

2021 Coimbra Commemorative International Conference:

Wir wissen auch jetzt noch nichts von Gott. Transcendence and Revelation on the centenary of Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*

From Creation to Revelation: Language in the *Star of Redemption*

Intro

Responding to German Idealism, Franz Rosenzweig sets out to create a philosophical system that does not abstract the individual and her earthly fear of death. In order to do so, he differentiates in the *Star of Redemption* (1921) between the individual's acquired knowledge, which is obtained through logic, and the knowledge that is revealed to her when encountering God. Accordingly, these two sources of knowledge correspond to the first two parts of the *Star*. The content of the first part of the book examines the knowledge one may acquire through logic, while the content of the second part discusses knowledge acquired through experience, when the person meets God.

Rosenzweig goes to great lengths in order to guide his readers from part one to part two, from the philosophical to the theological. However, perceiving past the limits of logic is not an easy task, especially when God has not yet revealed himself to Rosenzweig's reader. Moreover, the reader is left with unresolved questions regarding the relation between logic and experience in Rosenzweig's system; namely, one may ask why philosophy (logic) is needed for Rosenzweig's system, if theology (experience) reveals a wider perspective.

In my talk, I will shed light on these topics through Rosenzweig's phenomenology of language. As I will show, according to Rosenzweig, the transition from logic to experience, and from creation to revelation, is demonstrated in the elements of language.

From Logic to Relation

In the first part of the *Star*, Rosenzweig constructs three elemental beings out of which his system will be realized: World, God and Man. Each element represents a fundamental consciousness through which the world is perceived, and therefore is also

limited and partial. When simply using reason, reality will always be perceived through one of three points of view – cosmological (world), theological (God), or anthropological (man) – depending on the being that is the source of this reasoning. Thus, with reason, there is a constant chance that two of the elements will be reduced into the third one. As Rosenzweig reiterates and clarifies a few years later, in his 1925 essay "The New Thinking", such reductions characterize the "old thinking", as seen throughout history in ancient, medieval and modern philosophy accordingly. Rosenzweig's "New Thinking", on the other hand, is an attempt to create a system in which the three elements – world, God and man – are all included without being reduced.

Therefore, only the relations between world, God and man will determine if they will remain abstract elements that may be reduced, or whether the person may perceive a truth that includes all three. As long as the three elements are detached from any context that relates between them ("torn out of the current"), they are merely hypothetical, since their possible relations are endless. In a chapter titled "Transition", Rosenzweig concludes the first part of the *Star*, still using logic, with the understanding that the elements only gain their certainty through their relations with one another. Thus, his task in the second part of the *Star* is to transition the reader into "a living movement, a circuit in which these elements swim."

Based on this conclusion, the relations ("Courses" or "Paths") between the elements are at the center of the second part of the *Star*. The knowledge referred to throughout this part of the book may be acquired only through the experience of these relations. Here Rosenzweig uses theological categories of creation, revelation and redemption in order to describe these relations between world, God and man. Since human experience is bound in time, the theological categories Rosenzweig uses to interpret the courses are time-bound, accordingly: the God-World relation of creation is always an event in the person's past, as she herself is a product of this creation. The Human-God relation of revelation can only be experienced in the present. Finally, the Human-World relation of redemption occurs in the future when the human will turn the commanding love of God (experienced in revelation) towards the world.

From Creation to Revelation

It is important to clarify that the second part of the *Star* is written from the standpoint of present time, within the experience of revelation. In the experience of revelation, the person encounters God, but also learns about the event of creation, that occurred in the past and enabled her reality in the present. Even though creation is a course that takes place between the other two beings, God and world, the human (who is part of this creation) learns about this course through the experience of revelation. This point is significant, since it means that comprehension of the God-World creation is only possible for the human retroactively, once she is experiencing revelation: "Here we learn that the world exists before all. It is simply there."

In other words -- for anyone who is not Franz Rosenzweig (writing the second part of the *Star*) and not taking part in the experience of revelation -- comprehension of the courses described in the second part of the *Star* is simply not possible. Yes, the event of creation is already part of any human's past -- since all humans are the result or product of this creation -- but they know nothing of this event, since they have not yet experienced revelation. As long as the person has not experienced revelation, she may only know the hypothetical elements that are constructed on the basis of logic in the first part of the *Star*. Once again, these elements are certainly established only through their courses with one another. And so, for a person who is prior to revelation, though having been created, there is no knowledge of this event of creation, nor of the other possible courses she may have with God and world in the courses of revelation and redemption.

This understanding leaves most of the *Star's* readers at an impasse: on the one hand, they are told that their perspective is partial and that the second part of the *Star* describes a fuller knowledge of the all. On the other hand, it is unclear how Rosenzweig expects them to achieve this knowledge when it requires an experience that has not yet occurred and is not dependent on them. The course of revelation, like all of the courses, requires the elements (in this case, God and man) to reach out of themselves for an encounter to take place. In the case of revelation, God calls out to the human with an active commandment to love Him, and the human responds with love. However, in order for the human to even hear this commandment in the first place, she must be "wholly receptive [...] pure readiness, pure obedience, all ears [...]. The summons to hear, the address by the given name -- all these are but preface to every commandment."

This means that before learning about the courses (creation, revelation and redemption), through the experience of revelation, one ought to be ready for the event of revelation in order for this event to occur. Although this precondition of "readiness" is prescribed by Rosenzweig in the second part of the *Star*, no reason-based argument is provided to convince his readers to make steps towards the event of revelation.

Language and Miracle

At first glance it seems that all Rosenzweig may ask the logical human of the first part of the *Star* is to believe in the possibility that the hypothetical elements will become real. But on what grounds? As suggested earlier, one wonders how the findings of the first, logical part of the *Star* contribute to the second, experiential part of the book. Does the logical construction of three hypothetical elements (world, God and man) lead in any way to the knowledge of the three courses connecting between them (creation, revelation and redemption), or at the very least to some form of readiness? Rosenzweig asks this very question: "Is there some indication at least of their rank and order for the chain of the route in the elements themselves, in spite of their blind introversion [...]?" This also begs the question: why does Rosenzweig need the logical construction of the elements in his system if the courses are ultimately based on the experience of revelation? These questions, I believe, do not only refer to Rosenzweig's attempted transition from the first part of the book to the second. Since the reader of the *Star* is already post-creation, Rosenzweig is hoping to transition her from creation to revelation.

I argue that Rosenzweig's concept of language answers these questions. In the introduction to the second part of the *Star*, Rosenzweig describes the silent "arch-words" – which enable the beginning of human consciousness – as a promise of the "real words" that are used in speech. This description of "arch-words" which promise "real words" fits perfectly in Rosenzweig's theological category of the Miracle, discussed throughout the entire introduction. The miracle is a fulfillment or realization of a preceding promise, expectation or prediction. Specifically, the miracle of revelation is a fulfillment of creation. Of course, the miracle of revelation is recognized retroactively; one learns only in revelation that it is the fulfillment of a promise made earlier in creation. The components of language keep a similar structure: "The prophecy

of the arch-words of logic finds fulfillment in the public laws of the real words, the forms of grammar." From the structure of this quote, we see that the "arch-words" are based on logic and the "real words" are based on grammar. The analogy between language and the structure of Rosenzweig's system is clear. First, similar to the relation between logic and grammar, the elements, which were constructed in the first part of the *Star*, are realized or fulfilled by the courses between them in the second part. Second, the relation between "arch-words" and "real words" is similar to that of creation and revelation.

However, unlike the retroactive model of the miracle, I believe that Rosenzweig's conception of language guides people towards the course of revelation; or at the very least to the belief in the fulfillment of the courses. A first indication towards the courses is found in the relation logic has to the grammar of language: "The language of logic is the prognostication of this real language of grammar." Even though the rules of grammar can only be derived once there is a spoken language – namely, retroactively – the language of logic, according to Rosenzweig, may indicate to the language of rules, grammar. However, a much clearer guide can be found in the fact that any person speaking language has access to grammar. The fact that she speaks a "real- word" language with other people – and leaves her own "arch-word" consciousness – can teach about the possibility of doing so with God in revelation, as well as expose her to the limits of logic comparing to grammar: "Thus it need not let itself be comprehended in the rationality of mathematical symbols. It leaves these behind. Grammar, the structure of the living language, supplies us with the symbolism to elucidate its content." The created human uses the "arch-words" in order to acquire the logic on which creation and the "arch-words" are based. Even though creation and "arch-words" are recognized only retroactively, and not on the basis of logic, language testifies the silent "arch-words" of the person that preceded speech. The name of the introduction to the second part of the *Star* is "On the Possibility of Experiencing Miracles". Rosenzweig hopes that the person experiencing language may believe in the possibility of experiencing revelation.