A Jewish moment

On the *Augenblick* in Franz Rosenzweig's *Der Stern der Erlösung*

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Abstract • In his dissertation on Hegel's conception of the state, Franz Rosenzweig highlighted the role of Christianity in Hegel's conception of the emergence of the universal. In his subsequent *magnum opus*, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (1921), a corner-stone in the history of modern Jewish thought, he is driven by the aspiration to rethink the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, and to re-inscribe the Jewish historical experience into the history of world spirit. Thus he approaches the problem of the universal from a standpoint that involves a rethinking of the theological underpinning of Hegel's system. This article explores how this is carried out through a new sense of time and temporality, epitomized through his repeated references to the temporality of the *Augenblick*, the 'moment'. Taking his cue from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, he transforms this key concept from its Christian and existential significance to designate what he takes to be a particular Jewish experience of confessional life in exile, as a theological politics beyond the state, and even beyond history in its conventional chronological sense.

Introduction

When commenting on what he had achieved in his epochal book *Der Stern der Erlösung* (1921) in an essay written a few yeas later, and entitled 'The new thinking', Franz Rosenzweig speaks of how he has embarked on a genuinely *experiential* (*erfahrende*) philosophy, in contrast to earlier idealistic and materalistic approaches.[1] But this new thinking, he adds, is ultimately a return to something familiar, namely to a 'common sense'. The 'secret' of this comportment, both old and new, is that it knows how to 'go on living' and most importantly, knows 'the right time'. This 'secret', he writes, 'constitutes the wisdom of the new philosophy'. And he illustrates his point with a poem by Goethe, of how, if only we could understand things 'in the right time', truth would be near.[2] For Rosenzweig, the poem illustrates the lesson that all knowledge is temporal, and that there is thus no knowledgde 'independent of time'. For, as he continues, 'At every moment (*Augenblick*) cognition is bound up with that very moment'. In short, nothing we

1 Rosenzweig 1984, 149 (my translation, HR). The present contribution is an elaboration of a paper given at a conference organized by the International Rosenzweig Society in Berlin in November 2024. I am grateful to the organizers for the opportunity to present it, and for valuable feedback from the participants. I also wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers for helpful critical and complimentary remarks.

2 As pointed out by one of the anonymous referees, the full proverbial statement – *Kommt Zeit, kommt Rat* – has the sense of knowing when to wait, indicating an openness to the circumstance that it will take time.

do or accomplish, including our contemplation of the most abstract and lofty topics, can separate itself from its temporality, its *Zeitlichkeit*. For this reason he can also add that this new method of the new thinking ultimately 'arises from its temporality' (Rosenzweig 1984, 151).

The reference in the 1925 essay to how at every *moment*, thinking is bound up with that very moment, may easily be missed, in particular when read in English, where the word 'moment' does not stand out as particularly noteworthy. But the reference here is to an *Augenblick*, literally 'the blink of an eye', as a name for the particular temporality of a realized or actualized time. In the later essay this particular word only occurs here, and almost in passing, as a preparatory entrance to the remarks on the temporal dimension of the new thinking in general. But if we turn to *Der Stern* the situation is different. There, the expression *Augenblick* occurs so frequently that it should be recognized as among the central organizing concepts of its linguistic-poetic web. In fact, it appears almost as frequently as the three main terms of the book: creation, revelation and redemption.[3] This fact in itself should make us attentive to its semantic roots and to its philosophical implications. What is really at stake, philosophically and theologically, in the use of this term and what does it tell us about the overall aspiration of the book?

The question highlights the issue of Rosenzweig's relationship to Hegel and German idealism, and its philosophical-theological legacy. As has often been pointed out, perhaps the most decisive point on which he claimed to distance himself from this towering philosophical predecessor had to do precisely with the *temporal* dimension of thinking, and consequently, with the way in which thinking situates itself in temporal terms; in other words, how it 'temporalizes', *sich zeitigt* or *geschieht*. In an essay on Rosenzweig's critique of the concept of time in German idealism, Renate Schindler has argued that a central aim of Rosenzweig was precisely to abandon the ideal of a 'time-less knowledge', to find instead other ways of uniting time and history with eternity, perhaps in the form of something 'always-present' (or simply 'eternal', *immerwährende*) (Schindler 2004b, 316 ff.). In particular, she adds, he objected against how Hegel 'abstracted thinking from time' and did not sufficiently conceive the 'historicity' (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of thinking. She refers to his understanding of time as a 'messianic time of eternity', and even suggests – in the form of a question – this heightened temporality was not just the door through which he wanted to lead his reader, but also the door through which he claimed to finally release Judaism (*Judenthum*) from Hegel.

In this context, Schindler mentions the term *Augenblick*, but she does not explore it further, and to my knowledge it was never explored as such in any systematic way in the subsequent literature.[4] Here I will approach this particular temporal concept, in its philosophical and historical context, by comparative and systematic means. I will argue that it is indeed a key conceptual tool by which Rosenzweig not only sought to criticize what he saw as the shortcomings of previous

3 See *Der Stern der Erlösung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988). For the English translation, I here refer to Barbara Galli's *The Star of Redemption* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), henceforth abbreviated as *The Star*. The references henceforth are given in the text, to the German and English versions respectively.

4 In her still unpublished thesis from the same year as the conference, 'Zeit Geschichte Ewigkeit in Franz Rosenzweigs *Stern der Erlösung*' (2004), Schindler expands in fascinating ways on the overall question of time and history in his thinking, but without going deeper into the specific significance of the concept of the *Augenblick*.

idealistic and rationalistic thinking, but also the means by which he tried to forge a temporal space of a confessional life in exile, which he envisioned as a privileged existential predicament of Judaism. To adequately assess the significance of this conceptual strategy we need to place his use of the *Augenblick* in its philosophical, theological and political context, as a designation of an eminent modern or modernist sense of time, first inaugurated in the writings of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

I have addressed the topic of the temporality of the *Augenblick* in earlier writings, primarily from the perspective of how it appears in Heidegger's philosophy.[5] In these previous attempts, I was not aware of its role and significance in Rosenzweig's *Stern*. This lacuna seems to be a general trait in the literature devoted to the role of *Augenblick* in modern existential and critical philosophy, from Kierkegaard, through Jaspers and Heidegger, to Benjamin.[6] The only other text I have found that deals explicitly with this theme in Rosenzweig is an essay by Wayne Froman, who explores it precisely in comparison with Heidegger (Froman 2004, 228–46). Since the use of the term *Augenblick* is so central to the overall argument in Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, as a designation for what he there speaks of as 'authentic' – *eigentliche* – temporality and historicity, the comparison between Heidegger and Rosenzweig is pertinent. And Froman outlines the term's philosophical role in instructive ways, summarizing its most important occurrences in *Der Stern*. But in order to understand its more specific meaning in Rosenzweig, I think the comparison with Heidegger comes with a certain risk. Since the systematic conceptual framework of *Sein und Zeit* is so tightly woven it tends to engulf what is taken within its grasp in ways that may not be the most helpful basis on which to proceed here, even though there are obviously important parallels. And since *Sein und Zeit* was composed and published after *Der Stern*, there can, of course, be no question of a Heideggerian influence on its argument. The same is true of Walter Benjamin, for whom the *Augenblick* also plays an important philosophical role, especially in his late fragments 'On the Concept of History' from 1940 (Benjamin 1968, 253–64). Rather than using Heidegger to elucidate Rosenzweig, it therefore seems more helpful to search for the common roots of their attempts to signify and to stage an intensified temporal experience across the separation of finite and infinite time. Hence I will instead proceed by first recalling the two most important forerunners to both Heidegger and Rosenzweig when it comes to the philosophical sense of the *Augenblick*, namely Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Not incidentally, these are also the two forerunners whom Rosenzweig himself highlights, alongside the late Schelling, as the most important sources of inspiration for his new thinking over all at the outset of *Der Stern*.[7]

Capturing eternity in the moment: Kierkegaard and Nietzsche

It was Kierkegaard who first introduced the temporality of the *Augenblick* as a modern philosopheme in *The Concept of Anxiety* from 1844, in the context of a critical discussion of the entire dialectical tradition from Plato to Hegel, contrasting it with what he takes to be a specifically Christian spirituality.[8] According

5 See Ruin 1994, esp. ch. 5; Ruin 1998, 2019.

6 In a more recent encompassing study of this theme (Koral 2007), Rosenzweig is not even mentioned.

7 See his reference to both, as formative earlier critics of idealistic philosophies, in the introductory section of the book (7/13 ff.).

8 When introducing the temporality of the *Augenblick* in *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger refers to Jaspers and his discussion of it in his *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* from 1919, but notes also that Jaspers picks it up from Kierkegaard. See Heidegger 1927/1979, 319.

to Kierkegaard, for Hegel the phenomena of passage, negation and mediation constitute elements in a logic of becoming, in which they are uncritically presupposed. In opposition to this use, he insists that they must be identified in their proper sphere, which is that of historical freedom. In this sphere, the *passage* is an event in which *the new* is realized in a leap, which he described as an 'elastic' phenomenon that cannot be captured in purely quantitative terms. In a long footnote, Kierkegaard then develops his critique of what he takes to be Plato's understanding of the *exaiphnes*, the sudden, as it is discussed primarily in the dialogue *Parmenides* (Kierkegaard 1982, 82 ff.). For Plato, he says, the moment, the critical event or present, remains an 'atomistic abstraction'. But in order to capture the unique sense of time as the event and reality of finite historical freedom we need to think the now, the present, or the moment in a different and more qualified sense than as a purely miniscule quantity. This is the point in the text when he introduces the moment in the form of an *øieblik*, which is the direct Danish equivalent to the German *Augenblick*. Nothing, he writes here, is as 'swift as a blink of the eye, and yet it is commensurable with the content of the eternal'. If, he continues, 'time and eternity touch each other, then it must be in time, and now we have come to the moment (*øieblik*)'. Therefore, such a blink is 'a designation of time, but mark well, of time in the fateful conflict when it is touched by eternity'. This sense, he argues, is not merely absent in the Platonic dialectic of the sudden and the eternal; ultimately, it shows that the Greeks 'lacked a concept of temporality', which was due to a 'lack of the concept of spirit (*ånd*)'. In a footnote to this argument, he also adds that this shows a 'striking contrast to Christianity, in which God is pictorially represented as an eye'.

The same original pagination is provided also in the English translations.

Thus we can see how moment in the form of the *øieblik/Augenblick* is here raised to the highest level of philosophical aspiration, as a decisive spiritual distinction, indeed the distinguishing mark of genuine spirituality as such. The synthesis of the temporal and eternal, he continues, is not just any synthesis; it is the 'expression for the first synthesis, according to which man is a synthesis of psyche and body that is sustained by spirit. As soon as the spirit is posited, the moment is present.' This is where Christianity emerges, as borne up by a deeper understanding of time. 'The pivotal concept in Christianity', he writes, 'that which made all things new, is the fullness of time, but the fullness of time is the moment as the eternal, and yet this eternal is also the future and the past'.

In a footnote, he mentions that there is in the *New Testament* 'a poetic paraphrase for the moment' in St Paul, who speaks of how the world will pass away *in a moment*, *en rhipe ophtalmou*, literally 'in the blink of an eye'. According to Kierkegaard, Paul thereby 'expresses that the moment is commensurable with eternity, precisely because the moment of destruction expresses eternity at the same moment'. He does not provide the specific reference, which is I Corinthians 15:52. There Paul speaks more specifically of how, in this blink of an eye, we 'shall all be transformed and resurrected'. It was Luther who translated this passage by coining the German expression *Augenblick*.[9] This particular metaphor for tem-

9 In Luther's Bible the passage reads: 'Siehe, ich sage euch ein Geheimnis: Wir werden nicht alle entschlafen, wir werden aber alle verwandelt werden; und dasselbe plötzlich, in einem Augenblick, zur Zeit der letzten Posaune.' In the English King James version it reads: 'In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.'

poral transformation recalls many expressions in the Pauline letters that describe a moment – often designated by the Greek term *kairos* – for the return of the Lord and when this current time will come to an end.

Kierkegaard's argument that this heightened sense of temporality is something that distinguishes a specifically *Christian* spirituality as opposed to a Greek sense of time is, however, doubly problematic. I Corinthians is written in Greek, but by a Jewish messianic writer, and by someone well educated in the prophetic literature, in order to convey to his readers a heightened and intensified sense of time as imminent, incalculable transformation. When we turn to how this temporal figure of the moment as *Augenblick* is deployed in Rosenzweig, we see how the stakes become even more complex, as he will seek to rescue it from both its Greek and its Christian connotations in order to make it speak from within a particular sense of historical confessional experience, which he will tie explicitly to a Jewish experience, and more specifically a particular exilic Jewish experience, that is still animated by Pauline traits. But before turning to Rosenzweig, we also need to look at Nietzsche, in whom a decisive *Augenblick* is also mobilized at one point to overcome a threatening nihilism of the spirit.

Some thirty years after Kierkegaard's dissertation, Nietzsche composed *Also sprach Zarathustra*, a work whose philosophical pathos at one point is also gathered under the sign of an enigmatic *Augenblick*. It concerns a central theme that animates the book, namely how to live in an authentic and affirmative way in relation to the finitude of existence and the irreversibility of time. The problem is articulated in a section in the second part of the book, entitled, notably, 'On Redemption' ('Von der Erlösung').[10] Here the great torment for humans is described as time's 'it was', the fact that what has happened cannot be undone. When the will is exposed to the irreversibility of what has taken place, it tends to recoil into a bitterness against time itself. This way the 'spirit of revenge' is born, as a revenge against time itself, and against the fact that life is constantly consumed and wasted. Out of the inability to confront this inevitable destruction the will transforms itself into destroyer, demanding revenge and punishment: 'everything passes away, therefore everything deserves to pass away' (Nietzsche 2005, 122). The will can try to escape this spirit of revenge by trying to exinguish itself, and to become instead a non-will. But here too Nietzsche traces a nihilistic impulse in this approach. A genuine redemption can only come from within a will that is able to fully encounter finite and destructive temporality, in what he explicitly refers to as a 'reconciliation' with time and perhaps even with something 'higher than any reconciliation'.

This is what is contained in his appeal to an affirmation of the 'eternal recurrence', that we must be able to will again what has been in order to release ourselves from the resentment against time itself, and thus to see and

10 'Vom Erlösung', in *Also sprach Zarathustra, Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 4 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1985). The quotations are from the English translation by Graham Parkes, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). The section 'On Redemption' is on pp. 119–23. Here it would be tempting to explore the connection to an important and enigmatic reference to the peculiar 'pathos of the Augenblick' of which Rosenzweig speaks in the text 'Paralipomena' (in *Zweistromland*, 82). The background of this formulation is the remark that the nature of revelation arises from the connection between pre-historical and historical myth. In a planned study I hope to explore more systematically the relation of Rosenzweig and Nietzsche, in what concerns the nature of religious experience and its theological implications. Benjamin Pollock pointed out this passage to me.

experience life ultimately as neither progression nor deterioration, but as a circular repetition of a recurring pattern. In the words of Zarathustra, this amounts to confronting time in and through a creative will, in a willing of what has been. Its task seems to amount to a willing of what by definition cannot be willed, since it can no longer be controlled or impacted. In a paradoxical sense it seems to want to combine the irreconcilable, viz. will and power, with what is ultimately uncontrolable and condemned to destruction. This paradox underlies the dramatic events that Nietzsche will later recount in the form of a famous allegory in the section 'On the vision and the riddle' in the third part of the book.

There he tells a story of how, while walking in the mountains, he met 'the spirit of gravity' in the shape of a dwarf (Nietzsche 2005, 134–8). What this spirit of gravity preaches is that everything that is thrown high must fall deep down, and that all truths are curves, and that time itself is a recurring circle. Thus, in a sense, his teaching is an inverted version of Zarathustra's own doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same. In Zarathustra's version it was meant as a route to redemption. The shape it takes in the words of the dwarf is instead an image of repetitive hopelessness, 'like drops of lead in my ear'. Against this gloomy message Zarathustra recalls that only 'courage' can defeat the sense of meaningsless repetition, in saying 'was that life? Well then, one more time!' All of this takes place while standing before a gate on which is written 'moment', *Augenblick*, described as follows:

> This long way back here: it goes on for an eternity. And that long lane out there – that is another eternity. They contradict themselves, these ways. They confront one another head on: – and here, at this gateway, they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed above it: the moment (*der Augenblick*). (Nietzsche 2005, 136)

At this point in the story Zarathustra hears a dog cry, and he sees a shepherd, into whose mouth a snake has crept while he lay asleep. After first having watched in horror and tried to pull it out, Zarathustra calls out to him to bite the head of the snake. The shepherd bites and rushes up, laughing, transformed, 'no longer shepherd, no longer human'. Zarathustra presents the story as a vision and a riddle, and thus as something to interpret, and he ends his account by declaring his 'longing for this laughter'.

Later on in the third part of the book Zarathustra travels back to his cave in the mountains. A few days after his return he is overcome by a torment, which is described in the section 'The Convalescent' (Nietzsche 2005, 188–93). It describes him as rushing around calling for the 'deepest thought of his own abyss'. He has taught a lesson about life as suffering and circularity, and now he is calling for his own 'abyss'. But after expressing these words he falls to the ground as if dead and remains lying there for a week, almost lifeless. When he resumes consciousness he recounts to his animals what has occurred, in a speech that in the strange vision also becomes an answer to the previous riddle. He describes how what overcame him was the 'great loathing for human existence'. It was this loathing which had crawled down into his throat, with its message of how everything is the same, that nothing is worth the effort, and knowledge only suffocates. He says: 'The eternal recurrence even of the smallest, the most pitiable, that was my loathing for all existence'. In this way he now explains his own sudden illness. His animals reply that his doctrine about eternal recurrence comes with a danger and a disease. The concluding sections of the third book then display a lighter and celebratory tone, where the narrative is followed by a sequel of hymnic songs, first 'The second dance song', addressed to a personified Life, and then the 'Yes and amen song', where refrain goes: 'I love you, O eternity!'

The enigmatic fable implies that thinking can itself generate a lethal disease, which again only thinking can cure through an affirmative deed, centred on the experience of time and concentrated in an *Augenblick*. Only through action and willing can the suffocating sense of repetitive time be transformed into a redemptive affirmation of a circular eternity, which is ultimately manifested in hymnal praise. In both of these aspects, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* anticipates Rosenzweig's argument in *Der Stern*, to which we now turn.

The *Augenblick* in *Der Stern*

Here I am unable to engage with all the different ways in which the temporal figure of the *Augenblick* appears in *Der Stern*. Instead, I want to focus on a few passages in particular, where I believe we can see how it condenses its message. This is the transition from the second to the third part, where the redemptive temporality of the *Augenblick* is staged in a telling way, involving how it can be actualized in and through the particular discursive mode of *prayer* (*The Star*, 279/267 ff.). In the last section of the second book, just before the summary 'Threshold', Rosenzweig asks if it is *prophecy* that can manifest the redemptive movement, or at least be its content. But instead, he continues, this redemptive force needs a form that can unite the not-yet-happened and the yet-to-happen. And this form is the 'hymn of praise'. In the psalms, the congregation, also in the form of its singular voice, displays its distress, in a gesture of surrender. He describes how in the Psalms the individual speaking voice reaches out for a 'we', in which 'the deepest meaning of the Psalms becomes fully luminous and manifest', which, he argues, takes place in Psalm 111 to Psalm 118, which he reads as the 'great hymn of praise', that explictly addresses the possibility of redemption. The very word 'psalm', he remarks, means song or hymn of praise. In this gesture of praise, life – both individual and collective – ultimately transports itself into redemption, or as he writes: 'Life becomes immortal in the eternal song of praise of Redemption'. And immediately following upon this remark, he writes: 'This is eternity in the moment (*Ewigkeit im Augenblick*)'. Here the heightened temporality of the *Augenblick* is what holds together creation and revelation in and through redemption. It is a name for a turning of time, accomplished by the linguistic act of hymnic praise.

In the section entitled 'Threshold', which ends the second part of the book, and immediately follows upon the quoted passage on how the time of eternity is gathered in the temporality of the moment, Rosenzweig again turns to criticizing Hegel and his conception of the infinite, as something that simply 'turns back on itself'. The remaining part of the section is a meditation on the relationship between creation and redemption and revelation from the presumed viewpoint of the divine itself, and a promise of steps 'beyond the threshold of the supra-world, the threshold from the miracle to the illumination'. In an exalted tone it celebrates the possibility of that fusion of eternity and finitude which it has already gestured towards. But since the temporal dimension of this event is not explicitly raised it easily slips out of sight. It is therefore noteworthy that as he begins the third and last part Rozenzweig returns to the problem of *prayer*, and more specifically to the temporality of prayer, or perhaps the different temporal modes of praying, as a key to his overall message.

The initial context of this discussion concerns the question of whether man can tempt God, and in return if God can really tempt man (as implied in the Lord's Prayer). On one level he disparages this whole conventional understanding of prayer as misguided – yet there is a sense in which it carries a kernel of truth, in that God has exposed the freedom of man, and most importantly how man in prayer can see himself within the larger order

of things. Prayer can be the prayer of both the sinner and of the fanatic, but genuine prayer is something different from trying to tempt God, or asking him not to tempt. What ultimately makes the prayer a central element in the whole argument of the book, however, concerns the way it involves a configuration, or, perhaps we should rather say, a staging of a heightened temporality.

Time and hour, as he writes, are powerless before God (*The Star*, 309/296). But we who live in time, who are temporal creatures, tend to focus on the past as something from which we emerge and the future as something towards which we are moving in anticipation. But only by keeping apace with love in the gesture of prayer, not moving ahead and not fleeing away, can prayer be answered: only then, he says, 'in the favourable moment' (*angenehme Zeit*) as also the 'time of grace' (*Gnadezeit*). In relation to eternity, the desire of prayer is not to bring about eternity, but to transform it into what is closest, and thus to anticipate a future in a moment, in an *Augenblick* (*The Star*, 308/295). The same thought is also staged through the figure of 'today'. As when Rozenzweig writes, in the same section, how 'Eternity … must be hastened, it must always be capable of coming as early as "today"; only through it is it eternity' (*The Star*, 321/306). The task of the genuine prayer is to make eternity into the very nearest thing, into a today. Such an anticipation of the future means turning eternity into an experience of a present saturated with the imperishable. But how could the transient nature of the present be preserved? His answer reads: 'There is only one way out: the moment we are seeking must, since it has flown away, begin again already at the same moment, in the sinking away it must already begin again; its perishing must be at the same time a beginning again' (*The Star*, 321–2/307). The new that we are seeking, he adds, must thereby be a moment that is not fleeting, but a *nunc stans*, another word for this intensified 'hour' (*Stunde*). Thus the possibility of redemption turns upon the proper understanding of time and comportment *vis-à-vis* it.

A Jewish post-political moment

What is particularly striking in Rosenzweig's actualization of the temporality of the *Augenblick* is how he claims to distinguish a unique Jewish temporal experience from that of the Christian, and how this translates into a kind of anti-political political theology. This topic is discussed in the first section of the third part, that has the title: 'The Fire of Eternal Life'. We saw earlier how, according to Kierkegaard, the genuine philosophical and theological sense of the *Augenblick* was presumably only accessible to the Christian spirit, not to the Greek. For Rosenzweig, however, the *Augenblick* is woven into an argument that instead critically distinguishes the Christian temporal experience from its Jewish counterpart. He argues that the Christian world-view implicates its believers in a worldly, progressive temporality, in which the now anticipates an eternity that this now cannot hold. This relates to the fact that the Christian world is one of state politics, where faith and its propagation are inextricably connected with worldly affairs. The Jewish sense of temporality, on the other hand, differs in that it is situated outside history, and outside the politics of the state. For this reason, it points in a different direction, which is correlated with the rituality of life, its prayers and its praise. While the European nations have fought their wars of faith, the Jew, he writes, has all such wars behind him in a mythical past (*The Star*, 368/351) – sadly ironical, one could say, considering where we are today. For this reason, the Jew is said not even to be able to take war seriously, and is therefore the 'only genuine "pacifist"'. Unlike the other religious congregations that still seek to articulate their form of life in the shape

of a conquering and successful state, the Jew experiences a participation of everyone with God in the annual cycle.

All this places the Jew 'outside the space of world history'. The Jewish people, Rosenzweig continues, is in itself 'already at the goal which the peoples of the world are just setting out from', since it already possesses 'the inner harmony of faith and life' which the peoples of the world are still presumably seeking. And by 'living the eternal peace' it stands 'outside of a warlike temporality'. The contrast between the Jews and peoples of the earth, especially the Christians, for whom the state is the supreme form of existence, also has temporal implications. The state controls time, it 'seizes the moment, and forms it according to its will and its ability' (*The Star*, 370/353). In doing so it tries to control 'contradiction between preservation and renewal, old and new law'. But when there is no state, there is no longer any world history. For what the state aspires to is to control a time that ultimately escapes it, and which is thus only 'a reflection of true eternity', moulding the 'bricks of world history as times to fall into the river of time'.

It is on this distinction that the antipathy to the Jews or 'the eternal people' is said to rest, since their 'true eternity' is 'foreign and annoying to the state and to world history' (*The Star*, 371/354). With this argument Rosenzweig challenges the Hegelian, Marxist or any other argument that claims that Jews constitute a political and historical anomaly. Instead, their ritual commitment to a tradition without a state is what marks them out as a future for a humanity to come. Through the historical experience they have presumably reached a point beyond the political and military struggles of world history, in a way that is ultimately played out in the shape of a different temporality, or experience of time. Whereas the states, he continues, 'carves with a sharp sword into the bark of the growing tree of time, the eternal people every year places untroubled and intact ring upon ring round the trunk of its eternal life' (*The Star*, 371/354). And whereas the struggling states set up 'the newest eternity as the true one' they instead posit the 'silent image of our existence'.

This image involves the span and communication between generations, as when he writes of how the 'arm of violence may force the newest with the last into a newest eternity of all', but it will never bring about the 'reconciliation of the latest grandson with the oldest ancestor', which is the 'true eternity of life'. In the very last section of the book, this difference between Christian and Jewish spirituality is addressed specifically in terms of different ways of experiencing the moment. For the Christian, he writes, experiences his Christianity 'in the feeling of the moment that leads the brother to him on the summit of the eternal way'. The meaning of his Christianity is condensed here, in 'the midst of time between eternity and eternity'. For us, on the contrary, he continues, 'the moment shows us eternity otherwise: not in the brother who stands nearest us, but in those who stand farthest from us in time, in the oldest and in the youngest'. In other words, it is manifested in a living bond of tradition, that connects generations to one another in shared ritual life. The 'bridge of eternity' he continues, 'arches for us over the mountain of Revelation' and the 'sea out of which one day the Star of Redemption will rise' (*The Star*, 384/367).

Against the political struggles to secure a state for the Jews alongside other nations, he thus places his faith in a living tradition or cultural memory, that operates according to a different temporal logic from that of the progression of the world spirit. If there is a redemption, it is borne not by the Christian hope of a conquering state or a world empire, but precisely in the memory and experience of 'the eternal people' who live 'outside all world history'. It is only in this anti- or post-political existence that the fire

is said to burn that 'nourishes itself from itself and therefore has no need of the sword that would bring nourishment to its flames from the woods of the world' (*The Star*, 372/355). For this fire 'burns silently and eternally'. In this imagery we see Rosenzweig expressing most clearly his hopes and fantasies for a Jewish messianic existence, that is both anti-political and eminently political, since it claims to hold the clue to a redeemed collective existence.[11]

The way that Rosenzweig portrays this experience and its post-political redeeming potential poses a stark and sad contrast to what is currently taking place in and around Israel, which at the time of the book's composition was still a political ideology in the minds of Zionists. Through the establishment of a Jewish state, the Jewish people re-entered precisely that world history that from Rosenzweig's perspective was a thing of the past. His book, and its dream of a redeemed humanity oriented by the example of the European Jews, could thus be seen as a dream from the past, and a route not taken. Or perhaps we should read it as a confession of his own specific existential predicament, as a non-Zionist German Jew. As such it insists not just on the prevailing relevance of Judaism in European Enlightenment modernity, but of the unique significance of Jewish exilic existence as a model for a post-nationalist post-political existence. Here, however, the aim is not to pass any final judgement on the validity of its vision, but just to convey a certain inner temporal logic of the argument.[12]

Towards the very end of the text, Rosenzweig describes the event whereby one who inhabits an exilic space outside that of history

11 As both of the anonymous referees have pointed out, the underlying argument of Rosenzweig's political vision of, is more complex and controversial than I have been able to elaborate here. He was not critical of German-European (Christian) imperialism *per se*, which he saw as a route to a new global order. Within it a Jewish stateless existence could remind an expanding Christian civilization of the need to move beyond the boundaries of the nation and thus transcend the pagan nationalist-political form of the state. His repeated negative assessment of Islam as both a religious and political force also belongs to this constellation. The problem could be phrased in terms of an alternative; either the Jewish exilic non-state-bound existence constitutes a future towards which all the peoples of the earth are invited, or we have a complementary model, as suggested by the references to the 'other peoples' of the world, and also by the quotation here below, of how he is speaking specifically of the 'rebirth of the Jew'.

12 For an excellent survey of contemporary views of Rosenzweig's relevance today, focusing on the very figure of redemption and its validity, see the special issue of *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 29 (2021), celebrating the centenary of *The Star*, edited by Benjamin Pollock. It contains articles by many of today's leading experts on Rosenzweig, including a short but timely text by the now sadly departed Paul Mendes-Flohr, that takes issue with the potential destructiveness of 'redemption' as a political ideal in view of its connection to messianic fanaticism. I take the liberty of quoting him at length, as also a celebration of his many contributions: 'The transference of redemption from a divinely dispatched Messiah to human agency most often entails the reassignment of divine grace to a dialectical logic said to determine ineluctably the course of history, and as such may be disclosed by rational discernment. Given its apocalyptic conceit that it possesses the key to redemption, secularized messianism authorizes political strategies to hasten the eschatological process. At the cusp of the denouncement of history these strategies tend to be driven by a Manichean political divide between good and bad guys, the forces of light versus the benighted forces of darkness. Such messianic fantasies blight the religious and political culture of the State of Israel, occluding realistic, humane dedication to resolving the conflict with the Arab co-inhabitants of the Holy Land' (Mendez-Flohr 2021, 26).

and state politics can be reborn, and how this takes place in a 'decisive moment'. He writes:

> If man carries his inner home, his inner position, with him, then the decisive moment, the moment of his second birth, his rebirth, must lie beyond the limits of his personality, before his own life. The rebirth of the Jew – for we are speaking about him – is not his personal one, but the re-creation of his people to freedom in God's covenant of the Revelation. (*The Star*, 440/418)

In this quotation, the leverage of the *Augenblick* in this discourse reaches a climax: it is the name for the temporality brought about by ritual praying speech, in order to establish a free relation to eternity in the moment, as a staging of sacred time – but also a quasi-political commitment to an identity which only thus becomes possible as also a twisting free from time itself, into the *Augenblick* in which the person who was only born becomes born again, but now as the free choice of a destiny which up until then was not fully affirmed and appropriated.

Towards the very end of the last part of the book, in the section entitled 'The Star of the Eternal Truth', Rosenzweig writes of how lived experience may touch the moment, but still not be in contact with the whole. For the All, he continues, 'can neither be known honestly nor experienced clearly; only the dishonest cognition of idealism, only the obscure experience of the mystic can make itself believe it has grasped it'. Instead it must be 'grasped beyond cognition and experience, if it is to be immediately grasped'. Ultimately, it can only be 'in the illumination of prayer' (*The Star*, 435/414).

Perhaps we should also read this remark as an indication of how the book as a whole seeks to be approached by its reader, namely as a form of prayer and a song of praise. In its very last sentences, the book indeed turns graphically into a prayer, into a celebration and praise of life, and an utterance of the yes. Here the *Augenblick* appears one last time, in the description of how the human being walking on this path is able – at every moment, every *Augenblick* – to speak truly to truth (*zur Wahrheit Wahrlich zu sagen*).

Concluding remarks

In Rosenzweig, we have seen how the rhetoric and poetics, and also the politics, of the *Augenblick* is staged through his text, in an implicit echo of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. It appears as a gesture seeking to overcome the numbing nihilism of a secular chronological temporal order. It aspires to explore a temporal experience that is not located on the scale of progressive history, but one that permits the temporal as such to come to a halt, and thus to invite eternity into the present, as an experience of its fullness in the moment. It is an experience of eternity that is intertwined with the temporality of ritual, and of prayer and praise. Thus the human being is thought to breach the secular space of chronological time to make room for time as an eternal present. This preoccupation with the ritual and theological sense of the heightened moment of ritual and praise also carries a particular Jewish theopolitical significance. Beyond its Christian meaning, as the time of the eternal, in the line from St Paul, through Augustine to Luther and Kierkegaard, it holds the promise, in Rosenzweig's conception, of a post-state-political order, which only the Jews, as a people outside history, can bear witness to. Thus, in *The Star* the *Augenblick* emerges as an image – and a promise – of a temporality of unique exilic existence. ■

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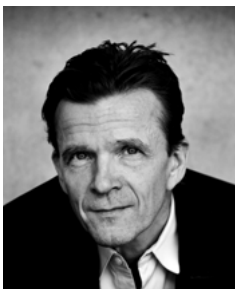

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