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Rosenzweig's Hegel

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In the following article, I shall focus upon Franz Rosenzweig's brilliant doctoral dissertation, *Hegel und der Staat*,¹ and will show that this book, whose impact upon the scholarship of Hegel's political philosophy was and remains considerable, embodies an understanding of political and historical life which departs quite significantly from Hegel's own conception. I will also show that some of the ideas Rosenzweig ascribes to Hegel in *Hegel und der Staat* recur, almost word for word, in his later masterpiece of Jewish philosophy, *The Star of Redemption*;² and I shall contend that this recurrence sheds light upon Rosenzweig's later attitude toward history and politics and also, perhaps, upon the way in which he turned to religion.

I will suggest, then, that the vexed question of Rosenzweig's relationship to Hegel ought to be restated. It is true, I think, that the widespread legend, accredited by Rosenzweig himself, according to which Hegelianism is irrelevant to the understanding of his "New Thinking" as embodied in *The Star of Redemption*, is ungrounded. Thus, in a recent and well-documented article on Hegel and Rosenzweig, Otto Pöggeler conclusively establishes that Hegel's philosophy was and remained Rosenzweig's fundamental philosophical reference.³ In the same article, however, Pöggeler also insists (pp. 121-122) that in *Hegel und der Staat* Rosenzweig did not really take issue with Hegel. These two points lead, I think, to the following conclusion: It is precisely because Rosenzweig rejected Hegelianism without having ever really come to terms with it that Hegelian motifs kept reappearing in his later writings. For as Hegel himself taught us, one cannot dismiss a philosophical doctrine without having first "interiorized" it. This is why Rosenzweig's philosophical orientation remained Hegelian: He kept going back to Hegel without going beyond him, because he did not engage in a proper analysis of Hegel's philosophy.

1. Franz Rosenzweig, *Hegel und der Staat: Bd. 1, Lebensstationen, 1770-1806; Bd. 2, Weltepochen, 1806-1831* (München: Oldenbourg, 1920), hereafter cited as 'HS'; submitted for the degree in 1912; expanded in 1914; first published in 1920; reprinted as one volume (Aalen: Scientia, 1962).

2. Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann, 1921), in v. 2 of his *Der Mensch und sein Werk: Gesammelte Schriften* (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), hereafter cited as 'SE'; *The Star of Redemption*, trans. by William W. Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970-71), hereafter cited as 'SR'.

3. Otto Pöggeler, "Between Enlightenment and Romanticism: Rosenzweig and Hegel," in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. by Paul Mendes-Flohr (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1988), pp. 107-123.

Quite clearly, Rosenzweig made use of Hegelian ideas in attempting to solve problems that recurrently engaged him. But these problems differed from the questions with which Hegel himself contended: The issue of historical relativism, which was so central for Rosenzweig's generation as well as, apparently, for Rosenzweig himself, was certainly still meaningless one century before, for Hegel. Yet Rosenzweig's very characterization (*SE*, p. 368) of the Jewish people as already being *am Ziel* – at the goal, beyond history and in this sense eternal – is a variant interpretation of Hegel's conception of eternity as being itself "in time," of history as spirit alienated in time. For the very terms in which Rosenzweig analyses history in *The Star of Redemption* are unmistakably Hegelian: It would be difficult to understand his description of the state as "the attempt, which must necessarily always be renewed, to give eternity within time to the peoples,"⁴ as in that sense an "imitator and rival of the people which is in itself eternal,"⁵ without Hegel's discussion of the nature and role of the state in history. Indeed, the very assertion according to which "there is no universal history without the state"⁶ would not have been denied by Hegel himself.⁷

But beyond the terms, the analysis itself is not Hegelian – even if, interestingly enough, it echoes Rosenzweig's earlier interpretation of Hegel's political philosophy. For the attribution to the state of two "words," *Recht* and *Gewalt*, 'law' and 'coercion', the attempt at showing how, through "coercion" (*Gewalt*), a new "law" (*Recht*) is instituted, or how the "multiplication of customs" peculiar to the people's life is opposed by the powerful assertion of the state, the determination of *Gewalt* as "letting life come into its right against right"⁸ – these are typical of Rosenzweig's *Hegel und der Staat*, of the way in which, in this book, Rosenzweig presents the evolution of Hegel's political philosophy as an evolution toward the *Machtstaat*.

Such a presentation betrays the ascendancy that the great German historian, Friedrich Meinecke, held over Franz Rosenzweig, who was his student. To be sure, in his dissertation Rosenzweig broke with Meinecke's interpretation of Hegel: He denied that Hegel was one of the first advocates of the *Machtstaat*, i.e., of a Machiavellian state which would be grounded upon *raison d'État* and exempt from all moral obligations toward the individual; and as Pöggeler remarks in the article cited above (p. 120), this is the very reason that his is the work of a pioneer. But it has to be acknowledged that, if indeed Rosenzweig's interpretation is that of an interrupted and incomplete evolution toward Meinecke's *Machtstaat*, it thereby still stays under the spell of Meinecke: It is still fully dominated by Meinecke's concepts and ideas and therefore cannot do justice to Hegel's own conception.⁹

4. "... der Staat ist der notwendig immer zu erneuernde Versuch, den Völkern in der Zeit Ewigkeit zu geben" (*SE*, p. 369).

5. "Nachahmer und Nebenbuhler des in sich selber ewigen Volkes" (*SE*, p. 369).

6. "Ohne Staat also keine Weltgeschichte" (*SE*, p. 371).

7. Compare also, more generally, *SE*, pp. 364-371, and *SR*, pp. 328-335, with G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, Erster Teil: Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. by Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1955), pp. 50-148; *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction: Reason in History*, trans. by H. B. Nisbet, with an intro. by Duncan Forbes (Cambridge: C. U. P., 1975), pp. 44-123.

8. "Die Gewalt läßt das Leben zu seinem Recht gegen das Recht kommen" (*SE*, p. 370).

9. This may help to explain how Rosenzweig could later write in a letter to Ernst Simon (early June 1923) that Germany had been poisoned by Hegel through "a belief in violence" (*Der Mensch und sein Werk: Briefe und Tagebücher, 1918-1929*, pt. 1, v. 2, p. 909).

For Rosenzweig takes over Meinecke's definition of *Macht* and identifies *Macht* with *Gewalt*, 'power' with 'violence' or 'coercion' (e.g., *HS*, v. 1, pp. 104-109, 125). He thus ignores Hegel's own definition of *Macht* and overlooks the distinction Hegel explicitly draws between these two terms. Hegel, to be sure, draws it in the *Science of Logic*, but not in the *Philosophy of Right*. Furthermore, in this latter book, he seldom refers to the state as a "power" (*Macht*);¹⁰ and he most often uses the term *Gewalt* in order to designate one or several of the state "powers" (*Amtsgewalten*): the Legislature, the Executive, and the Crown (e.g., §§ 272-273; *GPR*, pp. 233-239; *PR*, pp. 174-178). Yet it should be kept in mind that the German word *Gewalt* has two completely different senses: It means 'violence' (or *violentia*) but also 'the authority to give orders' (or *potestas*);¹¹ and it is fair to assume that Hegel does not confuse these meanings. Furthermore, his manner of using the term *Gewalt* (as *violentia*) in the *Philosophy of Right* (e.g., §§ 90-103; *GPR*, pp. 90-99; *PR*, pp. 66-73) is consistent with the definition he adopts in the *Science of Logic*. In this work, he defines *Macht* or 'power' as the power of the concept, i.e., that of reason; and he writes that "violence" (*Gewalt*) or, for that matter, "fate" (*Schicksal*) "falls into mechanism, insofar as it is said blind, i.e., as its objective universality is not recognized by the subject in its specific peculiarity."¹² He explains that the world, although it is essentially rational in nature, may well appear to us as a mechanism, one in which relations between objects or events would be governed by no rational law: The outcome of clashes between objects would merely depend upon the force with which the one happens to strike the other and the resistance the latter one opposes to it. It would depend upon blind and arbitrary violence (cf. *WL*, v. 2, pp. 242-243; *SL*, p. 603).

Rosenzweig takes no account of this analysis. He also does not see that already in one of the first drafts of *The German Constitution* (1799-1800) Hegel had elaborated a concept of *Macht* different from Meinecke's notion as well as from our common understanding of the term. He had distinguished between *Gewalt* or "violence" as "extraneous" to reality, "particular against particular," and the *Macht* or "power" of life, a power grounded upon some universal which would be interior to reality itself and thereby the source of its transformations.¹³ Indeed, it was this distinction which had enabled him to criticize all revolutionary attempts at realizing abstract universal ideals. Such attempts, he had said, are "violent." For, he had explained, they are not grounded in objective but only in abstract universal principles; and the implementation of abstract universal rights unavoidably leads to violent clashes. No wonder that, according to him, revolutionaries had to meet their "fate", i.e., to fail. The limited life which exists, he then wrote, can only be attacked "through its own truth, which lies within it" (*SPR*, p. 140) in order to be

10. But note Hegel's polemical remark on the nature of the *Staatsmacht* in the *Philosophy of Right*, § 258: *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, ed. by Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, pp. 211-215, hereafter cited as 'GPR'; *Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T. M. Knox (Oxford: O. U. P., 1967), pp. 158-160, hereafter cited as 'PR').

11. See, for example, the article "Gewalt" in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. by J. Ritter (Basel/Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1974), v. 3, pp. 561-569.

12. G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, ed. by Georg Lasson (Leipzig: Meiner, 1923), v. 2, p. 370, hereafter cited as 'WL'; *Science of Logic*, trans. by A. V. Miller (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), pp. 720-721, hereafter cited as 'SL'.

13. G. W. F. Hegel, *Schriften zur Politik und Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. by Georg Lasson (Leipzig: Meiner, 1913), pp. 138-140, hereafter cited as 'SPR'.

changed. The universality of moral ideals and values has to be understood as itself interior to reality, and therefore able to change it.

The attempt at going beyond the bemoaning of fate, beyond the mere recording of acts of violence in history in order to grasp its inner power is characteristic of Hegel's political philosophy; and it already marks this first draft of *The German Constitution*. Still, it is only during the years of his stay at Jena (1801-1807) that Hegel succeeded in elaborating his own conception of *Macht*, as identical with *Geist*.¹⁴ It is worth noticing that Rosenzweig does pay attention to this Hegelian equation of power with spirit. Yet it seems to me that he does not elucidate the proper meaning of Hegel's concept of *Geist*. One finds in *Hegel und der Staat* repeated discussions of the Hegelian notion of *Volksgeist*, but no elucidation of the notion of *Geist*. Furthermore, in his discussion of Hegel's *Volksgeist* Rosenzweig perspicaciously points to Montesquieu's influence (e.g., *HS*, v. 1, pp. 166-170). But one has to pay attention to the exact respect in which Hegel turned to Montesquieu in order to clarify the attitude he adopted in the debate between partisans of the Enlightenment and adepts of Romantic tendencies on the meaning of this notion. My contention is that Hegel saw in this notion of the *Volksgeist* an attempt to bring together both the rationality proper to individual reason, to laws as humanly enacted, and traditions, customs, culture generally – including religion. It is because Hegel considered the *Volksgeist* as produced by human beings as well as forced upon them, as uniting freedom and necessity, that he deemed it to be the motive force of history. It is in this sense, too, that he equated *Geist* with *Macht*. This explains why it would be mistaken to interpret Hegel's political evolution as an evolution away from Kant's *Rechtsstaat*, and toward Meinecke's *Machtstaat*.

Still, Meinecke's overriding influence is felt in yet another aspect of Rosenzweig's work: It leaves its mark upon Rosenzweig's interpretation of the relationship Hegel establishes between the *Volksgeist* and the state and, thereby, upon Rosenzweig's understanding of Hegel's evolution toward the nation-state. As a matter of fact, Rosenzweig interprets Hegel's political philosophy according to Meinecke's well-known distinction between *Staatsnationen* and *Kulturnationen* – between nations founded upon the unifying force of a common political history and constitution, and nations founded upon some common cultural experience – whether linguistic, literary, or religious.¹⁵ He equates the Hegelian *Volk* with Meinecke's *Staatsnation*, and sets it against the notion of *Kulturnation*. Thereby, he is led to assert that Hegel did not relate state and culture, except in early, as yet non-elaborated Tübingen drafts and in the later *Philosophy of History* (cf. *HS*, v. 2, pp. 180-181). But such an assertion would be correct only if Hegel's conception of culture could be derived from Meinecke's *Kulturnation* and, beyond it, from a romantic understanding of culture. Characteristically, this is indeed what Rosenzweig seems to do. But the romantic definition of culture, as being the irrational source of the life of a *Volk*, is not Hegelian. According to Hegel, the process of culture rather is the very means through which human beings raise themselves to universality, i.e., to reason; and "cultural" activities such as language, labor, and

law could not take place had they not been grounded in a rational organization, that of the state. For Hegel, then, culture is inherently related to the state. But it is related to it precisely because and inasmuch as it is an essentially rational process. This should enable us to understand, I think, why Hegel opposed so fiercely the contemporary pre-nationalistic doctrines according to which a *Volk* ought to be given a state because of its common irrational cultural origins: He saw in them a perversion of his own conception.¹⁶

Furthermore, according to Hegel, phenomena such as art, religion, and philosophy cannot be conceived independently of political life. Hegelian idealism is founded upon the understanding of *Geist* as a totality, the interpretation of a people's life as *total*. It therefore renders erroneous any analysis of politics or religion as phenomena which are independent of one another; and this means that according to Hegel isolating politics or religion while disregarding the fact that they are internally related would be equally mistaken. Because Rosenzweig, in *Hegel und der Staat*, neglects the religious dimension of Hegel's thought, his presentation of Hegel's political thought is misleading. But it may equally be said, I think, that his presentation entails a non-Hegelian understanding of religious life.

This "total" character of Hegel's idealism further entails that it would be erroneous to interpret the notion of *Volksreligion* Hegel developed in Bern and Frankfurt on the basis of contemporary doctrines ascribing political functions to religion. According to such doctrines, religion, whatever its content is (mythological or Christian), can be considered a mere instrument of politics. But Hegel believed that because such conceptions presuppose the independence of politics from religion, they are mistaken. It is, for him, the identity of contents of politics and religion which renders necessary the recourse to religion for whoever wants to *educate* the people. Indeed, he put strong emphasis upon the fact that one has to take people as they are: The pagan mythology of the Teutons, he said, may well have suited their political behavior and in fact their whole way of life. But it cannot be resuscitated.¹⁷ Thus, it seems to me that the call for a "new mythology" in the so-called "Earliest System-Program of German Idealism" (1796) – which Rosenzweig, as is well known, ascribed to Schelling rather than to Hegel¹⁸ – fits into Hegel's political thought only inasmuch as one keeps in mind the fact that for Hegel religion, as well as edu-

16. On this point, see also my "Hegel at Jena: Nationalism or Historical Thought?" *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 61, 2 (1979): 175-195.

17. Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Frühe Schriften, Teil I*, ed. by Friedhelm Nicolini and Gisela Schüler, v. 1 of his *Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1989), pp. 359-378; *Early Theological Writings*, trans. by T. M. Knox (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1948), pp. 145-151.

18. Cf. Franz Rosenzweig, *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus: Ein handschriftlicher Fund* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1917); reprinted, together with the manuscript itself, in *Mythologie der Vernunft: Hegels "ältestes Systemprogramm" des deutschen Idealismus*, ed. by Christoph Jamme and Helmut Schneider (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), pp. 79-125. H. S. Harris translated the manuscript into English and published it in his *Hegel's Development: Toward the Sunlight, 1770-1801* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), pp. 510-512. The discussion of the problem of determining who was the author of this manuscript still goes on today; for example, in addition to Harris' comments (pp. 249-257): Otto Pöggeler, "Hegel, der Verfasser des ältesten Systemprogramms des deutschen Idealismus," *Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 4: Hegel-Tage Urbino 1965*, ed. by Hans-Georg Gadamer (Bonn: Bouvier, 1969), pp. 17-32; and Xavier Tilliette, "Schelling als Verfasser des Systemprogramms?," *Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 9: Hegel-Tage Villigst 1969: Das älteste Systemprogramm: Studien zur Frühgeschichte des deutschen Idealismus*, ed. by Rüdiger Bubner (Bonn: Bouvier, 1973), pp. 35-52.

14. On this point, see my "Macht and Geist in Hegel's Jena Writings," *Hegel-Studien*, 18 (1983): 139-172.

15. See here, first and foremost, Friedrich Meinecke's famous book, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat* – 2nd ed. – (München: Oldenbourg, 1911).

cation itself, was never merely instrumental to any independently conceived aim.

Beyond the problem of the relationship between religion and politics, it is the very nature of Hegel's idealism which is at stake here. It is true, I think, that the way in which, in the *Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig tries to relate faith and knowledge, the attempts he made at understanding the different religious traditions in conceptual terms and at developing an interpretation of history on their basis, are hardly conceivable without Hegel's influence. But they are far from being Hegelian. Indeed, one may perhaps see in them an outcome of the way in which, in his first book, Rosenzweig related to religion: Is it a mere coincidence if the very religious dimension, still repressed in *Hegel und der Staat*, reappears later in a Hegelian clothing? Can one not suppose that, had Rosenzweig adequately evaluated Hegel's attitude toward religion in his first work, he himself would have elaborated, in the *Star of Redemption*, a very different attitude toward Hegel's idealism and perhaps, thereby, toward religion itself?

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Eduard Gans (1797-1839): Hegelianer-Jude-Europäer: Texte und Dokumente. By Norbert Waszek. (Hegelianica: Studien und Quellen zu Hegel und zum Hegelianismus, ed. by Helmut Schneider; v. 1). New York: Peter Lang, 1991. Pp. 199. ISBN 3-631-43883-4.

For a brief account of Gans' importance to Hegelianism, see Waszek's "Eduard Gans on Poverty: Between Hegel and St. Simon," *The Owl*, 18, 2 (Spring 1987): 167-178.