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Franz Rosenzweig's Concept of Redemption as a Vehicle for Confronting the Philosophical Problem of Contemporary Transhumanism

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Abstract: This article presents Franz Rosenzweig's concept of redemption as a vehicle for raising some important questions for confronting the contemporary movement of Transhumanism. The upshot of our discussion is located in the existential questions asked, following a philosophical comparison of Rosenzweig's religious and philosophical commitment to human life in its most robust form, with Transhumanism's scientistic vision. To do so, the article first discusses some techno-scientistic assumptions of Transhumanism, showing that it presumes what was once a core principle of German Idealism, the identity of reason and being, against which Rosenzweig rebelled. Then, the article turns to examine Rosenzweig's humanistic redemptive vision and its emphasis on the corporeal, the temporal, and the worldly (rather than the purely spiritual, the apocalyptic, and the other-worldly). The conclusion makes explicit the ways in which Rosenzweig's redemptive vision provides a contrasting model to the one set forth by Transhumanism.

Keywords: Franz Rosenzweig, the Star of Redemption, German idealism, corporeality, Transhumanism

1 Introduction

This article proposes that Franz Rosenzweig's concept of redemption is a useful vehicle for raising important questions for confronting the contemporary movement of Transhumanism.

In memory of our friend and teacher, Prof. Eliezer Schweid.

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The first section demonstrates that Transhumanism's vision predicts that at some point in the middle of the 21st century, the era in evolutionary history in which human life on Earth will come to an end, and be replaced by Artificial Intelligence (hereafter AI). We will further show that the intellectual innovation of Transhumanism lies in its advocating a deterministic model of human self-overcoming by means of technology.

The following sections will then explore how Rosenzweig's concept of redemption can help understand the philosophical problematic involved in Transhumanism. In many ways, the relationship between consciousness and technology in Transhumanism is reminiscent of the "the identity of reason and being", which Rosenzweig cited as the foundational flaw of German Idealism and in response to which he constructed his own philosophical system. It is important to distinguish between the philosophy identifying reason with being, against which Rosenzweig railed, and the scientific functionalist one that characterizes Transhumanism. Nevertheless, both subjugate human existence to a logic of immanence that, *a priori*, rejects aspects of the human spirit that are rooted in human mortality and the potential for a relation to transcendent realities.

To fully explore the way in which Rosenzweig's philosophy can enable a reevaluation of Transhumanism, the article subsequently investigates different aspects of Rosenzweig's thought that demonstrate how the experience of mortality replaces the identity of reason and being in German Idealism, as the constituting element of the human self and its experience of the world, while demonstrating that Rosenzweig's idiosyncratic use of the biblical terms creation, revelation, and redemption presupposes human mortality as a condition for life and the attainment of meaning and wisdom.

The second section schematically presents the inter-relationship of Rosenzweig's critique of the identity of being with reason in German Idealism and his consideration of human mortality as the starting point for his own philosophy and subsequently as the basis for redemptive knowledge. Sections three, four and five then link Rosenzweig's understanding of human mortality to his ontological conception of time and temporality in a manner that demonstrates a strong similarity between the Transhumanist understanding of human existence and Rosenzweig's depiction of man and God in ancient Greek drama as lacking in life. In these sections we highlight the role played by mortality in Rosenzweig's biblical hermeneutic and the prospect of revelation contained within it, as the key to understanding his anthropology of transcendent relations and revelatory presence as reflections of his philosophy's overall emphasis on the experience of life and love as opposed to mere existence. Section six then returns to the theme of

revelation in preparation for a final comparison between Rosenzweig's redemptive understanding of human existence and that proposed by Transhumanism. Here it is shown that the previously mentioned redemptive knowledge is, for Rosenzweig, a necessary condition for the actual transformation of human beings from the experience of suffering rooted in their mortality even as it reflects the fact of mortality in and of itself.

Ultimately, Rosenzweig's work sheds light on the way in which the value and meaning of life is necessarily rooted in the fact of human mortality, which is negated by Transhumanism. This mortality, together with the experience of transcendent relations which it enables, constitutes the condition for consciousness and volition without which there can be no possibility of living a meaningful life. This means that the technical, deterministic, and algorithmic knowledge on which the end of days is predicated in Transhumanism can only be seen, from Rosenzweig's perspective, as antithetical to those aspects of existence necessary for life. Thus, this article concludes by confronting Transhumanism's dubious attribution of consciousness to Artificial Intelligence in light of Rosenzweig's redemptive epistemology.

2 Transhumanism and the Technological Secularization of Apocalyptic Messianism

What do we mean by the term Transhumanism? As any intellectual movement, Transhumanism is a conglomerate of ideas rather than a monolithic stance. Transhumanism is distinct from post-Humanism, which argues against the idea of hierarchical human sovereignty of planet Earth, instead proposing a fluid, horizontal and "egalitarian" web of relations between human beings and their surroundings.[1] In contrast, Transhumanism claims that mortal human beings are ultimately worthless and that humanity is about to end its evolutionary role on Earth. This approach is championed by inventors and futurists like Ray Kurzweil,[2]

1 For example, see Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the late Twentieth Century", in her *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149–181. A full discussion and critique of post-Humanism is beyond the scope of this article. For an implicit critique of such quasi-egalitarianism in the context of animal ethics, see Shelly Kagan, *How to Count Animals, more or less* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2019), who terms this axiological trajectory, for lack of a better term, as "Unitarianism" (2).
2 See Ray Kurzweil, *Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Viking, 2006). For a critical assessment of Kurzweil's Transhumanism, consult Michael Hauskeller, *Mythologies of Transhumanism* (Switzerland: Springer, 2016), 11–34.

and scholars such as Nick Bostrom[3] and Max More.[4] While post-humanistic authors are less decisive about the futility of being human and concentrate on countering dualist philosophical anthropologies, Transhumanists generally have a negative appreciation of bodily human existence.[5] This hostility toward the human creature, is predicated on a negative approach to human embodiment, spatiality, and temporality, and has roots in pre-modern philosophies, Gnosticism being the prominent example (see more below).

The relevance of Rosenzweig's concept of redemption to the discussion of Transhumanism has to do with the way one imagines the relation of the human subject to the outer horizon of its existence. Here, Kurzweil's notion of "singularity" is informative. This refers to the point in the evolution of the universe when he expects that human beings will be transformed and superseded by smart technology. Kurzweil apparently drew on the concept of 'singularity' in physics – a moment of infinite density that signifies the beginning and end points of a universe's expansion and subsequent contraction.[6] Kurzweil's singularity signifies the end of human universe as we know it, namely the end of human evolutionary development and transformation, which means it can be conceptually compared to the eschatological idea of the "end of days." Where biblical eschatology refers to the "end of days" as an event brought about by an act of divine transcendence, the

3 See Nick Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought", *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14 (2005), 1–25; idem, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2014). Another significant expression of Bostrom's Transhumanism is the radical nominalism expressed in his 'Simulation Argument'. See Nick Bostrom, "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?", *Philosophical Quarterly* 53:211 (2003), 243–255. This radical skepticism concerning the reality of the physical world has its inspiration in Plato's cave parable and more specifically in Descartes's radical skepticism, which (despite his quest for securing an absolute certainty) seems to undermine the possibility of realism. On Descartes and the surprising connection between the belief in divine omnipotence and the "deceiving God", see Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche* (IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1–32.

4 See Max More, "The Philosophy of Transhumanism," in *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology and Philosophy of the Human Future*, ed. Max More and Natasha Vita-More (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell), 1–17.

5 See Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Transhumanism as a Secularist Faith", *Zygon* 47:4 (2012), 710–734, for an introductory taxonomy of these viewpoints, and the wealth of references she provides.

6 As in the Penrose–Hawking singularity theorems. See Stephen Hawking and Roger Penrose, *The Nature of Space and Time* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 27–36. The origin-singularity is the moment of infinite density that preceded the explosion of energy that produced the universe. The end-singularity is the moment of infinite density into which our universe will allegedly collapse. For a philosophical critique of Kurzweil's singularity as deterministic and dogmatic, see Peter Ochs, "Underdetermined Singularity: The Way the Creator Speaks", forthcoming in *The Unique, the Singular, and the Individual: The Debate about the Non-Comparable, Claremont Philosophy of Religion, Conference Proceedings*, ed. Ingolf Dalferth (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022).

"end of days" envisioned by Transhumanism will be a result of technology, deterministically created by human beings.[7]

According to Kurzweil, there are six "epochs" in world history: (1) Physics and Chemistry – the earliest stage of cosmic evolution when all of existence was in the form of lifeless matter; (2) Biology and DNA – the appearance and development of organic life from microbes to plants and animals; (3) Brains – the development of living creatures, from those with simple neuro-systems to advanced primates and Homo sapiens; (4) Technology – from Homo sapiens to the digital revolution of the late 20th century; (5) Human-made technology merges with Human intelligence – human consciousness and AI become indistinguishable; and (6) "The Universe Wakes Up" – following the 'singularity event', when biological matter and whatever is left of human subjectivity become dominated by AI. The end of human evolution at the expected "singularity event" is supposed to occur in the transition from the fifth to the sixth epoch.[8]

Kurzweil speaks explicitly of a future that can already be expected, as current historical processes culminate, sometime around the year 2045. He believes that at that time AI and robots will reach a stage of sentient autonomy that is sufficient to rule the world (and the universe), making humans redundant.[9] Some Transhumanist authors, like Eric Dietrich, even contend that the extinction of humanity is something humans should actively promote.[10]

Kurzweil's language further implies a clear hierarchical relationship between epochs that recalls the hierarchy noted in 19th century evolutionary theory the appearance of between homo-sapiens and all that preceded them. Here, an evolutionary leap constitutes an apocalyptic moment, insofar as Kurzweil describes the matter of the universe that precedes the singularity event as 'sleepy' but which will thereafter become "saturated with intelligent processes and knowledge."[11]

So, Transhumanism has three elements: first, a blend of a deterministic evolutionary theory that goes beyond biology, extending to the entire development

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7 See Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Technologizing Transcendence: A Critique of Transhumanism", in *Religion and Human Enhancement: Death, Values, and Morality*, ed. Tracy J. Trothen and Calvin Mercer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 267–283.

8 The title of Kurzweil's book, *Singularity is Near*, clearly alludes to Luke 21:28: "because your redemption is drawing near" (*New English Translation*, available online: https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-English-Translation-NET-Bible/).

9 See Kurzweil, *Singularity is Near*, 1–34.

10 Eric Dietrich, "Homo Sapiens 2.0: Building the Better Robots of Our Nature," in *Machine Ethics*, ed. Michael Anderson and Susan Leigh Anderson (NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 531–538. Dietrich portrays humans as irredeemably charged with immoralities such as racism, rape, and murder.

11 Kurzweil, *Singularity is Near*, 15.

of materiality and cognition; second, a strong faith in the teleological inevitability of technological progress; and third, a quasi-religious messianic mindset.[12] For the purpose of comparison with Rosenzweig, it is important to note that this messianic-redemptive mindset is closely tied to questions surrounding matter and spirit in the development of Western philosophy and religion. Transhumanism shares several features with Gnosticism,[13] including a strong and principled rejection of this-worldliness and corporeality, a view of human beings as irredeemably flawed, and a notion that redemption from a state of corruption is entirely dependent upon a "higher" state of knowledge. In Gnosticism this is the knowledge of the distant, spiritual God ("*Barbelo*") who is "absolutely other" and totally detached from the material world, and its angelic rulers (in Gnosticism, the biblical creator God is often called *Yaldabaoth*). In Kurzweil's Transhumanism, higher knowledge is tied to physics and technology.

However, the parallel between higher knowledge and knowledge of physics and technology is confounded by the fact that the AI celebrated by Transhumanism challenges the classical distinction between matter and spirit. Transhumanism purports a nominalist conception of technology that aims to fill the role ascribed in the past to the absolute spirit (whether divine, as in medieval philosophy, or divine-human, as in German Idealism). Thus, to clarify the philosophical problem at the heart of Transhumanism, this article considers Transhumanism from the standpoint of Rosenzweig's critique of the identity of reason and being.

3 Transcendence, Mortality, and Redemption in Rosenzweig's Understanding of Human Creatureliness

The starting point of Rosenzweig's philosophy is his consideration of the relation of the self to the world. Rosenzweig sees the body and bodily experience of mortality as prior to the totalizing activity of the spirit – prior to the spirit's ever-present attempt to translate existence into its own terms. For Rosenzweig, the spirit is

12 See Tirosh-Samuelson, "Transhumanism as a Secularist Faith". On Transhumanism vis-à-vis idolatry prohibition in the context of Jewish tradition, see Nadav S. Berman, "Jewish Law, Techno-Ethics, and Autonomous Weapon Systems: Ethical-Halakhic Perspectives", *Jewish Law Association Studies* XXIX (2020), 91–124, at 109–110.

13 On Gnosticism and the disputes over the definition of this intellectual school, see Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963); Gedalyahu G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Leiden: Brill, 1984); Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

important only insofar as it is dialectically tied to the bodily experience of mortality.[14]

He follows the tradition of Western religious thought in believing that redemption from suffering is possible and that it requires a knowledge that comes from on high. However, for Rosenzweig, this redemptive knowledge must take into account the positive value of material experience and mortality no less than the free flight of the spirit.[15] This is achieved by criticizing the Hegelian "identity of reason and being,"[16] while viewing the structure of reality through relations of transcendence and presence, reminiscent of the Hebrew Bible, in its place.[17] These are the relations that constitute the interaction of the human self with God and the world.[18]

As is well known, Rosenzweig describes the relations between God, human beings, and the world using the biblical terms creation, revelation, and redemption. We would like to show that the meaning Rosenzweig ascribes to these terms presume the changing orientation of human subjectivity to the universe as the subjectivity of a mortal and corporeal being. As a result, the experience of one's mortality becomes the condition for the revelatory knowledge that exposes the meaningfulness of life, beyond the suffering and alienation that derives from the fear of death.

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14 Unless otherwise noted, references to the English translation of Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* will be to the earlier Hallo translation. Each reference to this translation will then be followed by a reference to the original German of the Surkhamp Verlag edition: Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William H. Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 3–4/ *Der Stern der Erlösung* (Frankfurt am Main: Surkhamp Verlag, 1988), 3–4.

15 For an interpretation of Rosenzweig's return to Judaism as inspired by his critique of Gnosticism, see Benjamin Pollock, *Franz Rosenzweig's Conversions: World Denial and World Redemption* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

16 *Star*, 12–13/*Stern*, 13–14. For discussions on this aspect of Rosenzweig's thought, see Stéphane Mosés, *System and Revelation*, trans. Catherine Tihani (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 50–55; Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik, *Existentielles Denken und Gelebte Bewährung* (Freiburg and München: Karl Alber Verlag, 1991), 32–34; Benjamin Pollock, *Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 14–26, 120–126.

17 We use the term Bible below to refer to the Hebrew Bible.

18 Rosenzweig associates these relations with biblical references to divine activity in terms of creation, revelation, and redemption. See Bernhard Casper, "Responsibility Rescued", in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Paul Mendes Flohr (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988), 89–106; Reiner Wiehl, "Zeit und Zieterfahrung im "neuen" Denken von Franz Rosenzwig", in *Franz Rosenzweigs "neues Denken"*, Vol. I: Selbstbegrenzendes Denken – in philosophos, ed. Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik (Freiburg and München: Karl Alber Verlag, 2006), 299–311; and Yossi Turner, *Faith and Humanism: A Study in Franz Rosenzweig's Religious Philosophy* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2001), 54–72, 147–163.

The redemptive knowledge toward which Rosenzweig's philosophy is directed, however, is not the knowledge of a spiritual God, distanced from the materiality of creation, which stood at the base of gnostic redemption. Nor was it the dialectical knowledge of nature and spirit that Hegel ascribed to the totalizing philosophical subject, or the functional knowledge that stands behind the techno-totalitarianism of contemporary Transhumanism. Rather, Rosenzweig's philosophy is directed toward the wisdom that he believed stands at the root of all valid knowledge. That is, knowledge derived through the search for a meaningful existence on the part of the concrete individual who, at times, stands utterly alone to face his mortality, and who at other times experiences the love and kindness of others while projecting his yearning for salvation onto the image of a benevolent God.

4 Rosenzweig: Worldly Being as Creation

Human mortality is a recurring theme in Rosenzweig's *Star*.[19] It provides the Archimedean point that irreparably breaks the totalizing presupposition concerning the identity of reason and being in German Idealism.[20] For Rosenzweig, the negation of self, imagined in the fear death is the starting point of knowledge because it confirms that death is "a something" that forever gives rise to a new and unique 'I'.[21] The creation of self in the confrontation with mortality, for Rosenzweig, is a necessary condition for the human ability to notice the "miraculous", the surprise of life in worldly existence that goes beyond what can be described in the rational categories of science and philosophy.

The experience of mortality is deeply tied to the inter-action of mind and body and denotes a complexity of self that also cannot be acknowledged through the logical categories of traditional philosophy, let alone the materialistic logic of Transhumanism. It is because of the inter-action of mind and body in temporal experience that Rosenzweig presents the individual self both as an impersonal

19 As in the opening of *The Star of Redemption*: "From death, from the fear of death arises all knowledge of the All." (*Star*, 3–4/*Stern* 3–4).

20 A vast scholarly literature is dedicated to German Idealism. For example, see Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), esp. 260–336, which discusses Kant's notion of the "fact of reason" and its philosophical aftermath.

21 *Star*, 3–4/*Stern* 3–4.

object of world-being in the vast reaches of the cosmos as well as a vital "center" and a "new beginning" in that cosmos.[22]

Below we shall return to the complexity of self in the context of Rosenzweig's discussions concerning the terms creation, revelation, and redemption. But first, it is necessary to note what constitutes the temporal character of existence for Rosenzweig, with respect to the theological notions of creation and revelation since these notions form the basis of his re-orientation to Western philosophy.

We begin with Rosenzweig's understanding of temporality in his notion of creation as opposed to the Hegelian understanding of time. For Hegel, spirit provides the logic through which all natural, social, cultural, and historical existence develops. This means that spirit as a form of subjectivity acquires a temporal existence by virtue of its dialectical inter-action with its worldly objects. For Rosenzweig, however, the inherent multi-temporal and multi-faceted character of language, which already includes a plurality of subjects and objects in the subject-predicate forms of its statements, replaces the methodological status of spirit in Hegel's philosophy.[23] Alluding to his commitment to language as that from which we come to understand the structure of existence, Rosenzweig elucidates the temporal character of existence that this philosophy presumes. "Through it [the verb] time becomes utterly real. It is not in it [time] that all occurs, rather it [time] itself occurs."[24]

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22 *Star*, 187, and compare with Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara Galli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 201/*Stern*, 208. To Rosenzweig's mind, language is superior to logic as the proper basis for a philosophical methodology that aims at a comprehensive understanding of existence. The advantage of language over logical categories stems from the multiplicity of temporal modes that it encompasses, and from language's reflection of subjective and objective existence through multiple possibilities of construction with respect to subjects and predicates. Through these characteristics of language, Rosenzweig shows how the individual human being is both part of the objective existence of the created world, and a speaking subject in the revelatory moment. On grammar and language in Rosenzweig's philosophy, see Bernhard Casper, *Das Dialogische Denken: Franz Rosenzweig, Ferdinand Ebner, und Martin Buber* (Freiberg: Karl Alber Verlag, 2017); Mosés, *System and Revelation*; Nahum Glatzer, "The Concept of Language in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig", in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, 172–184; Yehoyada Amir, *Reason Out of Faith: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004); and Turner, *Faith and Humanism*.

23 See previous note. One of the advantages of quality of language as the basis for a philosophical methodology over philosophical logic is its ability to express temporal experience.

24 The statement does not appear in the *Star*, but rather in the later essay he wrote to explain the *Star's* overall direction: Franz Rosenzweig, "The New Thinking", in Franz Rosenzweig, *Zweistromland* (Berlin: Philo, 2001), 220. Elliot R. Wolfson, in his *Giving Beyond the Gift: Apophasis and Overcoming Theomania* (NY: Fordham University Press, 2014), 34–89, interprets Rosenzweig's redemptive idea and suggests that Rosenzweig's "universal singularity" is contrasted with Hegel's "singular universality" (39). This observation helps demonstrate the contrast between

The import of this statement can be felt in many discussions in the *Star of Redemption*, wherein Rosenzweig speaks of worldly existence in terms of temporal continuity (for example, an hour, a day, or an epoch), as well as of the human being as but one of the many particular moments that comprise this continuity. For Rosenzweig, occurrence is the movement of life that arises from the tension between the fleeting moment and the temporal continuity of the hour, the day, and the historical period.[25] This is a relation that is essentially present both in language and in those forms of artistic and religious endeavor that reflect the dynamics of real life. From this follows his understanding of world-being as creation,[26] which is expressed through the tension that always already exists between the fleeting moment and the series of moments that constitute the world's continuity. Rosenzweig's reference to world-being as 'creation' denotes the character of the world as a living phenomenon, because of the transcendent origin of the life-giving tension between the fleeting moment and the continuity of time.[27]

Rosenzweig understands the fear of death to be a *condition* for life because of this tension between the fleeting moment and the continuity of time in one's experience of mortality. The higher knowledge with which Rosenzweig associates redemptive consciousness derives from the potential for a relation with a transcendent that is only possible within this experience of mortality.

The experience of a relation with a transcendent other, which provides the basis for Rosenzweig's understanding of revelation and redemption, is manifest in his writing in two ways: One is a relation to the imagined transcendence of divinity as the mysterious originator of life.[28] The other is a relation to the transcendent

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Rosenzweig's temporal singularity and Kurzweil's apocalyptic singularity (as described in section one above).

25 See Turner, *Faith and Humanism*, 50–54, 58, 64, 105–108, 166–183, and Reiner Wiehl, "Zeit und Ewigkeit in Franz Rosenzweig's 'Stern der Erlösung'", *Trumah* 7 (1998), 135–146.

26 On redemption as worldly in Rosenzweig's thought, see Julie E. Cooper, "Can the World Be Redeemed? *Ge'ulah* versus *Pidyon*: Toward a Mundane, Non-Eschatological Approach to Redemption", *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 29 (2021), 39–54. This issue of the *JJTP* is dedicated to Rosenzweig's concept of redemption.

27 This is expressed in the way he understands the term 'miracle', as it appears in the title of the second part of the *Star*, that discusses creation, revelation, and redemption. In Rosenzweig's discussion of creation, the miracle is the life-giving power of creation through which divinity transcends itself and frees the world from its mere factuality (see *Star*, 12, 158–159/*Stern*, 12, 176–177). See Turner, *Faith and Humanism*, 47–72, and compare to Wayne Frohman, "The Sense of Creation and its Role in the *Star of Redemption*", in *Faith, Truth, and Reason: New Perspectives on Franz Rosenzweig's Star of Redemption*, ed. Yehoyada Amir, Yossi Turner, and Martin Brasser (Freiburg: Karl Alber Verlag, 2012), 245–257.

28 Referring to the biblical creation narrative, Rosenzweig writes: "God spoke. That came second", meaning that the Bible itself opens with the fact of mystery. Even before the Bible reports that

otherness of the human individual. Both constitute a dialogical relation in which the self and the other become present to each other. These relations also constitute a redemptive moment in that they each involve an overcoming of the abyss that separates moment from moment, and subsequently of the existential fear of death, loneliness, and suffering as the sole concern of life.

5 The Human Being as a Creature and the Prospect of Revelation

What Rosenzweig means by human creatureliness can be understood by contrasting his opening statement in *The Star of Redemption* (concerning the fear of death as the beginning of all knowledge) with Max More's Transhumanist definition of life. Transhumanism, according to More, understands life as immortality; that is, as simply not subject to death.[29] Rosenzweig ascribes this type of immortality to pagan consciousness, as exhibited through the depiction of the Olympian gods in Greek mythology who, he says, are described "as alive" without being "of life."[30] Following Rosenzweig, we might say that AI, with or without physical matter attached to it, mimics the gods of Greek mythology in that it too is presumably not subject to death but is also not "of life." Importantly, this particular conflation of life and immortality is indifferent to the connection between subject, consciousness, and bodily experience that is characteristic of mortal human beings.

Precisely because of the connection between subjectivity, consciousness, and experience in human life, Rosenzweig was adamant in depicting the gods of Greek mythology as esthetic inventions. They are not "gods of life" as they are abstracted from the flow of time that gives rise to life, and therefore do not have a dialogical interaction with real living creatures. The same is true for the tragic hero in Greek drama. For Rosenzweig, the hero is reminiscent of the living human, but is abstracted from the temporal reality that gives rise to the tragic situation, and so

God created by saying "Let there be light!", the act of creation through this speech must have already occurred. Thus Rosenzweig says, that the "divine speech" with which the world was created, is not "the beginning", but rather "the audible fulfillment of the silent beginning". It is already the first miracle. The beginning is God created." (*Star*, 112). According to Rosenzweig, the presence of the divine voice in the dialogue of revelation precedes the experience of revelation as dialogue, and yet knowledge of creation is dependent on the recognition of the creator as a Thou.

29 See More's "The Philosophy of Transhumanism".

30 *Star*, 33–35/*Stern*, 36–38.

from real human life.[31] To be alive requires the experience of mortality, within which the identity of being and reason breaks open and dialogue is experienced.

Consequently, in his commentary on the biblical creation story, in the first book of the second part of *The Star*, Rosenzweig notes that after God beholds the human being that He created, the Bible does not say as it did in reference to all previous creations: "and He saw that it was good," but rather "and He saw that it was *very* good" (Genesis 1:31). Rosenzweig expounds on this verse, quoting Rabbi Meir's famous *midrashic* interpretation that plays on the audible similarity between the Hebrew words for 'very' (*me'od*) and 'death' (*mot*): "And God saw that it was very good – (*tov me'od*), the *midrash* attributed to Rabbi Meir a statement referring to the biblical text: "*Tov meod – tov mot* (very good – death [is] good)."[32] For Rosenzweig, this implies that while the previous worldly creations that have no conception of their mortality are 'good,' in that they exist or in that they entered into existence through the act of divine creation, the creation of the human being, who is always aware of hist own mortality, is more than good, is 'very good.'[33]

In Rosenzweig's treatment of this topic, two aspects of human existence become intertwined. Metaphysically, the human self is infused with the desire for life as a result of the consciousness of mortality. Epistemologically, the desire for life gives rise to a spirit that looks beyond the given moment. In his describing the relations between God and the world (creation), between God and the human individual (revelation) and between the human and the worldly (redemption), Rosenzweig is careful to distinguish between "source" (*Quelle*) and "origin" (*Ursprung*).[34] The origin of life, for the human being and for the world, is in the mysterious act of creation, ascribed to the Creator, but this does not infer a divine source for the character or even the structure of the world as experienced. Instead, these are determined in the inner configuration of the world in itself. Similarly,

31 *Star*, 76–80/*Stern*, 83–87.

32 *Genesis Rabbah*, trans. Jacob Neusner, vol. 1 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985), 9:5. The Hebrew word מָוֶת, as in Deut 30:15 (pronounced as *mavet*), means "death", whereas the construct state of this word is מוֹת (as in Lev 16:1). Compare with Buber's contention that "The Script of life is so unspeakably beautiful to read because death looks over our shoulder" (*Martin Buber, Daniel: Dialogues on Realization*), trans. Maurice Friedman, new Foreword by Paul Mendes-Flohr [NY: Syracuse University Press, 2018], 91. See the discussion by Paul Mendes-Flohr, "In the Shadow of Death: Jewish Affirmations of Life", *Religions* 13:1 (2022) 26, available at: https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13010026.

33 *Star*, 155/*Stern*, 172–173.

34 This is explicit in his discussions on God, man and the world in the books that constitute the second part of the *Star*, wherein divine activity gives life to the world and to the human being, and the human being affects the growth of life in the world (origin), even as the manifest characteristics of each can only develop in the context of a configuration of traits that precedes the influence of the other two.

while divine activity is the origin of human life, the source of the human desire for life is one's own subjectivity, ignited through the self's meeting with mortality.

For Rosenzweig, the human experience of being a solitary self who is utterly alienated from the objectivity of world-being makes the will to live frustrated and powerless. Referring to the experience of mortality with which he opened the *Star*, Rosenzweig says that "human volition … wants nothing other than what it is … like God's freedom, it wants its own essence."[35] But the fleeting nature of human existence in the tragic situation contradicts the desired realization of the fundamental human will to live one's own life. Because of this, Rosenzweig writes that unlike "God's freedom," human freedom," at least in the initial tragic circumstances, is "free will" but "not free power."[36]

Free will, we should note, is already a spiritual phenomenon, but it is one that does not have the power of self-realization. Rosenzweig appears to follow Nietzsche in viewing spiritual creativity as embedded in all of human art, culture, and philosophy as a dialectical expression of the human flight from the fact of mortality. Yet, for Rosenzweig, without "revelation" the will for true self-realization remains powerless.[37] Given this, Rosenzweig gleans his philosophy of human existence from the stark contrast he draws between the Hebrew Bible and Greek drama, as testimony for the two distinct consciousnesses of the self's experience in the world. The tragic element, which stems from the experience of mortality, is common to both. However, the biblical creation story alludes to a connection between the initial tragedy of human existence in the presence of impending death and the possibility of being saved through revelation. In contrast, Greek drama highlights the tragic element as essential to human fate through the dramatic appearance of the "tragic hero," for whom the momentary tragic will becomes an ever-present "defiant will."[38]

Ultimately, both literatures represent a free-flighted spiritual creation that simultaneously reflects the rootedness of the creative spirit in the earth-bound quality of human mortality. However, for Rosenzweig the Bible constitutes a superior form of literary creation because it is based on revelation and therefore goes beyond what can be known through artistic culture. The foundation of biblical wisdom is the Bible's belief in creation as the mysterious dynamic of life in the world, and in revelation as the exposure of divine power in the life of the individual and community. Because the Bible (generally speaking) understands the world as

35 *Star*, 66–68/*Stern*, 71–73.

36 Idem.

37 On this basis Rosenzweig considers art, particularly literature, as "language before language."

38 *Star*, 67–68/*Stern*, 72–73. On the notion of the "tragic hero" in Hegel, see Peter Eli Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 95.

creation, it is conscious of human mortality but also recognizes the potential for redemption from the suffering caused by that mortality through the experience of relations with transcendent others. As though to say, mortality causes suffering, alienation, and even a loss of the sense of meaning, but is nonetheless the condition for over-coming this loss and being redeemed from existential bondage to them.

6 Revelation and the Prayer for Redemption: Temporality, Dialogue, and Hope

On this background, we will now explore the manner in which human mortality serves as an aspect of redemptive knowledge and as a condition for the actual redemption from suffering. In Rosenzweig's thought, the power of life in creation represents the potential for a redemption from suffering because it is the beginning of what he terms revelation.

Ontologically speaking, according to Rosenzweig, nothing occurs in revelation that has not already occurred in creation. The occurrence of existence through the tension between the isolated moment and overall continuity of time still provides the material and spiritual infrastructure of all that is. Yet, psychologically, in revelation the power of creation is experienced differently and brings about a radical change in the character of human subjectivity. After describing the alienated self, represented by the tragic hero, as a conglomeration of momentary and "passionate surges" arising as "defiant pride", but acting internally because of its powerlessness, he then speaks of a transformation of the constitutive elements of that self in terms of a "serene diffusion" of its will, as "humility" emerging "into the exterior"; that is – toward another.[39]

The association of "passionate surges" with the tragic individual's "defiant will" recalls the relationship of the individual moment to the continuity of time. The "serene humility" that follows the experience of revelation does not change the temporal character of existence already given in creation, rather it is a sense of completeness within the moment of intimate connection with another.

This is the context through which Rosenzweig understood the biblical concept of revelation. He believed that a close reading of biblical literature reveals a definite change in the human experience of freedom as the finite subject hears a call well up from within the mysterious abyss that surrounds the fleeting moment of the individual's being. This was depicted in the story of the Garden of Eden, where,

39 *Star*, 167–168/*Stern*, 187–188.

following the eating of the forbidden fruit, God calls: "Adam where art Thou?" (Gen. 3:9) and in what Rosenzweig sees as the completion of that story, in the binding of Isaac where Abraham responds to that very same call, "*Hineni*":

> To God's "Where art Thou?" the man had still kept silent as a defiant and blocked self. Now, called by his name … he answers, all unlocked, all spread out, all ready, all soul: "Here I am."[40]

Rosenzweig identified a similar dialogical trajectory in biblical poetry, most explicitly in the *Song of Songs*. In the context of his discussion on revelation, Rosenzweig elaborates on the inclusion of the *Song of Songs* in the Hebrew Bible, asking: "What strange error allowed these pages to slip into God's word?"[41] The difficulty is that the *Song of Songs* presents itself as a "purely human" love poem. Rosenzweig objects to the traditional claim that it is merely an analogy for divine love.[42] For him, in contrast, even the analogy of divine and human love is only possible because all love (including love between human beings) is already "divine" in the fullest sense of the word. "Man loves", he says, "*because* God loves and *as* God loves."[43]

This is not a mystical statement. Instead, it indicates that the presence of love in revelation – whether it be the love of a lover for his or her beloved, the love of a parent for a child, or the love of one human being for his or her neighbor – is nothing other than the divine power of life magnified through the human soul. Human love is already part and parcel of the divine mysterious movement that gives life to the finite. The trans-rational character of love, however, cannot be ignored by the human subject whose existence has already been touched and transformed by the experience of being loved. The giving of love and the giving of life, for Rosenzweig, are two different dimensions of the same thing. Because of the temporal continuity of worldly existence, the giving of life in creation means the pre-determined animation of worldly existence from moment to moment. For the individual self, which already is but one fleeting moment in the continuity of time, the giving of life in creation culminates in the experience of love that poetically (and ontologically) "fills" the self "beyond its borders," transforming the tragic "self" into a living "soul".

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40 *Star*, 176/*Stern*, 196.

41 *Star*, 199/*Stern*, 222.

42 *Star*, 199/*Stern*, 222. "It is not enough that God's relation to man is explained by the simile of the love and the beloved." Rosenzweig's interest in R. Judah Halevi's love poems, and in providing to them a translation and a commentary, drew on the above sensitivities. See Franz Rosenzweig, *Ninety-Two Poems and Hymns of Yehuda Halevi*, trans. Thoman A. Kovach, Eva Jospe, and Gilya Gerda Schmidt, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000), esp. 24–25 and 198–221.

43 *Star*, 199/*Stern*, 222 (emphasis added).

This is what it means to receive love and to give love.[44] This is why, for Rosenzweig, every single act of human love is already an act of divine revelation and why each act of revelation is already a momentary redemption from suffering. The *mitzvah* to "love your neighbor" is a simple continuation of the *mitzvah* to "love your God",[45] which follows from the overwhelming experience of love on the part of the soul. Human love can never be a mere analogy for divine love – it is a continuation of divine love.

The ontological and psychological aspects of Rosenzweig's interpretation of the *Song of Songs* converge as he considers the verse: "Set me as a seal upon your heart/as a seal upon your arm/for *love is strong as death*" (8:6). Noting the preponderance of I and Thou statements made rhythmically in the back-and-forth movement between the lover and the beloved, Rosenzweig recalls that the Thou is also an I, though in the 'second person.' He writes: "[T]he word I is now the keynote … it runs under the whole melodic-harmonic texture, now in one voice, now switching to the Thou … There is just one short passage in the whole book where it falls silent … These are the words of *the love which is as strong as death*."[46]

Death is "the Ultimate and Consummate of creation"[47] because it is with the consciousness of one's mortality that the human self is born.[48] But the "love" of revelation "is as strong as death."[49] The revelation of love that, only momentarily, redeems one from the sense of isolation and paralysis that arose from the fear of death is nonetheless dependent upon the presence of the human participant as mortal. As if to say, only one who lives his or her mortality is able to experience another's love.

The experience of love in revelation constitutes a redemptive moment. But it does not and cannot nullify death, because without mortality there would be no love or zest for life, and there would be no intimate connection with others that gives life meaning. Love, however, does give life and joy while neutralizing the paralysis of suffering that comes from the experience of mortality. Nevertheless,

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44 For comparison, see Olivia Mitscherlich, "Der Gleichnischarakter der Liebe", in *Rosenzweig Yearbook* 5 (2010), 84–95.

45 *Star*, 205, 214/*Stern*, 229, 239.

46 *Star*, 201–202/*Stern*, 225 (emphasis added).

47 *Star*, 202/Stern, 225.

48 Rosenzweig's rather positive view of human mortality has its concievable implications for the contemporary Natalism/Anti-natalism debate, on which we cannot elaborate here. For a stance which is proximal to Rosenzweig in some respects, see the discussion by David Heyd of the famous dispute (Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Eruvin* 13b) between the rabbinic House of Hillel and the House of Shammai concerning whether it is better for the human creature to come into existence. David Heyd, "Is it Better not to be Born?" [in Hebrew], *Daat* 90 (2020), 7–25, esp. 23–25.

49 *Star*, 202/Stern, 225.

love is only a fleeting or momentary experience. It is a moment of self-realization. But following the fleeting experience of having been loved, the "I" returns to the mundane world and with it to a renewed fear of death. Something has changed. The soul that has experienced love can no longer view the world only as given factuality. Now, the soul can recognize the potential for life in the world as creation and so can *anticipate* a renewal of love's momentary intimacy. Thus, Rosenzweig says that the human personality, which had previously woken up to its self-hood in the fear of death, now has no choice but to "plead with the lover to sunder the heavens of his ever-lasting presentness,"[50] in order to enable one to realize the love relation once more and to make it a consistent characteristic of human life in the world, rather than that of a mere passing moment. However, it appears that the memory of having been loved is only sufficient to know that a renewal of that love is possible. This memory serves as a basis for hope, but is not sufficient for the redemptive experience to be renewed. This requires that the hope held by the mortal individual becomes a part of one's worldly knowledge.

7 Redemptive Knowledge and the Transformation of Humanity

In Rosenzweig's thought we can discern a distinction between redemption, as a term that signifies the transformation of human existence enabled by revelation, and what we refer to as redemptive knowledge. Redemptive knowledge is a vision of human experience in the world that has not yet been realized but which might be realized at any given moment. Redemption, on the other hand is the realization of that vision.

On this point we find ourselves in disagreement with Norbert Samuelson and Hava Tirosh-Samuelson's depiction of Rosenzweig's concept of redemption as an occurrence that will come only at the end of time and in which it is expected that all of existence will be reabsorbed into a divine eternity that is aloof from temporality.[51] Instead, in our understanding of Rosenzweig the expectation of redemption following the "end of days" is of epistemic significance in that it contributes to the aspect of anticipation in the realization of redemption *within* time. In this sense the

50 *Star*, 204/*Stern*, 228, and compare with 184–185/205.

51 Our interpretative discomfort is strengthened by the fact that Rosenzweig himself was deeply concerned by Spinoza's a-cosmism (*Star*, 17/*Stern*, 19). See Benjamin Lazier, *God Interrupted: Heresy and the European Imagination between the World Wars* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 74–92.

eschatological vision is important as an aspect of redemptive knowledge but has no intrinsic ontological meaning in Rosenzweig's thought.[52]

Put differently, the eschatological vision is necessary for Rosenzweig for the human subject to be able to look with hope beyond the confines of his or her own fleeting moment of existence. It is as if the eschatological border of history and the abyss that surrounds the fleeting moment of the individual's existence in the continuity of moments that comprise time were one and the same. Our understanding of Rosenzweig's discussion of anticipation and hope is that, for him, redemptive knowledge is needed to bring about the realization of a humanity that is freed from the paralysis that arises from the fear of death. Thus, Rosenzweig considered Christianity as representing the striving for redemption in the end of days, and Judaism as representing the community experience of redemption already in the present.[53] The aspect of redemptive knowledge that actually participates in the transformation of humanity is a temporal one that involves the constitution of continuous love relations by combining the activity of the soul who yearns for love and now believes that this yearning can again be realized, with the anonymous growth of life in creation.[54]

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52 Hava Tirosh-Samuelson and Norbert Samuelson, "Jewish Perspectives on Transhumanism", in *Building Better Humans? Refocusing the Debate on Transhumanism*, eds. H. Tirosh-Samuelson and Kenneth L. Mossman (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011), 105–132. The Samuelsons contend that for Rosenzweig, "both creation and time are nothing substantial" and that just "as the world was created from nothing, so the world will end as nothing" (126). However, seen in the context of the over-all discussion of the *Star*, this statement is exaggerated. We admit that there are statements in Rosenzweig's discussion that lend themselves to such a reading, but all that he says concerning the transition from revelation to redemption shows that his concept of redemption is *this-worldly*. The character of existence as seen when looking toward the end immediately reappears as already present in the beginning. For a broader discussion on the circulatory character of beginning and end in Rosenzweig's concept of redemption, see Martin Brasser, "Der Stern ist eine Mitternachtssonne", *Rosenzweig Yearbook 1 (Franz Rosenzweig heute)* (2006), 191–217.

53 Rosenzweig saw both Judaism and Christianity as expressions of a redeemed existence in time, based upon the 'anticipation' of a divine "end of days". Redemption here is a product of revelation and its anticipated re-occurrence in time. Thus, the Jewish experience of *Yom Kippur* is an experience of the 'end of days' that is renewed through ritual every year, while Christianity experiences the end of days as something which indeed can only come in the future, and is yet anticipated in the very yearning or hope for that future in the present. In this manner, both Judaism and Christianity are redemptive religions (*Star*, 298–379). See Alexander Altmann, "Rosenzweig and History", in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, 124–137; Mosés, *System and Revelation*, 174–200; Hans-Christoph Askani, "Die Gestaltung der Zeit durch die Liturgie im Judentum und Christentum", in *Franz Rosenzweigs 'neues Denken'*, Vol. II, ed. Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik (Freiburg and München: Karl Alber Verlag, 2006), 956–981; and Irene Kajon, "The Concept of 'Vertrauen' in the *Star of Redemption*", in *Faith, Truth, and Reason*, 315–331.

54 "From two sides there is a knocking on the locked door of the future. Life presses toward the world in a dark growth which defies all calculation even as the soul, sanctifying itself, seeks its way

What Rosenzweig means by this is that the creation of a true humanity in which a multiplicity of love relations replaces the experience of alienation and violence that results dialectically from the fear of death in an unredeemed world, requires an interaction between the anonymous growth of life within the created world and the subjective search for a renewal of the love relation on the part of one to whom it has already been momentarily revealed.

In this context Rosenzweig understood the meaning of Judaism and Christianity as religions of revelation and paths to redemption.[55] Judaism and Christianity configure the search for the renewal of the intimate love relation as the dominant characteristic of human redemption promised by biblical prophecy through radically different experiences of temporal existence with respect to world history. However, they share the belief that the prospect of redemption is founded upon the mystery of divine creation, and first becomes present in the world through revelation. What is most important for the consideration of redemptive knowledge in Rosenzweig's thought, is that he understood the institution of prayer in Judaism and Christianity as a "beacon of light" aimed at the location of other human beings, who as a result of their own place in the growth of life within the world are already ripe to receive the love of another.[56] Redemptive knowledge or enlightenment acquired in the wake of revelation therefore enables the renewal of the love relation with others through anticipation.

What is the character of this knowledge or enlightenment? First, it is a knowledge or an awareness that Rosenzweig alludes to in the introduction of the Third part of the *Star*, where he speaks of redemption as the joining of "God's Time" and "Earthly Time."[57] It is the awareness made possible by the revelation that

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to the neighbor in the hot outpouring of the heart. World and Soul – both knock at the locked gate, the former growing the latter acting. Growing as well as acting become eternal by means of anticipation." *Star*, 227/*Stern*, 254.

55 See note 53 above. For a discussion on Rosenzweig's understanding of how ritual makes the anticipated meeting with eternity present in the context of Judaism, see Joseph Turner, "Metaphysical and Hermeneutic Aspects of Recollection of the Past in Jewish Ritual According to Franz Rosenzweig", in *The Legacy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Luc Ankaert, Martin Brasser, and Norbert Samuelson (Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2004), 157–167.

56 *Star*, 270–271, 273–275/*Stern*, 301–302, 303–306, and see Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, *Better than Wine: Love, Poetry, and Prayer in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996); Angel Garrido-Matturano, "Gebet als ereignishafter Weg zur Warheit: Bemerkungen über die Rosenzweigeische Auffassung des Gebetes", in *Faith, Truth, and Reason*, 277–302; and Yossi (Joseph) Turner, "Prayer and Love in Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*", *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 8:2 (2014), 173–193.

57 *Star*, 272/*Stern*, 303. On Rosenzweig's notion of worldly-anchored temporality vis-à-vis Kierkegaard's thought, see Gilad Sharvit, "History and Eternity: Rosenzweig and Kierkegaard on Repetition", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 26 (2019), 163–198.

transforms all forms of "beseeching," even those that are egotistically motivated, into an intentional search for meeting another human self who has also confronted his or her mortality, and is therefore already ripe to enter into a love relation.

For Rosenzweig, the problem that needs to be confronted by redemptive knowledge is that the human desire for love is in this sense blind. It is always attracted by the individual who appears closest, even if that individual is not yet ripe for love. Only those who have unexpectedly experienced tragedy in the past are ripe to receive love in the present, just as only one that has received love in the present can give love. Since the growth of life in the world happens only as a result of the impact of divine creation on the particulars that are already included in the world's earthly existence, Rosenzweig maintains that we are speaking of a joining of God's time and earthly time. Prayer is a source of enlightenment that uncovers traces of divine activity within the world, and as such is necessary to locate the neighbor who is made ripe for love through the dialogical meeting of the individual's experience of finitude with the eternal character of divine activity.

At the end of the *Star*, Rosenzweig offers a philosophical depiction of the redemptive knowledge necessary for the transformation of humanity and freedom from suffering when he speaks about divine truth. This discussion constitutes the philosophical perception of Truth with which he proposes to replace the totalizing understanding of Being in German Idealism. "The proposition, God is Truth … stands all alone among the propositions which seek to elucidate his essence", but:

> This divine essentiality is none other than God's revealing … himself. Even the "ultimate" … is none other than the innermost that we know of him, namely that he reveals himself to us … that he is Truth tells us in the final analysis none other than that he – loves.[58]

The type of knowledge that we refer to as redemptive is therefore, one in which human mortality, and finitude in general, is seen or experienced as an aspect of eternity.[59] This eternity is quite different from the immortality of the gods. Human existence is *human* because of the changes that occur in the ontological horizon of experience as it negotiates its standpoint in eternity from a perspective that views mortality itself as an integral aspect of eternity. At its center stands the recognition of divine activity that defines creation as the growth of life in the world, and which, in revelation, momentarily disclosed itself as the ever-renewable source of life in

58 *Star*, 388–389/*Stern*, 431–432.

59 Rosenzweig offers an example of this aspect of redemptive knowledge in his consideration of Psalm 90: Prayer of Moses, Man of God, with which he confronts Goethe's "pagan" prayer for "Hope" (*Star*, 275/*Stern*, 306). See Joseph Turner, "A Reading of Psalm 90 in Light of Rosenzweig's Concept of Time", in *Rosenzweig als Leser*, ed. Martin Brasser (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2004), 499–507.

the human soul. In this manner, redemptive knowledge is necessary for the realization of redemption from suffering in the world but does not constitute such a redemption in and of itself. In contrast to the mechanistic redemptive knowledge suggested by proponents of Transhumanism, for Rosenzweig redemptive knowledge is volitional and thus could never be technical, deterministic, or algorithmic.

This is the locus of redemption in Rosenzweig's thought: making the content of divine Truth, which in biblical eschatology is expected to be revealed in "the end of days," already present in any given moment. It is not the apocalyptic redemption of humanity expected by ancient Gnosticism or the scientistic one expected by contemporary Transhumanism. It is not even an event that happens to all of humanity at the same time. Instead, redemption is an experience-forming event that occurs for different segments of humanity at different times as a result of their own subjective insights and modes of anticipation regarding the future. The anticipation of the future, which combines knowledge of creation as a miraculous growth of life in the world and which turns the revelation of love in the world into a continuous phenomenon, is expressed in the song of redemption in the Book of Psalms, and sung by both Jewish and Christian faith communities throughout the generations. It is a song of praise that invites all of humanity to join in the celebration of life as a miraculous event that the faith community singing it already discovered at the root of its communal existence.[60]

8 Conclusion: Rosenzweig's Concept of Redemption vis-a-vis Transhumanism

In light of the above discussions, we can now look at Rosenzweig's concept of redemption, developed in response to German Idealism, from the stand-point of a contemporary critique of Transhumanism.

One side of Rosenzweig's concept of redemption involves a sort of biblical eschatology insofar as he utilizes the biblical notion of the "end of days" while formulating important aspects of his views concerning the nature of human existence, historical development, and the potential for a redemption from suffering. But in Rosenzweig's concept of redemption, the "end of days" is presented in a radically different manner than Kurzweil's "singularity." As discussed above, this is because Rosenzweig's "end of days" is open-ended: it can become present at any given moment of time but also might never arrive.

60 "Praise the Lord, all the peoples, elevate him all the nations … for His grace has overtaken us and the divine Truth stands forever. Praise the Lord for it is *good*." (Psalms 117:1–118:1) *Star*, 250–253/*Stern*, 278–282.

Rosenzweig's fundamental intuitions regarding mortality and relations of transcendence that are inherent to the Judeo-Christian heritage help to clarify the conditions necessary to speak of human consciousness vis-a-vis Transhumanism.[61] All human existence involves the presence of a cultural language that allows for self-reflection, wonder, and the enunciation of thoughts concerning the nature and meaning of life. For this, the theological languages of Western civilization are as good as any. But they are particularly instructive when confronting Transhumanism, since this movement is a product of the same historical civilization that produced these categories in the first place. Historically, Transhumanism is the result of a process that begins with the break between the Humanities and natural science in Western thought since the 19th century. Even though the logic of Transhumanism is an extension of the logic of positive science, the ethos exhibited by members of the Transhumanist movement who support the supersession of human subjectivity by AI does not stem from the functional logic of science alone. It also places the desirability of humanity's supersession in accordance with concepts of redemption that had previously been developed in Western thought.

Kurzweil considers Transhumanism to be ethical because human life is a primitive bodily burden and source of suffering that can now be overridden by the presumed intelligent transformation of the cosmos brought about by AI. On this basis, he established himself as a herald of the coming secularized redemption of humanity through AI. Reduction of suffering must certainly be seen as of a positive or even a redemptive value. The question is at what price, and what is it that makes the reduction of suffering into something positive?

Hans Jonas once commented that, with the rejection of corporeality in Gnostic circles, the care for nurturing human ethical virtues (*arete*), which was dominant in Greco-Roman ethics, was abandoned.[62] Rosenzweig's thought offers an intelligible and convincing explanation as to why this might be so. The ethical values required for a healthy or productive confrontation with the givenness of human suffering are not produced ex nihilo, but are a product of the spiritual struggle that human beings are forced to wage with the effects of their own embodiment and mortality. Unfortunately, Rosenzweig did not develop the ethical implications of his thought,

61 The Jewish or Hebraic idea of covenant, for instance, may shed important light on contemporary Law & Technology dilemmas. See Tal Z. Zarsky and Nadav S. Berman, "What is the Juxtaposition Between the Silicon Valley and Mt. Sinai? Covenantal Principles and the Conceptualization of Platform-User Relations", forthcoming in the *Journal of Law and Religion*.

62 Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 270–277. Jonas remarks that "The denial of man's natural stature, and therewith of the 'excellence' (virtue) attainable through its development is universal in the acosmic climate of opinion." (277). According to Jonas, this gnostic current is accompanied by a view of Mosaic law and morality as mere tyranny (46).

but the kernel for such a development is present in the redemptive knowledge presumed in his philosophy, insofar as this knowledge predicates the intimacy of human relations upon the miraculous potential for love whose origin always stands beyond the limits of deterministic logic.

Indeed, there is a great difference between the identity of reason and being proposed by German Idealism and that which characterizes Transhumanism. And yet the similarity is obvious. German Idealism constitutes a philosophical ideology in which the individual human subject and all particularities of natural and spiritual existence are reduced to the totalizing logic of a universal spirit. Transhumanism subjugates all of these to the totalizing reason of an empirically oriented techno-science. Like ancient Gnosticism, Transhumanism delegitimizes human corporeality, while its inner logic follows the overall trajectory of modern science in that it presumes evolutionary determinism. We suggest that the fundamental philosophical problematic of Transhumanism is that it ascribes value, and thus an evolutionary advance, to the negation of suffering on the part of a new form of being that itself is a creation of this very-same non-human techno-science. It is therefore oblivious to the question of human mortality and corporeality.

Transhumanism is a paradoxical ideology because it celebrates AI as though it were the same type of vital spirit celebrated in the past by Idealism, even though AI is but a tool of digital manipulation. In this regard, Transhumanism is a form of Idealism turned on its head. It identifies being with reason in a way that supersedes suffering and mortality, but it is no longer the reason of a conscious spirit or personality, but that of an unconscious machine. It functions as though it has consciousness without being conscious and as though it has will without intention. We might ask, how could AI have spirit, personality and intention if these are forged, as Rosenzweig submits, through grappling with one's own mortality.

For both German Idealism and Transhumanism death is not real. This does not mean that the proponents of these world views do not personally experience death as not real. Quite the opposite, the existential reality of death constitutes a large part of the motivation for the faith in redemption by AI on the part of Transhumanists. But redemption here involves a flight from death as a constitutive existential phenomenon. To say, as Rosenzweig did concerning Hegel, that for the proponents of Transhumanism death is not real means that they see death as irrelevant to the structure of existence. Transhumanism divorces death and suffering from the personal experience of mortality and from the sense of existential wonder about the mystery of origin. As a result, there is also no place for love in the world imagined by Transhumanism, nor is there room for the self-transcendence of the human spirit that grows from sorrow.

By relating to mortality as irrelevant to existence, both Idealism and Transhumanism constitute a logic of flat immanence that *a priori* precludes a consideration of life in the context of relations with a transcendent other; divine, human, or worldly. And yet, it must be conceded that the spiritual orientation of German Idealism had a great respect for the human being as a living subject, Rosenzweig's critique notwithstanding. Transhumanism, on the other hand, simply discounts the human subject.

Perhaps the transformation of human body parts into mechanical appendages of virtual intelligence will put an end to pain and suffering. But, is this something we ought to consider as an ideal value to be striven for? Taking Rosenzweig's side (along with many other existential philosophers), we maintain that the question of ethical value with respect to pain and suffering can only arise in the context of the concrete psycho-somatic existence of human beings; that is, with respect to a being whose mortal creatureliness and autonomous spirit are initially entangled.

No rational speculation can answer the question of which is better: the mortal experience of suffering on the part of a concrete autonomous human being that gives rise to a meaningful life, or the synthesized existence of human biology and artificial intelligence. This is for the same reason that philosophical discourse can never objectively prove why existence is better than non-existence. However, rational discourse, like this article, can delineate what is at stake in the acceptance of Transhumanism's program. What is at stake is the very givenness of human existence, as life, that provides the basis for a consideration of what is good and meaningful. What is at stake is the continuation of human existence as the life of a mortal subject, whose spirit is inextricably tied to the momentariness of existence, but which also bears the continuous potential for love, meaning, wonder and hope.

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