pp. 218-261/*Système and Révélation*, pp. 180-227 and pp. 228-275.

<sup>829</sup> See Amir, Yehoshua, “Das spezifisch Jüdische im Denken Rosenzweigs”.

<sup>830</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Gritli-Briefe*, 2.11.1918, pp. 177-178, p. 177.

<sup>831</sup> See on this topic Dagan, Hagai, “Franz Rosenzweig: Biography and Personal Philosophy”.

<sup>832</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 79/*Stern*, p. 77.

<sup>833</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80/p. 77.

Creation that is placed at its feet, conquered; death, the conquerer of all, and Orcus, who jealously holds onto all that is mortal, collapse before its strength and the violence of its ardor; [...].<sup>834</sup>

In this sense, love holds a crucial place in the development of *The Star*, since it is the pivotal issue that links creation, revelation and, ultimately, redemption. Stéphane Mosès emphasizes this central role of love by pointing out that it “is not procreation but *Eros* that defines the humanity of man [...].”<sup>835</sup>

Levinas also stresses the fact that the theme of love is a fundamental aspect of the work of Rosenzweig. In his preface to Stéphane Mosès’s book *System and Revelation*, Levinas writes that the issue at stake in *The Star of Redemption* would be to work out the fact that the “[t]he ultimate bound of psychism is not the one insuring the unity of the subject, but, so to speak, the tying separation of society, the *dia* of the dialogue, of dia-chrony, of time that Rosenzweig aims to ‘take seriously,’ the tying separation we call by a well-worn name – love.”<sup>836</sup> Indeed, in the act of revelation, i.e. the opening of God to man, “the soul receives the love of God.”<sup>837</sup> According to Rosenzweig,

[...] [love] is not a quality of the lover; it is not a man who loves. The fact of loving is precisely not a determination in the definition of a man. Love in the man is ephemeral *self-transformation*, a self-renunciation; he is no longer anything other than lover when he loves; the I, otherwise the bearer of the attributes, disappears entirely in the moment of love. *Man dies in becoming lover and is reborn as lover.* [...] So love is not attribute, but *event* [...].<sup>838</sup>

This event is realized, for Rosenzweig, in the receiving of the commandment of love – “You shall love the Eternal your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might.”<sup>839</sup> This commandment is profoundly linked to the present, since “[a]ll Revelation is placed under the great sign of the today; it is ‘today’ that God commands and it is ‘today’ that his voice is to be heard. It is the today in which the love of the lover lives – this imperative today of the

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<sup>834</sup> Ibid., p. 217/pp. 225-226.

<sup>835</sup> Mosès, Stéphane, *System and Revelation*, p. 71/*Système et Révélation*, p. 70, emphasis added.

<sup>836</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Foreword”, p. 22/“Préface”, p. 16.

<sup>837</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 183/*Stern*, p. 189.

<sup>838</sup> Ibid., pp. 176-177/pp. 182-183, emphasis added.

<sup>839</sup> Deuteronomy, 6:5. See Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 190/*Stern*, p. 196.

commandment.”<sup>840</sup> However, being a *divine* commandment, it is linked at the same time to a transcendental sphere, to a ‘beyond’. As Eric Santner points out in his study *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life. Reflections on Rosenzweig and Freud*, this divine imperative has to be conceived of as our opening to this ‘beyond’, which is realized nonetheless in the here and now. Santner argues that “*Rosenzweig’s paradox*, if I might call it that, is that our opening to this ‘beyond’ is the very thing that places us in the midst of life, in proximity to our neighbor.”<sup>841</sup> Furthermore, taking a closer look at the relationship between *language* and *love*, one discovers a profound parallel. Rosenzweig wrote about this relationship: “Only the one who loves, but really he can say and does say: Love me. From his mouth, the commandment of love is not an [*sic*] strange commandment, it is nothing other than *the voice of love* itself.”<sup>842</sup> In this context, I must admit that I have always read this sentence in a much stronger sense than the English translation renders it, since Rosenzweig has written in the original German version: “*Nur der Liebende, aber er auch wirklich, kann **sprechen und spricht: Liebe mich.***”<sup>843</sup> I read this passage as if the ability to speak would be given, according to Rosenzweig, only to the one who loves. Everything depends here on how to translate the verb “*sprechen*”: it can mean either *to talk/to speak (parler)* or as *to say (dire)*. However, I would prefer the first option and would translate “*sprechen*”, the word used by Rosenzweig, rather with **to speak**. Rosenzweig probably would have used “*sagen*” if he meant *to say (dire)*. This would thus reformulate the translation as follows: “**Only the one who loves, but he really, can speak and speaks: Love me.**” If one reads the passage the way I propose, one discovers that the ability to speak is essentially connected to the command to love: love and language would be, in this sense, deeply intertwined in the system of *The Star*.

Another aspect which is similar to language as well as to love is the condition of being both present *and* transcendent, human *and* superhuman [*über-menschlich*], as Rosenzweig points out:

For it is not possible for love to be ‘purely human’. When it begins to speak – and this it must do, for there exists no other utterance spoken besides itself than the language of love – so when love speaks, it is already changed into something superhuman; for the sensuous character of the word is full to the

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<sup>840</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 192/*Stern*, p. 198.

<sup>841</sup> Santner, Eric L., *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life. Reflections on Rosenzweig and Freud*, p. 66. See further Moyn, Samuel, “Is Revelation in the World?”.

<sup>842</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 190-191/*Stern*, p. 197.

<sup>843</sup> See *ibid.*, *Stern*, p. 197.

brim with its divine suprasensuous meaning; like language itself, love is at once sensible and suprasensuous. [... *die Liebe ist, wie die Sprache selbst, sinnlich-übersinnlich.*] <sup>844</sup>

This ‘language of love’, of which Rosenzweig speaks, is manifested, in a way, also in the epiphany of the face in Levinas’s thought. In fact, the face too is both sensible, i.e. concretely visible, and supra-sensory [*über-sinnlich*], i.e. in-visible in its full significance. It expresses the transcendent and eternal commandment “Thou shalt not murder”. The impossibility of conceptualizing it is also one of the main characteristics of the musical idea, as Danielle Cohen-Levinas highlights, since it “does not express a truth referring to a unity. [...] It is a critique of representation.” <sup>845</sup> The transcendence of language, its ‘supra-sensory’ aspect, refers in this sense to its sonority. The inability of language to grasp an object in all its dimensions is not applicable to music. Music is beyond the thematization of discourse and knowledge. In its specific mode of sonority it takes up the issue at stake in the discourse and develops it further with a different approach – just at that point where the thematization of the said, ‘out of breath’, had to drop it and let it slip away from the concatenation of words and notions. <sup>846</sup> With this in mind, Danielle Cohen-Levinas points out that “constituted in knowledge, the words have lost the object. The musical idea is not knowledge, an accumulation of words, concepts and theories [...]. It causes a content more essential than the total of all words to emerge.” <sup>847</sup>

Furthermore, another interesting aspect between Levinas and Rosenzweig shows up, in my view, when Rosenzweig emphasizes that “the I [...] disappears entirely in the moment of love. Man dies in becoming lover and is reborn as lover.” <sup>848</sup> Is this not a kind of similar situation – while keeping in mind however all the differences between Levinas and Rosenzweig – to that described by Levinas in *Otherwise than Being* where the subject finds itself facing “a passivity more passive than all passivity” <sup>849</sup> However the subject in Levinas is not transformed by this event since it finds itself, before any possible transformation, as a *substitution*, as the ‘one-for-

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<sup>844</sup> Ibid., p. 216/p. 224, emphasis added.

<sup>845</sup> Cohen-Levinas, Danielle, “Prolégomènes à l’Idée musicale. Socrate musicien”, p. 41: “[...] n’exprime pas une vérité renvoyant à une unité. [...] Elle est une critique de la représentation.”

<sup>846</sup> See further on this topic Jankélévitch, Vladimir, *Music and the Ineffable/La musique et l’ineffable*.

<sup>847</sup> Ibid., p. 46: “[...] constitués en savoir, les mots ont perdu la chose. L’idée musicale n’est pas un savoir, une accumulation des mots, de concepts et de théories [...]. Elle fait émerger un contenu plus essentiel que le total de tous les mots.”

<sup>848</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 177/*Stern*, p. 182, emphasis added.

<sup>849</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *OBBE*, p. 15/AQE, p. 49.

the-other' (*l'un pour l'autre*).<sup>850</sup> The I in Levinas is conceived of as a "Here I am", *me voici* (in Hebrew הִנְנִי [*hinnehi*])<sup>851</sup> right from the very beginning of its existence, before any choice:

From the moment of sensibility, the subject is *for the other*: substitution, responsibility, expiation. But a responsibility that I did not assume at any moment, in any present. Nothing is more passive than this challenge prior to my freedom, this pre-original challenge, this sincerity. Passivity of the vulnerable, condition (or incondition) by which being shows itself creature.<sup>852</sup>

Coming back to Rosenzweig's line of reasoning in Part III of *The Star*, God himself is presented as "the one who loves [*der Liebende*]"<sup>853</sup> Indeed, this is the only feature that man can perceive of God, as Rosenzweig points out:

[...] we experience his existence immediately only in the fact that he loves us, and awakens our dead Self into the beloved soul that loves in return. The Revelation of the divine love is the heart of the All. [*Die Offenbarung der göttlichen Liebe ist das Herz des All.*]<sup>854</sup>

This demonstrates how eros (in the form of sensual love) and transcendence, language and love are closely linked in the *The Star of Redemption*. In fact, it is a sort of *theomorphism* which we can find not only in his theories on language, as Rivka Horwitz points out,<sup>855</sup> but also in love and its particular role in the system of *The Star*. According to Rosenzweig, "in language the difference between 'immanence' and 'transcendence' is extinguished. [...] Man loves because, and as, God loves. [*Der Mensch liebt, weil und wie Gott liebt.*] Man's human soul is the soul awakened and loved by God."<sup>856</sup> We can indeed admit that the act of falling in love is a divine act in the sense that we cannot choose by ourselves to fall in love or not. Like birth, which we accept prior to being born and without our free will, we experience falling in love without our agreement. For that reason, 'falling in love' possesses also a tragic dimension. However, love has

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<sup>850</sup> Ibid., p. 14/p. 29, Levinas explains that substitution is not to be conceived of as a "transubstantiation, a changing from one substance into another [...]." See further *ibid.*, chapter IV on "Substitution", pp. 99-129/pp. 156-205.

<sup>851</sup> Genesis, 22:1.

<sup>852</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Without Identity", in: *Humanism of the Other*, pp. 58-69, p. 64/"Sans identité", in: *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, pp. 83-101, p. 94.

<sup>853</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 404/*Stern*, p. 425.

<sup>854</sup> Ibid., p. 403/p. 424. See also *ibid.*, p. 404/p. 425: "As the loving one only God is not the Lord. Here he is active. He is not above his act. He is in it. He is one with it. He loves."

<sup>855</sup> See on this topic Horwitz, Rivka, "From Hegelianism to a revolutionary understanding of Judaism: Franz Rosenzweig's attitude toward Kabbala and Myth", pp. 42-43, here p. 42: "*Theomorphism* is the theory of language that Rosenzweig develops in his writings."

<sup>856</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 214/*Stern*, p. 222.



to be seen as distinguished from ‘falling in love’ and, therefore, it is neither tragic nor violent, according to Rosenzweig. Anyhow, whereas the love of God extends to the whole of humanity (even if it is addressed to each one of us individually by God), the human love is always directed to a single and unique being. In contrast to the concepts of a ‘universal love’ or a love for ‘everybody’, human love is a deeply *singularly* act since it means to pick out one unique being and to say ‘I love you more than anything else in the world.’<sup>857</sup> To be precise, in the act of loving we do not love ‘the world’ generally speaking, but *one* unique human being. This can be seen as a moment of *election*, as being chosen, and in this sense it is positively linked to an exteriority, i.e. the command to love. According to Rosenzweig, the love, which follows this command, is in its immediate expression conceived as a pure commandment without explanation:

The love of the lover has no other word to express itself than the commandment. Everything else is already no longer immediate expression, but explanation – explanation of love. The explanation of love is very deficient, and like every explanation, it always comes after the event; and therefore, since the love of the lover is in the present, it really *always comes too late*.<sup>858</sup>

It seems that words have no access to this domain, which is reserved for the most unspeakable emotions. Here, art regains its full importance as the ‘language of the unspeakable’ and as the only way for man to express this ‘unspeakable’. However, the presence of love is inaccessible to words, it is pure presence – “The language of love is only present; dream and reality, sleep of the limbs and wakefulness of the heart [...]”<sup>859</sup> This presence is revealed by us only through the very essence of divine love – beyond life and death. Because, according to Rosenzweig,

God is not life, God is light. He is the Lord of life, but he is as little alive as he is dead; and to state one or the other about him, as the ancient man states, that ‘he lives’, and as the modern man states, that he ‘is dead’, betrays equal pagan partiality. Only that neither-nor of dead and alive, only that fine point where life and death touch and melt into one does not forbid the typical terminology. God neither lives nor is dead, but he gives life to what is dead, he – loves.<sup>860</sup>

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<sup>857</sup> Slavoj Žižek points out this aspect in the beginning of Astra Taylor’s documentary “Zizek”: “Love means: I pick out something [...]. Even if this something is just a small detail, a fragile individual person. I say, ‘I love you more than anything else’: in this quite formal sense, love is evil,” cited in Ginsburg, Shai, “Taking Slavoj Zizek seriously”, p. 76. Even if Žižek in his particular style of hyperbolizing his philosophical ideas exaggerates this aspect in my view (by pointing it out as “evil”), he highlights nonetheless an important issue of human love – its radical *uniqueness*.

<sup>858</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 191/*Stern*, p. 197, emphasis added.

<sup>859</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217/p. 226.

<sup>860</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403/p. 423.

As a gift of the divine love, human love is indeed part of this fragile point where life and death touch and melt. Like the love of God, the human love too is as strong as death. Love signifies thus our victory over death.<sup>861</sup>

**b) Love and the silent Self of Creation, or: how to become “a soul that speaks”<sup>862</sup>**

O God how do I grasp your life  
As that which makes the hour full,  
As *voice* that’s placed ahead of you;  
For nothingness, this painful sensation  
To you, you eased it with creation.<sup>863</sup>

In Part I of *The Star of Redemption*, which describes the state of creation, Rosenzweig defines man under two different aspects: on the one hand, as a part of the world, as an *individual*, and, on the other as a “meta-ethical” reality, as a *Self*. However, neither the one nor the other can get into relation with that which is not him.<sup>864</sup> These two aspects are characteristic for the concept of man, developed by Rosenzweig in the first part, as a human being characterized by being *silent* and *tragic*. He sees the paradigm of such an existence embodied by the tragic hero of the Greek tragedy, as he points out: “For that is the distinctive sign of the Self [*das Merkzeichen des Selbst*], the seal of its greatness, and the mark of its weakness: it is silent. The tragic hero has only one language that is in perfect accordance with him: precisely, silence.”<sup>865</sup> This silent man exists;

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<sup>861</sup> Ibid., p. 178/p. 183, “love is the eternal victory over death”. See also Katz, Claire Elise, “*For Love is as strong as Death*. Taking another look at Levinas on Love”, p. 129.

<sup>862</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 88/*Stern*, p. 87.

<sup>863</sup> Rilke, Reiner Maria, *The Book of Hours: prayers to a lowly God*, p. 53. For the German version see: *Das Stunden-Buch, 1. Buch, Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben* [1899], p. 34: “Gott, wie begreif ich deine Stunde,/ als du, dass sie im Raum sich runde,/ *die Stimme* vor dich hingestellt;/ Dir war das Nichts wie eine Wunde,/ da kühltest du sie mit der Welt.”

<sup>864</sup> See Mosès, Stéphane, “Révélation et Dialogue chez Franz Rosenzweig”, p. 523.

<sup>865</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 85/*Stern*, p. 83. On the importance of the topic of tragedy for Rosenzweig see Ephraim Meir, *Letters of Love*, p. 33, note 41: “In 1911, Rosenzweig intended to write a book on the figure of the hero. The planned title was *Der Held. Eine Geschichte der tragischen Individualität in Deutschland seit Lessing*.” See: Rosenzweig, Franz, *GS*, I, 1, p. 119.

however, he is not *alive*, in the proper meaning of this word, according to Rosenzweig, because to become a soul that speaks means, first of all, becoming *alive* and, moreover, becoming more and more alive. Properly speaking, it has to do with the *coming into being* of one's own existence and thus opening a way beyond the closed existence of the silent Self: "There is no road that leads from the [...] [*silent Self*] buried in itself to the resounding open air [*ins tönende Freie*]; all roads lead only more deeply into the inner silence."<sup>866</sup> In this process, love and language have an essential function. In Part I Rosenzweig elaborates further upon a kind of 'language' before man has access to language itself, i.e. before he is able to *truly* speak. Rosenzweig introduces thus the *original words*, the *Urwörter*: *Yes*, *No* and *And*.<sup>867</sup> These three *original words* do not yet constitute a language, however they are the base for all language. Because of them, a pre-language can be formed. They are thus of eminent importance because they are the indispensable condition for "the promise of a language which unifies all humanity."<sup>868</sup>

In this context, art in all its forms plays a crucial role. According to Rosenzweig it is able to function as a sort of intermediary between human beings. The role of art is seen as a means of creating a bridge between human beings: art says the unsayable.<sup>869</sup> Beyond the *living* speaking, it creates a common space where an understanding without words, "a communication before language"<sup>870</sup> can take place:

[...] there exists a world where this silence itself is already speech, not, of course, speech of the soul, and yet speech; a speech before the speech, a speech of the unexpressed, of the inexpressible. [...] This is the world of art. [...] Even before all real human language, art creates as language of the inexpressible the first and for all time indispensable mute understanding of the inexpressible, beneath

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<sup>866</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 89/*Stern*, p. 87, emphasis added. I have slightly modified the translation of Barbara Galli and replaced the translation of "*ins tönende Freie*" as "the cry from without" with "the resounding open air", which is the translation of William W. Hallo [cf. Rosenzweig, Franz, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. by William W. Hallo, Boston: Beacon Press, 1972, p. 80], because it seems to me more appropriate here.

<sup>867</sup> See Bensussan, Gérard, *Franz Rosenzweig. Existence et Philosophie*, pp. 24-37.

<sup>868</sup> Crépon, Marc, *Les promesses du langage. Benjamin, Rosenzweig, Heidegger*, p. 134.

<sup>869</sup> Therefore it is so difficult to interpret works of art, because what they say is *beyond* words, as points out Rainer Maria Rilke in a letter to Franz Xaver Kappus on February 17, 1903: "There is nothing that manages to influence a work of art less than critical words. They always result in more or less unfortunate misunderstandings. Things are not as easily understood nor as expressible as people usually would like us to believe. Most happenings are beyond expression; they exist where a word has never intruded. Even more inexpressible are works of art; mysterious entities they are, whose lives, compared to our fleeting ones, endure." See: Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Letters to a Young Poet*, pp. 9-10/*Briefe in zwei Bänden*, Vol. 1 (1896 bis 1919), pp. 143-146, here 143.

<sup>870</sup> Mosès, Stéphane, "L'Esthétique de Franz Rosenzweig", p. 122.

and alongside the real language. The silence of the tragic hero is silent in all art and in all art is understood without any words. The Self does not speak and yet is heard. The Self is seen.<sup>871</sup>

The experience of art thus creates the possibility of a communication without language because it is *seen*. One can establish here a juxtaposition of the notions of ‘to see’ and ‘to hear,’ and respectively of the *view* and the *sound*, which is fundamental for the argumentation in *The Star*.<sup>872</sup>

In his article *Reality and Its Shadow*, Emmanuel Levinas describes the role of the artist in a manner resembling that of Rosenzweig. For Levinas, each “artist – even a painter, even a musician – tells. *He tells of the ineffable*. [...] Where common language abdicates, a poem or a painting speaks.”<sup>873</sup> Similarly to Rosenzweig, Levinas does not see the possibility of a work of art opening the way for true communication, because, according to Levinas, the artwork “does not give itself out as the beginning of a dialogue.”<sup>874</sup> In summary, Levinas is of the opinion that “art does not belong to the order of revelation [*l’art n’appartient pas à l’ordre de la révélation*].”<sup>875</sup> He sees it as a sort of *pre-language*, outside the domain of the face-to-face encounter, which is realized for Levinas only through the living speech, i.e. in the Saying. In order to be a ‘real’ language “one would have to introduce the perspective of the relation with the other without which being could not be told in its reality, that is, in its time.”<sup>876</sup> The deficiency of art is thus the lack of the possibility to create a true dialogue. The beginning of language is realized for Levinas through the *face*. The face provides the indispensable condition for any event of true communication. In the animal world, this face-to-face encounter does not exist since the face is not exposed in this relation. By contrast, the face is always exposed in the human being. The face

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<sup>871</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 89-90/*Stern*, pp. 87-89.

<sup>872</sup> Chaliel, Catherine, *Sagesse des sens. Le regard et l’écoute dans la tradition hébraïque*, pp. 32-34.

<sup>873</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Reality and Its Shadow”, in: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, pp. 1-13, p. 1/“La réalité et son ombre”, in: *Les imprévus de l’histoire*, pp. 107-127, p. 107, emphasis added.

<sup>874</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2/p. 109.

<sup>875</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3/p. 110. See in this context also Jacques Rolland’s discussion of “Reality and Its Shadow”, in: Rolland, Jacques, *Parcours de l’autrement*, pp. 233-259, with respect to Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption* see especially pp. 250-251.

<sup>876</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Reality and Its Shadow”, in: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, pp. 1-13, here p. 13/“La réalité et son ombre”, in: *Les imprévus de l’histoire*, pp. 107-127, here p. 127. On the topic of art with respect to Levinas’s philosophy, see also Gritz, David, *Levinas face au beau*, especially pp. 53-70.

is always “nude”<sup>877</sup> before the other. Without it, the human being would fall back into the state of the animal.<sup>878</sup> In this sense, Rosenzweig sees in the human face the premise of *fraternity*:

The brotherliness thus weaves its bond between men of whom none is like the other; it is in no way identity between anything of that which bears human countenance, but unanimity precisely of men of most different countenance. Certainly only this one thing is needful: *that men have a countenance altogether – that they see each other.*<sup>879</sup>

For Levinas as well, a true community is possible only through the face and it is the face-to-face encounter among men which creates the bond of fraternity between human beings. According to Levinas,

[a] face obsesses and shows itself, between transcendence and visibility/invisibility. [...] The other is from the first the brother of all the other men. The neighbor that obsesses me is already a face, both comparable and incomparable, a unique face and in relationship with faces, which are visible in the concern for justice.<sup>880</sup>

Levinas refers in this context to a passage in *Totality and Infinity*, where he further explains his notion of a relationship between language, face and fraternity:

The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other – language is justice. It is not that there first would be the face, and then the being it manifests or expresses would concern himself with justice; *the epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity.*<sup>881</sup>

While conceiving mankind as united in the simple fact that all men have a face, it is nevertheless worth noting in the following pages the more troubling aspects of the notion of the face according to Levinas. The face calls and incites us. It offers not a knowledge which one can grasp and handle by means of the reason. It offers an *experience* which we make without our agreement, without having chosen this experience a priori. In the relationship to the other, an indisputable order is presented, according to Levinas, a commandment from which one cannot escape: “you

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<sup>877</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, pp. 74-75/Ti, p. 70: “the nakedness of the face”.

<sup>878</sup> See Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Duino Elegies. A Bilingual Edition*, “The Eighth Elegy”, pp. 64-69.

<sup>879</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 366/*Stern*, p. 383. On the notion of fraternity, see Catherine Chalier, *La Fraternité: Un espoir en clair obscur*.

<sup>880</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 158/AQE, p. 246.

<sup>881</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 213/Ti, p. 234, emphasis added.

shall not commit murder.”<sup>882</sup> This command is presented as an ‘ethical language’ beyond words. It is received as a fact before all communication starts, yet it nevertheless shows itself in language under the form of the *Saying* [*Dire*]. The eminent feature of the Saying in my view is the moment where a relationship between men ‘beyond language’ is woven as a possibility of language, that is to say, according to Levinas, an ‘ethical language’. Saying has thus the aim of highlighting the original and fundamental signification of language *beneath* the transmission of a message, to which we most often reduce it:

Saying is not a game. Antecedent to the verbal signs it conjugates, to the linguistic systems and the semantic glimmerings, a foreword preceding languages, it is the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach, the one for the other, the very signifyingness [*signifiance*] of signification.<sup>883</sup>

In a manner similar to the conception of Rosenzweig’s New Thinking, Levinas points out that the Saying has “sense prior to the truth that it unveils, prior to the advent of the knowledge and information it communicates, pure of all said, *saying that doesn’t say a word*, [...]”<sup>884</sup> That is, Saying precisely is not reduced by Levinas to communication, but moreover it defines the *energy*<sup>885</sup> or the *breath*<sup>886</sup> which gives ‘life’ to language in that it is at once and always in relation with others. In his innovative way of philosophizing, the New Thinking, Rosenzweig underlines this essential importance through the aspects of having a “need for the other” and of “taking time seriously”.<sup>887</sup> *Saying* as such – although not in the radical *separated* way of the interlocutors in which Levinas conceives this term – is thus also fundamental for Rosenzweig’s thought.

The face opens up the possibility for fraternity and real communication, according to Levinas, which is nothing other than living speaking face-to-face. It is precisely that which was

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<sup>882</sup> Ibid., p. 199/p. 217.

<sup>883</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 5/AQE, p. 17. On the notion of ‘the one for the other’ (*l’un pour l’autre*), see Franck, Didier, *L’un-pour-l’autre. Levinas et la signification*.

<sup>884</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Without Identity”, in: *Humanism of the Other*, pp. 58-69, p. 64/“Sans identité”, in: *Humanisme de l’autre homme*, pp. 83-101, p. 94, emphasis added.

<sup>885</sup> See Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 297/Ti, p. 331, where Levinas speaks of “the en-ergy [én-ergie, *sic*] of the vigilant presence which does not *quit* the expression.”

<sup>886</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 5 and p. 180/AQE, p. 16 and p. 276. See also *ibid.* the theme of inspiration, in chapter V, pp. 140-144/pp. 220-225.

<sup>887</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “The New Thinking”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 109-139, p. 127/“Das neue Denken. Einige nachträgliche Bemerkungen zum ‘Stern der Erlösung’”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, III, pp. 139-161, pp.151-152.

impossible for the human being depicted in the Greek tragedy, as Rosenzweig emphasizes.<sup>888</sup> Levinas underlines this aspect in one of his early articles, written in the thirties: “Paganism is a radical powerlessness to leave the world. [*Le paganisme est une impuissance radicale de sortir du monde.*]”<sup>889</sup> By contrast, for Levinas, the face possesses the capacity to cause the living speaking to extend, because, “[t]he face is a living presence; it is expression. [...] The face speaks. [*Le visage parle.*]”<sup>890</sup> Obviously this is a question of a language ‘beyond words’ which Levinas defines as an *ethical language*. The latter is realized through the face. However, “[t]he relation with the face is not an object-cognition [*connaissance d’objet*]. [...] There is here a relation between me and the other *beyond rhetoric*.”<sup>891</sup> In fact there is the paradoxical situation that, according to Levinas, the other is, at bottom, not a phenomenon of the world, although the encounter with the other takes place in the here and now. However, in the relation with the other, a transcendent relation is always at the same time present. A nucleus of transcendence resides in the presence of the other, which calls me and troubles me. Levinas calls this “the *revelation* of the other”, which

[...] implies transcendence, radical separation, the strangeness of the interlocutors, the revelation of the other to me. In other words, language is spoken where the common plane is wanting or is yet to be constituted. It takes place in this transcendence. Discourse is thus the experience of something absolutely foreign, a pure ‘knowledge’, a *traumatism of astonishment*.<sup>892</sup>

At this point, the more troubling aspects of the notion of the face come to the fore. Discourse takes place over an unbridgeable abyss and it is precisely this separation between the interlocutors which incites them to speak to each other. Far from depicting a paralyzing and all-embracing harmony which would reveal the fellow human being as ‘the *same* as me’ in the long run, Levinas emphasizes the radical *alterity* of the other which he even describes, as we have seen, as a “traumatism of astonishment”. One can conclude that “[t]o communicate is to be prepared to be overthrown,”<sup>893</sup> as Avital Ronell concisely puts it. This ambiguity of language must be kept in mind, while comparing Levinas’s ideas on language with Rosenzweig’s

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<sup>888</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 85-88/*Stern*, pp. 83-86.

<sup>889</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “L’actualité de Maïmonide”, p. 144.

<sup>890</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *TI*, p. 66/*Ti*, p. 61.

<sup>891</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75/pp. 72-73, emphasis added.

<sup>892</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73/pp. 70-71.

<sup>893</sup> Ronell, Avital, *The Test Drive*, p. 35.

conception of how to become “a soul that speaks”<sup>894</sup>: whereas Rosenzweig emphasizes the role of love as a crucial one in this process, Levinas clearly points out: “Discourse is not love.”<sup>895</sup> There can be no question of bridging this gap concerning the role of love. However, I would like to highlight that both thinkers strongly refer in their argumentation to a commandment – Levinas to the commandment not to kill: “you shall not commit murder”,<sup>896</sup> expressed in the face, and Rosenzweig to the commandment to love: “You shall love the Eternal your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might,”<sup>897</sup> expressed in the experience of revelation.<sup>898</sup> Both connect a sphere of transcendence with worldly experiences. Revelation is thus for both not something ‘outside the world’, it happens as an exteriority in the here and now, i.e. as a rupture of totality.

Although Levinas wrote much about such notions like eros, fecundity and desire, love holds in the long run not the crucial place in his thinking as it does for Rosenzweig.<sup>899</sup> In fact a certain ambiguity concerning Levinas’s views on love can be noticed. Nonetheless the aspect of love should not be neglected in his work, as can be seen from the following statement, made by Levinas in an interview in 1985:

[...] what is *truly human* is – and don’t be afraid of this word – *love*. And I mean it even with everything that burdens love or, I could say it better, responsibility. And responsibility is actually love, as Pascal said: ‘without concupiscence’ [*sans concupiscence*]. It is preeminently the access to the singular. [...] Love, or responsibility, is instead that which gives meaning to singularity. The relation is always not reciprocal; love exists without worrying about being loved. That is my concept of dissymmetry. The other is, in this moment, the beloved, singular. And I am singular in another sense, as chosen, as being chosen for responsibility.”<sup>900</sup>

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<sup>894</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 88/*Stern*, p. 87.

<sup>895</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 76/Ti, p. 74.

<sup>896</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199/p. 217.

<sup>897</sup> Deuteronomy, 6:5. See Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 190/*Stern*, p. 196.

<sup>898</sup> For a comparative approach of these two commandments that influenced Levinas’s and Rosenzweig’s philosophy respectively, see Meir, Ephraim, *Jewish Existential Philosophers in Dialogue*, part II, chapter 4 “Franz Rosenzweig: Under the Commandment ‘Thou Shalt Love’”, pp. 84-102, and chapter 5 “Emmanuel Levinas: Under the Commandment ‘Thou Shalt Not Kill’”, pp. 103-128.

<sup>899</sup> See “The Phenomenology of Eros”, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 256-266/Ti, p. 286-299.

<sup>900</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Intention, Event, and the Other”, in: *Is it righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins, pp. 140-157, p. 143/“Intention, Ereignis und der Andere. Gespräch zwischen Emmanuel Levinas und Christoph von Wolzogen am 20. Dezember 1985 in Paris”, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Humanismus des anderen Menschen*, trans. by Ludwig Wenzler, Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 2005, pp. 131-150, p.134, emphasis added. The interview with Levinas was conducted in German.



It seems to me thus that love is significant for Levinas. Even if he states that “discourse is not love”,<sup>901</sup> love plays nonetheless its part in Levinas’s philosophy. The moment where the notion of love comes to the fore in Levinas’s view is the moment of *election*, of ‘being chosen’, which reveals the uniqueness of the other. In love we experience the other as non-replaceable and as being unique in the world. This marks an important aspect for Levinas’s philosophy which is, for instance, notably absent in the philosophy of his teacher Martin Heidegger, as Samuel Moyn points out: “It is of interest in this regard that, to my knowledge, Heidegger never composed a philosophy of love.”<sup>902</sup> Given the ambivalent but significant status of love in his thinking, it comes as no surprise that Levinas elaborates a sub-chapter in *Totality and Infinity* entitled “The Ambiguity of Love”. Here he points out that the difficulty with love is that it “remains a relation with the Other, that turns into need, and this need still presupposes the total, transcendent exteriority of the other, of the beloved.”<sup>903</sup> To say it briefly, love requires that the other remain transcendent, that he endlessly escape the image that one makes of him. If he were to be entirely comprehensible, he could never inspire such mysterious feelings of which love makes us a witness. The love for the other is nourished by his otherness, which endlessly escapes my cognition and withdraws from me.<sup>904</sup> And yet, despite all this, we love and maybe this “and yet” [*und dennoch*] sums up the best the secret of love: “Love aims at the Other; it aims at him in his frailty [*faiblesse*].”<sup>905</sup> On the other hand, however, the other is *really* present in love. As we are usually not falling in love with ghosts, but with real human beings, that are alive in flesh and blood, we love these human beings as they are: precisely in flesh and blood. So the lofty and the worldly, the *transcendent* and the *immanent* sphere are interlaced in the phenomenon of love. In any case, the beloved other remains the *other* par excellence, as Shalom Rosenberg points out: “We have no access to other minds. That is the hidden alterity. Other minds are infinite to us. We absorb the objects that we encounter into the self. Not so the Other.”<sup>906</sup> Levinas describes in this sense what he calls the ‘ambiguity of love’ as follows:

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<sup>901</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 76/Ti, p. 74.

<sup>902</sup> Moyn, Samuel, “Divine and Human Love: Franz Rosenzweig’s History of the Song of Songs”, p. 212.

<sup>903</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 254/Ti, p. 285.

<sup>904</sup> See also Levinas, Emmanuel, TO, p. 94/TA, p. 89: “What one presents as a failure of communication in love precisely constitutes the positivity of the relationship; *this absence of the other is precisely its presence as other.*” Emphasis added.

<sup>905</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 256/Ti, p. 286.

<sup>906</sup> Rosenberg, Shalom, “Levinas and Infinity”, p. 15. See Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, pp. 42-43/Ti, pp. 32-33.

The possibility of the Other appearing as an object of a need while retaining his alterity, or again, the possibility of enjoying the Other, of placing oneself at the same time beneath and beyond discourse – this position with regard to the interlocutor which at the same time reaches him and goes beyond him, this simultaneity of need and desire, of concupiscence and transcendence, tangency of the avowable and unavowable, constitutes the originality of the erotic which, in this sense, is *the equivocal par excellence*.<sup>907</sup>

It is interesting to notice how Levinas in the course of the statement switches in the last section of the phrase from the subject “love” to the “erotic”. Describing his subject of the ambiguity of *love* with the explanation of the originality of the *erotic*, it becomes obvious that these notions are interwoven in his interpretation. Both take part in the outlined ambiguity, being at the same time an expression of *need* and of *metaphysical desire*. Levinas alludes in this context to the myth Aristophanes tells in Plato’s *Symposium* and depicts it as the return of the Self to itself, incorporating the other in itself: “This desire [...] is broken and satisfied as the most egoistic and cruelest of needs.”<sup>908</sup> Levinas reveals in the romantic myth of a possible total unification of two partners the most cruel and egoistic tendencies. Far from relegating the feminine to a ‘second sex’, as Simone de Beauvoir argued, who has seen Levinas’s views as typical for masculine thinking – “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other”<sup>909</sup> –, Levinas opens up, on the contrary, a space for the feminine at this central point of his philosophy. Taking up the line of thought of Beauvoir, some feminist readings of Levinas have outlined critical gender approaches to his thought as not adequately taking into account the feminine.<sup>910</sup> Stella Sandford, for instance, argues in her study *The Metaphysics of Love. Gender and Transcendence in Levinas* that Levinas made a distinction between man as ‘man’ and as ‘woman’: “The fact is that the feminine is opposed to the human in a way that the masculine is not.”<sup>911</sup> In contradistinction to this statement, Jacques Derrida’s reading of Levinas’s philosophy highlights in particular Levinas’s notion of

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<sup>907</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 255/Ti, pp. 285-286, emphasis in the original.

<sup>908</sup> Ibid., p. 254/p. 285. I have slightly modified the translation at the end of the sentence and have written rather “egoistic and cruelest” instead of “egoist and cruelist” in order to mirror the grammar of the French more accurately. In the original Levinas wrote: “Ce désir [...] se brise et se satisfait comme le plus égoïste et le plus cruel des besoins.”, Ti, p. 285. The word “égoïste” is used as an adjective. I have decided to reproduce this in English as “egoistic” rather than using the substantive “egoist”. I have also amended the spelling of “cruelist” to “cruelest”.

<sup>909</sup> Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex*, p. xvi and *ibid.*, note 3/*Le deuxième sexe*, p. 15 and pp. 15-16, note 1.

<sup>910</sup> See Irigaray, Luce, “The Fecundity of the Caress: A Reading of Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, ‘Phenomenology of Eros’”, as well as the anthology *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Tina Chanter.

<sup>911</sup> Sandford, Stella, *The Metaphysics of Love. Gender and Transcendence in Levinas*, p. 62.

[...] the humanism of [the] ‘feminine alterity’, the humanism of the other woman, of the other (as) woman. If woman, in the silence of her ‘feminine being’, is not a man, she remains [*demeure*] human.<sup>912</sup>

It is, in my view, beyond doubt that Levinas’s notion of alterity was first and foremost shaped out of his notion of the *feminine*. Already in 1947 in *Time and the Other* Levinas defines the feminine as “the absolutely other”, i.e. as the other *par excellence*, and takes up this idea in *Totality and Infinity*, where it is further described as “the welcoming one par excellence, welcome in itself – the feminine being.”<sup>913</sup> In unveiling the solipsistic tendencies of the Greek myth of Aristophanes of the two that become one, Levinas opened up a way to recognize alterity – and to recognize it first and foremost through a recognition of the feminine. Claire Elise Katz has pointed this out in her study *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine*, as follows:

If we remember that the original other is the feminine and that the other is also my teacher, then it is from the traits of the feminine that we must learn. The Greek (philosophical) tradition, by silencing the feminine, has silenced mercy, and thus silenced ethics.<sup>914</sup>

To become a ‘soul that speaks’, to take up Rosenzweig’s words, means therefore in Levinas’s view to open oneself up to the alterity of the feminine.<sup>915</sup>

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<sup>912</sup> Derrida, Jacques, “A Word of Welcome”, in: Derrida, Jacques, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 37/“Le mot d’accueil”, in: Derrida, Jacques, *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 73.

<sup>913</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TO, p. 85/TA, p. 77; and TI, p. 157/Ti, p. 169.

<sup>914</sup> Katz, Claire Elise, *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine. The Silent Footsteps of Rebecca*, p. 4. See further Levinas, Emmanuel, *Ethics and Infinity*, pp. 68-69/*Éthique et Infini*, p. 61, where Levinas expounds on the Biblical passage Genesis 1:27, “male and female created He them.”

<sup>915</sup> For a gender-oriented analysis of Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption* see Amir, Yehoyada, “Ein genderorientierter Blick auf die Liebe Gottes zum Menschen”.

c) **“Schläft ein Lied in allen Dingen...” – Language as the event of Revelation:**

**The voice of love**

If Hellas is called the ‘eye of the world’, Israel can be said to be ‘the ear of the world’. Israel hears God’s voice in revelation. Moses addresses the tribes with ‘Hear, O Israel’. In the *keriath schma*, in ‘the calling to hear’ the Jew daily assumes the ‘yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven’. The true story of Israel is one of vacillation between obedience and disobedience [*Gehor-sam und Ungehorsam*] toward God.<sup>916</sup>

As we have seen, Rosenzweig puts an important accent on *spoken* language. Far from being simply a philosophy of language, the New Thinking of Rosenzweig rather follows language as interlocution.<sup>917</sup> In this process revelation plays a central role. What happens, in concrete terms, in the revelation? And how does language take part in this event? To put it quite simply: revelation is the experience of the opening of God to the human being. Rosenzweig describes this process as a stirring event which tears the self away from its original silence by giving it a *loved* soul and a *living* speech. The central point of this event is that in the experience of revelation, as Stéphane Mosès underlines,

[...] being is given to the human being at the very moment when he renounces the affirmation of his selfness [*ipséité*]. It is this passivity, which is not inaction, that defines that which Rosenzweig calls the *soul*. The soul is, in the human being, the consciousness of its dependence through the relationship with an exteriority [*extériorité*]. It is *the presence in him of this exteriority* [...] which awakens him to being.<sup>918</sup>

In this passage of the silent Self towards the speaking soul, the crucial step concerns the sound, i.e. *to hear* and to become *audible*. Therefore I place the accent in my interpretation on *orality*. In

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<sup>916</sup> Taubes, Jacob, *Occidental Eschatology*, p. 16/*Abendländische Eschatologie*, p. 15: “Wenn Hellas das ‘Auge der Welt’ genannt wird, so lässt sich vielleicht von Israel sagen, dass es das ‘Gehör der Welt’ ist. In der Offenbarung hört Israel die Stimme Gottes. Mit *höre Israel* wendet sich Mose an die Stämme. In der *keriath schma*, im ‘Rufen des Höre’, nimmt der Jude täglich das ‘Joch des Königtums des Himmels’ auf sich. Die Wirklichkeit Israels schwingt zwischen Gehor-sam und Ungehorsam gegen Gott.”

<sup>917</sup> Crépon, Marc, “Présentation”, p. 9.

<sup>918</sup> Mosès, Stéphane, “Révélation et Dialogue chez Franz Rosenzweig”, p. 518, emphasis added.

my view, the central point of the revelation for Rosenzweig is not the *seeing*, but rather the *hearing*, and more concretely, hearing the *voice* of an other. As I have pointed out, the preeminent characteristic of the voice is its ephemerality. Language qua voice essentially *happens*; it passes away as it takes place. Just as God passes before Moses and allows him only to see his trace, the voice too leaves only its *trace* as an echo in the memory of the one who heard it.<sup>919</sup> Thus, Levinas speaks of the “the trace of saying” [“*la trace du Dire*”].<sup>920</sup> In contrast to the face, which is at first sight difficult to imagine as not being a phenomenon for Levinas, because one sees the face nevertheless *concretely*, the voice does not offer this bodily evidence. Although the voice is produced by the body, it also possesses a life *beyond* the body – a life as *pure sound*. Moreover, its appearance is paradoxical because it appears and disappears in the same instant. In being pronounced, it fades away. It is created from nothing but the most volatile, invisible element – air.<sup>921</sup> It is important to point out these characteristics of the voice because Rosenzweig sees human nature in its very essence precisely in the characteristic of being *ephemeral*:

Man is ephemeral, being ephemeral is his essence, as it is God’s essence to be immortal and unconditional, and it is the world’s essence to be universal and necessary. [...] His own nature is certainly not itself infinite, but ‘in’ infinity; it is a singular reality and yet it is everything. Around it lies the infinite silence of the human not-nothing; it itself is the sound that resounds into this silence, a finite and yet unlimited entity.<sup>922</sup>

In this sense that which constitutes the human being most essentially is nothing other than his *breath* which he respire and through which the *sound* – unique to his soul, which resonates – is created: “the breath starts a melody”, as Danielle Cohen-Levinas puts it.<sup>923</sup> The breath can indeed be seen as offering the potential for a melody made by every individual human being, a single melody that composes as a whole a polyphony, i.e. a sort of a symphony of humanity, to which each individual adds his unique tonality. Rosenzweig alludes to this in *The Star of Redemption* when he writes that the personality of man can be conceived of as a *voice*, resounding among other voices. He describes this aspect in Part I of the *Star* as a process which leads from the

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<sup>919</sup> Exodus, 34:5. For the notion of the trace in the work of Levinas, see the article by Levy, Zeev, “Die Rolle der Spur in der Philosophie von Emmanuel Levinas und Jacques Derrida”.

<sup>920</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *OBBE*, p. 168/AQE, p. 261.

<sup>921</sup> On this subject, see further the study by Irigaray, Luce, *L’oubli de l’air chez Martin Heidegger*.

<sup>922</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 72-73/*Stern*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>923</sup> Cohen-Levinas, Danielle, *La voix au-delà du chant. Une fenêtre aux ombres*, p. 111 and p. 170. On “hearing” in the context of musical works, see Levinas, Michaël, *Arsis et Thésis ou La chanson du souffle*, composed in 1976, for bass flute in C.

isolated and silent Self to the awakening of a personality, able to participate in a society with fellow human beings. This transition is crucial in *The Star* and is realized particularly through the function of the voice:

The Self is simply closed in itself. It owes this to its rootedness in the character. If it were rooted in the individuality, [...] it is not the Self, the Self closed in itself and not looking outside itself that would have sprung up, but the *personality*. As the origin of the name already indicates, *the personality is man*, he who plays the role assigned to him by fate, one role beside others, *a voice in the polyphonic symphony of humanity*. It is really a 'highest good of the children of the earth' – one for each of them. The Self has no relation with the children of men, always only with one man alone, with the 'Self' precisely. [...] The Self does not have a plural. [...] [I]t is Adam, man himself.<sup>924</sup>

Alluding to Goethe by describing it as the “highest good of the children of the earth [*höchstes Gut der Erdenkinder*]”,<sup>925</sup> Rosenzweig defines the personality metaphorically as a *voice*, which takes part in a symphony of mankind. By referring his notion of personality to the metaphor of a “polyphonic symphony of humanity”, Rosenzweig reveals the great significance he attaches to the voice. As etymologically mirrored in the word *per-sonare*, the ‘per-sonality’ is thus first and foremost characterized as being *sonorous*, i.e. something audible. The isolated Self, “buried in itself”, has no ability to express his innermost feelings “to the resounding open air [*ins tönende Freie*]; all roads lead only more deeply into the inner silence.”<sup>926</sup> This is seen as the main characteristic of the Self according to Rosenzweig:

The Self can only be silent. In any case, it can always seek to express itself in lyrical monologues, although this expression, precisely as expression, is no longer quite fitting; the Self does not express itself, it is buried in itself. But *as soon as it enters into conversation it ceases to be Self*; Self is Self only as long as it is alone.<sup>927</sup>

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<sup>924</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 77/*Stern*, pp. 73-74, emphasis added.

<sup>925</sup> Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, *West-Östlicher Divan*, first book, “Suleika”: “Volk und Knecht und Überwinder,/ Sie gestehn zu jeder Zeit:/ *Höchstes Glück der Erdenkinder/ Sei nur die Persönlichkeit.*” Emphasis added.

<sup>926</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 89/*Stern*, p. 87, emphasis added. I have slightly modified the translation of Barbara Galli and replaced the translation of “*ins tönende Freie*” as “the cry from without” with “the resounding open air”, which is the translation of William W. Hallo [cf. Rosenzweig, Franz, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. by William W. Hallo, Boston: Beacon Press, 1972, p. 80], because it seems to me more appropriate here.

<sup>927</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 86/*Stern*, p. 84, emphasis added.

The process from the Self to the personality is further developed in Parts II and III of *The Star*, describing respectively the transformation into ‘a soul that speaks’, realized under the commandment to love, and finally the participation in the communal life.

Rosenzweig’s metaphorical description of man’s personality being ‘a voice among other voices’ has also been poetically expressed by Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) in his *Notes on the Melody of Things* [1898]:

Whether it be the singing of a lamp or the voice of a storm, whether it be the breath of an evening or the groan of the ocean – whatever surrounds you, a broad melody always wakes behind you, woven out of a thousand *voices*, where there is room for your own solo only here and there. *To know when you need to join in: that is the secret of your solitude*: just as the art of true interactions with others is to let yourself fall away from high words into a single common melody.<sup>928</sup>

Rosenzweig’s issue, seen in the light of Rilke’s poetical reflections, can thus be further interpreted in the sense that man is everywhere and always surrounded by voices. Perhaps one could refer again in this context to a certain influence of Kabbalah on Rosenzweig, as the research of Moshe Idel and Rivka Horwitz has shown.<sup>929</sup> For the *Zohar* the power of the voice is a very important aspect. The recent research on Kabbalah takes the aspects of the *breath* and the *voice* more and more into account; however, it is still at its beginning, as Jonathan Garb points out: “These dimensions of the power of language have been addressed to a relatively lesser extent in existing research on Kabbalah. It is important to stress that the issue of breath and language has not yet been made the focus of any research.”<sup>930</sup> Nonetheless, as Garb demonstrates, the voice is attributed an eminent power in the Kabbalah which is profoundly linked with the phenomenon of life.<sup>931</sup> In this sense the *Zohar* says that “*there is nothing in the world which does not have a sound.*”<sup>932</sup> Similar to Rosenzweig’s thinking, the genesis of *oral* speech, that is to hear and to become audible, i.e. to have a voice, and the phenomenon of life are seen in their deep

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<sup>928</sup> Rilke, Rainer Maria, “Notes on the Melody of Things”, p. 51/“Notizen zur Melodie der Dinge”, p. 416, in the original “when you need to join in” (“*wann Du einzufallen hast*”) is emphasized, the rest is emphasized by me.

<sup>929</sup> Idel, Moshe, “Franz Rosenzweig and the Kabbala”, and Horwitz, Rivka, “From Hegelianism to a revolutionary understanding of Judaism: Franz Rosenzweig’s attitude toward Kabbala and Myth”. With respect to Levinas see further Wolfson, Elliot R., “Secrecy, Modesty, and the Feminine: Kabbalistic Traces in the Thought of Levinas”.

<sup>930</sup> Garb, Jonathan, “Powers of Language in Kabbalah: Comparative Reflections”, p. 235.

<sup>931</sup> Ibid., p. 244: “[...] speech is empty of substance, a matter of vapor, and yet it is the foundation of our human world. [...] The world is animated by pure breath.”

<sup>932</sup> *Zohar*, I, 92a, cited after Garb, Jonathan, “Powers of Language in Kabbalah: Comparative Reflections”, p. 236.

connection. As I pointed out, there is a development throughout *The Star* which describes the process of the silent Self into a personality (in Part I), further into a speaking soul (in Part II) and as an active part in the communal life (in Part III). This shows a gradual transition from silence towards speech – even though it must be noted that in Part III language itself is surpassed in the long run by the silence of the liturgical *gesture*, which stands above words for Rosenzweig. However, for the individual man and his relationship to life the outlined gradual transition from ‘a silent Self’ to ‘a speaking soul’ is of great importance. In order to expound on this gradual transition in more detail, let me cite at length a passage from Part III, in which Rosenzweig outlines the complex relationship between silence and speech with respect to the religious community in which the I participates. Rosenzweig argues that, in the community,

[...] in the We, finally, everything is gathered in order to enter into the unanimous rhythm of the chorus whose many voices sing the final song. *All the voices have become independent, each sings the words to the melody of its own soul*, and yet all these melodies yield to the same rhythm and are united in one harmony. Yet, they are still always words, the voices of the inspired world always agree upon a word. The word that they sing is We. As song this would be a last and full final agreement. But as word, it is as incapable as any other word is of being the last word. *The word is never last*; it is not merely spoken, it is also speaking. This is the true mystery of language, its own life; *the word speaks*.<sup>933</sup>

This passage is remarkable for two reasons: Firstly, it shows how important the role of the voice is for Rosenzweig in the final part of the *The Star*. The independent voices are gathered in a chorus that chants in unanimous harmony, yet each one in its very own unique manner with “the melody of its own soul”.<sup>934</sup> Secondly, Rosenzweig explains why the word is not able to have ‘the final word’, that is to say why silence is the ultimately final point of Redemption: because the word ‘speaks’. This means that in the very essence of language there resides an endless discourse, one word referring to another, calling for new words to explain the previous ones. This auto-reference of language is only surpassed *beyond* words, i.e. in the final silence of Redemption, described in part III of *The Star*. This recalls Heidegger’s notion of a language that ‘speaks’ – “*Die Sprache spricht*.”<sup>935</sup> Referring to Heidegger’s statement, Levinas describes this aspect of language in his essay on Paul Celan as “[a]n elementary communication without revelation,

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<sup>933</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 254-255/*Stern*, p. 264.

<sup>934</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254/p. 264.

<sup>935</sup> Heidegger, Martin, “Die Sprache”, in: *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, pp. 10-33, here p. 12, emphasis in the original.



stammering infancy of discourse, a most clumsy intrusion in the famous ‘*language that speaks*’, the famous ‘*die Sprache spricht*’: entrance of the beggar into ‘the house of being’.”<sup>936</sup> Hence, Levinas refers this aspect of language to a ‘communication without revelation’, that is to say it differs essentially from Rosenzweig’s notion of language which is connected with revelation. However, what is at stake here is the common aspect that language speaks endlessly: “*the word speaks*”,<sup>937</sup> as Rosenzweig argues. In so far as the essence of man is conceived of by Rosenzweig as a ‘linguistic being’ – the ‘coming to being’ is in fact a ‘coming to language’ – the essence of man too speaks endlessly, inspiring (Rosenzweig uses the term ‘*beseelen*’<sup>938</sup>) and vivifying the world and fellow human beings through love which is connected to the ability to speak, as I pointed out above.<sup>939</sup> Pursuing this idea further, one can conclude that in Part III, in the community of living *everything* speaks in its own way; it is only necessary to have an appropriate openness of the soul, in accordance with the audible world around it, to perceive the innumerable sounds of the world, infinitely different. The American composer John Cage expressed the cited insight of the *Zohar* in his own radical manner: “Music is everywhere. You just have to have the ears to hear it”.<sup>940</sup>

Taking up the hypothesis of Marc Crépon in his study *Les promesses du langage* that “*The Star of Redemption* would speak about nothing other than speech,”<sup>941</sup> I would like to highlight the function not only of speech, but more precisely the trait of speech which is *audible*, that is, the voice. In this way, Crépon’s hypothesis offers a completely new perspective, until now neglected by the research on Rosenzweig. Interpreters of Rosenzweig have always placed the accent on language only and have forgotten what in my view is the heart of the matter for Rosenzweig: that is, precisely, the *voice*. It is through the voice that pre-language becomes “true language

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<sup>936</sup> Levinas Levinas, “Paul Celan: From Being to the Other”, in: *Proper Names*, pp. 40-46, p. 40/“Paul Celan. De l’être à l’autre”, in: *Noms propres*, pp. 59-66, p. 59, emphasis in the original.

<sup>937</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 255/*Stern*, p. 264, emphasis added.

<sup>938</sup> See e.g. Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 258-259, p. 264, p. 287: “the inspiring effect of love”/*Stern*, pp. 268-269, p. 274, p. 300: “*beseelende Wirkung der Liebe*”.

<sup>939</sup> See chapter IV, 2. a), “The role of love in *The Star of Redemption* and its connection to language”.

<sup>940</sup> Cage made this idea fruitful in composing his work *4’33’’*, a musical piece for piano which is entirely silent. (See my excursus in chapter II, “At the crossroads of music, poetry and ethics – *poethics* in the thought of Levinas and John Cage”.) For the original biblical source of the phrase “the sound of silence”, understood as a *murmur* or *rustling* of silence, see in the Bible, Book of Kings I, 19:12: “[...] and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire, and after the fire a *still small voice* [קוּל דַּמְמָה דַּקָּה].” Levinas refers to this expression in the title of his article “Roger Laporte and the Still Small Voice”, in: *Proper Names*, pp. 90-93/“Roger Laporte et la voix de fin silence”, in: *Noms propres*, pp. 131–137.

<sup>941</sup> Crépon, Marc, *Les promesses du langage*, Benjamin, Rosenzweig, Heidegger, p. 133.

[*langage*] [...] because the language [*la langue*] becomes *audible*<sup>942</sup> – and this event can be realized through the voice alone. It is the *sonority* of speech which makes it the magic key that opens up the silence of the Self. As Danielle Cohen-Levinas points out: “The specific orality of the voice is to assume human otherness [*l’altérité*].”<sup>943</sup> Conceiving language as being nothing less than “the seal of humanity in man,”<sup>944</sup> Rosenzweig is of the opinion that “man became man when he spoke; and all the same *there is until this day no language of humanity*, on the contrary this will be only at the end.”<sup>945</sup> The possibility of an all-embracing understanding realized in, what Rosenzweig calls, a “language of humanity” is thus postponed to an eschatological future. Man can only perceive a glance of it in the silence of the Redemption, Rosenzweig describes in Part III of *The Star*, depicting the silence of the religious *gesture*, used in the ceremonies of the liturgy. The gesture is unifying the community beyond the word. However, here too the voice plays a central role, because it is through the voice that the chants of the religious community are expressed. The voice creates among the attendees a “community of voices” [*Stimmengemeinschaft*], as Moshe Idel expressed it.<sup>946</sup> The ritual community is constructed to a large extent through its common chant which enables the community to feel united in the song. The sonority plays thus an important role.

The importance of sonority can also be found in Rosenzweig’s analysis of the “Grammar of Eros (The Language of Love)” in *The Star*.<sup>947</sup> In this section Rosenzweig highlights in particular the ‘becoming audible’ of the I, which he calls the “‘root word’ [*Stammwort*]”<sup>948</sup> of the Revelation: “I is always a No become audible.”<sup>949</sup> But not only in this section is the voice and all that which accompanies it (audibility, sonority, the act of hearing and listening, etc.) of great importance. One can find numerous references to the voice in *The Star*; for instance, Rosenzweig repeatedly speaks of “the voice of God”<sup>950</sup> in various contexts: “the silent hearing of God’s voice,”<sup>951</sup> “the voice of the true God,”<sup>952</sup> “the voice of the Living One,”<sup>953</sup> and it has to be seen

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<sup>942</sup> Ibid., p. 138, emphasis added.

<sup>943</sup> Cohen-Levinas, Danielle, *La voix au-delà du chant. Une fenêtre aux ombres*, p. 123.

<sup>944</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 120/*Stern*, p. 122.

<sup>945</sup> Ibid., emphasis added.

<sup>946</sup> Idel, Moshe, “Die laut gelesene Tora. Stimmengemeinschaft in der jüdischen Mystik”, and of the same author, “The Voiced Text of the Torah”.

<sup>947</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 187-200/*Stern*, pp. 193-206.

<sup>948</sup> Ibid., p. 187/p. 193.

<sup>949</sup> Ibid.

<sup>950</sup> Ibid., p. 192/p. 198.

<sup>951</sup> Ibid., p. 333/p. 348.

also in allusion to “the voice of Revelation”<sup>954</sup>: “For only where there is life [...], only there does the voice of the Living One find an echo.”<sup>955</sup> The power of speech is so profound in Rosenzweig’s view that he even admits that “*where the world is, there, too, is language*; the world is never without the word, and it exists only in the word, and without the word, it would itself also not exist.”<sup>956</sup> In this context, “the voice of Love” holds a crucial place since it is, in my view, the key notion for understanding what is at stake in the event of Revelation. The experience of *Revelation*, as Rosenzweig describes it, is realized not through seeing, feeling, touching or speaking, but through hearing. Even though seeing is also of great significance for Rosenzweig, since he explicitly emphasizes in Part III that truth is experienced ultimately through *vision* (parallel in this sense to Rabbi Yehuda haLevi’s (1024-1141) emphasis on seeing).<sup>957</sup> However, for the Revelation in Part II the most important sense in my view is the *hearing*. Above all other senses, Revelation appeals to the ears. It is a *call*. It comes as no surprise in this context that the most important prayer in Judaism, the *Schema Israel* [שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל; “Hear, [O] Israel”], is in fact “a call to hear”.<sup>958</sup> It encapsulates the monotheistic essence of Judaism by connecting it to the hearing of the voice of God: “*Hear, O Israel: the Lord is Our God, the Lord is One.*” This is one of the most essential features in Judaism, as Jacob Taubes points out: “In the *keriath schma*, in ‘the calling to hear’ the Jew daily assumes the ‘yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven’.”<sup>959</sup> With respect to Rosenzweig’s thinking, it is the hearing of “the voice of Love” which opens up the silent Self and lets him become “a soul that speaks”.<sup>960</sup> Although one could argue that Rosenzweig himself in his article “The New Thinking” explained that “the difference between old and new, logical and grammatical thinking does not rest on *loud* versus *quiet*, but rather on needing the other and, what amounts to the same, on taking time seriously,”<sup>961</sup> which indicates that the act of speaking *loudly* is not the main feature for Rosenzweig’s New Thinking, but

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<sup>952</sup> Ibid., p. 45/p. 40.

<sup>953</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-46/p. 41.

<sup>954</sup> Ibid., p. 146/p. 149.

<sup>955</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-46/p. 41.

<sup>956</sup> Ibid., p. 312/p. 327, emphasis added.

<sup>957</sup> Ibid., p. 414/p. 436: “In the view we grasp eternal truth. [*In der Schau erfassen wir die ewige Wahrheit.*]” Regarding Rosenzweig’s translations of Yehuda haLevi’s poems see Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, IV, 1, *Jehuda ha-Levi: 95 Hymnen und Gedichte der 60 Hymnen und Gedichte*, ed. by Rafael N. Rosenzweig. For an English translation see Galli, Barbara, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi. Translating, Translations, and Translators.*

<sup>958</sup> Deuteronomy, 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord is Our God, the Lord is One.”

<sup>959</sup> Taubes, Jacob, *Occidental Eschatology*, p. 16/*Abendländische Eschatologie*, p. 15.

<sup>960</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 88/*Stern*, p. 87.

<sup>961</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “The New Thinking”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 109-139, here p. 127/“Das neue Denken. Einige nachträgliche Bemerkungen zum ‘Stern der Erlösung’”, in: Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, III, pp. 139-161, here pp. 151-152, emphasis added.

moreover the other and time.<sup>962</sup> Nevertheless, I would like to stress the fact that the voice doubtlessly is of great importance in Rosenzweig's argumentation, because it holds a crucial function in *The Star*: the voice is the medium through which the event of Revelation is realized. Furthermore it is also the medium through which the "speaking-thinking" [*Sprachdenken*] of the New Thinking realizes the approach to the other and to time, i.e. its two main characteristics, that is, needing the other and taking time seriously.

The creative power of language is furthermore revealed in the biblical account of creation where it is said that God uses first and foremost his language to create the world. It is through his speech that he called the things to be: "And God *spoke*: Let there be light..."; whereas it would have been much more simple and to the point to write: "And God *made* light". However the Bible right from its start emphasizes the power of the creative word: God himself *spoke*, and so *speaks* man, according to Rosenzweig, who sees language, as love, sensual [*sinnlich*] and supra-sensory [*übersinnlich*]. The creative word [*das schöpferische Wort*], an aspect elaborated also by Walter Benjamin in his essay "On Language as such and on Human Language", and furthermore the coming into being through language are important aspects for Rosenzweig's thinking.<sup>963</sup> Concluding this chapter, I would also like to highlight the reverberation of this process of creation; while man, the world and all the things in it have been created through *sound*, i.e. through a voice, it necessarily must *re-sound* out of them. The task of man would be thus to unchain a *hidden* melody in every being and every single thing, as the German romantic poet Joseph von Eichendorff (1788-1857) wrote in his poem "*Wünschelrute*" [Divining Rod]: "*Schläft ein Lied in allen Dingen/ Die da träumen fort und fort/ Und die Welt hebt an zu singen/ Triffst Du nur das Zauberwort* [There sleeps a song in all things/ which dream there on and on/ and the world begins to sing/ if only you strike the magic word]".<sup>964</sup> In my view, this poem sums up poetically what is at stake in the role and function of the "voice of love" in the event of Revelation in *The Star of Redemption*.

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<sup>962</sup> By the way, it is striking that one of Levinas's book titles emphasizes exactly these two most important aspects of Rosenzweig's New Thinking: *Time and the Other/Le Temps et l'autre*.

<sup>963</sup> See Benjamin, Walter, "Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen"/"On Language as such and on Human Language". For a comparative approach, see Mosès, Stéphane, "Langage et Mystique chez Walter Benjamin et Franz Rosenzweig", in: Mosès, Stéphane, *Franz Rosenzweig. Sous l'Étoile*, pp. 131-166.

<sup>964</sup> Eichendorff, Joseph von, "Wünschelrute", p. 121. The verb "treffen" is ambiguous: it can be translated in English either with "strike" or "come across" which highlights either intention or chance.

**3. a) The voice of the commandment (*mitzvah*) in Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, with a view to Rosenzweig and Levinas's lectures on "The Written and the Oral" and "Word and Silence"**

Language is the fact that always one sole word is proffered: God.<sup>965</sup>

As I have shown, an important common theme between Levinas and Rosenzweig is the accent both thinkers place in their work on *orality*, i.e. the spoken word. In the following, I extend this parallel to the work of Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786).<sup>966</sup> Similar to Rosenzweig and Levinas, Mendelssohn gives more value to the spoken than to the written word. This corresponds with the devaluing of the written that can also be found in the work of other authors of the Enlightenment, such as Rousseau and Lessing, who rise up against what they called a pure *Buchstabengelehrtheit* [book knowledge]. According to this point of view, only in the spoken word is it possible to convey and preserve the spirit of a living and current religion. In the age of the Internet, email and the mobile phone, Mendelssohn's reflections on the value attached to books and letters resonate in an almost prophetic manner. In his book *Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism*, published in 1783, he expounds:

The diffusion of writings and books which, through the invention of the printing press, has been infinitely multiplied in our days, has entirely transformed man. [...] Everything is dead letter; the spirit of living conversation has vanished. [...] Hence, it has come to pass that man has almost lost his value for his fellow man. Intercourse with the wise man is not sought, for we find his wisdom in writings. [...] We do not need the man of experience; we only need his writings. In a word, we are *literati, men of letters*. Our whole being depends on letters; and we can scarcely comprehend how a mortal man can educate and perfect himself without a *book*.<sup>967</sup>

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<sup>965</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Roger Laporte and the Still Small Voice", in: *Proper Names*, pp. 90-93, p. 93/"Roger Laporte et la voix de fin silence", in: *Noms propres*, pp. 131-137, p. 137: "Le langage, c'est le fait qu'un seul mot toujours se profère: Dieu."

<sup>966</sup> On the biographical background of Moses Mendelssohn, see Altmann, Alexander, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*, and Bourel, Dominique, *Moses Mendelssohn, la naissance du judaïsme moderne*. For an overview on different Jewish education concepts in the German-Jewish context, with special attention to Rosenzweig and Mendelssohn, see further Krochmalnik, Daniel, "Deutschjudentum: Bildungskonzepte von Moses Mendelssohn bis Franz Rosenzweig", pp. 88-91.

<sup>967</sup> Mendelssohn, Moses, *Jerusalem*, pp. 103-104/"Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum", pp. 421-422. See further, Eisen, Arnold, *Rethinking Modern Judaism: Ritual, Commandment, Community*, p. 82, who analyses in detail the role of the oral and ceremonial law for Mendelssohn within his cultural context.

The cited passage comes just after Mendelssohn's definition of the *ceremonial law* [*Zeremonialgesetz*], which is doubtlessly one of the key notions of his study.<sup>968</sup> In spite of the negative connotation which became attached to this notion in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – in fact, the representatives of the Haskala who came after Mendelssohn, such as David Friedländer, Lazarus Bendavid and others, see in the ceremonial law one of the main obstacles for the emancipation of the Jews<sup>969</sup> –, Mendelssohn in contrast returns to this in his work *Jerusalem* as one of the pillars of his interpretation of Judaism. He goes even so far as to see in the ceremonial law the very characteristic of Judaism.<sup>970</sup> He defines it as follows: “The ceremonial law itself is a kind of living script, rousing the mind and the heart, full of meaning, never ceasing to inspire contemplation and to provide the occasion and opportunity for *oral instruction* [... *zum mündlichen Unterrichte Anlaß und Gelegenheit gibt*].”<sup>971</sup> To understand this question (discussed in Haskala) in a broader context, it has to be noted here that the issue at stake in the era of emancipation was the question of how to conserve Jewish religious identity without being completely assimilated into a majority-Christian society. Thus, the question that arose was how to maintain alterity, i.e. the religious ‘otherness’ of the Jews, against the social pressure of society. It is striking in this context that in his plea for religious freedom Mendelssohn specifically referred to the *human face*, a notion so important for Levinas's thinking, underscoring the simple fact that all men have different facial features and no one looks the same as his neighbor:

Brothers, if you care for true piety, let us not feign agreement where diversity is evidently the plan and purpose of Providence. None of us thinks and feels exactly like his fellow man; why then do we wish to deceive each other with delusive words? We already do this, unfortunately, in our daily intercourse, in our conversations, which are of no particular importance; why then also in matters that have to do with our temporal and eternal welfare, our whole destiny? Why should we make ourselves

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<sup>968</sup> See Krochmalnik, Daniel, “Das Zeremoniell als Zeichensprache. Moses Mendelssohns Apologie des Judentums im Rahmen der aufklärerischen Semiotik”.

<sup>969</sup> See for example Friedländer, David, *Sendschreiben an Seine Hochwürden, Herren Oberconsistorialrath und Probst Teller zu Berlin, von einigen Hausvätern jüdischer Religion* [1799], p. 48: “Abwerfung des lästigen Jochs der Ceremonial- und Ritualgesetze.”

<sup>970</sup> Moreover, this was not the first time Mendelssohn dealt with the notion of the ceremonial law: at the order of the King of Prussia, Frederick the Great, Mendelssohn wrote his study *Ritualgesetze der Juden betreffend Erbschaften, Vormundschaften, Testamente und Ehesachen in so weit sie Mein und Dein angehen*, published in 1778. The work's objective was to help Prussian judges in their treatment of legal disputes amongst Jews. See Stern, Selma, *Der Preußische Staat und die Juden*, pp. 126-130. On the notion of “ceremonial law” see Krochmalnik, Daniel, “Mendelssohns Begriff ‘Zeremonialgesetz’ und der europäische Antizeremonialismus. Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung”, and Freudenthal, Gideon, “Moses Mendelssohn, des hiéroglyphes à l'idolâtrie”, pp. 77-79.

<sup>971</sup> Mendelssohn, Moses, *Jerusalem*, pp. 102-103/“Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum”, p. 421, emphasis added. See further Hilfrich, Carola, *‘Lebendige Schrift’ – Repräsentation und Idolatrie in Moses Mendelssohns Philosophie und Exegese des Judentums*.

unrecognizable to each other in the most important concerns of our life by masquerading, *since God has stamped everyone, not without reason, with his own facial features?*<sup>972</sup>

Obviously Mendelssohn wanted to stress that human *alterity* and the right to be different is foreseen by God himself and the way He designed the world. The human face brings to the fore in this way an irreducible otherness, an argument which is of particular interest with respect to Levinas's philosophy. Levinas, for his part, points out the Jewish emancipation, for which Mendelssohn undoubtedly stands as an important protagonist, in all its ambiguities in his foreword to Stéphane Mosès study *System and Revelation*, underscoring the pitfalls of this political and social process:

This modernity first found its expression and its doctrine in Moses Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* in 1783. And yet, was not the progressive de-Judaization of the Jewish citizens of the European national states in the course of the nineteenth century a clue to the fragility of this first philosophy? Emancipation, ensuring Jews of the continuity of a purely confessional Judaism, began to mean assimilation.<sup>973</sup>

However, in Mendelssohn's view, it was precisely by upholding the ceremonial law that the outlined process of assimilation should be prevented.

Mendelssohn thus places emphasis on the *oral* education, realized in the face-to-face relationship between the teacher and the pupil. In this way, the meaning of the commandments and of the law is constantly renewed through oral transmission and avoids stagnating into dead letters. He defines ceremonial law in terms of writing which is 'alive', as a kind of "*living writing*"<sup>974</sup> – *living*, or *alive*, because it is realized not in its written form, but rather verbally and through gesture, that is to say, through the *ritual*. As an action at first sight deprived of any practical end, the ritual can only raise curious questions for a neophyte: why do we do this?<sup>975</sup> It

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<sup>972</sup> Mendelssohn, Moses, *Jerusalem*, p. 138/"Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum", p. 456, emphasis added.

<sup>973</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Foreword", p. 17/"Préface", p. 11.

<sup>974</sup> Mendelssohn, Moses, *Jerusalem*, pp. 102-103/"Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum", p. 421.

<sup>975</sup> As Arnold Eisen explains in the foreword of his study *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, p. xi, it was an event of the same type which awakened his interest for this problem. At the start of Sukkot in a synagogue in Philadelphia, while attending the service, a strange feeling seized him: "I could not help but wonder, despite my familiarity with the rituals of the holiday, what on earth these people were doing and why they were doing it. A few moments later, no less incredulous than before, I had joined the march." One could say that at this moment Eisen indeed lost connection with the *transcendent* content which justified the fulfillment of the rite which is supposed to represent that content.

is not difficult to find the model for this question in the evening ceremony of *Pesach* (Passover), where the youngest child at the table of the *Seder* asks questions, starting with the most fundamental one: “why do we do these things?” [? המ נשתה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות ?] “Why is this night different from all other nights?”] Then the child must listen to an explanation comprising a summary of history and Jewish theology, all before dinner. In this way, the meaning of the commandments is brought to life again at each *Seder* through the performance of *speaking*. To formulate this process in a Levinasian manner: that which has already been said must be said anew in order not to calcify into a dead, contextless text, but rather to renew its connection to the saying and to remain in this way living speech within the community. That is, according to Levinas, the very essence of language, as he explains in the foreword of *Totality and Infinity*:

But it belongs to the very essence of language, which consists in continually undoing its phrase by the foreword of the exegesis, in *unsaying the said*, in attempting to restate without ceremonies what has already be [sic] ill understood in *the inevitable ceremonial in which the said delights*.<sup>976</sup>

Even though this passage is not related to ‘liturgical’ ceremony it is nevertheless of interest to point out how Levinas employs in this context the word ‘*ceremonial*’. The “inevitable ceremony in which the said delights” is connected by Levinas to speaking and the spoken, which refers to his notions of the Saying and the Said. According to the role and function which Mendelssohn attributed to the living language in his definition of the ceremonial law mentioned above, one can draw a parallel to Levinas’s thought. Indeed, that which Mendelssohn’s definition brings to light is one of the most fundamental aspects of Levinas’s work: the Saying and the Said.<sup>977</sup> As I have demonstrated, these notions play an extraordinary role in Levinas’s philosophy: “The Infinite passes in the saying. [*Que l’Infini se passe dans le Dire... .*]”<sup>978</sup> The Saying has no temporally fixed point, but it is realized rather in the uninterrupted process of connecting words to one another, and in this fashion it *happens* or *takes place* in its own fulfillment. It is the act of performing that constitutes the essence of speaking. Its realization occurs as a passing away.

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<sup>976</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 30/Ti, p. 16: “[...] l’essence même du langage [...] consiste à défaire, à tout instant, sa phrase par l’avant-propos ou l’exégèse, à *dédire le dit*, à tenter de redire sans cérémonies ce qui à déjà été mal entendu dans *l’inévitable cérémonial où se complait le dit*,” emphasis added.

<sup>977</sup> See the chapter “The Said and the Saying” [sic]/“Le Dire et le Dit”, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, pp. 5-7/AQE, pp. 16-20.

<sup>978</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 147/AQE, p. 230.



Once the breath has been exhaled, its being there, its *Dasein*, has vanished – to this extent, speaking, just as the ritual, consists essentially of the very act of saying and has to be renewed every time. This evokes the issue of a *breathed meaning*, that is, a meaning which is alive only in that time during which it is said, in the time of *saying*. This is precisely why Mendelssohn sees in Judaism a defense against idolatry. As it takes place essentially in the ceremony, it is bound to a living present. This aspect is highlighted by Levinas through the emphasis he puts on the voice, which interrupts the solipsistic ‘being-for-my-own’: “To speak is to interrupt my existence as a subject, a master, but to interrupt it without offering myself as spectacle, leaving me simultaneously object and subject. *My voice brings the element in which that dialectical situation is accomplished concretely.*”<sup>979</sup> In a face-to-face conversation the *re-spiration* of the breath, consumed in the voice, becomes the *in-spiration* of the other. It is in this sense that we have to understand why for Levinas “the banal fact of conversation [...] is *the marvel of marvels [la merveille des merveilles]*.”<sup>980</sup> Mendelssohn, too, highlights in several sections in his *Jerusalem* the importance of the voice as the mode in which God reveals Himself. He cites in this context the example in Exodus 33:15, where Moses wants to see the face of God; however, he is only allowed to see the trace of his Glory and to hear His *voice*.<sup>981</sup> Levinas also refers precisely to this example in order to illustrate his notion of the *trace*. God’s presence is thus revealed through His voice – a presence which, like the trace, is a reference to an absence which is also presence, a presence that has passed, just as the voice vanishes in its emerging, as I have outlined above. Pursuing this thought further, one can attribute to the voice a certain *eschatology*, as Danielle Cohen-Levinas does when she describes an “eschatology of the voice [*eschatologie de la voix*]”,<sup>982</sup> emphasizing the specifically *temporal* feature of the voice. This is because, as I have shown, the voice escapes the temporal representation in ‘being there’ and ‘being absent’ at the same time: “The voice cannot therefore be defined within time since it belongs to it. [*La voix ne peut par conséquent se définir dans le temps puisqu’elle lui appartient.*]”<sup>983</sup> This entails so to

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<sup>979</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “The Transcendence of Words: On Michel Leiris’s *Biffures*”, in: *Outside the Subject*, pp. 113-117, p. 117/“La transcendance des mots. À propos des Biffures”, in: *Hors sujet*, pp. 195-203, p. 203, emphasis added.

<sup>980</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Ethics and Spirit”, in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 3-10, p. 7/“Éthique et Esprit”, in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 13-23, p. 19.

<sup>981</sup> Mendelssohn, Moses, *Jerusalem*, pp. 122-123/“Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum”, pp. 440-441; see also *ibid.*, p. 97/p. 415.

<sup>982</sup> Cohen-Levinas, Danielle, *La voix au-delà du chant. Une fenêtre aux ombres*, p. 85.

<sup>983</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

speak a particular “time of the voice [*le temps de la voix*]”,<sup>984</sup> highlighting its *temporal* (perceptible through the senses) and *timeless* (transcending the senses) nature. The eternity of the moment is thus reproduced in every true face-to-face conversation by the unique melody of the human breath, which connects through the voice the presence with a ‘beyond of time’. Levinas explains this profound connection between the human *breath* and human *time* in an interview with Bracha Ettinger as follows: “Time, our time, is already the breath of the human being. Our time is the breath of the spirit.”<sup>985</sup>

In my interpretation of Mendelssohn’s definition of the ceremonial law, two aspects are fundamental: the signification of the *voice* in the process of the ritual and, with it, the *performativity* of the ritual. This latter aspect is expressed first and foremost in its dynamic character. Although the process of a ceremony or ritual may be strictly regulated and therefore at first sight static in its content, in the very act, i.e. in the *gestures* and the *saying*, there remains always a certain degree of contingency and unpredictability which brings to the fore the same content anew, every time. Even if the text remains the same, the modulation of the human voice always brings it to life in a new way. It is because of this unbridgeable liturgical difference that transcendence reappears and takes place each time anew. In his innovative study on *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning*, Steven Kepnes emphasizes precisely this aspect, which hitherto has been given too little attention in the scholarly research:

Because liturgy is performed by a specific group at a specific time and place, it is never the same. Because liturgy is a living performance that is dependent upon the skill and attitude of its players, it always varies from its script. Thus, liturgical reasoning is always new. It is neither preexistent nor static; it is discovered and revealed in every liturgical performance.<sup>986</sup>

This point is also emphasized in Leora Batnitzky’s interpretation of Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem*, underscoring that: “Jewish ceremonial law emphasizes *performance* rather than adherence to dogma.”<sup>987</sup> In fact Mendelssohn underlines clearly in his *Jerusalem* the performativity of the liturgical ceremony as expression of the ceremonial law:

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<sup>984</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>985</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Time is the Breath of the Spirit. In Conversation with Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger*, p. 21.

<sup>986</sup> Kepnes, Steven, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning*, p. 3.

<sup>987</sup> Batnitzky, Leora, *Idolatry and Representation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered*, p. 38.

Man's actions are transitory; there is nothing lasting, nothing enduring about them that, like hieroglyphic script, could lead to idolatry through abuse or misunderstanding. But they also have the advantage over alphabetical signs of not isolating man, of not making him to be a solitary creature, poring over writings and books. They impel him rather to *social intercourse*, to imitation, and to *oral, living instruction*. For this reason, there were but a few written laws, and even these were not entirely comprehensible without oral instruction and tradition; and it was forbidden to write more about them. But the unwritten laws, the oral tradition, *the living instruction from man to man*, from mouth to heart, were to explain, enlarge, limit, and define more precisely what, for wise intentions and with wise moderation, remained undetermined in the written law. [...] Thus teaching and life, wisdom and activity, speculation and sociability were most intimately connected; or rather, thus should it be, according to the initial plan and purpose of the lawgiver.<sup>988</sup>

Thus, transmission entails an ongoing process of interpretation which takes place through the living speech of oral instruction as well as through a necessary *social intercourse*. This is therefore to be understood in connection with the voice – the medium through which we convey our messages in the social discourse. I will expound upon the aspect of sociability in more detail in the section after the next.<sup>989</sup>

For now, I rather want to draw a parallel between Mendelssohn's notion of the ceremonial law and Levinas's views on "The Written and the Oral" [*L'Écrit et l'Oral*"]. Under this title Levinas gave a lecture in Paris on February 6, 1952 at the *Collège philosophique*, which was founded by Jean Wahl. This lecture was published only recently, in February 2011, in the second volume of Levinas's *Œuvres Complètes* (Collected Works). It offers a fresh perspective on Levinas's points of view on the written and the oral, which I would like to set in fruitful dialogue with Mendelssohn's views on this topic. Levinas starts his considerations with the assertion that there are two ways in which truth manifests itself, i.e. the *written* and the *oral* form: "The Written and the Oral are not only two ways in which the pupils demonstrate the knowledge they have acquired. These are two ways for the truth to manifest itself."<sup>990</sup> He goes on to describe what characterizes these two forms, the written and the oral, with all that is entailed in their respective

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<sup>988</sup> Mendelssohn, Moses, *Jerusalem*, pp. 119-120/"Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum", pp. 437-438, emphasis added.

<sup>989</sup> See chapter IV, 4., "Transmitting the fire – the renewal of tradition through the living speech".

<sup>990</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "L'Écrit et l'Oral", in: *Parole et Silence*, pp. 199-229, p. 203: "L'Écrit et l'Oral ne sont pas seulement deux façons dont les élèves attestent les connaissances qu'ils ont acquises. Ce sont deux façons pour la vérité de se manifester."

processes of realization. Concerning the oral form, he expounds the role of sound in the transmission of the message: “In the living word, the sound – physical reality – is carried away into the world of existence of the thought itself. The physical reality disappears behind the expressed thought.”<sup>991</sup> In this way, the *bodily* aspect of the voice disappears completely for Levinas behind the thought which is expressed – leaving only the pure *thought* as result. However, the written also ‘speaks’ in some way, according to Levinas: “This irrevocable word – because written – it speaks without listening; it is law. [...] the written speaks to me.”<sup>992</sup> It is noteworthy, in the context of Mendelssohn’s discussion of the ceremonial law, that Levinas does indeed attach to the written the status of a kind of *law* and that also the written words ‘speak’ for Levinas – “however they miss a *face*. The written discourse does not hear my questions.”<sup>993</sup> It is easier to cope with texts than with real interlocutors because there is no reply of an other which could come up against my understanding and interpretation. In this sense, Levinas argues that “[e]verything which is written is testament, the word of a dead person and the last word. [...] To read is no longer to grasp the thought of the other, it is *to judge* it.”<sup>994</sup> Hence, the written cannot really enact a relationship with the other. Even if the text ‘speaks’, as Levinas says, there is no ‘real’ dialogue between reader and writer because of the temporal distance which separates them. Therefore, the importance of the *face*, as profoundly linked to language, is one of the salient features of Levinas’s argumentation in this lecture. In fact, one can see how the notion of the face is elaborated and connected to language in this early text of 1952:

This presence of the thought itself, beyond all relativity – this is its presence in the word of the teacher [*maître*] since, when the teacher speaks, *the thought has a face*. [...] That which is in relationship with us without being a subject of a practical activity, without being a vision within a horizon – that is a face. The origin of the truth is in the teaching. *The face is a condition of truth.*<sup>995</sup>

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<sup>991</sup> Ibid., p. 210: “Dans la parole vivante, le son – réalité physique – est emporté dans le monde d’existence de la pensée elle-même. La réalité physique disparaît derrière la pensée exprimée.”

<sup>992</sup> Ibid., p. 212: “Cette parole sans appel – puisque écrite – elle parle sans écouter; elle est loi. [...] l’écrit me parle.”

<sup>993</sup> Ibid., p. 213: “[...] les mots – nous abordant de face qui manquent cependant de visage. Le discours écrit [...] n’entend pas mes questions.”

<sup>994</sup> Ibid., p. 211 and p. 214: “Tout écrit est testament, parole de mort et dernier mot. [...] Lire, ce n’est plus saisir la pensée d’autrui, c’est la *juger*.” Emphasis added.

<sup>995</sup> Ibid., p. 217 and p. 223: “Cette présence de la pensée elle-même, en dehors de toute relativité – c’est sa présence dans la parole du maître car lorsque le maître parle, la pensée a un visage. [...] Ce qui est en relation avec nous sans être objet d’une activité pratique, sans être vision dans un horizon – c’est un visage. L’origine de la vérité est dans l’enseignement. *Le visage est condition de vérité.*” Emphasis added.

In a similar way as Mendelssohn in *Jerusalem*, Levinas emphasizes the *oral* instruction, i.e. the *teaching* through the voice. However, he goes even further than Mendelssohn and connects this teaching with a special feature of the body: the *face*. Through the human presence, the neutral thought becomes a *face* for Levinas. It becomes a meaning beyond the meaning – it becomes truth. Although the written truth is also a form of truth – as outlined above it is conceived by Levinas *inter alia* as *law* –, the oral truth has however a much greater significance for Levinas since it is bound to the human presence and to the *face*. He thus clearly points out the supremacy of the oral truth which supports in the end human society itself:

The society is the present of teaching and not the past of the written. All the achievements of civilization deposited in the written – and from which surely the word between men is nourished – would be nothing *if man were not to see the face of man*.<sup>996</sup>

In the elaboration of his theme, Levinas even goes so far as to connect the oral language with the *divine*. This is a remarkable passage because, despite Levinas's link of religion to the relationship of the same to the other, as he explains in *Totality and Infinity* (“We propose to call ‘religion’ the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality”<sup>997</sup>), there is no section in his entire work to my mind where he makes such a strong connection between language, the other and the divine:

Indeed, God alone speaks. Insofar as the other speaks to me – that is to say insofar as I speak to him – the Other is God. I do not deify the other, on the contrary it is the category of the divine – if one can pose the divine as category at all – which derives from the Dialogue. [...] The monotheistic God reveals himself through the word. He surpasses all the paganisms [...] because he gives the divine the exceptional situation of the *interlocutor*, the absolute character of the word.<sup>998</sup>

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<sup>996</sup> Ibid., p. 228: “La société est le présent de l’enseignement et non pas le passé de l’écrit. Tout l’acquis de la civilisation déposé dans les écrits – et dont certes la parole entre hommes se nourrit – *ne serait rien si l’homme ne voyait pas le visage de l’homme*.” Emphasis added.

<sup>997</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 40/Ti, p. 30.

<sup>998</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “L’Écrit et l’Oral”, in: *Parole et Silence*, pp. 199-229, p. 227: “Dieu seul parle en effet. Dans la mesure où autrui me parle – c’est-à-dire dans la mesure où je parle à autrui – Autrui est Dieu. Je ne divinise pas autrui, c’est au contraire la catégorie du divin – si toutefois on peut poser le divin comme catégorie – qui dérive du Dialogue. [...] Le Dieu monothéiste se révèle par la parole. Il dépasse tous les paganismes [...] parce qu’il donne au divin la situation exceptionnelle de *l’interlocuteur*, le caractère absolu de la parole.” Underlined in the original text, italicized emphasis added by me.

Revelation through the word and, thus, revelation coming to the self from the *outside* – this corresponds to the notion of revelation one can find in the preparatory notes for *Totality and Infinity*, where Levinas gives the following remarkable definition of revelation, underscoring precisely the heteronomy of the event and the fact that it is received from outside of the subject:

Revelation – something given that I did not give to myself. Not to be said in terms of an experience that remains potent and masterful and which is assumed in the light. A past that was not present. Or the word of the Other [l'Autre] which is the Other [Autrui].<sup>999</sup>

Here, too, we can find the connection of *language*, i.e. the word, the *Other* and a *divine* or at least transcendent category, that is revelation. That revelation is received from outside links it with the *voice* or more precisely the *sound* as coming from outside, breaking through the 'crust' of the subject. In this sense, Levinas introduces hearing in his argumentation and connects it with what he calls the 'absolute thought':

The absolute thought is inseparable from the verb to hear. [...] We must therefore assume that the dialogue is [...] {the thought itself, a radical new form of understanding.} The question of the one who listens is part of the expression of the one who speaks.<sup>1000</sup>

This idea is expressed in Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, as I have shown, as well as in Rosenzweig's conception of 'speaking-thinking' (*Sprachdenken*). In emphasizing that the *question* of the one who listens is indeed part of the expression of the *response*, Levinas situates his thinking in proximity to the process of 'speaking-thinking' described by Rosenzweig, where both interlocutors (speaker as well as listener) participate equally in producing the epistemological outcome. The dialogue brings forth knowledge with *two* voices and it is in this sense a *pluralistic*

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<sup>999</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 443: "Révélation – qqch. de donné que je ne me suis pas donné. Ne peut pas être dit en termes d'expérience qui demeure puissance et maîtrise et qui assume dans la lumière. Un passé qui ne fut pas présent. Ou la parole de l'Autre qui est Autrui." Underlined in the original. I opted for a fairly literal translation here and therefore translated "dans la lumière" with "in the light"; however, it should be kept in mind that Levinas was probably thinking of Heidegger's phenomenological approach. "In the light" can thus be read as "in public", "clear" or everything which can be seen "in light", referring to Heidegger's notion of a "*Lichtung* des Seins", in the sense of a "clearing" of Being.

<sup>1000</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "L'Écrit et l'Oral", in: *Parole et Silence*, pp. 199-229, p. 225: "La pensée absolue est inséparable du verbe entendre. [...] Il faut donc supposer que le dialogue est [...] {la pensée elle-même, une forme radicalement nouvelle de la compréhension.} La question de celui qui écoute fait partie de l'expression de celui qui parle." Underlined in the original.

thinking that depends on the other to develop itself. In this process, the *sound* of the voice plays a crucial role.

This issue is further elaborated by Levinas in his lecture “Word and Silence” [*Parole et Silence*], which he also gave at the *Collège philosophique* in Paris, on 4 and 5 February, 1948. This lecture, also published only recently, just as “The Written and the Oral” [*L’Écrit et l’Oral*], in February 2011, is particularly important in this context since Levinas elaborates here upon what he calls a “phenomenology of sound [*phénoménologie du son*]”.<sup>1001</sup> According to Levinas, the phenomenon of sound has to be conceived as *light* which stirs up the subject’s world of solipsistic solitude – to speak with Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*, one could add: the sound stirs up the world of the silent Self (*stumme Selbst*). It thereby opens up a breach in the solitude of being which *echoes* further even if the phenomenon itself has vanished. In this *reverberation*, Levinas sees the proper character of the sound, as he points out:

[...] in what does the sonority of the sound consist? In its reverberation, in its being as such, the sound is a burst [*éclat*]. Or, to put it in a way which places more emphasis on its social character – the sound is scandal. [...] World of solitude where all that is other is also mine. However, the essence of sound is rupture. [...] Yet pure rupture which does not lead to something luminous but which produces the light. Insofar as it is a quality of the senses, *insofar as it is a phenomenon, the sound is light*; but it is a point of light where the world rings out and shatters [*éclate*], where it is overburdened. This overflowing or overburdening of the sensory quality through itself, its incapacity to hold its content – that is the very sonority of the sound.<sup>1002</sup>

The interweavement of different metaphors of light and sound – the sound is light *and* reverberation at the same time – makes this passage particularly difficult to situate it in the context of Levinas’s reflections on language. However, there can be no doubt about the fact that Levinas attributes to sound a great significance and that his reflections on sound and sonority must be seen in context with the voice, which is the human sound *par excellence*. Yet it is

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<sup>1001</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Parole et Silence”, in: *Parole et Silence*, pp. 69-104, here pp. 89-93.

<sup>1002</sup> Ibid., p. 90: “[...] en quoi consiste la sonorité du son? Dans son retentissement. Dans son être même, le son est éclat. Ou pour le dire, d’une façon qui fait davantage ressortir son caractère social – le son est scandale. [...] Monde de solitude où tout ce qui est autre est à la fois mien. Par contre, l’essence du son est une rupture. [...] Mais rupture pure qui ne conduit pas à quelque chose de lumineux mais qui fait ressortir de la lumière. En tant que qualité sensible, *en tant que phénomène, le son est lumière*; mais c’est un point de lumière où le monde éclate, où il est débordé. Ce débordement de la qualité sensible par elle-même, son incapacité de tenir son contenu – c’est la sonorité même du son.” Emphasis added.

remarkable that Levinas does not elaborate upon a “phenomenology of the voice”, but in more general terms he speaks of a “phenomenology of sound”. This phenomenology attaches to sound an extraordinary importance with respect to the intersubjective relationship, i.e. the relationship of the I to the other. According to Levinas, “the sound breaks up the world of light and introduces an *alterity* and a *beyond* within the world.”<sup>1003</sup> In connecting the phenomenon of sound to alterity, Levinas confirms in some sense what I have tried to demonstrate in the previous sections of this thesis: that there is a connection between alterity and sound in Levinas’s thinking and that this has a great significance for the *voice*. The voice, an aspect too little considered in Levinas’s work in my view, embodies – precisely in its bodiless presence – the *ethical* moment of intersubjectivity, bringing the subject in connection to the other, i.e. alterity. However, taking into account this only recently published lecture of his unedited writings, there can no longer be any doubt about the connection of sound and alterity. Against the background of my interpretation it becomes comprehensible why Levinas emphasizes in his lecture “The Word and Silence” [*Parole et Silence*]:

The sound is thus the glory of the other event: the mystery of being insofar as it is other. [...] The sonority as a whole describes the structure of a world where the other can appear. [...] Language is the possibility for a being to appear from outside, for a reason to be a you, to present itself as face, temptation and impossibility of murder.<sup>1004</sup>

The profound connection in Levinas’s thinking of the notions of language, face and sound is here clearly revealed. As I have outlined in the introduction, the face is conceived by Levinas as ‘the beginning of language’ and in this is already conveyed an ethical message – ‘Thou shalt not murder’. One can see from the lecture “Word and Silence”, given shortly after the war, in February 1948, that Levinas began very early after the war to give special attention to the ‘face’, a notion which is not present in his writings before the war, e.g. in *On Escape [De l’évasion]* from 1935. According to Levinas in “Word and Silence”, there comes *first* language and afterwards the thought, which evolves indeed out of the language. The relationship to the other *qua face*, provided in a face-to-face conversation, is at the base of human communication and

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<sup>1003</sup> Ibid., pp. 90-91: “[...] le son déchire le monde de la lumière et introduit une *altérité* et un *au-delà* dans le monde.” Emphasis added.

<sup>1004</sup> Ibid., pp. 92-93: “Le son est donc la gloire de l’événement autre: le mystérieux de l’être en tant qu’autre. [...] La sonorité dans son ensemble, décrit la structure d’un monde où l’autre peut apparaître. [...] Le langage, c’est la possibilité pour un être d’apparaître du dehors, pour une raison d’être toi [*sic*], de se présenter comme visage, tentation et impossibilité du meurtre.”



makes it possible. This echoes Mendelssohn's views on the primacy of oral teaching, emphasizing "the living instruction from man to man, from mouth to heart,"<sup>1005</sup> as Mendelssohn argues in *Jerusalem*. Similarly Levinas highlights in his lecture the importance of oral teaching through language and the face-to-face relationship. He outlines in this context the notion of an 'expressed thought' (*ein 'ausdrückliches' Denken*), as he argues:

To learn is not communication of a thought [...], but is rather the first relationship: to find oneself before a different reason, to exist metaphysically. Thus, the thought does not precede language, but it is rather only possible through language, that is to say through teaching and through the recognition of the other as teacher. [...] The spoken doctrine – the *Ausdrücklich denken* – presupposes school and teaching.<sup>1006</sup>

Further, Levinas's interest in the term *expression* (*Ausdruck*) finds reference in a remark in his philosophical notes [*Notes philosophiques diverses*], published in the first volume of his Collected Works and composed probably between the publication of *Time and the Other* [*Le Temps et l'Autre*, 1948] and *Totality and Infinity* [*Totalité et Infini*, 1961]. Here Levinas already formulated the idea to develop a counter-position to Heidegger with respect to the notion of expression: "To take position regarding the way Heidegger depreciates the term *Ausdruck*."<sup>1007</sup> Thus, a certain continuity can be traced back in Levinas's work regarding this aspect. The same applies also to his reflections on the relationship between *language* and *sound*, i.e. more precisely a specific kind of sound: *rhythm*. Already in Levinas's captivity notebooks one can find the following thoughts on this relationship: "Poetry is thus as a *rhythm*. The artifice of language, of color, can create this rhythm. The poetry music is this rhythm in its pureness. *Poetry is the things set in music*."<sup>1008</sup> Within the limited framework of this section I can only refer briefly to the

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<sup>1005</sup> Mendelssohn, Moses, *Jerusalem*, p. 119/"Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum", p. 437, emphasis added.

<sup>1006</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Parole et Silence", in: *Parole et Silence*, pp. 69-104, p. 93: "Apprendre n'est pas communication d'une pensée [...], mais relation première: se trouver devant une raison autre, exister métaphysiquement. La pensée ne précède donc pas le langage, mais n'est possible que par le langage, c'est-à-dire par l'enseignement et par la reconnaissance d'autrui comme maître. [...] La doctrine parlée – l'*Ausdrücklich denken* – suppose école et enseignement." Emphasis in the original.

<sup>1007</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 277: "Prendre position à l'égard de la façon dont Heidegger déprécie le terme *Ausdruck*." See Heidegger, Martin, "Die Sprache", in: *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, pp. 10-33, here p. 14.

<sup>1008</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 100: "La poésie est donc comme un rythme. L'artifice du langage, de la couleur, peut créer ce rythme. La poésie musique est ce rythme dans sa pureté. La poésie c'est les choses mises en musique." Crossed out in the original. See also *ibid.* the numerous other sections on *sound*, *sonority* and *expression* which can be found notably in Levinas's captivity notebooks, see: *Carnets*, pp. 131-132, pp. 145-146, pp. 166-168 and p. 195, which prove an early discussion of this topics.

continuity of Levinas's discussion of these aspects in his work. However, it becomes obvious that the publication of Levinas's unedited writings within the scope of the edition of his Collected Works has opened up new horizons for these subjects in Levinas's work. The scholarly debate about the unedited writings has only just begun and many interesting insights remain to be revealed from this material, offering new interpretations of Levinas's work.

Taking into consideration Rosenzweig's point of view in the context of Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, it has to be underscored that liturgy holds a central place in *The Star of Redemption*, where it is in fact attributed an "Organonstellung".<sup>1009</sup> Just as the logos of mathematics in Part I, describing Creation, and the grammar of eros in Part II, describing Revelation hold an "Organonstellung", so *liturgy* holds this central place in the final section, Part III, describing Revelation. Why does liturgy have such a great significance in Rosenzweig's *Star*? The role of liturgy becomes clear by taking a closer look at what is at stake in the event of Redemption: it is not the spoken word, but the *silent gesture* which allows man to experience in the here and now a glance of the redeemed world. Hence, liturgy as such and moreover a specific kind of "liturgical reasoning"<sup>1010</sup> is of great significance for Rosenzweig's argumentation in *The Star*. One can conclude in some sense, as did Stéphane Mosès, that "the silence of art, which is before the word, joins up with that [silence] after the word, that religious symbols"<sup>1011</sup> take form in liturgy. In this way, a renewed silence of a totally different order can be traced in the event of Redemption, as Rosenzweig emphasizes: "Hence it turns out that the height of liturgy is not the common word, but the common *gesture*."<sup>1012</sup> In terms of liturgy, beyond the notions of the 'written' and the 'oral' that I outlined with respect to Levinas and Mendelssohn, the problem between the *law* and its concrete realization in life was one of the most significant for Rosenzweig after having completed his opus magnum *The Star of Redemption*. In a letter to Rudolf Hallo on March 27, 1922 Rosenzweig states that

[...] *the* central problem of my life (after having completed the Star) [...] is namely -- *the law*. [...]  
We start with the actions. May we ourselves or others once find the principles for it. [...] Judaism is

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<sup>1009</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 312/*Stern*, p. 327.

<sup>1010</sup> See Kepnes, Steven, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning*, chapter three on "Liturgical Time: Franz Rosenzweig's 'Star of Redemption'", pp. 79-129.

<sup>1011</sup> Mosès, Stéphane, "L'Esthétique de Franz Rosenzweig", p. 135: "[...] le silence de l'art, qui est celui d'avant la parole, rejoint [...] le silence d'après la parole, celui des symboles religieux."

<sup>1012</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Stern*, p. 329/*Star*, p. 313, emphasis added.

*not* law. It creates law. But it *is not* it. It 'is' being Jewish. So I pointed it out in the Star and I know that it is right. But now you will understand that after finishing the book (cf. its last word) the life only begins, the probation of the truth only *after* Θεωρία [vision, theory].<sup>1013</sup>

Hence, Rosenzweig emphasizes the lived experience of *being Jewish* before the written law. First, there is the Jewish *life* for Rosenzweig and, subsequently, there are derived from it the specific laws and principles. This attitude is echoed also in Rosenzweig's leadership of the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus*, which was guided by the motivation of a free research, answering the up-to-date Jewish questions with a fresh approach and, although rooted in the commandments (*mitzvot*) and the Jewish tradition, without determining from the outset what should be the outcome of the questioning. In his article "Towards a Renaissance of Jewish Learning" ["*Bildung und kein Ende*"] Rosenzweig argues against "the endless writing of books on Jewish subjects. Books are not now the prime need of the day. But what we need more than ever, are human beings – Jewish human beings [...]." <sup>1014</sup> Echoing Mendelssohn's plea for the real encounter with wise man of lived experience instead of reading only the books of them,<sup>1015</sup> Rosenzweig emphasizes that what is needed is first and foremost a renewed sense for Jewish Being, for *Jewishness*, as he argues:

[...] what we mean by Judaism, the Jewishness of the Jewish human being, is nothing that can be grasped in a 'religious literature', or even in a 'religious life'; nor can it be 'entered' as one's 'creed' in the civil registry of births, marriages, and deaths. The point is simply that it is no entity, no subject among other subjects, no one sphere of life among other spheres of life; [...]. It can be grasped

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<sup>1013</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, letter to Rudolf Hallo, 27.3.1922, in: GS, I, 2, pp. 761-768, here pp. 761-762: "[...] *das Zentralproblem meines Lebens* (nach Abschluß des Sterns) [...], nämlich – – *das Gesetz*. [...] Wir fangen mit den Handlungen an. Mögen wir selbst oder andre einmal die Grundsätze dafür finden. [...] Das Judentum *ist nicht* Gesetz. Es schafft Gesetz. Aber es *ist es nicht*. Es 'ist' *Judesein*. So habe ich es im Stern dargestellt und weiß, daß es richtig ist. Aber nun wirst Du verstehn, daß nach Abschluß dieses Buches (vgl. sein letztes Wort) das Leben erst anfängt, die Bewährung durch das Leben noch *nach* der Θεωρία [Schau, Theorie]." All emphasis in the original. On the topic of law see also Batnitzky, Leora, "Revelation and Neues Denken – Rethinking Buber and Rosenzweig on the Law".

<sup>1014</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, "Towards a Renaissance of Jewish Learning", in: *On Jewish Learning*, pp. 55-71, here p. 55/"*Bildung und kein Ende* (Pred. 12, 12). Wünsche zum jüdischen Bildungsproblem des Augenblicks, insbesondere zur Volkshochschulfrage", in: GS, III, pp. 491-503, here pp. 491-492.

<sup>1015</sup> See Mendelssohn, Moses, *Jerusalem*, pp. 103-104/"*Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum*", pp. 421-422: "Everything is dead letter; the spirit of living conversation has vanished. [...] Hence, it has come to pass that man has almost lost his value for his fellow man. Intercourse with the wise man is not sought, for we find his wisdom in writings. [...] We do not need the man of experience; we only need his writings. In a word, we are *literati, men of letters*." Emphasis in the original.

through neither the writing nor reading of books. [...] It is only lived – and perhaps not even that. One is it. One is Jewish.<sup>1016</sup>

It was, thus, rather an attitude, i.e. a certain Jewish lifestyle, which Rosenzweig was searching for, as he founded the *Lehrhaus*, as Stefan Meineke points out:

To Rosenzweig being Jewish meant first and foremost bringing to life an attitude or life style that is not governed by a fixed set of laws, but is in accord with the commandment of love, making man responsible for the fate of his neighbor. As a didactic method, therefore, the *Lehrhaus* was left with nothing but a ‘principle of unprincipledness’ (*Rezept der Rezeptlosigkeit*).<sup>1017</sup>

Life is bound to *presence* – and so is the ‘commandment of love’ as well as the commandment as such. Just like the voice, the commandment finds its realization in the presence. It is pure presence, as Rosenzweig concisely sums up: “The commandment is thus pure present.”<sup>1018</sup> In the following sub-chapter, I will further expound upon the implications of the presence of the voice in this context, primarily with respect to the translation of the Bible made by Rosenzweig and Buber.<sup>1019</sup>

In conclusion, I want to extend my interpretations on Mendelssohn, Levinas and Rosenzweig by drawing a parallel between their points of view and contemporary art and literature, which will lead us to a reexamination of the event of friendship. Without in any way reducing religious ceremonies to purely aesthetic acts, it is nevertheless striking that this conception of transcendence counts also for modern art, which, in contrast to the paintings or sculptures of the past, has more often created *performances*, *happenings* and other temporary installations in public space, requiring the participation and involvement of the spectators. That is to say, creating works of art from material that is not to be preserved as performance or activity

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<sup>1016</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “Towards a Renaissance of Jewish Learning”, in: *On Jewish Learning*, pp. 55-71, here pp. 57-58/“Bildung und kein Ende (Pred. 12, 12). Wünsche zum jüdischen Bildungsproblem des Augenblicks, insbesondere zur Volkshochschulfrage”, in: GS, III, pp. 491-503, p. 493, emphasis in the original.

<sup>1017</sup> Meineke, Stefan, “A Life of Contradiction. The Philosopher Franz Rosenzweig and his Relationship to History and Politics”, pp. 485-486. The citation “principle of unprincipledness” is taken by Meineke from Rosenzweig’s article “Bildung und kein Ende”, see: GS III, p. 500.

<sup>1018</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 191/*Stern*, p. 197. I slightly modified the translation of Barbara Galli and left out the hyphen between “thus” and “pure” since it does not appear in the original text: “So ist das Gebot reine Gegenwart.”

<sup>1019</sup> See chapter IV, 3. b), “Some aspects on the role of the voice in the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible translation”. For further reading regarding Buber’s educational concepts in light of Levinas’s philosophy see Kaminska, Monika, *Dialogische Pädagogik und die Beziehung zum Anderen. Martin Buber und Janusz Korczak im Lichte der Philosophie von Emmanuel Levinas*,

(because this art *happens*, to stay with the issue at stake in the ceremonial law described by Mendelssohn) means that the art cannot be idolized in a museum. Instead of a picture hanging on a wall for an indefinite period of time, one is confronted in contemporary art more often with *living* and *temporary* objects of art (e.g. happenings, performances, etc.).<sup>1020</sup> Coming back to Mendelssohn and Levinas, it is noteworthy that in his foreword to the French reedition of Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, Levinas puts precisely this aspect of performativity into relief when he defines the commandments, which are expressed in the ceremonial law, as

[...] permanent reminders of the innate beliefs and explanations during the ritual and ceremonial gestures which fill the life of the faithful with revealed Law. *Constant intervention of the living voice and reason* against the intellectual aberration of dead images and signs, stuck in systems. Yoke of the law freeing the minds.<sup>1021</sup>

This recalls again the power which is attributed to the voice in the Bible, where God appears to the Israelites first and foremost through His voice: among numerous examples, one can say without a doubt that one of the most significant can be found in Deuteronomy 4:12, cited also by Rosenzweig in *The Star*: “Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was *only a voice* [זולתי קול].”<sup>1022</sup> God's authority is not represented through a visible sign but through His voice, i.e. through a *sound*. We saw above that Mendelssohn puts great emphasis on the oral education and that, for him, the ceremonial law is characterized by living speech and the human voice. For Levinas as well, as I have shown,<sup>1023</sup> the voice plays a leading role, since the Levinasian subjectivity comes into being through precisely this process: through language addressed to an other; to be brief, through *speaking*. Levinas goes so far as to define human identity as such as a sound which escapes the temptation of naming and thereby escapes being captured in a concept:

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<sup>1020</sup> See Fischer-Lichte, Erika, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, especially pp. 219-227, which deals with the topic of the voice.

<sup>1021</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “*Préface*”, p. 13: “Législation et vérités historiques qui comportent, notamment, une sage pédagogie: permanents rappels des croyances innées et explications renouvelées à l'occasion des gestes rituels et cérémoniels dont la Loi révélée emplit la vie des fidèles. *Intervention incessante de la voix et de la raison vivantes* contre l'aberration intellectuelle des images mortes et des signes immobilisés dans les systèmes. Joug de la loi libérant les esprits.” Emphasis added.

<sup>1022</sup> Deuteronomy 4:12; Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 441/*Stern*, p. 465.

<sup>1023</sup> See chapter IV,1. “Presence through voice – towards a new definition of Levinas's conception of subjectivity”.

Nameless identity. It says *I* which is identified with nothing that presents itself, if not the very sound of its voice. [...] Unjustifiable identity, pure sign made to others, sign made of the very donation of the sign, the messenger being message, the signified sign without figure, without presence, outside the acquired, outside of civilization. Identity immediately posed in the accusative of the ‘here I am’, like a sound audible only in its echo, delivered to the ear without taking satisfaction in the energy of its repercussion.<sup>1024</sup>

However, to conceive this transcendence *only* through language and living speech is to confer upon it a capacity without limit, of which it cannot possibly boast, because to speak requires being spoken – and it is precisely there that silence rises up as a limit to expression, which was believed to be unlimited. The French philosopher Michel Serres has adequately pointed out this critique:

This idea, so widespread, that all must be said and must be resolved through language, that any real problem provides material for debate, that philosophy is reduced to questions and responses, that one cannot look after oneself while speaking, that education passes exclusively through discourse, this talkative, theatrical, advertising, shameless idea without modesty ignores the real presence of the wine and the bread, its tacit taste, its smell, forgets the cultivation through subtle gestures, the connivance, the complicities, what goes without saying, the plea of distinguished love, the impossible intuitions which flash like lightning, the charm which lies behind a look, [...] I have known all these without texts and from persons without grammar, children without a lexicon, elderly without vocabulary, I have lived a great deal as a stranger, mute, terrified behind the curtain of languages, would I have truly enjoyed life if I had not made listening or speaking, the very dear [thing] which I know remains set by silence.<sup>1025</sup>

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<sup>1024</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Foreword”, in: *Humanism of the Other*, pp. 3-8, here pp. 7-8/“Avant-propos”, in: *Humanisme de l’autre homme*, pp. 11-16, p. 16: “Identité qui n’a pas de nom. Elle dit ‘je’ lequel *ne s’identifie à rien* qui se présente, sinon *au son même de sa voix*. [...] Identité injustifiable, pur signe fait à autrui ; signe fait de cette donation même du signe, le messenger étant message, le signifié – signe sans figure, sans présence, hors l’acquis, hors la civilisation. Identité posée d’emblée à l’accusatif du ‘me voici’, comme un son qui ne serait audible que dans son propre écho, livré à l’oreille sans se complaire dans l’énergie de son retentissement.”

<sup>1025</sup> Serres, Michel, *Les cinq sens. Philosophie des corps mêlés – I*, p. 111: “Cette idée si répandue que tout doit se dire et se résout par le langage, que tout vrai problème donne matière à débat, que la philosophie se réduit à des questions et des réponses, qu’on ne peut se soigner qu’en parlant, que l’enseignement passe exclusivement par le discours, cette idée bavarde, théâtrale, publicitaire, sans vergogne ni pudeur, ignore la présence réelle du vin et du pain, leur goût tacite, leur odeur, oublie l’élevage par les gestes à peine esquissés, la connivence, les complicités, ce qui va sans dire, la prière d’amour insigne, les intuitions impossible qui claquent comme l’éclair, le charme qui traîne derrière une allure, [...] j’ai connu tant de choses sans textes et de personnes sans grammaire, enfants sans lexique, vieillards sans vocabulaire, j’ai tant vécu à l’étranger, muet, terrifié derrière le rideau des langues, aurais-je vraiment goûté la vie si je n’avais fait qu’entendre ou parler, le très précieux de ce que je sais reste enchâssée de silence.” See further, Mersch, Dieter, *Ereignis und Aura. Untersuchungen zu einer Ästhetik des Performativen*, p. 25.

Without a doubt, there *is* something ineffable between human beings – and it has perhaps to do with that which is the most precious. Is not God named the *Great Ineffable* since he transcends all names? The source from which all names derive is left without a name and remains unspeakable, simply referring to “the Name”, *haShem*. With this in mind, I agree with Everett Fox that it was surely

[...] no accident that in his final year, Rosenzweig devoted major effort to an essay on Mendelssohn’s (and his own) translation of the *Tetragrammaton*. What was at stake, he maintained, was the distinction between the ‘God of the philosophers’ and the living, speaking God of faith.<sup>1026</sup>

To give a voice to the unspeakable and, thereby, to bring into a philosophical language that which refuses to be captured by a concept, is one of the central enterprises of Levinas’s philosophy. In fact, it is a matter of approaching that which one cannot grasp in words and which eludes, through its very essence, every attempt at thematization.<sup>1027</sup> But it is perhaps the writers and poets who understand this better than the philosophers. The great importance of literature for Levinas, who once stated that “the whole of philosophy is only a meditation of Shakespeare,”<sup>1028</sup> underscores this. Literature and moreover poetry opens up a space between human beings where language is *reborn*. In this sense, the writer must create a *unique* language for what he wants to express. First, there is the encounter and, afterwards, the search for a language to capture what had been experienced in this encounter, that is, precisely the ineffable. The touching memory which H el ene Cixous gave of her encounter with Michel Foucault and the friendship which evolved between them gives an example of the ineffable experience between human beings:

What happened there has no name. It happened before all names, or perhaps beyond the names, I don’t know. In the quiet uncovered, where the mute languages are spoken. It happened at a place without war, without weapon; in another world. Only with difficulty one can speak about it in the world here. I cannot say who he was. Who I was. *The one for the other*; this was for sure; deep inside of us, beyond thoughts, as a knowledge. It was warmth and half-closed eyes. Tenderness. An

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<sup>1026</sup> Fox, Everett, “Franz Rosenzweig as Translator”, p. 380. For Rosenzweig’s article see Rosenzweig, Franz, “*Der Ewige. Mendelssohn und der Gottesname*”, in: GS, III, pp. 801-815; see further also Galli, Barbara, “Rosenzweig and the Name for God”.

<sup>1027</sup> See on this topic the article of Habib, St ephane, “Comme si on savait ce que l’on voulait dire”, pp. 243-256.

<sup>1028</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, TO, p. 72/TA, p. 60. See further the many literary examples and citations in Levinas’s captivity notebooks, in: Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*. From his captivity notebooks it is clear that Levinas bases his philosophical thinking on literary illustrations, see e.g. my interpretation in chapter I, 1, “Levinas’s early philosophical reflections on being and death in light of his *Carnets de captivit e*”, on the *impossibility of dying*, alluding to a citation Levinas taken from Jean Racine’s (1639-1699) play *Phaedra* (1677).

animalistic – yes, even more than human – peace. A sense of the soul: you are not hurting me, that is certain. [...] We felt this. We have met at this place, where one *feels* Good and Bad. [...] Where you are, Michel, I don't know, but I hear your voice very clearly. Only the time stood still, not you. I see your voice.<sup>1029</sup>

It is remarkable that Cixous uses Levinas's expression '*the one for the other*' (*l'un pour l'autre*) to describe the ineffability she experienced in the encounter with Foucault. Further still, that she refers to his *voice*, not his face, which she still sees clearly before her eyes after his body (and with it his face) has vanished – "*I see your voice*".<sup>1030</sup> This refers to Levinas's reflections on the voice in "Word and Silence" [*Parole et Silence*"] and his statement that, "being a phenomenon, the sound is light [... *en tant que phénomène, le son est lumière; ...*]."<sup>1031</sup> Thus, the *literary* description of the ineffable between human beings brings us back here to the interpretation of *philosophy* – and so my interpretation comes full circle at this point. However, I do not want to conclude these considerations without referring to the impressive account of Levinas's son Michaël, describing the last encounter between his father and Maurice Blanchot. The close friends saw each other personally for the last time in June 1961. It was the day after Levinas's defense of his Habilitation *Totality and Infinity* at the Sorbonne, an event which Blanchot attended as a listener in the auditorium. Although Michaël Levinas was only twelve years old at that time, he nevertheless retained a touching memory of this last encounter between Blanchot and Levinas:

The words shattered on their first names: Maurice, Emmanuel; there was something ineffable between them which was expressed, more than thirty years ago, only in their letters and the dedications of their books. [...] There was a silent emotion in the room, interspersed with attempts to *speak*. The impossible words became fragmented as stifled sobs. It remained the 'you' and the first names, Maurice, Emmanuel. [...] This morning in June 1961 they took time off from one another in order to

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<sup>1029</sup> Cixous, Hélène, "Cela n'a pas de nom, ce qui se passait", pp. 153-154: "Cela n'a pas de nom, ce qui se passait. Cela se passait avant les noms ou peut-être au-delà des noms, je ne sais pas. Dans l'ouvert tranquille, où l'on parle des langues silencieuses. Cela se passait dans un lieu sans guerre, sans arme. Un autre monde. C'est difficile à raconter dans ce-monde-ci. Je ne peux pas dire qui il était. Qui j'étais. L'un pour l'autre. Mais c'était sûr. Au fond de nous, derrière les pensées, ça se savait. C'était chaud et les yeux mi-clos. C'était de la tendresse. Une paix animale, oui, plus qu'humaine. Un flair de l'âme: toi, tu ne vas pas me faire de mal. [...] Nous le sentions. Nous nous rencontrions dans ce lieu où l'on *sent* le bien et le mal. [...] Je ne sais pas où tu es Michel, mais ta voix je l'entends parfaitement. C'est seulement le temps qui s'est arrêté. Pas toi. Je vois ta voix."

<sup>1030</sup> On the topic of "seeing voices" in a Biblical context see Chalié, Catherine, "Voir des voix", pp. 143-151, in: Chalié, Catherine, *Sagesse des sens. Le regard et l'écoute dans la tradition hébraïque*.

<sup>1031</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Parole et Silence", in: *Parole et Silence*, pp. 69-104, p. 90.



continue this unbreakable bond in a proximity even greater because distant and freed of any trivial orality. They never saw each other again face-to-face.<sup>1032</sup>

The speechless face-to-face situation in which the last personal encounter between Levinas and Blanchot finally took place in some sense is reflected also in Blanchot's own reflections on friendship. For Blanchot, friendship

[...] passes by way of the recognition of the common strangeness that does not allow us to speak *of* our friends but only to speak *to* them, not to make of them a topic of conversations (or essays), but the movement of understanding in which, speaking to us, they reserve, even on the most familiar terms, an *infinite distance*, the fundamental separation on the basis of which what separates becomes relation. Here discretion lies not in the simple refusal to put forward confidences (how vulgar this would be, even to think of it), but it is the interval, the pure interval that, from me to this other who is a friend, measures all that is between us, the *interruption of being* that never authorizes me to use him, or my knowledge of him (were it to praise him), and that, far from preventing all communication, brings us together in the *difference* and sometimes the *silence* of speech.<sup>1033</sup>

The ineffable marks the source of all language, the abyss in which all words collide. And yet we speak because, despite the fact that the ineffable is in the long run (perhaps) more powerful than language, it is nevertheless precisely this *failure* of language which motivates us to speak to one another, as Levinas points out: "The Other is the ineffable, but it is for that reason that we speak to him."<sup>1034</sup>

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<sup>1032</sup> Levinas, Michaël, "L'ultime rencontre entre Emmanuel Levinas et Maurice Blanchot", p. 254 and p. 256: "Les mot se brisaient sur leurs prénoms: Maurice, Emmanuel; il y avait entre eux un lien indicible qui ne s'exprimait depuis plus de trente ans que par des lettres et leurs livres dédicacés. [...] Il y avait dans cette pièce une émotion silencieuse entrecoupée de tentatives de *parler*. Les paroles impossibles se fragmentaient comme des sanglots étouffés. Il restait le "tu" et les prénoms, Maurice, Emmanuel. [...] Ce matin de juin 1961, ils prirent congé l'un de l'autre pour poursuivre ce lien indissoluble dans une proximité encore plus grande car lointaine et déagée de toute oralité triviale. Ils ne se sont plus jamais revus en face à face."

<sup>1033</sup> Blanchot, Maurice, *Friendship*, p. 291/*L'amitié*, pp. 328-329.

<sup>1034</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "L'Écrit et l'Oral", in: *Parole et Silence*, pp. 199-229, p. 219: "Autrui, c'est l'ineffable, mais c'est pour cela qu'on parle à lui."

**b) Some aspects on the role of the voice in the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible translation and Levinas's notions of the Saying and the Said**

Every word is a spoken word.<sup>1035</sup>

In spring 1925 Franz Rosenzweig started together with Martin Buber the translation of the Bible in German. They intended to create a rather literal translation and entitled it therefore a “*Verdeutschung der Schrift*”, that is to say a ‘Germanization’ of the Scripture.<sup>1036</sup> As a result of this specific approach to translation they did not hesitate to modify or even to reinvent the German grammar in order to translate the original text as *literally* as possible and to make the subtle nuances of the original Hebrew text perceptible to a German audience. This highly creative work was realized in an ongoing intellectual dialogue between Buber and Rosenzweig. Regarding this process, Buber made the comment that “[t]he papers that were exchanged in these years provide together the most living commentary: the Scripture coming to light in a space of interaction.”<sup>1037</sup> The very beginning of the project was marked by the question of whether the Bible is translatable at all [“*Ist die Schrift übersetzbar?*”] and whether the moment would be right for another translation of the Bible, as Martin Buber reflected in an essay in 1930:

Does the age have the room to breathe for a new beginning? Does it have the calling, the energy, the support, the ear? [*Hat das Zeitalter den Atemraum für einen Neubeginn? die [sic] Berufung, die Kraft, den Beistand, das Gehör?*]<sup>1038</sup>

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<sup>1035</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “Scripture and Word: On the New Bible Translation”, p. 40/“Die Schrift und das Wort. Zur neuen Bibelübersetzung”, in: GS, III, pp. 777-783, p. 777: “Alles Wort ist gesprochenes Wort.

<sup>1036</sup> For a recently published fine study regarding the Bible translation of Rosenzweig and Buber, see Benjamin, Mara, *Rosenzweig's Bible. Reinventing Scripture for Jewish Modernity*, as well as the article of Bourel, Dominique, “D'une Bible à l'autre: de Moses Mendelssohn à Buber-Rosenzweig”. Regarding the sociological-philosophical background of the possibilities of translation as such, see the article of Reichert, Klaus, “Zur Übersetzbarkeit von Kulturen – Appropriation, Assimilation oder ein Drittes?”, as well as Motzkin, Gabriel, “Philosophy and Translation”.

<sup>1037</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, IV, 2, *Sprachdenken: Arbeitspapiere zur Verdeutschung der Schrift*, ed. by Rachel Bat-Adam, “Einleitung (nach Berichten von Martin Buber)”, pp. ix-xxi, here p. xi: “Die Blätter, die in diesen Jahren hinüber und herüber gegangen sind, ergeben zusammen den lebendigsten Kommentar: die Schrift hell werdend im Raum einer Wechselwirkung.”

<sup>1038</sup> Buber, Martin, “From the Beginnings of Our Bible Translation”, in: *Scripture and Translation*, pp. 176-183, p. 177/“Aus den Anfängen unserer Schriftübertragung [1930]”, p. 317, see *ibid.* also the other citation in the sentence. I have modified the first sentence since the translation (“Does the age have room for a new beginning?”) simply omitted the word “*Atemraum*” to which I wanted to draw attention in particular. This shows further how the

The way Buber poses the question by referring to an “*Atemraum*”, ‘a room to breathe’, already highlights the issue at stake in this section: the attention Buber and Rosenzweig gave to the role of the *voice* within their translating process and how they tried to make perceptible the specific Hebrew voice of the original text in their German translation. That the Bible was initially conceived as an *oral* source, transmitted by mouth from generation to generation, is of great importance in this context. It has been pointed out by Israel Yuval that the decision for an oral transmission was made intentionally, in order to maintain a religious difference to Christianity:

The Sages’ ban on writing down the Oral Law may be also explained [as] [...] a conscious, thoroughly ideological response to the fear that the Oral Law would be universalized and expropriated from its internal Jewish context, as happened to the Written Law when the Hebrew Bible was translated into the Septuagint canonized by Christianity.<sup>1039</sup>

Further, with the Biblical text having been written down, the message was transformed into a *written* structure and lost its oral character.<sup>1040</sup> In contrast, Buber and Rosenzweig intended to go back to the roots of the Biblical message. They shared the opinion, as Ilaria Bertone points out,

[...] that the biblical text was born not as a written text but rather as a spoken word, a word orally proclaimed. This *Gesprochenheit* is the actual reality of the Bible: in Jewish tradition Scripture, *miqra*, is recited aloud, as confirmed by the masoretic systems of vocalization and musical annotation attached to each word of the text. The fact that the Bible was eventually committed to writing was due to the fear of losing it, but this does not change its essentially oral character.<sup>1041</sup>

Thus, Buber and Rosenzweig paid a lot of attention to the oral character of the text and to the requirements of the *voice* in order to read the text out loud. Their main focus was to revive the biblical text because, according to Buber,

[...] the passage of time had largely turned the Bible into a palimpsest. [...] the Hebrew *sounds* themselves have lost their immediacy for a reader who is no longer a listener; they are suffused by a

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significance of the voice has been left aside in the reception of Buber’s and Rosenzweig’s reflections on their translation.

<sup>1039</sup> Yuval, Israel Jacob, *Two Nations in Your Womb. Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>1040</sup> See Graham, William A., *Beyond the Written Word. Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*.

<sup>1041</sup> Bertone, Ilaria, “The Possibility of a *Verdeutschung* of Scripture”, p. 180, emphasis in the original.

*voiceless*, theologically and literarily determined rhetoric, and are compelled by that rhetoric to speak not the spirit that attained its *voice* in them but a compromise among the spiritualities of two thousand years.<sup>1042</sup>

In the process of reviving the Bible the voice holds thus a crucial place for Buber and Rosenzweig. In the following, I give an example of what this means concretely for their translation. Further, I focus on Rosenzweig's and Buber's theoretical writings which accompanied their Bible translation and the role which the voice held in this project. It is highly interesting in this context that the early years of their translation were indeed, as Daniel Krochmalnik points out, the "acoustic founding years [*akustische Gründerjahre*]"<sup>1043</sup> when phonograph records became popular. The technical progress made it possible to reproduce the music of the concert hall in the living room of everybody. The repercussions of this development can be found in Rosenzweig's music reviews.<sup>1044</sup> He had great interest in music and admired for example the opera of Richard Wagner, whom Siegfried Kracauer in his critical review in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* pointed out as the spiritus rector of Buber's and Rosenzweig's Bible translation.<sup>1045</sup> However, while Rosenzweig was writing on music, translation and the voice, it is noteworthy that he himself was already deprived of speech due to his illness. Despite Rosenzweig's physical illness, which prevented him from speaking and moving, he worked on the translation together with Buber. This is more than remarkable for a man in such a fragile state of health and it underlines the importance of the Bible translation for Rosenzweig, as Everett Fox points out:

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<sup>1042</sup> Buber, Martin, "On Word Choice in Translating The Bible: *In Memoriam* Franz Rosenzweig", p. 73/"Über die Wortwahl in einer Verdeutschung der Schrift. Dem Gedächtnis Franz Rosenzweigs [1930]", p. 135, emphasis added.

<sup>1043</sup> Krochmalnik, Daniel, "Martin Buber und die Musikalität der Bibel", pp. 31-34. Regarding the historical background of the technical development of the transmission of voice and music, see Göttert, *Geschichte der Stimme*, chapter XVII, pp. 399-422.

<sup>1044</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, "The Concert Hall on the Phonograph Record", in: *Cultural Writings of Franz Rosenzweig*, pp. 116-154/"Der Konzertsaal auf der Schallplatte", in: GS, III, pp. 427-448. See further Galli, Barbara, "Rosenzweig's Music Reviews".

<sup>1045</sup> Kracauer, Siegfried, "Die Bibel auf Deutsch. Zur Übersetzung von Martin Buber und Franz Rosenzweig", in: *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 27. and 28.4.1926, reprinted in: *Das Ornament der Masse*, pp. 173-186, regarding the reference to Wagner see pp. 180-181/"The Bible in German. On the Translation by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig", in: *The Mass Ornament*, pp. 189-201, with reference to Wagner, pp. 195-196. Buber's and Rosenzweig's answer to Kracauer's critique appeared also in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 18.5.1926, under the title "Die Bibel auf Deutsch", reprinted in: Rosenzweig, Franz, "Die Bibel auf Deutsch", GS, III, pp. 791-800/"The Bible in German: In Reply", in: Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, pp. 151-160. For a commentary on the discussion between Kracauer and Buber/Rosenzweig see Askani, Hans-Christoph, *Das Problem der Übersetzung – dargestellt an Franz Rosenzweig. Die Methoden und Prinzipien der Rosenzweigschen und Buber-Rosenzweigschen Übersetzungen*, pp. 263-281.

For the ensuing four-and-a-half-year-period – the final part of his life – Rosenzweig devoted the greater part of his energies to translating the Hebrew Bible, and more specifically, to forging the German of the translation into a form that would allow it *to speak in a Hebrew voice*.<sup>1046</sup>

After Rosenzweig's death in December 1929, Buber continued the work alone, which he finally finished in 1962, without, however, taking into account the corrections he added to the reeditions which appeared in the subsequent years.<sup>1047</sup>

Levinas too was very attentive to the voice in which a message was conveyed. This sensitivity is reflected for example in an article he wrote in 1985 to commemorate Vladimir Jankélévitch. The article begins with a reference to the particularity of Jankélévitch's way of speaking:

Vladimir Jankélévitch had a certain way of speaking; a bit haltingly, in such a way that, in the perfect clarity of the statement, each word sprang up new, as if unforeseeable in the word that preceded it. [...] That is how I heard Jankélévitch even in his everyday utterances [...]. [...] The rhythm and breath of his spoken words still orchestrate, for my ears, the printed pages of his work.<sup>1048</sup>

By drawing attention to the voice of Jankélévitch, Levinas connects the written text of this philosopher, i.e. *what* he wrote, with the oral character of his thinking, i.e. *how* he spoke. In a similar way, Rosenzweig points out in his article "Scripture and Luther" ["*Die Schrift und Luther*"], published in July 1926, the importance of paying attention to the 'tone' in which a message is proffered. Rosenzweig argues that

[...] it is impossible to transmit the content without at the same time transmitting the form. *How* something is said is not peripheral to *what* is said. *The melody makes the music*. The command: 'attention!' is, as regards 'content', identical with the 'your attention, please' of a cultivated art

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<sup>1046</sup> Fox, Everett, "Franz Rosenzweig as Translator", p. 372, emphasis added.

<sup>1047</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, IV, 2, *Sprachdenken: Arbeitspapiere zur Verdeutschung der Schrift*, ed. by Rachel Bat-Adam, "Einleitung (nach Berichten von Martin Buber)", pp. ix-xxi, here p. xix.

<sup>1048</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Vladimir Jankélévitch", in: *Outside the Subject*, pp. 65-69, p. 65/"Vladimir Jankélévitch", in: *Hors sujet*, pp. 113-121, p. 117. The article first appeared in *L'Information juive* (July, 1985), shortly after the death of Jankélévitch in June 1985.

historian or desk lieutenant, and also with the substantially irreproachable syntactic reworking, ‘I order you to pay attention’; but it is not the same thing as either.<sup>1049</sup>

In order to properly translate the original text one must listen to what I am inclined to define as the ‘voice of the textual structure’. To meet the requirements of a faithful translation the issue at stake was first and foremost to reproduce the literal meaning of the text, i.e. the content in its specific form. To give an example of what this means concretely, I cite from the first verse at the beginning of the book of Genesis (Genesis 1:1) only one phrase, by means of which one sees clearly what the intention of Buber’s and Rosenzweig’s translation was: describing the primal scene of creation, the Hebrew text says that there was only “תהו ובהו” [*tohu va’bohu*], which Luther translated as “*wüst und leer*”, whereas Buber and Rosenzweig opted for “*Irrsal und Wirrsal*”, trying to point out with this formulation, on the one hand, the specific rhyme and sing-song rhythm of the Hebrew words (*tohu va’bohu*), and on the other hand, that the earth was full in a chaotic way, without the structure of a created cosmos – however not “empty” (*leer*) as Luther says.<sup>1050</sup> Bringing back in this way the literal meaning as well as a sense for the sound of the original, the Buber-Rosenzweig translation seeks to show “the intricate connection between the ‘What’ (*Was*) and the ‘How’ (*Wie*)”<sup>1051</sup> of the Hebrew language, which should be made perceptible for the German reader in order to render the text as faithfully as possible. However, this approach was conceived by Rosenzweig and Buber as an “impossible task” [*“eine grundsätzlich unerfüllbare Aufgabe”*] since the uniqueness of a text cannot be reproduced in another language.<sup>1052</sup> According to Buber, “[r]evelation is accomplished in the human body and

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<sup>1049</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “Scripture and Luther”, p. 61/“Die Schrift und Luther”, in: GS, III, pp. 749-772, p. 763: “[...] man kann den Inhalt nicht vermitteln, wenn man nicht zugleich auch die Form vermittelt. Für das, *was* gesagt wird, ist es nicht nebensächlich, *wie* es gesagt wird. *Der Ton macht die Musik*. Das Kommando: Stillgestanden! ist zwar inhaltlich ‘identisch’ mit dem: Bitte stillgestanden! eines zarten Kunsthistorikers und Etappenleutnants und auch mit der ‘inhaltlich’ einwandfreien Satzumformung: ich befehle euch, stillzustehen; dasselbe ist es nicht.” Emphasis added.

<sup>1050</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, IV, 2, *Sprachdenken: Arbeitspapiere zur Verdeutschung der Schrift*, ed. by Rachel Bat-Adam, p. 3, see further *ibid.*, pp. 4-6; cf. also Buber, Martin and Rosenzweig, Franz, *Die fünf Bücher der Weisung*, Vol. 1, “Das Buch: Im Anfang”, p. 9: “Im Anfang schuf Gott den Himmel und die Erde. Die Erde aber war Irrsal und Wirrsal. Finsternis über Urwirbels Antlitz. Braus Gottes schwingend über dem Antlitz der Wasser.” For a detailed linguistic study regarding the Buber-Rosenzweig translation, see Müller, Augustin Rudolf, *Martin Bubers Verdeutschung der Schrift* and, more recently, Askani, Hans-Christoph, *Das Problem der Übersetzung – dargestellt an Franz Rosenzweig. Die Methoden und Prinzipien der Rosenzweigschen und Buber-Rosenzweigschen Übersetzungen*.

<sup>1051</sup> Bertone, Ilaria, “The Possibility of a *Verdeutschung* of Scripture”, p. 178.

<sup>1052</sup> Buber, Martin, “On Word Choice in Translating The Bible: *In Memoriam* Franz Rosenzweig”, p. 74/“Über die Wortwahl in einer Verdeutschung der Schrift. Dem Gedächtnis Franz Rosenzweigs [1930]”, p. 138.

the human voice, i.e., in *this* body and *this* voice, in the mystery of their uniqueness.”<sup>1053</sup> In this sense, revelation is bound to a specific moment in time and space and cannot be transferred or seen detached from it. As a result, Buber argues that a faithful translation can only approximately reproduce the text by corresponding to its patterns:

The auditory patterns of German can never *reproduce* the auditory forms of Hebrew; but they can, in growing from an analogous impulse and in exercising an analogous effect, *correspond* to them Germanically, can *Germanize* them.<sup>1054</sup>

Similarly, Franz Rosenzweig emphasizes at the beginning of his article “Scripture and Luther” that the task of translation is *as such* unfulfillable: “Translating means serving two masters. It follows that no one can do it. [Übersetzen heißt zwei Herren dienen. Also kann es niemand.]”<sup>1055</sup> However, as Rosenzweig argues further in this article, speech as such is already in itself always translation. Far from being only the work of a translator, in Rosenzweig’s eyes, *every* human being actually translates and does so all the time in order to understand the world he lives in. This endless task of translating is as such a feature of human speech for Rosenzweig. To reformulate this task in a Levinasian manner with respect to the Buber-Rosenzweig-translation means literally to render the Saying perceptible and, moreover, ‘audible’ in the Said, i.e. to let the Hebrew ‘voice of the text’ resonate in the German translation, echoing in the present as an untranslatable past. It is the task of the translator, in this sense, to ‘resurrect’ the text, to let the reader feel the primary thrill of the original and to render it from a mute text, whose words dream to be ‘heard’, into a *living* text that *vivifies* its readers.

In his essay “Poetry and Resurrection: Notes on Agnon” Levinas describes the style of writing of Samuel Joseph Agnon (1888-1979) in this sense as “a resuscitated language [*langue ressuscitée*]”<sup>1056</sup> which gives birth to the Jewish world of the past, vanished in the Shoah, however resurrected through the unique style of Agnon’s writing with the help of the power of

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<sup>1053</sup> Ibid., emphasis in the original.

<sup>1054</sup> Ibid., p. 75/p. 140: “Deutsche Lautgestalt kann nie hebräische Lautgestalt reproduzieren, aber sie kann, aus analogem Antrieb wachsend und analoge Wirkung ühend, ihr deutsch entsprechen, sie verdeutschen.” I take over the emphasis according to the translation; however, as the German citation shows, it does not appear in the original text.

<sup>1055</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “Scripture and Luther”, p. 47/“Die Schrift und Luther”, in: GS, III, pp. 749-772, p. 749.

<sup>1056</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Poetry and Resurrection: Notes on Agnon”, in: *Proper Names*, pp. 7-16, p. 9/“Poésie et résurrection: Notes sur Agnon”, in: *Noms propres*, pp. 13-25, p. 17.

“poetry – that last refuge of transcendence in Western humanism.”<sup>1057</sup> In my view, there is an analogy here in the translation project of the Bible by Buber and Rosenzweig and Agnon’s literature: both ‘resurrect’ the Jewish past through the power of their words, both focusing first and foremost on the *sonority* of the language, as Levinas outlines with respect to Agnon’s work:

The Jewish way of life, rechanneled by the rite from its beginning and development in nature, thus mirrors, in Agnon, the sonority of the language in which it is expressed; the ambiguity of the present-day words resounds in the text from out of their dream. That life is not just sung; it is itself song. That is probably what lies at the root of the strictly untranslatable dimension of Agnon’s work.<sup>1058</sup>

This untranslatable dimension had to be faced also in the work of the Bible translation: how does one let the Hebrew Saying resonate in the German Said (if it might be permitted to use in this context the Levinasian notions)? In his theoretical reflections that accompanied his Bible translation, Rosenzweig points out as a possible answer that the Saying of the Bible must not be captured in a frozen text. On the contrary, it must remain what it is – a *living voice*. The notion of the voice is thereby of great significance for the translation of the Bible, as Rosenzweig points out further in his essay “Scripture and Luther”:

For 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* – from outside this church, this people, this heaven. It does not keep its sound from echoing in this or that restricted space, but it wants itself to remain free. If somewhere it has become a familiar, customary possession, it must again and anew, as a *foreign and unfamiliar sound*, stir up the complacent satedness of its alleged possessor from outside.<sup>1059</sup>

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<sup>1057</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15/p. 24.

<sup>1058</sup> Ibid., p. 10/p. 19. See further on this topic Meir, Ephraim, *Jewish Existential Philosophers in Dialogue*, pp. 122-128.

<sup>1059</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “Scripture and Luther”, p. 56/“Die Schrift und Luther”, in: GS, III, pp. 749-772, p. 758: “Denn die Stimme dieses Buches darf sich in keinen Raum einschließen lassen, nicht in den geheiligten Innenraum einer Kirche, nicht in das Sprachheiligtum eines Volks, nicht in den Kreis der himmlischen Bilder, die über eines Landes Himmel ziehen. Sie will immer wieder von *draußen* schallen, von jenseits dieser Kirche, von jenseits dieses Volks, von jenseits dieses Himmels. Sie verwehrt nicht, daß ihr Schall sich echohaft in Räume verfängt, aber sie selber will frei bleiben. Wenn sie irgendwo vertraut, gewohnt, Besitz geworden ist, dann muß sie immer wieder aufs neue als *fremder, unvertrauter Laut* von draußen die zufriedene Gesättigtheit des unvermeintlichen Besitzers aufstören.” Emphasis added.



The description Rosenzweig gives here of the role of the ‘voice of the Bible’ resonates in some sense with his notion of the ‘voice of the revelation’, a notion I have outlined in a previous section.<sup>1060</sup> It stirs up man from his *mute* being as a Self and transforms him into a soul that *speaks*. The ‘voice’ of the Bible, described by Rosenzweig as a foreign and unfamiliar sound from outside (“*fremder, unvertrauter Laut von draußen*”), is attributed in this context to the power of a revelatory voice. The aspect of being ‘outside’ emphasizes again the dimension of revelation as received from without the subject and thus refers to the other, as being ‘outside’ of the I. It recalls in this context Levinas’s definition of revelation in the preparatory notes for *Totality and Infinity*, where the *exteriority* of the event is particularly emphasized:

Revelation – something given that I did not give to myself. Not to be said in terms of an experience that remains potent and masterful and which is assumed in the light. A past that was not present. Or the word of the Other [l’Autre] which is the Other [Autrui].<sup>1061</sup>

Revelation, as being received from outside, is linked with a *sound* coming from outside, i.e. the *voice*. Rosenzweig refers to ‘sound’ in his article in order to highlight the capacity to overwhelm somebody and to shake him up. In this sense, he argues: “The Luther Bible was, then, a *trumpet-call* in the ear of those who had fallen asleep happy in their possession of the ‘received and certified’.”<sup>1062</sup> Luther has given a new ‘voice’ to the Bible by translating it in a new *sound*. Changing the words of the translation means, on the one hand, changing the *sense*, but also, on the other hand, changing the *tone* or *melody* of the text. This is because words have a double existence: a written and an oral form. That the text can be read *out loud* marks the transitory event of a mute and ‘dead’ text to an animated and ‘living’ text. The written form is needed to conserve the content, however the transcendence is kept alive through the revival through its sound, i.e. its *voice*. In this sense Rosenzweig speaks of “the voice of the Bible [*die Stimme dieses Buches*]”.<sup>1063</sup> Likewise Buber refers to the fact that in the traditional view of Judaism the Bible was to be “called out loud”, קריאה, instead of being read in silence. Here again, all depends

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<sup>1060</sup> See chapter IV, 2., “Revelation, language and the ‘voice of love’ in Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*, with a view to Levinas”.

<sup>1061</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets*, p. 443: “Révélation – qqch. de donné que je ne me suis pas donné. Ne peut pas être dit en termes d’expérience qui demeure puissance et maîtrise et qui assume dans la lumière. Un passé qui ne fut pas présent. Ou la parole de l’Autre qui est Autrui.” Underlined in the original.

<sup>1062</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “Scripture and Luther”, p. 57/“Die Schrift und Luther”, in: GS, III, pp. 749-772, p. 759, emphasis added.

<sup>1063</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “Scripture and Luther”, p. 56/“Die Schrift und Luther”, in: GS, III, pp. 749-772, p. 758.

on the voice and its power to revive the text. Being originally an *orally* transmitted text, the Bible, as a consequence, has to be read out loud, as Buber points out:

But what originates in speaking can live again only in speaking, indeed can only in speaking be purely perceived and received. In Jewish tradition, Scripture is to be recited. The so-called system of accents that accompanies each word of the text furthers a return to its rightful spokenness; even the Hebrew term for ‘reading’ means ‘to call out’. The traditional name of the Bible is ‘the reading’, i.e. the ‘calling out’; God says to Joshua [1.8] that the book of the Torah is never to depart, not from his eyes, but from ‘his mouth’, that Joshua is to ‘murmur’ in it (that is what the following verse actually means), i.e., to form the intonation patterns in a low voice.<sup>1064</sup>

This demonstrates further the profound connection between *spirit* – and in this context also in particular the ‘holy spirit’ of the biblical text –, *revelation* and *voice*. Giving a new voice to the Bible means thus also to revive the spirit of others and to keep revelation alive by transmitting it orally with a new voice. Rosenzweig saw in this process a fundamental task, which was not at all of marginal significance for his own life. This was an insight Rosenzweig began to have especially after the completion of *The Star of Redemption*, which, however, had its importance before as well. In a letter to Rudolf Ehrenberg in October 1917, Rosenzweig already emphasized the great importance of translating: “Translating is in fact the very task of the spirit; only when something has been translated, does it become really *audible* [*laut*], no longer to be dismissed from the world.”<sup>1065</sup> Seen in the context of “Scripture and Luther” nine years afterwards, in 1926, where Rosenzweig argues that all speaking is in fact already translation because “when we speak, we translate from our intention into the understanding we expect in the other,”<sup>1066</sup> this line of thought shows not only the great importance of translation for Rosenzweig, but also the necessity of the other person and, further, the aspect of *exteriority* which marks all real speaking. For Rosenzweig, all speaking is *dialogical* speaking, addressed towards the *outside* and towards the other. That which is at stake in a dialogue resides in that which remains fundamentally ‘outside’ of any thematization. Martin Buber emphasizes this in his speech “The Word That Is Spoken”

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<sup>1064</sup> Buber, Martin, “On Word Choice in Translating The Bible: *In Memoriam* Franz Rosenzweig”, p. 76/“Über die Wortwahl in einer Verdeutschung der Schrift. Dem Gedächtnis Franz Rosenzweigs [1930]”, p. 141, emphasis added. See also Psalm 1:2.

<sup>1065</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, I, 1, pp. 460-461, 1.10. 1917: “Das Übersetzen ist überhaupt das eigentliche Ziel des Geistes; erst wenn etwas übersetzt ist, ist es wirklich *laut* geworden, nicht mehr aus der Welt zu schaffen.” Emphasis in the original.

<sup>1066</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “Scripture and Luther”, p. 47/“Die Schrift und Luther”, in: GS, III, pp. 749-772, p. 749.

[“*Das Wort das gesprochen wird*”], which he held at a conference organized by the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts in 1960. Buber argues in his lecture that even

[...] if we could take an inventory of all the physical and psychic phenomena to be found within a dialogical event, then there would remain something *sui generis* outside that could not be included – and this is just that which does not allow itself to be understood as the sum of the speech of two or more speakers, together with all the accidental circumstances. This something *sui generis* is their dialogue.<sup>1067</sup>

This shows that the dimension of *exteriority* is crucial in the moment of speaking. As Bernhard Casper points out with respect to Rosenzweig and Levinas, this moment can be conceived of as a Saying that delivers itself in the gift of the Said.<sup>1068</sup> Casper shows further that Levinas’s notions of the Saying and the Said can be used for a fruitful discussion of Rosenzweig’s views on translation. For both thinkers, the linguistic dimension implies also a transcendental dimension since speaking refers to the other and even *needs* the other. The interpersonal relationship constituted in language is defined by Levinas as nothing less than *religion*, as he argues in *Totality and Infinity*: “[...] *thought consists in speaking*. We propose to call ‘religion’ the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality.”<sup>1069</sup> Speaking and translation entail responsibility for Rosenzweig as well. Not only as being simply a response to the other – response as connected to *respons-ibility* –, but moreover as being a *service* for the other. This can be seen in Rosenzweig’s work for the *Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt, but also in his assessment that his work would be “a gift” to the German people.<sup>1070</sup> With respect to the development of Rosenzweig’s work after the completion of *The Star of Redemption*, it becomes thus comprehensible why he devoted the waning energy of the last years of his life to the translation of the Bible, being a logical consequence of his considerations in *The Star*.

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<sup>1067</sup> Buber, Martin, “The Word That Is Spoken“, pp. 354-355/“Das Wort das gesprochen wird”, p. 11. The emphasis appears only in the translation, not in the original.

<sup>1068</sup> See Casper, Bernhard, “Die Genese des Sprechens im Übersetzen und das religiöse Verhältnis. Rosenzweig und Levinas”, in: Casper, Bernhard, *Religion der Erfahrung. Einführungen in das Denken Franz Rosenzweigs*, pp. 143-155, p. 146: “Deshalb geschieht mein Sprechen letztlich und ursprünglich als ein Mich-Überschreiten auf den Anderen hin. Es geschieht als eine Darreichung des Sagens in der Gabe des Gesagten.”

<sup>1069</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, TI, p. 40/Ti, p. 30.

<sup>1070</sup> See Rosenzweig, Franz, GS, I, 2, p. 885-888, p. 887: “Our work will be rewarded by Germany, at the most, posthumously; nevertheless we do it, as long as we do it in Germany, for Germany. [...] And *The Star* will indeed – and rightly so – be seen a gift, which the German spirit owes to its Jewish enclave.”/“Unsere Arbeit wird uns von Deutschland höchstens posthum honoriert, aber darum tun wir sie doch, solange wir sie in Deutschland tun, für Deutschland. [...] Und der Stern wird wohl einmal und mit Recht als ein Geschenk, das der deutsche Geist seiner jüdischen Enklave verdankt, angesehen werden.”

In a highly poetical style Rosenzweig emphasizes in his article “Scripture and Luther” the significance of the role of the voice for a reader devoted to the study of the Scripture. Through his belief, Scripture will reveal itself to this attentive reader little by little, just

[...] as a spotlight brings one sector of the landscape out of darkness, then another, then is dimmed, so for this person the days of his life illuminate Scripture, and let him see sometimes, amidst Scripture’s human traits, also *what is more than human* – today here, tomorrow there, but with today’s event implying no guarantee of tomorrow’s. Yet everywhere these human traits can, in the light of a lived day, become transparent, so that suddenly they are written into the center of his own heart, and the divinity in what has been humanly *written* is, for the duration of this heartbeat, as clear and certain *as a voice calling* in this moment into his heart and *being heard*.<sup>1071</sup>

The transformation of the written text, that is to say the thematized and the Said, into a *Saying*, that is a voice, is thus the crucial event in the process of the study of the Bible. The transcendence, i.e. what Rosenzweig refers to as “what is more than human” and which exceeds the human limits physically and mentally, shows itself as a voice calling into the heart of the reader. As the voice combines both spheres, the physical *and* the spiritual one, it lies precisely at the intersection between the ‘graspable’ and the ‘un-graspable’. The transcendence of the revelation, conveyed by the voice, shows itself in *hiding*, in fading away like the breath. Jean-Luc Marion calls this event “a voice without name” since the appeal of the voice cannot be summed up in a name, defining its essence. It withdraws from any conceptualization and thereby offers the very possibility for the event of revelation. According to Marion, “the voice which reveals [...] remains without Name.”<sup>1072</sup> The voice in its ineffable essence offers the moment for revelation. Thus, to hear a voice out of the written text, a voice that *calls* the reader and that shakes him out of his silent reading – herein lies the very function of the the role of the voice in the context of the Bible translation. Rosenzweig uses the notion of the voice at numerous places

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<sup>1071</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, “Scripture and Luther”, p. 59/“Die Schrift und Luther”, in: GS, III, pp. 749-772, pp. 760-761: “[...] wie ein Scheinwerfer für eine Weile ein Stück der Landschaft aus dem Dunkel heraushebt, dann wieder ein anderes, dann abgeblendet wird, so erhellen diesem Menschen die Tage seines Lebens die Schrift und lassen ihn in ihren Menschlichkeiten heut hier und morgen da – und das Heut übernimmt keine Bürgschaft für ein Morgen – das mehr als Menschliche erkennen. Im Menschlichen selbst; sie ist überall menschlich. Aber allerorten kann dieses Menschliche unter dem Lichtstrahl eines Lebenstages durchsichtig werden, derart, daß es diesem Menschen plötzlich in die eigene Herzmitte *geschrieben* ist und ihm das Göttliche im menschlich Geschriebenen für die Dauer dieses Herzschlags ebenso deutlich und gewiß ist *wie eine Stimme*, die er in diesem Augenblick in sein Herz *rufend vernähme*.” Emphasis added.

<sup>1072</sup> Marion, Jean-Luc, “The Voice without Name: Homage to Levinas”, p. 231.

in this article, and, in my view, this is a highly interesting aspect with respect to Levinas's notions of the Saying and the Said. Something comes to the fore through the voice, something which is not entirely summed up by the words that are proffered, something ineffable though *mirrored* in words – the transparent 'face' (to refer to another key notion of Levinas's thinking) of the *breath* of the Hebrew voice, light as air, appears out of the pages of the Buber-Rosenzweig translation while reading it out loud. The transcendence of the translation is in this way transmitted through the Saying, i.e. through the voice.

In an other essay from this period, "Scripture and Word: On the New Bible Translation" [*Die Schrift und das Wort. Zur neuen Bibelübersetzung*"], published in 1925, the year of the beginning of the Bible translation, Rosenzweig elaborates in more detail the relationship between the written and the oral. He begins his article by pointing out that "[e]very word is a spoken word. The book originally served the word, whether declaimed, sung, or spoken; it sometimes still serves it today, as in theatrically living drama or opera."<sup>1073</sup> However, in the present days this has fundamentally changed. Nowadays the book rules over the spoken word, as Rosenzweig asserts:

The book no longer serves the word. It becomes the word's ruler and hindrance; it becomes Holy Scripture. And with Holy Scripture, with letter-by-letter commentaries on the *soundless* and *dumb* word [*dem laut-losen, stummen Buchstaben*] [...] we have the end of the book subservient to the word [...].<sup>1074</sup>

Regarding the Bible this situation is particularly unacceptable for Rosenzweig, who sees in fact the very essence of the Bible endangered by this development. Similarly to Mendelssohn in his *Jerusalem*, as I have shown in the previous chapter,<sup>1075</sup> Rosenzweig emphasizes the *oral* character of the Bible, which highlights its special character among all other books:

This book alone must [...] remain word. It cannot attain the autonomous, aesthetic value of *Schrift* because it cannot attain the distance that is the precondition of this value. Its content, the essential part

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<sup>1073</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, "Scripture and Word: On the New Bible Translation", p. 40/"*Die Schrift und das Wort. Zur neuen Bibelübersetzung*", in: GS, III, pp. 777-783, p. 777.

<sup>1074</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

<sup>1075</sup> See chapter IV, 3. a), "The voice of the commandment (*mitzvah*) in Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, with a view to Rosenzweig and Levinas's lectures on 'The Written and The Oral' and 'Word and Silence'".

of its content, refuses displacement into objectivity, the separatedness, the *madeness* [*das Verfaßte*] that characterizes all that becomes literature.<sup>1076</sup>

A certain parallel to Levinas's notions of the Saying and the Said appears obvious in this context. Both thinkers underscore the significance of saying and the spoken word before that which is said and thematized. Similar to Levinas's argumentation that emphasizes the transcendence of the Saying,<sup>1077</sup> Rosenzweig points out that "the essential content [*of the Bible*] is precisely what escapes the specifying and distancing power of *Schrift*: the word of God to man, the word of man to God, the word of men before God."<sup>1078</sup> Hence, emphasis is put on the "word", i.e. the spoken word transmitted through the voice. Further, and like Buber, Rosenzweig draws attention to the idea of the Bible as "the *qer'iah*, the 'calling-out'", according to the Hebrew tradition.<sup>1079</sup> Therefore the translation of Buber and Rosenzweig is intended to take into account the human breathing and also the necessary segmentation of speech which is entailed by the breathing.<sup>1080</sup> This requires an occasional alternance of silence and speech, which Rosenzweig calls a "breath-renewing silence [*aternerneuerndes Schweigen*]"<sup>1081</sup> A faithful translation must take this into account, according to Buber and Rosenzweig. In the emphasis which Rosenzweig puts on the breath one can see another parallel to Levinas's notion of the Saying, which draws on the significance of the human breath in the event of the Saying. Particularly in the last chapter of *Otherwise than Being*, entitled *Outside*, Levinas underlines this aspect:

That the breathing by which entities seem to affirm themselves triumphantly in their vital space would be a consummation, a coring out of my substantiality, that in breathing I already open myself to my subjection to the whole of the invisible other, that the *beyond* or the liberation would be the support of a crushing charge, is to be sure surprising. It is this wonder that has been the object of the book [*Otherwise than Being*] proposed here.<sup>1082</sup>

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<sup>1076</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, "Scripture and Word: On the New Bible Translation", p. 41/"Die Schrift und das Wort. Zur neuen Bibelübersetzung", in: GS, III, pp. 777-783, p. 778, emphasis in the original.

<sup>1077</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 147/AQE, p. 230: "The Infinite passes in the saying. [*Que l'Infini se passe dans le Dire... .*]"

<sup>1078</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, "Scripture and Word: On the New Bible Translation", p. 41/"Die Schrift und das Wort. Zur neuen Bibelübersetzung", in: GS, III, pp. 777-783, p. 778, emphasis in the original.

<sup>1079</sup> Ibid., p. 42/p. 779.

<sup>1080</sup> Ibid., p. 43/p. 779: "Breath is the stuff of speech; the drawing of breath is accordingly the natural segmenting of speech."

<sup>1081</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1082</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, p. 181/AQE, p. 277, emphasis in the original. See further Feron, Etienne, "Le Dire ou la respiration du sujet", in: Feron, Etienne, *De l'idée de transcendance à la question du langage. L'itinéraire*

Breathing holds thus a remarkable place for Levinas's thinking. He defines it as a form of 'opening-up' of the subject toward the other:

[...] breathing is transcendence in the form of opening up. [...] In human breathing, in its everyday equality, perhaps we have to already hear the breathlessness of an inspiration that paralyzes essence, that transpierces it with an inspiration by the other, an inspiration that is already expiration, that 'renders the soul'! It is the longest breath there is, spirit.<sup>1083</sup>

Similarly, Rosenzweig emphasizes in his article "the obligation to let the Scripture be suffused once again with the breath of the word [*die Schrift wieder vom Atem des Worts durchziehen zu lassen*]"<sup>1084</sup> and "the obligation of hearing the breathing movement of the word from the pen-strokes of the Scripture [*die Atemzüge des Worts allein aus den Schriftzügen der Schrift zu erhorchen*]"<sup>1085</sup> This is because the transcendence that comes to the fore in the words of the Bible cannot be subsumed into the meter of any grammar and syntax. The inspired words require thus an *inspirational* reading, that is to say, to 'resurrect' them through the Saying and with the breath of one's voice.<sup>1086</sup> In this context Rosenzweig refers again to the sonority and musicality of the voice that transmits a meaning beyond the written text:

The apparent singsong of Talmud study, i.e., the 'musical' setting of the sentence as read, sets up the logical understanding of it; Hermann Cohen similarly 'set' difficult sentences of Plato and Kant even in reading them aloud. Those who comprehend such experiences will understand how logical meaning can be based on musical value in the biblical punctuation as well.<sup>1087</sup>

Hence, the oral form, the Saying of a text, is as important as the silent reading, and even more helpful to understand its full meaning. The spoken word is able to express a *transcendent* meaning and to enter in this way into dialogue with the other and to open oneself up to the word

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*philosophique d'Emmanuel Levinas*, pp. 133-138, as well as the article of the same author, "Respiration et action chez Levinas".

<sup>1083</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, OBBE, pp. 181-182/AQE, p. 278.

<sup>1084</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, "Scripture and Word: On the New Bible Translation", p. 44/"Die Schrift und das Wort. Zur neuen Bibelübersetzung", in: GS, III, pp. 777-783, p. 781.

<sup>1085</sup> Ibid., pp. 44-45/p. 781.

<sup>1086</sup> Ibid., p. 45/p. 782: "The word that cannot tolerate meter because in it the soul breaks free of measure is spoken into it [*the Bible*], and speaks out from it."

<sup>1087</sup> Ibid., p. 44/pp. 780-781.

of the other. This process is described by Rosenzweig, who concludes his article with the following pathetic words:

Henceforth the gate into the *nocturnal silence* that enveloped the human race in its origins, dividing each from each other, and all from what was *outside* and what was *beyond* – henceforth the gate is broken and cannot altogether be closed again: the *gate of the word*.<sup>1088</sup>

The gate of the word is, in Levinas's eyes, the *infinity* which passes in the Saying. The spoken word enables the time to become a messianic time, because within it each tiny second represents "the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter", as Walter Benjamin pointed out in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History".<sup>1089</sup>

Concluding, I want to highlight the power of language from another point of view: the revival of Hebrew as a modern, spoken language. This correlates to Rosenzweig's and Buber's project in the sense of bringing a *voice* to a 'mute' text, in which the Hebrew language survived, encapsulated in the 'square letters' that pious Jews used throughout the centuries in a religious context only. In a text written for Franz Rosenzweig on the occasion of his fortieth birthday in December 1926, Gershom Scholem, three years after his arrival in Palestine, points out the great dangers entailed in the 'secularization' of Hebrew:

This country is a volcano, and language is lodged within it. People here talk of many things that may lead to our ruin, and more than ever of the Arabs. But there is another danger, much more uncanny than the Arab nation, and it is a necessary result of the Zionist enterprise: what of the 'actualization' of the Hebrew language? That sacred language on which we nurture our children, is it not an abyss that must open up one day? [...] But if we transmit the language to our children as it was transmitted to us, if we, a generation of transition, revive the language of the ancient books for them, that it may reveal itself anew through them, shall not the religious power of that language explode one day?<sup>1090</sup>

Just as Rosenzweig saw the Bible endangered by its 'petrification' in a book that becomes 'Holy Scripture' and therefore sacrosanct, untouchable and dead, Scholem sees the life of the Jewish

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<sup>1088</sup> Ibid., p. 46/p. 783, emphasis added.

<sup>1089</sup> Benjamin, Walter, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", p. 264/"Über den Begriff der Geschichte", p. 704.

<sup>1090</sup> Scholem, Gershom, "On Our Language: A Confession", p. 97. See also the interpretation of Scholem's text in Mosès, Stéphane, "Scholem and Rosenzweig: The Dialectics of History", as well as from the same author, "Language and Secularization", in: *The Angel of History. Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, pp. 168-182/"Langage et sécularisation", in: *L'ange de l'histoire. Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, pp. 341-368.



people endangered by the secularization of the Hebrew language into a modern, spoken language. The question of whether Scholem's predictions have become reality cannot be examined here, more than eighty years after he wrote his text. Rather, it is of utmost interest to put Scholem's reflections and Rosenzweig's views on language into dialogue. It is for instance striking that Scholem, while laying out his argument, underlines like Rosenzweig the great significance of the 'name' in language:

Language is name. The power of language is enclosed in the name; the abyss of language is sealed within it. [...] And yet, out of the spectral degradation of our language, the force of the holy often speaks to us. For the names have a life of their own; [...].<sup>1091</sup>

Describing the process of linguistic secularization up to its end, it is further striking that Scholem, like Rosenzweig and Buber, refers to the notion of the *voice* as the ultimate kernel of language:

Because at the heart of such a language, in which we ceaselessly evoke God in a thousand ways, thus calling Him back into the reality of our life, He cannot keep silent. This inevitable revolution of language, in which the Voice [*sic*] will again become audible, is the only subject never discussed in this country.<sup>1092</sup>

This short analysis of Scholem's text shows that the notion of the voice is taken up with regard to many aspects, however the main focus in all these considerations lies, in my view, in a connection between God's voice and the voice of man: *His* voice reverberates in the voice of *man*. This recalls Rosenzweig's theomorphism of human language and love in *The Star*, where he points out:

Only the one who loves, but really he can say and does say: Love me. From his mouth, the commandment of love is not an [*sic*] strange commandment, it is nothing other than *the voice of love itself*. [...] Once again, let us seek the word of man in the word of God. [...] Man loves because, and

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<sup>1091</sup> Ibid., p. 98; cf. Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, p. 202/*Stern*, p. 209: "[...] the name is not sound and smoke, but word and fire. It is a matter of invoking the Name, it is this that must be confessed: I believe It." On Scholem's assertion that "names have a life of their own", see also Steiner, George: "Languages are living organisms. Infinitely complex, but organisms nevertheless. They have in them a certain life force, and certain powers of absorption and growth. But they can decay and they can die." In: *Language and Silence. Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman*, p. 96.

<sup>1092</sup> Scholem, Gershom, "On Our Language: A Confession", p. 99.

as, God loves. [*Der Mensch liebt, weil und wie Gott liebt.*] Man's human soul is the soul awakened and loved by God.<sup>1093</sup>

Hence a parallel with respect to the significance of the voice in Scholem's and Rosenzweig's points of view can be seen in the aspect of an 'actualization' of language. This aspect is taken up by Rosenzweig in his article "Modern Hebrew? On the occasion of the translation of Spinoza's *Ethics*".<sup>1094</sup> Far from only having the task of transmitting content, speech, seen under the aspect of the voice, is in fact much more than that: it is, as Rosenzweig puts it in *The Star*, the *voice* of love itself. This can be read in the context of Adriana Cavarero's book *For More Than One Voice*. Cavarero points out that the idea of communication that can be traced back in the Hebrew tradition takes on a different approach:

This idea affirms that speakers communicate themselves to one another, in the voice of God, which reverberates in the sound of their language. The reverberation of the divine *qol* in articulate speech is in fact the originary communication that makes communicable every further act of communication.<sup>1095</sup>

The voice ties together all these threads – the divine and the human, the language and the ineffable, the presence and the absence. Like a red thread it runs through the texts I have examined in this section and offers much potential for further exegesis, as I have tried to show in these concluding remarks.

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<sup>1093</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, *Star*, pp. 190-191 and pp. 213-214/*Stern*, p. 197 and pp. 221-222, emphasis added.

<sup>1094</sup> Rosenzweig, Franz, "Neuhebräisch? Anlässlich der Übersetzung von Spinozas Ethik", in: GS, III, pp. 723-729.

<sup>1095</sup> Cavarero, Adriana, *For More Than One Voice. Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, p. 22.

#### 4. a) Transmitting the fire – the renewal of tradition through the living speech

Tradition is the transmission of the fire, instead of the adoration of the ashes.<sup>1096</sup>

Taking up Mendelssohn's statement that the ceremonial law requires constant social intercourse in order to be explained and interpreted every time anew, I would like to draw attention in the following to the notion of *sociality* that arises from this context. It is nothing new to start with the consideration that Judaism places a much greater significance in the *doing* than in the *believing*. In this sense, Mendelssohn emphasizes in *Jerusalem*:

Among all the prescriptions and ordinances of the Mosaic law, there is not a single one which says: *You shall believe or not believe*. They all say: *You shall do or not do*. Faith is not commanded, for it accepts no other commands than those that come to it by way of conviction.<sup>1097</sup>

Pursuing this idea further, it is logical that he concludes *Jerusalem* with his famous plea for religious freedom, advising the rulers of the government that they should pay attention to the *deeds* of men and in return should permit the freedom of thought and religion to all their citizens: "Pay heed to the [right] *conduct* of men; upon this bring to bear the tribunal of wise laws, and leave us *thought and speech* which the Father of us all assigned to us as an inalienable heritage and granted to us as an immutable right."<sup>1098</sup> In one of his anthologies of Talmudic lectures, *In the Time of the Nations*, Levinas reports an anecdote about Hannah Arendt which illustrates excellently this emphasis of the doing vis-à-vis the belief:

The Christians attach great importance to what they call faith, mystery, sacrament. Here is an anecdote on this subject. Hannah Arendt, not long before she died, told the following story on French radio. When she was a child in her native Königsberg, one day she said to the rabbi who was teaching her religion: 'You know, I have lost my faith.' And the rabbi responded: 'Who's asking you for it?' The response was typical. What matters is not 'faith', but 'doing'. Doing, which means moral behavior, of course, but also the performance of ritual. Moreover, are believing and doing different things? What

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<sup>1096</sup> "Tradition ist die Weitergabe des Feuers, anstatt die Anbetung der Asche." Gustav Mahler.

<sup>1097</sup> Mendelssohn, Moses, *Jerusalem*, p. 100/"Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum", p. 418, underlined in the original.

<sup>1098</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138/p. 457, emphasis in the original.

does believing mean? What is faith made of? Words, ideas? Convictions? What do we believe with? With the whole body! With all my bones (*Psalm 35:10*)! What the rabbi meant was: 'Doing good is the act of belief itself.' That is my conclusion.<sup>1099</sup>

In his article "Judaism", written for the *Encyclopaedia Universalis* in 1971 and republished in his anthology *Difficult Freedom*, Levinas underlines this aspect in other words, emphasizing that "[i]t is perhaps in a ritualism, regulating all the gestures of the complete Jew's day-to-day life, in the famous yoke of the Law, which the pious experience as something joyful, that we find the most characteristic aspects of Jewish existence."<sup>1100</sup> The observation of the commandments (*mitzvoth*) thereby causes a community to arise, which discloses itself as a religious and a *social* unity. In the previous section, I have outlined the importance of *speaking* for Levinas, Rosenzweig and Mendelssohn, with special attention to the liturgical sphere. However, this social unity is not reduced to the religious sphere. It extends to more general questions of cohabitation amongst human beings. This Jewish model of a society, which is created and supported by the *mitzvoth*, finds its node in its universality, that is to say that the values which are lived and expressed through Judaism concern, at base, *all* human beings. They are, upon closer inspection, not limited specifically to the Jewish community. Nota bene: although the religious commandments appeal only to the *particular* Jewish community, they bring to the fore a social community which contributes *universal* social and ethical values to the society. In this way, considered as a civilizing force, Judaism brings to light through its tradition (מסורת) values which are as such an integral part of human rights, i.e. the Ten Commandments ('Thou shall not murder!' etc.).<sup>1101</sup> This conveys the hope to see the realization, hitherto utopian, of a peaceful cohabitation which brings together different cultures and religions. This is because "*no religion is an island*",<sup>1102</sup> and the idea that all human beings are connected with one another through the simple fact of being *human* represents a keystone of this project of living together: "We are all brothers, all sisters. From such intimacy comes the hope of our humanity."<sup>1103</sup>

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<sup>1099</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Judaism and Christianity", in: *In the Time of the Nations*, pp. 145-150, p. 148/"Judaïsme et Christianisme", in: *À l'heure des nations*, pp. 189-195, p. 192.

<sup>1100</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Judaism", in: *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 24-26, p. 26/"Judaïsme", in: *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 43-46, p. 46.

<sup>1101</sup> See Meir, Ephraim, "*Quo vadis, religio?* Religion as Terror and Violence or as Contribution to Civilization. A Plea for Trans-Difference", in: Meir, Ephraim, *Identity Dialogically Constructed*, pp. 10-26.

<sup>1102</sup> See on this topic Heschel, Abraham Joshua, "No Religion is an Island". See further the anthology *Theologie im Plural. Eine akademische Herausforderung*, ed. by Wolfram Weiße.

<sup>1103</sup> Cohen, Richard A., *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy. Interpretations after Levinas*, p. 22, particularly the chapter "Humanism and the rights of exegesis", pp. 216-265.

The notion of *fraternity*, in its first formulation in the Enlightenment, must be thought of as a concept encompassing generations, nations and cultures.<sup>1104</sup> The Jewish vision of history as composed of *toldot* (תולדות), i.e. of successive generations connected with one another through their birth and death, rests on the idea that human beings are united in time and era. The transmission of what I am inclined to call the ‘fire of tradition’ consists thus in maintaining this continuity through the generations. The idea of intergenerational oral transmission has been recently studied by Catherine Chalié in her book *Transmettre, de génération en génération*.<sup>1105</sup> Chalié supports the thesis that, in living speaking transmitted from one human being to another, something happens that goes beyond mere communication – and it is precisely that which reunites the human community as such. She illustrates her reflections notably by referring to the fundamental texts of human civilization: “The act of recounting – ‘You shall say to your son’ (*véhigadta leBinekha* [וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ]) (Ex. 13:8) – thus constitutes a leitmotiv in the Bible. All cultures are transmitted at first in this fashion, from generation to generation.”<sup>1106</sup> In this way, we have to imagine this process as a sort of *uninterrupted dialogue* which comes about through the saying.<sup>1107</sup> It is held and maintained between two people, then extended through a dialogically structured community, and finally reflected and taken up, beyond cultural and national borders, in the context of a worldwide conversation.<sup>1108</sup> The vital power of *speech* and the power of the *spirit* are in this sense united in the ‘transmitting of the fire’, conceived as an ongoing dialogue between men, as Abraham Joshua Heschel underlines in *Man’s Quest for God*: “We shall never be able to understand that the spirit is revealed in the form of words unless we discover the vital truth that speech has *power*, that words are *commitments*.”<sup>1109</sup>

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<sup>1104</sup> On the notion of fraternity, see Chalié, Catherine, *La Fraternité, un espoir en clair-obscur*, with special attention to Levinas’s work see chapter 5, “Fraternité irréductible”, pp. 123-154.

<sup>1105</sup> Chalié, Catherine, *Transmettre, de génération en génération*.

<sup>1106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22. See further *ibid.*, p. 23 with reference to Franz Rosenzweig’s *New Thinking*.

<sup>1107</sup> See the model of an ongoing intellectual dialogue between Derrida and Gadamer in: Derrida, Jacques/Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Der ununterbrochene Dialog*, ed. by Martin Gessmann.

<sup>1108</sup> See further on this topic the article of Casper, Bernhard, “Seit ein Gespräch wir sind”.

<sup>1109</sup> Heschel, Abraham Joshua, *Man’s Quest for God. Studies in Prayer and Symbolism*, p. 25, emphasis added.

## b) Walking on the moon – on the significance of talking face-to-face in politics

Abel, stand up / so that it might begin differently / amongst us all<sup>1110</sup>

In the face-to-face speaking there is something revealed which exceeds the dimension of the political, something which is reflected in the ethical sphere, beyond communication. In this context, Levinas speaks repeatedly in *Beyond the Verse* of a “continued revelation” which takes place in the saying, notably in that of exegesis, for which a plurality of speakers is indispensable, for no man has access to the truth alone. On the contrary, according to Levinas, it is necessary to understand

[...] the very *plurality as an unavoidable moment of the signification of meaning*, and as in some way justified by the destiny of the inspired word, so that the infinite richness of what it does not say can be said or that the meaning of what it does say can be ‘renewed’, to use the technical expression of the Rabbis.<sup>1111</sup>

The idea that the “struggle for shared meaning [is] essential to humanity”<sup>1112</sup> was also emphasized by Martin Buber in his lecture “The Word That Is Spoken” [*Das Wort das gesprochen wird*]. Buber argues that “[i]t is the communal nature of the *logos* as at once ‘word’ and ‘meaning’ which makes man man, and it is this which proclaims itself from of old in the communalizing of the spoken word that again and again comes into being.”<sup>1113</sup> This way of ‘coming into being’ of the word is paved however through the breath of the voice, which puts men in relation to one another, as Harold Stahmer points out, citing Walter J. Ong: “Voice is the foundation for role-playing among men in the sense that the use of voice and its understanding

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<sup>1110</sup> Domin, Hilde, “Abel steh auf”, in: *Ich will Dich. Gedichte*, pp. 28-29, here p. 28: “Abel steh auf / damit es anders anfängt / zwischen uns allen”. See also Domin’s poetry in the context of the anthology *Viele von uns denken noch sie kämen durch wenn sie ganz ruhig bleiben. Deutschsprachige Gegenwartslyrik von Frauen*, ed. by Ingeborg and Rodja Weigand, pp. 45-49.

<sup>1111</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “On the Jewish Reading of Scriptures”, in: *Beyond the Verse. Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, pp. 101-114, pp. 109-110/“De la lecture juive des Écritures”, in: *L’au-delà du verset: lectures et discours talmudiques*, pp. 125-142, p. 136.

<sup>1112</sup> Friedman, Maurice S., *Martin Buber. The Life of Dialogue*, p. 359; cf. *ibid.* also the chapter “Appendix A: Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas: An ethical query”, pp. 337-352.

<sup>1113</sup> Buber, Martin, “The Word That Is Spoken“, p. 356/“Das Wort das gesprochen wird”, p. 16. I take over the emphasis according to the translation; however, it does not appear in the original text.

[...] forces man to enter into others.”<sup>1114</sup> It is precisely for this reason that the *face-to-face* conversation, in my view, matters so much in the political realm. To take into consideration a pluralistic structured signification of meaning would lead to more open-mindedness and to more recognition of the arguments of the ‘other’ political side. This would bring about the hope one day to attain a peace which is not only an armistice between two wars, but a lasting peace. Levinas refers to this notion by outlining a *messianic peace*, conceived as a state situated beyond war and beyond history. Although war is an important point of reference for Levinas’s thinking (see e.g. the foreword of *Totality and Infinity*), his conception of history and time nevertheless transports us *beyond* time.<sup>1115</sup> Through the notion of the Saying (*le Dire*), Levinas outlines something ‘outside time’ (*hors temps*) which must always be re-captured and re-actualized through a re-saying face-to-face. This necessitates another way of addressing others and, consequently, another way of having a conversation. In contrast to a discourse thematizing the other and a communication reduced to the simple exchange of information, Levinas works out the model of a conversation directed *towards* the other. He argues that in the very possibility to speak resides *in nuce* the possibility for peace: “Peace is produced as [...] aptitude for speech.”<sup>1116</sup> The loss of language between men and the breakdown of real communication, produces a kind of *mutism* which provides the primary condition for war and all the cruelties entailed with it, as Antje Kapust has argued in her intriguing study *Der Krieg und der Ausfall der Sprache*.<sup>1117</sup> However, in language resides also the power of a *revival* of language and the power to re-new the conversation, every time anew – even in times when it seems that men have lost their capacity to speak to each other. Language is newly reborn in every new conversation that starts and in this power of actualization lies the very characteristic of language, as Bernhard Casper emphasizes: “Language is in fact always re-newed conversation. [*Sprache ist in Wirklichkeit sich immer neu ereignendes Gespräch.*]”<sup>1118</sup>

To speak to someone means in the first place to *give time* to the other, that is to say, to set up and arrange a common space. The idea of hospitality, of welcoming the stranger, expresses

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<sup>1114</sup> Stahmer, Harold, “*Speak That I May See Thee!*” *The Religious Significance of Language*, p. 1, see further *ibid.*, chapter 1, “The Power of Speech in Oral and Aural Settings”, pp. 1-67.

<sup>1115</sup> See Mosès, Stéphane, *Au-delà de la guerre. Trois études sur Lévinas*.

<sup>1116</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *TI*, p. 23/Ti, p. 8.

<sup>1117</sup> Kapust, Antje, *Der Krieg und der Ausfall der Sprache*, pp. 118-124.

<sup>1118</sup> Casper, Bernhard, “Seit ein Gespräch wir sind”, p. 88.

itself in the first instance through what is said to him.<sup>1119</sup> Indeed, the lack or the loss of the sense of hospitality can be thought of as the most fundamental symptom of xenophobia, as Nicolas Weill argues: “When a society [...] no longer questions the limitations and defects of its own capacity to welcome the other, but rather projects onto the stranger the responsibility of the failure of this welcoming, the alarm signals are in the red.”<sup>1120</sup> The challenge resides in the task to render the stranger no longer a stranger, but a brother, by maintaining his right to be different amongst an otherwise homogenous group. The lack of communication, widespread in the political domain as well as in daily life, makes the establishment of peace unlikely. Already in 1953, Martin Buber pointed out with clear-sightedness this loss of language among people in his acceptance speech for the German bookseller’s Peace Prize (*Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels*): “That the people can no longer lead a real conversation with one another is not simply the most recent phenomenon; it is also the most urgently demanding phenomenon of the pathology of our time.”<sup>1121</sup> It is therefore not surprising that the paradigm of *conversation* has maintained its relevancy also with respect to the most recent ethical theories, such as that found for instance in the work of Kwame Anthony Appiah. In one of his recent studies, Appiah argues: “That’s why the model I’ll be returning to is that of conversation – and, in particular, conversation between people from different ways of life. [...] [C]onversations across boundaries can be delightful, or just vexing: what they mainly are, though, is inevitable.”<sup>1122</sup> Levinas also refers repeatedly to the importance of a face-to-face conversation which would go beyond the political, but which could be realized only at rare and precious moments in the political sphere. The example Levinas gives in this context is that of former Egyptian President Anwar Sadate’s visit to Israel in 1977, which, according to Levinas, illustrates a *trans-historic* event, in some ways comparable to the first steps of man on the moon:

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<sup>1119</sup> On the notion of hospitality see Meir, Ephraim, “Das Abrahamitische Abenteuer (Er)Leben”, pp. 35-37. See further, Schérer, René, *Zeus hospitalier. Éloge de l’hospitalité*. For a renewed treatment of the relation between the ethical and the political in Levinas’s and Rosenzweig’s thought, see Herzog, Annabel, *Penser autrement la politique. Éléments pour une critique de la philosophie politique*, especially pp. 234-263, and, of the same author, “Is Liberalism ‘all we need’? Levinas’s Politics of *Surplus*”, as well as Horowitz, Asher and Horowitz, Gad, “Is Liberalism all we need? Prelude via Fascism”.

<sup>1120</sup> Weill, Nicolas, “Une nouvelle ‘paresse du cœur’?”, in: *La République et les antisémites*, pp. 63-102, here p. 64: “Quand une société [...] ne s’interroge plus sur les limites ni les défauts de sa propre capacité d’accueil à autrui mais projette, au contraire, sur l’étranger la responsabilité de l’échec de cet accueil, les signaux d’alarme son tau rouge.”

<sup>1121</sup> Buber, Martin, “Das echte Gespräch und die Möglichkeit des Friedens”, p. 229. See further Kapust, Antje, “Dialogische Momente der Menschenwürde”.

<sup>1122</sup> Appiah, Kwame Anthony, *Cosmopolitanism. Ethics in a World of Strangers*, p. xix.



The peace concluded between Israel and Egypt, the unusual conditions in which it had been brought about by President Sadat's trip to Jerusalem on 19 November 1977 and which, on the small screen [*of the television*], must have seemed like man's first steps on the moon (though no more irrational), represents in our eyes [...] the very path on which reconciliation had a chance to occur. [...] Hence Sadat's grandeur and importance. His trip has probably been the exceptional transhistorical event that one neither makes nor is contemporaneous with twice in a lifetime.<sup>1123</sup>

This demonstrates that that which takes place in a conversation is not, we can see, completely translatable or to be summed up into words; and it is perhaps *precisely* this feature of face-to-face conversations that makes them so important, especially in the realm of politics. The model of conversation can be seen as an event constituting what we see as 'politics' as such. With his notions of the face and the Saying, Levinas, in my view, has contributed greatly to the task of rethinking and taking a fresh approach to politics. As man is not alone in this world, the 'trans-historical' journey of Sadat – this little step between men which seems as incredible as 'walking on the moon' – has to be renewed, every time anew, through the saying face-to-face. As we are bound to others through creation, this brings about fraternity and responsibility – a notion Levinas never tired of stressing in his philosophical as well as confessional texts. In his Talmudic lecture "As Old as the World?" Levinas underlines that *liberty* necessarily entails *fraternity* and that these two notions cannot be conceived as independent from one another:

For the human world to be possible – justice, the Sanhedrin – at each moment there must be someone who can be responsible for the others. Responsible! The famous finite liberty of the philosophers is responsibility for that which I have not done. Condition of the creature. Responsibility that Job, searching in his own impeccable past, could not find. 'Where were you when I created the World?' the Holy One asks him. You are a self, certainly. Beginning, freedom, certainly. But even if you are free, *you are not the absolute beginning*. You come after many things and many people. You are not just free; you are also bound to others beyond your freedom. You are responsible for all. Your liberty is also fraternity.<sup>1124</sup>

Taking into consideration these reflections, a new approach to politics should be worked out on the basis of an intercultural face-to-face dialogue.

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<sup>1123</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "Politics After!", in: *Beyond the Verse. Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, pp. 182-188, p. 183 and p. 187/"Politique après!", in: *L'au-delà du verset: lectures et discours talmudiques*, pp. 221-228, p. 222 and p. 226, emphasis added.

<sup>1124</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, "As Old as the World?", in: *Nine Talmudic Readings*, pp. 70-88, p. 85/"Vieux comme le monde?", in: *Quatre Lectures Talmudiques*, pp. 149-187, p. 182, emphasis added.

## **Conclusions – Levinas and Rosenzweig: Impulses for an ethical approach to postmodern philosophy**

Who is a hero? One who turns an enemy into a friend.

Avoth deRabbi Nathan

The present thesis has tried to outline the complex interweaving of Judaism, philosophy and language in the thought of Emmanuel Levinas and Franz Rosenzweig. Special attention was given to the voice in this context. In conclusion, I would like to highlight from the foregoing chapters certain insights that have been outlined with respect to ethics and aesthetics by emphasizing their importance for a new approach to postmodern philosophy and putting them in dialogue with the points of view of postmodern thinkers, e.g. Simon Critchley. In this context, the project of a postmodern *Jewish* philosophy, outlined by Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, Steven Kepnes, Robert Gibbs and others, will be given special attention.<sup>1125</sup>

To begin with, it seems to me no exaggeration when Levinas is described in an anthology of the key figures of postmodernism as “the most original and important ethical figure in postmodernism.”<sup>1126</sup> As Levinas is largely conceived nowadays as “a transdisciplinary thinker,”<sup>1127</sup> frequently crossing between the borders of the philosophical (Greek) and the spiritual (Jewish) sides in his writings, his work inspires many innovative approaches also for other fields of knowledge, e.g. biomedicine, as has been worked out by Corine Pelluchon.<sup>1128</sup> However, the question remains: what is Levinas’s specific contribution to postmodern philosophy and in which way might his thought be useful for the purposes of elaborating an *ethical* approach to postmodern philosophy? Firstly, an aspect which is often neglected should be kept in mind; namely, that Levinas’s work in the first instance is not intended to set up rules for ethics, but

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<sup>1125</sup> See *Reasoning After Revelation. Dialogues in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy*, ed. by Steven Kepnes, Peter Ochs and Robert Gibbs.

<sup>1126</sup> Atterton, Peter, “Emmanuel Levinas”, p. 231.

<sup>1127</sup> Smith, Michael B., “Levinas: A Transdisciplinary Thinker”, p. 61.

<sup>1128</sup> Pelluchon, Corine, *Éléments pour une éthique de la vulnérabilité. Les hommes, les animaux, la nature*, and, from the same author, *L’autonomie brisée. Bioéthique et philosophie*. See further Perpich, Diane, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, chapter 5, “Scarce Resources? Levinas, Animals, and the Environment”, pp. 150-176.

rather to describe the possibilities of the condition under which ethics, i.e. the relation of the I to the other, takes place. Furthermore, Levinas's thinking regarding ethics is not *epistemologically* founded, but instead is grounded in the non-thematizable Saying and the proximity of the I to the other. This aspect is important for his whole work, and not just his philosophical writings, as Ephraim Meir points out:

In his texts on Bible and Talmud as well as in his metaphysics, Levinas strived to show the primacy of ethics as an irreducible structure on which all other structures rest. His ethics is not epistemologically founded; it is not based upon reason as in Kant, but upon the normative relationship, i.e., upon the concrete command of the other man.<sup>1129</sup>

Just as the Saying escapes its thematization, one can never be wholly grasped by philosophy, because one essentially escapes narrativity. The task of the 'ethical language', outlined by Levinas, is therefore to allow for an endless approach to the other, which I would like to call an *asymptotical narrativity*. This aspect of Levinas's philosophy is highlighted by Shalom Rosenberg, who describes Levinas's style of writing as an innovative interweaving of novelty and philosophy that is sometimes difficult to understand at first sight:

Levinas' writings are full of intuitions and images that are many times transformed into a novel philosophical terminology. This, together with his wish to go back to the original meaning of the words, makes the understanding of his works more difficult. Sometimes, he puts in the old linguistic vessels new semantic meaning. And what is more, as we shall see, the novel and the original coexist.<sup>1130</sup>

Therefore, the notion of an *asymptotical narrativity* best describes in my eyes the paradoxical mode in which Levinas's concept of an ethical language is realized in the scope of the philosophical discourse.

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<sup>1129</sup> Meir, Ephraim, *Levinas's Jewish Thought between Jerusalem and Athens*, p. 30. See further on this topic the study of Chaliel, Catherine, *What Ought I to Do? Morality in Kant and Levinas/Pour une Morale au-delà du Savoir: Kant et Levinas*.

<sup>1130</sup> Rosenberg, Shalom, "Levinas and Infinity", p. 13. See further Wyschogrod, Edith, "Emmanuel Levinas and the Problem of Religious Language".

Taking into consideration Levinas's statement that his "critique of the totality has come in fact after a political experience that we have not yet forgotten,"<sup>1131</sup> we should not neglect to note here that an adequate place for the Shoah within an historical narrative remains to be found. The historian Dan Diner underlines this aspect as follows:

The integration of the Holocaust into the course of history, the construction of an appropriate historical narration for an event unprecedented in its brevity and extremity, somehow disconnected from past and future, still remains an insurmountable task. It seems that the only serious attempt to deal with it historiographically is to accept its fundamental irreconcilability with the saeculum's core narratives.<sup>1132</sup>

As Levinas tries to find an adequate philosophical expression for his thought that takes into account the Shoah as a traumatic event of mankind, in some sense he has to manage the same narrative problems as his colleagues in the history department. In this context Maurice Blanchot pointed out the impossibility of fulfilling the task that Levinas's philosophy sets out. This ambiguity can be revealed, according to Blanchot, in the entire plan of Levinas's thinking, trying to integrate the ineffable into a philosophical language:

How can one philosophize, how can one write within the memory of Auschwitz of those who have said, oftentimes in notes buried near the crematoria: know what has happened, don't forget, and at the same time, *you won't be able to*. It is this thought that traverses, that bears, the whole of Levinas's philosophy and that he proposes to us without saying it, beyond and before all obligation.<sup>1133</sup>

This has its echo in Levinas's style of writing, first and foremost in *Otherwise than Being*.<sup>1134</sup> The notion of the *trauma* plays a crucial role for Levinas in this context, as Simon Critchley points out in his study *Infinitely Demanding*: "Trauma was not a theoretical issue for Levinas, but a way of dealing with the memory of horror. [...] In short, the Levinasian ethical subject is a

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<sup>1131</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Ethics and Infinity*, pp. 78-79/*Éthique et Infini*, p. 73.

<sup>1132</sup> Diner, Dan, "The Destruction of Narrativity: the Holocaust in Historical Discourse", p. 78.

<sup>1133</sup> Blanchot, Maurice, "Our Clandestine Companion", p. 50/"Notre compagne clandestine", pp. 86-87, emphasis added.

<sup>1134</sup> See Weber, Elisabeth, *Verfolgung und Trauma. Zu Emmanuel Levinas' 'Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence'*, and also Meir, Ephraim, *Voor een actieve herinnering. Maatschappij, mens en God na Auschwitz*, as well as, from the same author, the revised and significantly expanded English version of this book, *Towards an Active Memory – Society, Man and God after Auschwitz* [in Hebrew].

traumatic neurotic.”<sup>1135</sup> However, concerning this conclusion, I must respectfully disagree with Critchley’s fine study, although I agree with it in large, especially regarding the assumption “that there is a motivational deficit at the heart of liberal democratic life, where citizens experience the governmental norms that rule contemporary society as externally binding but not internally compelling.”<sup>1136</sup> Facing this central problem of current ethics and politics, Critchley takes up the thought of Levinas, among others, and tries to develop a theory of ethical subjectivity which faces the ethical experience of an *unfulfillable* demand. According to Critchley, the ethical subject of Levinas

[...] is a *split subject* divided between itself and a demand that it cannot meet, a demand that makes it the subject that it is, but which it cannot entirely fulfil. The sovereignty of my autonomy is always usurped by the heteronomous experience of the other’s demand. The ethical subject is a *dividual* [*sic*].”<sup>1137</sup>

Critchley’s characterization of ethical language in Levinas’s work misinterprets the notion of trauma in my view. Of course, trauma comes from “outside of the self”<sup>1138</sup> and “can strike without warning, like a terrorist explosion,”<sup>1139</sup> but it is not to be understood as a *psychological* notion in Levinas’s thought.<sup>1140</sup> It is true that Levinas’s subject is a ‘non-identical subject’ and that “otherness is in the self,” as Ephraim Meir points out.<sup>1141</sup> However, this has to be seen in the context of metaphysical transcendence Levinas outlines in his work and not of psychoanalysis. When one focuses first and foremost on the aspect of a split-up subject, as Critchley does, one disregards that the most important aspect of Levinas’s ‘ethical language’ is the proximity to the other, which is realized in the Saying. An *infinite* approach to the other corresponds to the *infinite* demand. Yet during the moment of the Saying, proximity is realized. It is an enigmatic moment that uproots the subject from itself through its breath by giving itself to the other. In this eschatological moment the subject is somehow *out of time*, somewhere between life and death. Or, as Foucault puts it in his essay *Language to Infinity*:

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<sup>1135</sup> Critchley, Simon, *Infinitely Demanding. Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, p. 61.

<sup>1136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>1137</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>1138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60

<sup>1139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1140</sup> For a discussion of Levinas’s thinking with respect to psychoanalysis see Bercherie, Paul and Neuhaus, Marieluise, *Levinas et la psychanalyse. Enquête sur une aversion*.

<sup>1141</sup> See Meir, Ephraim, “The Non-Identical Self, Autonomy and Heteronomy. Response to Hannah Hashkes”.

Writing so as not to die, as Blanchot said, or perhaps even *speaking so as not to die*, is a task undoubtedly as old as the word. The most fateful decisions are inevitably suspended during the course of a story. We know that discourse has the power to arrest the flight of an arrow in a recess of time, in the space proper to it.<sup>1142</sup>

Furthermore, the philosophy of Levinas is not to be understood as martyrdom or as masochistic ethics that requires nothing other than sacrifices from the subject. Since Levinas outlines a radical notion of responsibility in his work, this had lead sometimes to an issue of psychological misinterpretation. However,

[w]e are far from a love for the criminal, far from those who like the Carmelites prayed in Auschwitz for both the victims and the executioners. Levinas never writes that one must love the executioner, he does write however that we are not free from a responsibility without limit.<sup>1143</sup>

This has to be taken into account also by politics which is required, as demanded by the ethical call. Levinas's philosophy is not understood as masochistic ethics because the *Saying* gives us the possibility to start again with a new beginning, leaving behind all that which has already been said, by reformulating it into other words – *autrement dit*.<sup>1144</sup> The *Saying* face-to-face realizes this moment of responsibility. In my opinion, the fundamental *ethical* contribution of Levinas's thinking to postmodern philosophy lies in this aspect. Beyond all the contingent moments in postmodern thought there is at least one fact that is absolute: the infinite demand for responsibility experienced through the face of the other. Levinas can thus even be seen as 'anti-postmodern' in this respect.<sup>1145</sup> This language before words, this proximity conveyed in the *Saying*, commands "Thou shalt not kill", a command which expresses itself in the face and the saying, i.e., the voice. In this context, I would also underscore that language consists *basically* of our voice, and that it is through the voice that the ethical moment of the *Saying* is realized. With

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<sup>1142</sup> Foucault, Michel, "Language to Infinity", p. 53, emphasis added.

<sup>1143</sup> Meir, Ephraim, "La Philosophie de Lévinas, sacrificielle et naïve? S'agit-il d'un drame?", p. 71: "Nous sommes loin d'un amour pour le criminel, loin de quelqu'un qui prierait comme les Carmélites à Auschwitz pour les victimes *et* pour les bourreaux. Lévinas n'écrit nulle part qu'il faut aimer le bourreau, mais il écrit que nous ne sommes pas dispensés d'une responsabilité sans borne."

<sup>1144</sup> See Casper, Bernhard, "Seit ein Gespräch wir sind", p. 88: "Language is in fact always re-newed conversation. [*Sprache ist in Wirklichkeit sich immer neu ereignendes Gespräch.*]"

<sup>1145</sup> See on this topic further Ajzenstat, Oona, *Driven Back to the Text. The Premodern Sources of Levinas's Postmodernism*.

this in mind, one can read the following statement by Giorgio Agamben as an indissoluble connection between language, ethics and the voice: “So, language is our voice, our language. As *you now speak, that is ethics.*”<sup>1146</sup> Through the saying, ethics is realized – notwithstanding the endless misunderstandings implied in the saying. On the contrary, it is exactly this shift in meaning that so often occurs in a dialogue between two people that keeps philosophy busy and is the reason why it can never come to rest, as John Cage’s anecdote highlights: “What he said was *one* thing; what I understood, *another.*”<sup>1147</sup> This tiny shift of meaning, that happens in fact everyday around the world, keeps the dialogue among people going and, further, emphasizes a crucial element of ‘speaking-thinking’ (*Sprachdenken*) of Franz Rosenzweig. In my view, the outlined concept of Rosenzweig’s ‘speaking-thinking’ can offer an innovative approach for a fresh interpretation of what is precisely at stake in postmodern philosophy: recovering the possibility for a common language in a society of strangers living in a world *après le deluge*.<sup>1148</sup>

Further, I want to draw attention in this context to some aspects of Steven Kepnes’s book *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning*. Kepnes argues that

[t]he resurgence of religion in politics, culture, and war marks a profound disillusionment with the modern secular ideologies of capitalism, socialism, democracy, and nationalism, and a sense of disappointment with the consequences of modern institutions for the meaning-making enterprise, for the material conditions of those who live outside the richest nations, and for the life-sustaining capacity of the global environment.<sup>1149</sup>

Against this background, Kepnes develops the hypothesis that truth as such is *liturgical*.<sup>1150</sup> As I have shown, liturgy indeed holds a special place in Rosenzweig’s thinking.<sup>1151</sup> Kepnes further draws the conclusion of the necessity for the practice of scriptural reasoning that takes shape in

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<sup>1146</sup> Agamben, Giorgio, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, p. 108, emphasis added.

<sup>1147</sup> Cage, John, *For the Birds. John Cage in Conversation with Daniel Charles*, p. 26, emphasis added.

<sup>1148</sup> See the anthology *After the Deluge. New Perspectives on the Intellectual and Cultural History of Postwar France*, ed. by Julian Bourg, cf. on Rosenzweig especially pp. 211-212, p. 222, pp. 361-362, on Levinas pp. 27-29, p. 37, p. 42, p. 83, and the article on Levinas by Kleinberg, Ethan, “The Myth of Emmanuel Levinas”, *ibid.*, pp. 201-223.

<sup>1149</sup> Kepnes, Steven, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning*, pp. 193-194.

<sup>1150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194: “My argument has been that precisely in the odd performances and strange behaviors of the oldest continually practiced religion of the West, precisely in the synagogue liturgies of the Jews, one finds some of the most profound attempts to formulate truth. The postliberal view of truth could thus be restated in a philosophical fashion as the hypothesis that *truth is liturgical.*”

<sup>1151</sup> See chapter IV, 3. a), “The voice of the commandment (*mitzvah*) in Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem*, with a view to Rosenzweig and Levinas’s lectures on ‘The Written and The Oral’ and ‘Word and Silence’”.

an interreligious dialogue and in collective discussions on the Jewish, Christian and Muslim forms of liturgy.<sup>1152</sup> This approach seems to me particularly fruitful for taking into account Rosenzweig's philosophy in postmodern thinking. It is noteworthy in this context that Steven Kepnes is part of a group of Jewish scholars, amongst them Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, Robert Gibbs, Peter Ochs, Ephraim Meir, and others, that have set out for themselves the task of discussing and defining what is at stake for Judaism in postmodern philosophy and how Jewish philosophy can be put into dialogue with postmodernism.<sup>1153</sup> This ongoing research process searches for Jewish approaches to postmodern philosophy, "reintroducing guidelines for moral and religious reasoning into public debates – guidelines that are neither relativistic nor imperialistic but at once definitive and pluralistic, in the manner of classical rabbinic inquiry."<sup>1154</sup> Coming back to Levinas, I think that the saying, as well as the voice, plays a crucial role here, since what lies at the heart of all discussions and inquiries is always the spoken word face-to-face among men. In this sense, saying is all that remains to keep our human society alive and worth living. The word, the simply spoken word face-to-face, is all that remains, after all; it is not much, but it is all we have to keep alive "the little humanity that adorns the earth [...]."<sup>1155</sup>

Regarding the outlined project of a postmodern Jewish philosophy, I share with Robert Gibbs the point of view that Rosenzweig's thinking has affinities with trends in postmodernism.<sup>1156</sup> However, the *ethical* claims which are present in Rosenzweig's, as well as in Levinas's, work are even more important to highlight in my view, because this is an aspect which is too often neglected in postmodernist thinking. As this is a philosophical approach that seems sometimes to lose the ground of the terminologies it uses while attempting to maintain a balancing act between reality and intellectual game, it is important to recall that there are ethical claims which are more important than all the word-games of postmodernism.<sup>1157</sup> Shalom Rosenberg makes this issue clear, underscoring in simple words the profound significance of ethics: "How is ethics possible? Why is ethics binding? I shall not kill, therefore you exist. The

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<sup>1152</sup> Kepnes, Steven, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning*, p. 195ff.

<sup>1153</sup> See e.g. Meir, Ephraim, "The Non-Identical Self, Autonomy and Heteronomy. Response to Hannah Hashkes".

<sup>1154</sup> *Reasoning After Revelation. Dialogues in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy*, ed. by Steven Kepnes, Peter Ochs and Robert Gibbs, p. 2.

<sup>1155</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *OBBE*, p. 185/AQE, p. 283. See also Bergo, Bettina, *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics. For the Beauty that Adorns the Earth*, pp. 169-205.

<sup>1156</sup> Gibbs, Robert, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, pp. 21-23 and epilogue.

<sup>1157</sup> For an innovative counter-example in this context see Annika Thiem's reading of Levinas with respect to the philosophy of Judith Butler, in: "Responsibility as Response: Levinas and Responsibility for Others", in: Thiem Annika, *Unbecoming Subjects. Judith Butler, Moral Philosophy, and Critical Responsibility*, pp. 95-143.



ethical Biblical message takes us beyond phenomenology,”<sup>1158</sup> and, in a broader sense, also beyond postmodernism. In times of a vivid discussion of a “clash of civilizations”<sup>1159</sup> and a worldwide mobility of millions of people from a wide range of different cultures, we have to face the task of finding a new charter of human rights, one which cannot be put into question by any of the cultural-ethnic groups living in this world.<sup>1160</sup> This is indispensable for creating a basis for a peaceful coexistence and acknowledging the unsubsumable alterity of the other and with it “the rights of others”, to allude to the important study of Seyla Benhabib.<sup>1161</sup> Levinas was well aware of the difficulties that arise when people encounter other fellow human beings, as well as of the difficulties that arise when men want to establish a *society* in which justice would be realized, as he points out: “Nothing is more strange or foreign than the other man, and it is in the light of utopia that man shows himself. Outside all enrootedness and all dwelling: *statelessness as authenticity!*”<sup>1162</sup> By outlining the main features of a “humanism of the other man”,<sup>1163</sup> Levinas has contributed a major part to this project. The outlined impulses of Rosenzweig’s and Levinas’s work for an *ethical* approach to postmodern philosophy make their thinking particularly fruitful for the present times. Not *only* for philosophy, but even for something much more important – life.<sup>1164</sup>

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<sup>1158</sup> Rosenberg, Shalom, “Levinas and Infinity”, p. 16.

<sup>1159</sup> This expression stems from a book title of the American political scientist Samuel Phillips Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* [1993], which provoked an intense debate on the subject. In Germany this issue has recently triggered a huge controversial discussion in the mass media because of the publication of the bestselling book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* [2010], written by Thilo Sarrazin, the former state finance minister of Berlin.

<sup>1160</sup> For an inspiring reading in this context see Sacks, Jonathan, *The Dignity of Difference. How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*.

<sup>1161</sup> See Benhabib, Seyla, *The Rights of Others. Aliens, Residents, and Citizens*.

<sup>1162</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, “Paul Celan: From Being to the Other”, in: *Proper Names*, pp. 40-46, p. 44/“Paul Celan. De l’être à l’autre”, in: *Noms propres*, pp. 59-66, p. 64, emphasis added. See further Sessler, Tal, *Levinas and Camus. Humanism for the Twenty-First Century*,

<sup>1163</sup> Wright, Tamra, *The Twilight of Jewish Philosophy. Emmanuel Levinas’ Ethical Hermeneutics*, p. 141.

<sup>1164</sup> See Timm de Souza, Ricardo, “Das neue Denken und die Ermöglichung des Friedens. Franz Rosenzweig und Emmanuel Levinas im Zentrum der Ereignisse des 20. Jahrhunderts”.

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## Table of figures

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Photograph of Franz Rosenzweig, 1926, Josef Prager Collection, ARC. 4° 1584 (L), The National and University Library, Jerusalem, Israel.

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Pencil drawing of Emmanuel Levinas, made by an unknown fellow prisoner during Levinas's captivity in a labor camp as a prisoner of war (1940-45). By courtesy of Michaël Levinas and IMEC (Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine), Abbaye d'Ardenne, St-Germain-La-Blanche-Herbe, Caen, France, where the original is preserved.

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“The Word”, 1933, oil on cardboard laid down on wood, private collection.

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**Declaration according to § 6 of the Ph.D. regulations of the  
*Hochschule für Jüdische Studien Heidelberg***

**Erklärung gemäß § 6 der Promotionsordnung der  
Hochschule für Jüdische Studien Heidelberg**

Ich habe die vorliegende Dissertation selbständig angefertigt sowie die benutzten Quellen und Hilfsmittel vollständig angegeben und im Einzelnen vollständig nachgewiesen.

Die vorliegende Arbeit wurde bis jetzt keiner anderen Hochschule, Fakultät oder Institution zur Begutachtung vorgelegt noch in der vorliegenden Form für eine andere Prüfung benutzt.

Ich erkläre, dass ich bei keiner anderen Hochschule den Antrag auf Promotion zum Dr. phil. gestellt habe.

Heidelberg, im Mai 2011

Silvia Richter

## Summary of the thesis

### **“Language, Philosophy and Judaism in the Work of Emmanuel Levinas and Franz Rosenzweig” in German according to § 7, subsection 2, of the Ph.D. regulations of the *Hochschule für Jüdische Studien Heidelberg***

### **Zusammenfassung der Dissertation „Language, Philosophy and Judaism in the Work of Emmanuel Levinas and Franz Rosenzweig“ auf Deutsch gemäß § 7, Absatz 2 der Promotionsordnung der Hochschule für Jüdische Studien Heidelberg**

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht den komplexen Zusammenhang von Sprache, Philosophie und Judentum im Werk von Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) und Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) im Lichte neuer Forschungsliteratur sowie bisher unveröffentlichter Schriften Emmanuel Levinas'. Unterschiedliche Denker haben das Werk Levinas' beeinflusst: Hierzu zählen vor allem Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) und Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), deren beider Schüler Levinas' war. Einen großen Einfluss hatte aber auch das Werk Franz Rosenzweigs, insbesondere dessen Hauptwerk *Der Stern der Erlösung* (1921), auf dessen grundlegende Bedeutung Levinas explizit verweist im Vorwort von *Totalité et Infini* (1961).<sup>1165</sup> Deshalb ist eine Untersuchung des Zusammenhangs von Levinas' und Rosenzweigs Denken vor dem Hintergrund der nun veröffentlichten neuen Schriften Levinas' von zentraler Bedeutung für die Levinas-Forschung.

Die neuen in dieser Arbeit vorgestellten Erkenntnisse sind vor allem der Miteinbeziehung bisher unveröffentlichter Schriften Levinas', die im Rahmen der ersten zwei Bände der Edition seiner Gesamtausgabe (*Œuvres Complètes*) erschienen sind, zu verdanken.<sup>1166</sup> Denn diese Schriften ermöglichen neue Einblicke in die Entwicklung der Philosophie Levinas'. Eine besondere Rolle spielen hierbei Levinas' Tagebücher während der Kriegsgefangenschaft

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<sup>1165</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Totalität und Unendlichkeit. Versuch über die Exteriorität*, Freiburg/München: Alber, 2002: „Der Widerstand gegen die Idee der Totalität hat uns im ‚Stern der Erlösung‘ von Franz Rosenzweig frappiert; diese Schrift ist zu häufig in diesem Buch gegenwärtig, um zitiert zu werden.“, S. 31.

<sup>1166</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Carnets de captivité, suivi de Écrits sur la captivité et Notes philosophiques diverses*, hg. von Rodolphe Calin und Catherine Chalié, Vorwort von Jean-Luc Marion, Paris: Bernard Grasset/IMEC, 2009, sowie Levinas, Emmanuel, *Parole et Silence, et autres conférences inédites au Collège philosophique*, hg. von Rodolphe Calin und Catherine Chalié, Paris: Bernard Grasset/IMEC, 2011.



(*Carnets de captivité*), die umfangreichen vorbereitenden Notizen (*Notes philosophiques*) für sein erstes Hauptwerk *Totalité et Infini* sowie Levinas' bisher unveröffentlichte Vorlesungen am *Collège de philosophie* in Paris in den Vierziger und Fünfziger Jahren. Darüber hinaus basiert meine Dissertation auf einer umfangreichen Berücksichtigung der in den letzten Jahren erschienenen internationalen Forschungsliteratur (vor allem in Amerika, Frankreich und Israel) – insbesondere zum Begriff der „Stimme“, den ich für eine neue Interpretation der Philosophie Levinas' und Rosenzweigs fruchtbar mache.

Die Arbeit ist in drei Teile gegliedert: Judentum, Philosophie und Sprache, die jeweils unterschiedliche Aspekte der Werke Levinas' und Rosenzweigs untersuchen und in Beziehung zueinander setzen. Die Grenzen sind hierbei nicht statisch zu verstehen, sondern gehen vielmehr thematisch ineinander über. Der erste Teil (Kapitel I) ist der Untersuchung des Themas des „Judentums“ gewidmet. Dieses Thema spielt eine wesentliche Rolle für Levinas' Werk (vgl. seine Talmud-Interpretationen) als auch für sein Leben und Wirken. Hierbei ist der Einfluss Rosenzweigs, dessen *Stern der Erlösung* Levinas um die Mitte der Dreißiger Jahre las, zentral. Die Entstehung und Entwicklung dieses Einflusses wird zunächst anhand einer Analyse des Frühwerks Levinas' erörtert. Besonders relevant sind in diesem Kontext Levinas' Artikel *Quelques réflexions sur le Hitlérisme* (1934) sowie sein Essay *De l'évasion* (1935). Wesentliche Impulse für eine neue Interpretation dieser Schriften konnten durch die Analyse neuer Quellen gewonnen werden, besonders Levinas' Kriegstagebücher, die neue Interpretationen und Rückschlüsse auf seine Rosenzweig-Rezeption ermöglichen. Ferner wird untersucht inwiefern der Begriff des Judentums als einer „Kategorie des Seins“ („*Judaïsme comme catégorie de l'être*“), der sowohl in Levinas' Kriegstagebüchern als auch in seinen Artikeln über Rosenzweig nach dem Krieg auftaucht, als ein Resultat seiner Rosenzweig-Rezeption zu bewerten ist und wie diese Rezeption Levinas' Denken nach dem Krieg weiter beeinflusste. Abschließend wird vor dem Hintergrund der biographischen und werkgeschichtlichen Bezüge versucht, eine Skizze der Verhältnisbestimmung von Judentum und Philosophie im Werk Levinas' unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Einflusses Rosenzweigs zu geben.

Das Thema der „Philosophie“ wird im zweiten Teil (Kapitel II) untersucht, das die begonnenen Analysen fortführt und sie in den Kontext der philosophischen Fragestellungen Levinas' und Rosenzweigs stellt. Zunächst wird die Problematik des Todes in Verbindung

gebracht mit Levinas' Begriff des *Es gibt (il y a)*, den er vor allem in seiner Schrift *De l'existence de l'existant* (1947) darlegt. Vorarbeiten hierzu lassen sich in seinen Kriegstagebüchern finden, wo Levinas den Begriff bereits in nuce entwirft und ihn nach dem Krieg theoretisch ausführlich entwickelt. In diesem Zusammenhang spielt der Einfluss von Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003) auf Levinas eine wichtige Rolle. Der Aspekt des Todes wird im Folgenden in Beziehung gesetzt zu den Begriffen Eros und Schöpfung im Werk Levinas' und Rosenzweigs. Ferner wird dem zeitlichen Modus der Eschatologie und seiner besonderen Bedeutung für Levinas' Denken, insbesondere im Hinblick auf die Rolle der Sprache in seiner Philosophie, Beachtung geschenkt. In diesem Kontext wird auch Jacques Derridas (1930-2004) kritische Rezeption von Levinas' *Totalité et Infini* in seinem Essay *Violence et Métaphysique* (1964) vorgestellt und in Verbindung gesetzt mit dem Problem der Narrativität bei Levinas. Letzterer Aspekt wird dann in einem weiteren Zusammenhang problematisiert, Bezug nehmend auf die Schwierigkeiten der Produktion literarischen Schreibens im Allgemeinen. In einem abschließenden Exkurs werden Bezüge zwischen dem Schaffen des US-amerikanischen Komponisten und Künstlers John Cage (1912-1992) und dem Werk Levinas' herausgearbeitet, wobei aufgezeigt wird, dass sich Momente der philosophischen Problematik Levinas' in dem musikalischen und theoretischen Werk Cages widerspiegeln bzw. auf künstlerische Weise Ausdruck finden.

Kapitel III und IV wenden sich vorrangig Themen der „Sprache“ zu. Zunächst wird in Kapitel III der Zusammenhang von Sprache und Sprachdenken im Werk Rosenzweigs dargelegt und in Beziehung gesetzt zum Begriff der Sprache bei Levinas. Ausgehend von Rosenzweigs Artikel *Das neue Denken* (1925) wird untersucht, was Rosenzweig unter dem Begriff eines „Neuen Denkens“ versteht und wie sich dieses widerspiegelt in seinem theoretischen und biographischen Schaffen, u.a. durch die Gründung des Freien Jüdischen Lehrhauses in Frankfurt. Zwei Aspekte sind bei dieser Analyse zu betonen: Sprache und Offenbarung. Die enge Verknüpfung dieser beiden Aspekte im Werk Rosenzweigs wird dann in Verbindung gesetzt zu ihrer Bedeutung bei Levinas. Im weiteren Verlauf wird Rosenzweigs Konzept einer messianischen Erkenntnistheorie (messianic epistemology) und sein Begriff der Wahrheit erörtert. Abschließend wird die Rolle der Sprache für Rosenzweigs Wahrheitsbegriff problematisiert und dargelegt, dass das Schweigen und die Vision des göttlichen Antlitzes, wie Rosenzweig es im dritten Teil des *Sterns der Erlösung* darlegt, letztlich einen höheren Stellenwert für ihn einnehmen als Sprache. Eine Darstellung des Einflusses der Kabbala und

deren Rezeption im Werk Rosenzweigs erhellen die Hintergründe für die Entwicklung seines Wahrheitsbegriffes als *Licht* und *Vision*, jenseits der sprachlichen Ausdruckskraft.

Schließlich untersucht Kapitel IV das Phänomen der *Stimme* im Werk Rosenzweigs und Levinas'. Zunächst wird der Begriff der Stimme fruchtbar gemacht für eine neue Interpretation des Subjektbegriffs bei Levinas. In einem zweiten Schritt wird der komplexe Zusammenhang von Offenbarung, Sprache und Liebe im Werk Rosenzweigs eingehender erörtert, mit einem speziellen Augenmerk auf die Rolle der „Stimme der Liebe“ im *Stern der Erlösung*. Hierbei wird der zentrale Stellenwert der *Stimme* im Offenbarungsgeschehen bei Rosenzweig herausgearbeitet. Es wird dargestellt wie aus dem „stummen“ Selbst eine „sprechende“ Seele wird und aufgezeigt, welche zentrale Funktion der „Stimme der Liebe“ (Rosenzweig) hierbei zukommt. Diese Aspekte werden jeweils in kritischem Bezug zum Werk Levinas' gesehen und in Auseinandersetzung mit dessen Denken fortgeführt. Darüber hinaus wird die Rolle der Stimme in Moses Mendelssohns (1729-1786) *Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum* (1783) untersucht und dessen Gedanken über die ständige Erneuerung der „Stimme des Gesetztes“ durch mündliche Lehre in Verbindung gesetzt zu Rosenzweigs Denken über Gesetz und Judentum einerseits und Levinas' Reflektionen über Sprache und Stille andererseits. Letzteres geschieht vor allem Bezug nehmend auf Levinas' bisher unveröffentlichte Vorlesungen *Parole et Silence* und *L'Écrit et l'Oral* Ende der Vierziger bzw. Anfang der Fünfziger Jahre.<sup>1167</sup> Ferner wird die Bedeutung der Stimme in der Bibelübersetzung, die Franz Rosenzweig ab 1925 gemeinsam mit Martin Buber (1878-1965) unternahm, herausgearbeitet und in Beziehung gesetzt zu Levinas' Begriffen des Sagens (*le Dire*) und Gesagten (*le Dit*). Abschließend wird die gesellschaftliche und politische Funktion der Stimme, insbesondere im Hinblick auf eine Aktualisierung der jüdischen Tradition sowie deren Weitergabe, erörtert.

Im Fazit wird die vorgestellte Interpretation des Denkens Levinas' und Rosenzweigs in den Kontext der postmodernen Philosophie gestellt. Hierbei wird veranschaulicht, welche Impulse von ihren Werken für die zeitgenössische philosophische Debatte ausgehen und für diese fruchtbar gemacht werden können. Denn insbesondere das jüdische Denken der beiden Philosophen bietet interessante und innovative Anstöße für eine ethische Neuorientierung der postmodernen Philosophie.

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<sup>1167</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Parole et Silence*, S. 69-104 und S. 199-229.