

## ON THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DIVINITY OF SPEECH: FROM HEGEL'S ANTI- DUALIST METAPHYSICS TO SPEECH THINKING.

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper contrasts the apophatic tradition, which has been reinvigorated by the post-structural emphasis upon 'unsaying,' with the dialogical or speech thinking tradition represented by the Jewish philosopher, Franz Rosenzweig, and his inimical dialogical partner, teacher and friend, Jewish apostate and post-Nietzschean Christian thinker, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. I trace the tradition back to Hegel's critique of the dominant metaphysical dualism of his age, while arguing that the key weakness in Hegel's argument is his privileging of reason above speech, and that his contemporary J.G. Hamann's understanding of the role speech in world-making had already supplied the supplement and direction that would be developed by Rosenzweig and Rosenstock-Huessy. I argue that although the apophatic accentuates certain dimensions of our experience that are not insignificant, when those dimensions occlude the sociality of religious practice and narrative, reality becomes mystified, as our more mundane reality, which is the very reality we live and die within, is relegated to something secondary and relatively unimportant, in extreme cases a kind of unreality.

**KEYWORDS:** apophatic; speech-thinking; Hegel; Hamann; Rosenzweig; Rosenstock-Huessy

With the theological turn in social theory this last twenty years or so there has been a growing recognition that the constitutive ideas and representations of religion have socio-anthropological significance. This significance cannot simply be dissolved into the philosophical argument about whether they are true or not. Different religious narratives lead, over time, to very different social and political formations. And if we want to explore the tensions and potential concordances of humanity, the old Enlightenment picture of religion as the alliance of fearful people, feverish imaginations and a manipulatively clever priest caste must be dispensed with. Two thinkers who advanced this position almost a hundred years ago were the Jewish thinker Franz Rosenzweig and his inimical dialogical partner, teacher, and friend, Jewish apostate, and post-Nietzschean Christian thinker, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. Both considered themselves to be part of a new tradition in which speech and dialogue took precedence over the

mind's ideas, and in which religion was irrevocably connected to world making. I trace the tradition back to Hegel's critique of the dominant metaphysical dualism of his age, arguing that the shortcomings in his arguments need to be supplemented by his contemporary J.G. Hamann's understanding of the role of speech in human world-making. I then look at how Rosenzweig and Rosenstock-Huessy develop speech-thinking beyond the promptings of Hamann and how this position draws out the short-comings of the apophatic tradition. The apophatic is a literary, philosophical and theological tradition which accentuates certain dimensions of our experience that are not insignificant. But when those dimensions occlude the sociality of religious practice and narrative, the reality we live and die within becomes relegated to something secondary and relatively unimportant.

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Of the absolutely Other we can say nothing. That sentence is the basis of the apophatic theological tradition. It is, as a glance at William Franke's masterly two volume collection of apophatic writings from the ancients to our contemporaries illustrates, a long and venerable tradition.<sup>1</sup> A great part of the venerableness of the apophatic tradition is due to the fact that it liberates the sacred from stale and rigid definitions, which imprison and reduce the sacred merely to being one other thing – albeit as the thing that is the source of any-thing. The apophatic, thus, serves the purpose of reminding us of our place in a greater scheme of things. And thus too we are reminded that our words share the same finitude as we ourselves; and yet we wish to intimate something beyond ourselves and our finitude. Or, as Franke puts it: 'Language must unsay or annul itself in order to let this unsayable something, which is nothing, no *thing* at any rate, somehow register in its very evasion of all attempts to say it. Only the *unsaying* of language can "say" what cannot be said.'<sup>2</sup>

Thus too, although the 'apophatic' can be a(n) (anti-)philosophical and aesthetic 'tactic' (from Gorgias to Beckett), generally though, the apophatic tradition defers to and reminds us of one of the most important features of life - its mystery. While our ability to measure, predict and account for nature through the accrument of its laws

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<sup>1</sup> See especially William Franke's collections with theoretical commentary *On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts*. Vol. I: Classic Formulations and Vol. II: *Modern and Contemporary Transformations* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). Also see Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *Ineffability: The Failure of Words in Philosophy and Religion* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), Michael A. Sells, *Mystical languages of Unsayings*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), and J. P. Williams, *Denying Divinity: Apophasis in the Patristic Christian and Soto Zen Buddhist Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and Chris Boesel and Catherine Keller *Apophatic Bodies : Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*, (Bronx, NY, USA: Fordham University Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> *On What cannot be Said Vol. 1*, p. 2.

enhances all manner of possibilities for human organization and social existence, it is the irruptive that is the original quality of existence we must respond to in the what and how of our lives. Our philosophical reflections, if they are to be of any value, must deal with this relationship of irruptiveness and responsiveness. We are pulled and pushed, formed and unformed, united and torn by life. Suffering, death, disease, pestilence, natural catastrophes and humanly caused cruelties and horrors – the panoply of evils - are as intrinsic to our experience of life as bounty and beauty. (And we recall that prior to philosophy, evil was not reduced to moral intentions, nor only to what humans had done). Narratives of a fall and God's wrath, the disjunction between the self as godhead and the world of suffering as an illusion, or a decline from a golden age are different ways in which the fundamental disjuncture of creation and fecundity, and suffering, sickness, and death are dealt with. The gods are first and foremost mysterious, irruptive and hidden powers of life. And just as polytheistic societies are the social and historical preconditions of monotheistic ones, the tension between life's powers forming a concordance, and the endless proliferation of powers that 'rule' is one which we see constantly repeated amongst pre-modern peoples. (Moderns who have lost a sense of God, if we may build on an insight from Kant's first *Critique*, are endlessly caught up in metaphysical quandaries that stem from the fact that our reasoning requires specification and generalisation.) Not all peoples approach life with a reverence for its very presence, even if all peoples (prior to the truncated vocabulary that flows into modernity from the mechanistic metaphysical revolution) participated in life-worlds where awe-some powers, whether good or evil, friends or foes, were intrinsic to its very fabric. And first and foremost, a god is sacred because it is the awe inspiring. The disjuncture between the mundane and the sacred is based upon the primordial recognition of the awe-fullness of existence, and the irruptive nature of hidden forces which compel us to acknowledge the limitations of all that we think we know and have done before. The irruptive does indeed render past speech mute, at least momentarily, as we confront the mysterious implacability of existence being 'that which defies expectation' - whatever 'that' is.

If irruptiveness is a quality that precedes our classification of life's qualities, and if irruptiveness does indeed force us to rethink so that we may continue our participation within reality, it will be no surprise that the apophatic, though a central feature of neo-Platonism and neo-Platonist tributaries of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, is not confined to one exclusive tradition. The irruptive, as that which eludes any previous narrative, is a constant of human experience, and thus we can find this idea spread across various cultures and traditions.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Thus Franke calls for an exploration of this tradition in non-Western cultures, *Ibid.*, p. 5.

But just as the apophatic is evoked in recognition of the awe-inspiring Otherness of the sacred, it is also the case that we only know that there is an apophatic *tradition* because we speak of it. Thus Chris Boesel and Catherine Keller in their Introduction to *Apophatic Bodies : Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*:

Surely the paradox entailed in this traditional apophatic gesture is mind-bending enough— speaking as unspeaking, knowing as unknowing, darkness as light— to keep us occupied for all these pages. The apophatic mystics— Jewish, Christian, Muslim— do surely speak. They speak and unspeak volumes. With uninhibited kataphasis (the presumed affirmative opposite of apophasis), at once confessional and speculative, liturgical and philosophical, they speak about God. The more they speak, the more they unspeak; and yet because of the infinity of which they speak, it would seem they can never stop speaking.<sup>4</sup>

Likewise, if the apophatic instructs, requests, or, even more strongly, commands that the encounter with the sacred is one that is so Other that silence is the only appropriate human response to it, it remains the fact that its Otherness is so vastly important that we are also *compelled to speak* of it.<sup>5</sup> That speech is perhaps a speech of recruitment (calling for others to come and contemplate) as well as inspiration: it may also be a speech of parable and analogy - a confession of inadequacy, which is also a poetic dive into the possibilities of language to express the vast infinitude and beauty of the Nothing that is the awe-inspiring source of everything.

Language laps and ebbs around the sacred as the sacred is sedimented into language at its most majestic and humble. From my remarks thus far, then, I hope it is evident that my argument is not to deny that specific experiences are of such depth and solemnity, or awe, or ecstasy that they have the power to momentarily blast away the significance of all manner of other kinds of experiences, and thus what names we may call upon to express them. Nor is my argument against such experiences having a

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<sup>4</sup> *Apophatic Bodies : Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Chris Boesel also addresses this in his essay in *Apophatic Bodies*, ‘The Apophasis of Divine Freedom: Saving “the Name” and the Neighbour from Human Mastery,’ which, drawing on Kierkegaard and Barth, is a rather orthodox, but finely argued riposte to Derridean and post-modern apophaticism. Note especially the following observation, which I fully concur with: ‘The negative gesture of the apophatic, then, always accompanies the necessary and appropriate kataphatic— that is, positive— speech to and about God, in order to preserve or ensure its faithfulness and “truthfulness” as creaturely thought and speech in relation to its divine referent— a divine referent, of course, whose infinite nature exceeds all such creaturely thought and talk. As such, the apophatic itself— like the kataphatic— is seen as a response to divine command, the command against idolatry in all its guises: the confused reduction of God to, and identification of God with, a particular creaturely reality of whatever form— inorganic or organic bodies, the bodies of words, texts, traditions, canons, the bodies of ideas, conceptual bodies— wherein the divine might be presumed to be grasped, limited, contained, comprehended in thought and speech, as an object of our knowledge, and so brought under our control and mastery,’ p. 310.

certain *elevation*, although not at the expense of other elevations. We may wish to draw circles around them, as it were, and point others toward their awe, as we gesture, perform rituals, prayers and chants, or simply enter into stillness in order to be reminded of, or directly encounter, a presence of such overwhelming potency and oceanic immensity. But surely the summoning and supplicating powers of language are every bit as, if not more, intrinsic to language than mere description. Further, it is also all too understandable that within the modalities of such solemnity, ecstasy or stillness, the worth of the mundanity of everyday life, not to mention the carnage and cruelty that have been the perennial accompaniments of social existence, not only take on a very different hue, but becomes the something that is really nothing in comparison.

Conceding all this then, I wish to make the point in this paper that the crevice between the sacred as an experience of Absolute Otherness and the world of speech and action all too easily is accompanied by a narrative that perpetuates a fundamentally flawed, even potentially pernicious, metaphysical dualism. The perniciousness of that dualism may be readily discerned when we consider the dysfunctional social formations that accompany the absolute diminution of the world, evident in cults of death, or aspects of theocratic societies such as Tibet, or Afghanistan under the Taliban. And if we come closer to home culturally, we cannot but help be struck by the ferocity with which early Humanists within the Church (from Dante to Erasmus) and Reformers attacked the hellish overflows of theocratic overreach. This is not to deny that the Reformers opened up new hells – for their path does lead to nationalism and thus is one major component of what becomes the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And what was lost in the Reformation has been powerfully addressed by Catholic apologists such as Hilaire Belloc and G.K. Chesterton, who repeatedly emphasized that the Catholic Church was a mosaic of various social types, an attempt to gather and balance a variety of human possibilities and not a mystical or puritan block of conformity (thereby they remind us of the conformist nature of so much of modernity). But it is to acknowledge that the Reformers' reaction against Otherworldliness was allied to their insistence that God's presence must be found in the world again, and that men and women should enter into families and adopt professions so that God's work be done by the faithful.

It was his appreciation of the importance of this feature of the Reformation (and thus why he would call himself a Lutheran)<sup>6</sup> that was the social component of Hegel's relentless attack upon metaphysical dualism. When reading or discussing Hegel it is

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<sup>6</sup> For Hegel's numerous references to himself as a Lutheran see Phillip Merklinger *Philosophy, Theology, and Hegel's Berlin Philosophy of Religion, 1821-1827*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 99-100

always necessary to distinguish what is brilliant and true and what is all too easily ridiculed and dismissed (and the *hubris* which is at its base) – which is what he himself was most proud of and which sustained his critique of metaphysical dualism – viz., his systemicity. Hegel, we recall, was nourished on Fichte and Schelling and cut his philosophical teeth by an analytic comparison of them (*The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy of 1801*) and, in his next work, *Faith and Knowledge* (1803), he advanced his case by drawing upon a further comparison of Fichte with Kant and Jacobi. He had accepted the Fichtean critique of Kant – that the transcendental elements were dependent upon an underlying unity which Kant had not adequately treated in his concept of transcendental apperception. Hegel had then accepted that Schelling had been correct to criticize Fichte's philosophy for failing to account for the necessity of what he called a 'point of indifference' which would explain the relationship between nature and the 'I.' Again, as all familiar with Hegel's development know, what then led Hegel to depart from Schelling was, as he made all too evident in a polemical aside in the *Phenomenology* was the poetic leap into the Absolute that Schelling had taught in his *System of Transcendental Idealism*. If we pause for a moment on why Hegel took up arms against Fichte and Schelling the power of his move (if not its completion) retains its philosophical significance.

The various modes of what, in *Faith and Knowledge*, he called the 'Subjective Principle' or 'Principle of the North' was that they provided reasons for what they ended up saying was not attainable by reason, and that in this respect they were presiding over a way of understanding that bifurcated the world and our relationship within it. For Hegel, this abstract understanding blinds us to the greater truth that we do not encounter a blank *x* (a 'thing in itself') of the world, but a world 'full of conceptual labour. As soon as we ascribe a predicate to the 'world' or any of its most elemental objects, say a 'rose' or a 'leaf of grass', we defer to a world of accumulated (i.e. historical) knowledge and experience – and this, for Hegel, is exactly what the sciences are. In other words, for Hegel, as soon as we want to do more than gesture to anything immediately 'there', i.e. as soon as we speak about reality, we enter into the 'labour of the concept', which cannot be severed from the systemic and logically dynamic elements which provide the unity that enables us to have ideas. (Had Kant not originally shifted philosophical attention to the formative elements and role of cognition, Hegel would not have been possible.) Reason is thus not simply, as Kant had argued, the capacity to make inferences from our understanding, but rather the perpetually active and dialectically immanent process in which we and the world share an identity. But, for Hegel, we fail to appreciate the identity we have with our world, particularly our social worlds, i.e. the world where the fruits of Reason are, after our

most pressing spiritual creations of religion, art and philosophy, most palpable. That is, in looking in our human worlds we see ourselves even more transparently than in looking at nature as such. But this makes us more prone to take disastrous flights into fancy to try and overcome the challenges and obstacles we are confronted with as we seek to expand our freedom – which, for Hegel, is the same as making the world ever more conform to Reason as the Absolute Idea.

For Hegel, the modern self was a divided and unhappy consciousness because it was not conscious of its own freedom, and thus of its own relationship between actuality and possibility. (This is why the more radical readings of Hegel such as found in Marcuse, or, more recently Žižek, miss the balance between conserving the past and moving into the future that is intrinsic to Hegel's view of politics.) As Hegel would elaborate upon in the *Phenomenology*, the bifurcation of modern consciousness was ubiquitous in the various metaphysical systems, defended by his contemporaries, which always smuggled in some *Jenseits*, some beyond, impenetrable to reason, but, mysteriously, accessible through faith, or art, or intellectual intuition.

For Hegel, genuine philosophical reasoning had to account for the continuity of the process in which a particular term is identified as essential to a metaphysical system, even if its presence is invoked as an element outside the system. That is to say, Hegel simply (and brilliantly) raised the question – how can something be outside of a system when its presence is essential to the system's existence? The element ostensibly beyond is, in other words, and from the point of view of what we know, fully continuous or commensurate in nature with what has preceded it. Whether it be *known* or *rationalized* as intuition, faith, or art, it is, says Hegel, not some thing or process existing outside of reason, but one very much within it. The philosophical error consists in not adequately reasoning about what is really happening.

If, as critics of Hegel from Schelling to Kierkegaard to Marx, to Rosenzweig, Cassirer and Croce to Levinas and Deleuze (just to take some of his critics) have held, Hegel's attempts are grotesque if not outright comical at times (everyone's favourite exhibit being *The Philosophy of Nature*), his insight on this matter was, nevertheless, true. And one may make a similar case about Hegel's social and political thought, which his critics, unsurprisingly, see as equally repellant. Indeed Hegel's approach to society is most deliberately, as the laborious scaffold of *The Philosophy of Right* unambiguously demonstrates, one in which the problem of diremption must be solved. Thus no component of the social and political system is addressed by Hegel until he demonstrates its dialectical or logical genesis. To be sure (as no end of post Second World War Hegel commentators have rightly argued), the solution is not totalitarian, and his *Rechtsstaat* bears features of a constitutional monarchy, which is also proto-

liberal–corporatist. Hegel’s view of the state was, as Eric Weil argued convincingly in his *Hegel and the State*, deeply indebted to a somewhat idealized version of liberal Prussia.<sup>7</sup> Its antecedents have more to do with the Italian republics and their independence, and the freedom of citizens to be subject to laws they themselves have made, than with what Prussia came to exemplify after Bismarck’s particular reconfiguration of the Prussian militaristic state for Germany’s national consolidation and imperial expansion.<sup>8</sup>

The problem of diremption, of the divided unhappy selves, of selves who (to take up Hegel’s critique of Kant and Fichte) give themselves moral laws they ever strive to attain but simply can’t live by, is a nightmarish one. For Hegel, it is the utopian basis for terror; the judgment of the actual by a literal nothing, a form which only happens to have a content at all by smuggling in features of the ethical life which become diminished and truncated so they may be squeezed into the overly formalized moral conscience of its bearer. Let us concede two major weaknesses in Hegel’s thinking: first, that he ends up in another phantasmagoric labyrinth when he tries to speak from the vantage point of the Absolute, and second, as Franz Rosenzweig relentlessly argued in his devastating two volume work *Hegel und der Staat*, Hegel failed to understand the greatest political problem of the 19<sup>th</sup> century leading up to the Great War - the problems of empire and nations. But he was not wrong to argue that modern men and women were deeply alienated from the world in which they lived. And the alienation extended to the very thoughts they had about it which found their expression even within the great philosophical works of the age. And yet again – we concede that Hegel’s divinization of the state (which, contrary to Walter Kaufmann, is undeniably what he does, and why his political theory goes awry in the manner identified by Rosenzweig)<sup>9</sup> is a disastrous move – which, nevertheless certainly says

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<sup>7</sup> Eric Weil *Hegel and the State*, translated by Mark A. Cohen (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998). However, one should not exaggerate Hegel’s liberalism either. To the liberal Rudolf Haym, Hegel was nowhere near liberal enough. See his *Hegel und seine Zeit*, (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1857). But Haym’s political environment had little in common with Hegel’s – by 1848 Prussian troops had fired upon Berliners wanting their freedom. See Peter H. Wilson’s brief but helpful essay, ‘The Origins of Prussian Militarism’, in *History Today*, Volume: 51 Issue: 5 2001, online at <http://www.historytoday.com/peter-h-wilson/origins-prussian-militarism> last viewed 28.10. 2013.

<sup>8</sup> I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for *Cosmos and History* for suggesting I make this point of clarification.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Kaufmann’s ‘Introduction’ to *Debating the Political Philosophy of Hegel*, (New Jersey: Transaction, 2010) has a section entitled ‘The March of God and Other Boners’ pp. 3-6 Also see his chapter 10, ‘The Hegel Myth and its Method.’ Kaufmann, in a manner reminiscent of what he does with his numerous writings and footnotes in his translations on Nietzsche, is ever on the look-out to make Hegel more palatable to his contemporaries. But while he saves Hegel from totalitarianism, and rightly points out that ‘The state is the march of God through the world’ injects totalitarian associations not in the German, he



something real/ actual/ true (to use his alignments) about the ‘self-consciousness’ of the modern state as the court of final appeal in, again to use Hegel’s terminology, ‘the ethical sphere.’ But, more importantly, if we look to his chastisement of Jakob Friedrich Fries’s romanticization of the German ‘student movement’ or his critique of Haller for an excessive romantic approach to law in the *Philosophy of Right*, or his critique of Fichte’s *Closed Commercial State* in his *Essay on Natural Right*, or, most powerfully, his critique of the ‘logic’ of the Terror in the *Phenomenology*, we can see that his attunement to the perils of utopian and Romantic flights into the Absolute stood in the closest relationship to his recognition of how the underpinning metaphysic of the negative socio-theology, the aphophatic, within the social, contains perils that cannot be ignored.

For all of Hegel’s diagnostic brilliance, I think the deep flaw within the philosophy came not so much from his recognition that the absolutization of the beyond, and thus what we may say about it, was but one more symptom of the alienation he sought to overcome, but that his move involved one capital error, the first part of which his critics have all identified. He made too much of reason and logic and its relationship to action. But he also made too little of the relationship between speech and action. The corollary of his relative failure to address speech, and what is also the cause of that failure, is the ‘excessive’ role that he gives to the mind, a product stemming from his belief that he had to account for the problem that led to Kant’s transcendental idealism (the problem of synthetic judgments *a priori*, which Hegel will demonstrate in the *Science of Logic* and *Logic* is due to an assumed dualism that is itself the problem).

Interestingly, it was a contemporary of Kant’s, Johann Georg Hamann, who was the thinker of that age who took speech most seriously and would thereby become one of the seminal figures of what Franz Rosenzweig and Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy called ‘new thinking’ or ‘speech thinking.’<sup>10</sup> Hegel was fascinated by Hamann and he would write a lengthy essay on Hamann. To be sure, he could not consider Hamann a

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fails to *reflect* upon what Hegel means by arguing that the state is providential (something he acknowledges Hegel as saying) and that it has become an authority without peer (i.e. God) in the modern world. Kaufmann has no idea that there may be a problem about the modern state that has nothing specifically to do with Hegel, but much to do with the scope of its reign. I am thinking here of Marcuse and Adorno, who for all their left Hegelianism, are, in my view, correct to see processes within the modern state as tending toward a total administrative state. Such a state poses a real contradiction to Hegel’s view of freedom as reconciliation. Overall when compared with Rosenzweig’s reading of Hegel in his *Hegel und der Staat* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1920) the readings of Hegel from the 1940s through to the 1970s in the Anglo-American world tend to be played out against a polarity of state and individual which de-historicizes *The Philosophy of Right*.

<sup>10</sup> See *Hegel on Hamann* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 2008), translated, edited, and introduced by Lisa Marie Anderson.

philosopher, and his assessment is frequently caustic. The fact, though, that he failed to pick up on Hamann's most important philosophical claim about language taking priority over reason is, I think, indicative of how immersed Hegel was in the paradigm he had inherited from Kant. For it was how Hamann viewed language that took him in a direction so alien to how Hegel was setting out the problem of the age. Hegel might well be forgiven for this oversight; for anyone familiar with Hamann knows that he frequently speaks in tongues so opaque, elliptical and mysterious that one could easily place him in the aphophatic tradition. Wisely, though, Franke does not include Hamann amongst his tradition. The philosophical innovation was raised against Kant in his very brief review of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*.<sup>11</sup> It makes but one simple, albeit all important point – that Kant's transcendental idealism is essentially a formalistic exercise which neglects how language is the root of reason.

It is worth briefly pausing upon this point and noting why it is worth taking seriously, and why it has not been. First, the entire problematic of Kant proceeds as if language did not matter – and in this Kant remains firmly in the naturalistic paradigm which Descartes establishes. His cognitive vocabulary and problems he sets to solve about mind and reality all come back to the metaphysical dualism laid out in Descartes' philosophical writings. What matters, for Kant, is that we can explain the relationship *between* phenomena, that is, the world of experience, and the apodictic system of mathematics. Because of the 'fit' between what could not possibly *be* (demonstrated to be) apodictic (phenomena), and what simply could not be anything other than apodictic (mathematics) Kant has to explain how this 'fit', which is required in the science of (Newtonian) physics, is possible. The fit between mathematical experimental models and phenomena is plain enough for all to see in the efficacy of Newtonian physics. This simply cannot be explained if we repeat Hume's mistake, and take the concept of cause as akin to other concepts that we attain through experience (and this holds for all the concepts of understanding and, what Kant calls, the forms of intuition, which supply the principle of the Newtonian framework). More bluntly, Hume did not grasp the distinction between the form or lawfulness of experience and the content that was the actual experience.

Stated thus, it is easy to see that language has no real role in any of this – it is a highly technical problem that takes place within a framework, and it is an attempt to make sense of a specific modality of human experience and knowledge (one which

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<sup>11</sup> Ronald Gregory Smith *J. G. Hamann: A Study in Christian Existentialism: An Introduction to the Thought of the Great Eighteenth Century Thinker with Selections from His Writings* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), pp. 207-222.

Kant uses as the basis of all knowledge, until he realizes this does not help explain what goes on in the biological sciences). Of course, as Fichte, Schelling and Hegel all argued this begs the problem of a plethora of other conditions which make thought possible and this also isolates what is happening in the natural world from the historical world; thus Hegel's critique of Kant is reminiscent of Vico's critique of Descartes. And it was this kind of isolation that the post-Kantian idealistic tradition could not countenance (just as Husserl could not countenance it). But even prior to this realization, it was Fichte's insistence upon thinking about the thinking being, factored into the philosophical problematic, that was the move that brought the edifice down. But even if we leave this point aside there was something also evident from the first that, for all its genius, (and again Hegel would expose this with typical forthrightness) the entire problematic of the *Critique* and its solution had to be cast in terms of a facultative logic (taken from Descartes's appropriation from the scholastics). Fichte and Hegel demanded legitimation of Kant's entire problematic, insisting he answer why he simply thought he could take elements ready to hand in the formation of the mathematical and empirical sciences as philosophical proof of anything. We recall that Kant's cognitive elements and their interaction include intuition (inner and outer), concepts (pure and empirical), imagination, reason, judgment, and various other operations which start to seem like an endless supply of rabbits stored in the philosopher's/magician's top hat. In other words, the more that was required of this facultative logic to illustrate precisely what the mind contributed to the larger question Kant had set himself about Reason - and the more Kant thought about the a priori contributions of cognition the more he saw - the less convincing it was as the solution to the original intention of establishing, once and for all, a scientific metaphysics. The constructive mathematical theory he had come up with did little more than provide a neat answer to the number line and thus the appropriateness of analytical geometry for the marshalling of experience into laws was as problematic as it was dazzling - albeit none of the successors were overly dazzled by it. And even in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Hegel was, as Marx and Engels protested, being treated as a 'dead dog,'<sup>12</sup> and the neo-Kantians, most brilliantly in the work of Herman Cohen, resurrected Kant, advances in mathematics were making this all too dubious to make the critical philosophy the solution Kant had claimed it to be. To sum up, Kant had set himself a problem that had evolved on the back of the metaphysical

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<sup>12</sup> This mutual ire by Engels and Marx about Hegel's mistreatment (see letter to Engels January 11, 1968; Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann, June 27 1870) would find itself articulated by Marx in the 'Afterword' of Volume 1 of *Capital* - <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p3.htm> The letters can be found at [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1868/letters/68\\_01\\_11.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1868/letters/68_01_11.htm) and [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1870/letters/70\\_06\\_27.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1870/letters/70_06_27.htm) All last viewed 28.10.2013.

accompaniment to the scientific revolution. The actual evolution of the problem did not concern Kant in the slightest. He focused solely on the philosophical problematic, including the core metaphysical antitheses generated within science, and ethics, and the transcendental conundrums of aesthetics (the traditional philosophical triumvirate of the true, the good and the beautiful) and the spill-over from these antitheses such as the meaning of freedom in history. Moreover, although he did not put it this way, he had adopted the cognitive language of the mind (including that of logic as well as the facultative language that was largely indistinguishable from what was then considered to be 'psychology') as well as the mathematical and 'natural' philosophical language that had evolved. It was the recognition of the genetic interplay of the various elements of the evolution of the sciences that, *inter alia*, united Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. But it was Hamann, before any of them who had noticed this, who saw that language was the constant within the problem and that the *relationship* between language and reality itself is never addressed by Kant. Of course, saying this does not contribute to solving the problem Kant had set himself; rather it displaces it as a real problem capable of having a solution. But (and here is an important overlap between Hamann and Hegel) once the world is seen as only knowable at all through the resources with which we with engage it, then the very dualism at the basis of Kant's philosophy (and it is a dualism, again as Hegel never ceased to emphasize) continuously dictates the moves of the entire system. Kant's Preface to *Critique of Judgment* reveals that he only realized that he should deal with art and teleology because he could not explain the relationship between freedom and necessity, a most telling remark about how the system was generating problems, and thus a key moment in the formation of the new idealism of Fichte etc. Thus, the question of whether the problem Kant had set himself was even a genuine problem, already assumes a metaphysical commitment.

Hamann was not primarily interested in taking his view of humanity from the natural sciences, let alone from the metaphysical turn inaugurated by Descartes, which makes the reductive approach of mathematical and experimental 'modelling' the yardstick of all real knowledge. He was interested in our symbolic nature, and in the role of speech in that symbolism. Of course, that does not mean that he could answer Kant's problem, anymore than Wittgenstein's concept of 'language games' answers it. But it is evident that Kant's answer is so flawed that for all its symmetry, it is unsustainable. What, though, Hamann awakens us to is that while the naturalistic metaphysics of modernity start with the formulation that the book of nature is written in mathematics, it is the relationship between speech and reality, and the different kinds of languages and powers stored in language, the symbolic 'keys' so to speak, that are required for the disclosure of different dimensions or aspects of reality. And this

means realizing that language is not something outside of reality or laminated over it, but as much within it as material or biological ‘things.’

Everything Hamann says about language flows from this – and it is not surprising that with the linguistic turn in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Hamann has (albeit slowly) acquired relevance. Moreover, we have entered into a Post-Secular Age – and this is not only evident from the fact that well educated peoples from all manner of faiths, aware of Enlightenment narratives, strictures and legacies, *choose* to find their orientation within a symbolic world that does not fit into the Enlightened enclaves of human possibility. Thus, too, philosophy has become ever attuned to how this is possible and thus Hamann no longer can be dismissed, as he was by Kant, as a *Schwärmer*, an irrationalist drunk on the feasts of the unbridled imagination (Kant was bewildered by how so much intelligence could be put to such poor use). But, with the disintegration of metaphysical naturalism, we are able to hear such sentences as the following with a freshness and relevance Kant did not seem to fathom: ‘every phenomenon of nature was a word – the sign, symbol, and pledge of a new mysterious, inexpressible, but all the more intimate union, community of participation of divine energies and ideas.’ And as Gwen Griffith Dickinson, who cites the afore sentence, continues, for Hamann, ‘every word is this pledge of divine and human interrelatedness; ultimately we are told “God was the word.” Because God is the word, and this word lives in our mouth and heart, God lives in our mouth and heart.’<sup>13</sup> Speech, if understood thus, is not primarily descriptive, but creative and redemptive. And it is this legacy of Hamann’s that would be taken up by Franz Rosenzweig, Ferdinand Ebner, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, Hans and Rudolph Ehrenberg and the other ‘speech thinkers’ who emerged in the catastrophe of the First World War.<sup>14</sup> They too insisted that speech not only is the means of transference of the species across the ages, of translation and thus communion between peoples, it is the basis of world and self-making; it engenders the unprecedented.

Also significantly, unlike say the late Wittgenstein, who would also pit language games against reductive accounts of mind and nature which dominated (and still do dominate) Anglo-American Analytic Philosophy,<sup>15</sup> the preoccupation with language was also mounted in the context of (a post-Nietzschean) revival of the role of faith in

<sup>13</sup> Gwenn Griffith Dickson, *Johann George Hamann’s Relational Metacriticism*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), p. 233.

<sup>14</sup> See Harold Stahmer’s *‘Speak That I May see Thee’: The Religious Significance of Language*, (New York: MacMillan, 1968).

<sup>15</sup> Of course, the famous conclusion of the *Tractatus* was Wittgenstein’s apophatic moment, and while he had an interest in religious thinkers, his ‘philosophy’ does not disclose the *sense* of religion as the group designated by Rosenzweig as ‘new thinkers.’

world making. Again this connection between language and world making was something that Hamann and his friend and intellectual sparring partner (also astute to the fecundity of language), Friedrich Jacobi would emphasize.<sup>16</sup> We have mentioned how Hegel was driven crazy by the manner in which faith was circulating in the various systems and discourses of his contemporaries – and that was why he saw characters as diverse as Schleiermacher and Fries and Schelling as largely of a piece. But while he was attuned to the underlying philosophical pattern of his time, his philosophy completely missed the ‘existential’ currents that would bind (completely unconsciously) Kierkegaard (who, of course, found a precursor in Hamann, and attended Schelling’s lectures which bored him, but which did articulate a similar existential critique of Hegel to Kierkegaard himself), Schopenhauer (Hegel’s younger contemporary nemesis) and Nietzsche; in different ways they would all leave pretensions of the Hegelian sort to system in ruins. Moreover, if, as I have suggested, Hegel was quite brilliant in his attack upon faith trumping knowledge, there was another way in which faith could be read. Hegel himself came closest to considering this alternative in his lectures of the *Philosophy of Religion*, where he sought to convey the genuine spiritedness of religion and its forms, a spiritedness, which nevertheless, he saw as being most fully articulated philosophically. In this respect, the ‘speech thinkers’ referred to above departed significantly from Hegel precisely because they thought he had missed the depth and significance of ritual which *binds* unconsciously in ways more effective than what can be achieved via conscious conceptual expression. But, from the perspective of these later thinkers, Hegel was simply too steeped in, and thus reacting to the Protestant idea of *Glauben* (and the German *Glauben* covers both faith and belief) as ‘belief’ or ‘faith’ in a *Jenseits* to really see the world making potency of religion. And anyone familiar with Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* can see that for all its nods to Christianity in an abstract/ conceptual sense how threadbare it is in its understanding and discussion of the Church, not to mention other faiths, in history. Bluntly, as far as Hegel’s lectures on history go, the Church, with its various synods, councils, doctrinal disputes may just as well not have existed between Jesus and Luther. Hegel saw history as essentially a philosophical answer to a philosophical problem. Accordingly, Hegel remained like a fly stuck to the fly-paper of the philosophical problematic he was

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<sup>16</sup> Hamann basically thought Jacobi was too steeped in the arid God of the Enlightenment to really appreciate the significance of the biblical God. For Hamann’s critique of Jacobi see George di Giovanni’s “Introduction” to his *Friedrich Jacobi: The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel All Will*, translated and introduction etc. by George di Giovanni, (Montreal: McGill Queen’s University Press, 1994), pp. 86 ff. See Hamann’s letters to Jacobi in Ronald Gregory Smith, *J. G. Hamann: A Study in Christian Existentialism*, pp. 246-260.

reacting to. And thus he did not really deal with the fact that in much of the Christian (and Jewish) tradition *Glauben* does not so much mean faith as ‘belief’ opposed to knowledge, but *trust* in the way of world making that proceeds through veneration of the name and powers of life that this name summons up, or attunes us to.

If Hegel had remained captive to the matrix or paradigm he was reacting to and thus missed other philosophical currents, the same was no doubt true of Kant who had missed the undercurrents that were raising the most serious criticisms of the faith in Reason that held the very disparate members of the Enlightenment together. And if we momentarily deploy the binary of faith and reason, the Enlightenment was an age erected on that very faith (and if by Enlightenment we take its naturalistic assumptions about knowledge into account, then this is consistent with Hegel’s larger criticism of faith).<sup>17</sup> Now Kant, who in so many ways is the apogee of Enlightenment philosophy himself, had, of course, understood that Enlightenment was built on faith. Thus his famous remark in the Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason* that knowledge must be denied to make way for faith.<sup>18</sup> For only thus could we recognize the *possibility* of freedom as active in the world. But it was more provocatively put by Friedrich Jacobi, who would (re)interpret David Hume’s skepticism as the concession that faith was the ontological condition of any knowledge<sup>19</sup> – a statement far stronger than Kant’s, but it was a statement which we can see adumbrates the subsequent trials of Reason as it becomes not only the province of science and morality and art (Kant’s great attempt to map out the cognitive ground and spheres of its presence) but ever more fragmented through the emergence of hermeneutics, phenomenology, existentialism and beyond. The fragmentation of Reason coincides with the realization of speech thinkers (a realization independent of, but not unrelated to anthropologists who had become immersed in the life-worlds of their studies) that faith was an intrinsic component of the life-world of a people, and hence of its identity. Of course, the Romantic critics of the Enlightenment had already intimated this, but an important step had been taken when it was not only seen that a people is constituted by its narratives, but that narratives themselves are vital: words become flesh. A people were not mute objects to be put under the scientific microscope but living creatures working on their world and themselves – not mere subjects either, but inter-relational responsive creatures. The

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<sup>17</sup> See my ‘Hegel on Kant, Fichte, Jacobi: Being Reasonable about Faith and Knowledge’ in *From Faith in Reason to Reason in Faith: Transformations in Philosophical Theology from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries*, edited by Wayne Cristaudo and Heung-wah Wong (Lanham: University Press of America, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxx.

<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Jacobi, David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism, a Dialogue (1787), in *Friedrich Jacobi: The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel All Will*, pp. 253-378.

step is not only an advance upon a restricted view of knowledge, but it is also an identification with a most archaic understanding of speech and ritual as powers.

Perhaps the most brilliant philosophical exposition to not only arrive at this conclusion, but to use it as the basis of a new philosophical anthropology was Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption*, all too often, especially today in North American readings, mistaken as an exercise in ethics. *The Star's* focus is primarily that of the meaning of Jewish and Christian peoples – but it makes its case by an extremely dense, and rich, though extremely schematic, comparative theo-anthropological appraisal of these two ways of world making with the foundations of ancient, Eastern, and Islamic peoples.<sup>20</sup> By exaggerating the importance of the role Rosenzweig ascribes to silence, Rosenzweig may be, and has been, included within the apophatic tradition,<sup>21</sup> but *The Star's* fundamental innovation is in how it tracks the different threads of world weaving and how they are spun out of contrary understandings of what is held sacred - the venerations, appeals and names which constitute the historical 'solidifications' and 'seals' of a people. Rosenzweig saw that many of the social and cultural variegations of peoples come back to which 'God' they worship; a people's God(s) represent the disparate what's and how's of what it is searching for from reality. The gods are symptoms and signs of different pangs of orientation. This world-weaving is as much true of the cross-cultural kinds or types who respond to the sacred as it is to the nations or peoples – for nations are, *inter alia*, collectives which are distinguished by the constellations of their designated types and modes of actions, the cluster of social roles and tolerated possibilities (possibly allowing for the genesis of new types).

Rosenzweig also argued in the *Star* that philosophy had to resort to theology to make sense of a domain of experience for which it simply lacked the language. Those are the dimensions of experience where something not only comes out of nothing (creation) but on account of which peoples (specifically the Jewish, Christian, and, for him, more problematically, Muslims) have been compelled to speak of a creator in

<sup>20</sup> Far less well known, and a work a team of us are presently translating, is the two volume *Sociologie* by Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy (now reissued in a new German edition as a three volume work) *Im Kreuz der Wirklichkeit: Eine nach-goethische Soziologie*, 3 vols., Mit einem Vorwort von Irene Scherer und einem Nachwort von Michael Gormann-Thelen, new edition of *Soziologie* by Michael Gormann-Thelen, Ruth Mautner, and Lise van der Molen, (Tübingen: Talheimer, 2009). The second (and, in the new edition, also the third) volume, which can be translated as *In the Full Count of the Times*, is also a brilliant exploration of the distinct socio-theo- anthropological features of tribes, empires, the Greek city states, and the Israelites, and the re-constitution of those formations after Christendom first takes hold of the Roman Empire and then forms the basis of Europe and its subsequent messianic revolutions and global flow-ons.

<sup>21</sup> Thus Franke dedicates a chapter to Rosenzweig's *Star* in Volume 2 of *On What Cannot be Said*. I am a great admirer of Franke's thoughtful, careful, and finely crafted scholarship, and my disagreement with him here is over relative weightings of where the unsayable fits into life for Rosenzweig – not about whether it is important *per se*.



order to actively participate with creation as composed of living creatures conscious of their historicity and fragility. For Rosenzweig, Jews and Christians had become conscious of a divine 'revelation,' first given voice in the *Song of Songs*, that love is as strong as death. This in turn stood in the closest relationship to the task assigned these peoples by their God: not only to participate in creation but to be co-redeemers of creation. Jews and Christians are thus seen as participants in the what and how of what survives death because of the strength of their love - their love dictates their role in 'eternity.' Eternity is not to be interpreted in a neo-Platonic or mystical sense, but in the perpetuity of time. In *Speech and Reality* this redemptive dimension of human existence is articulated by Rosenstock-Huessy thus: 'it is we who decide what belongs to the past and what shall be part of the future.'<sup>22</sup>

From this perspective, the theological is itself an anthropological discourse – and thus to know a person or a people we need to know what they sacrifice themselves for, know what they hold sacred, what they look toward in order to organize themselves for today and tomorrow. That is to say who or what we worship is a key to who or what we are. And that originary act of worship seeps its way deep into cultures. Thus for example, just as the Calvinist content of the founders of the United States has diminished in social efficacy, its Calvinist form is as manifestly conspicuous in its economy, politics, popular culture and other sites of reflexivity, the origins of Islam cling tenaciously to the Middle East. Thus, from this perspective, the theo-anthropological roots of world making tend to be occluded in narratives where the oceanic silence of the sacred reduces historical experience to mere Maya (or any other such modality in which the intense experiences of beatitude/nirvana etc. blasts away the significance of the ostensibly more fragile and fleeting actions done in time). Thus in contrast to the apophatic, Rosenzweig's conception of the sacred does not relegate speech to something fundamentally inadequate when compared to what is most important. Rather, the God who creates and redeems the world is a God of action and a God who does his work through speech, whose love is spread by our lips. Rosenstock-Huessy will capture this power of God in his book *The Fruit of Our Lips*.<sup>23</sup>

Thus do action speech and love stand in a vital relationship not only to each other, but also to enhancing the sacredness of creation itself. In the latter case, the loveliness of life is not only preserved, and protected but also furthered through speech and action. Further, in this case, our task on earth is not simply to contemplate

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<sup>22</sup> Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Speech and Reality* (Norwich, VT.: Argo, 1970), 19.

<sup>23</sup> Raymond Huessy, Rosenstock-Huessy's grand-son, is presently doing a new English edition of this work which has appeared in German as *Die Furcht der Lippen* in *Die Sprache des Menschengeschlechts*, Vol. 2, (Lambert Schneider: Heidelberg, 1964), and in English as *The Fruit of Lips, or, Why Four Gospels?* ed. Marion Davis Battles, (Pittsburgh, Pa.: The Pickwick Press, 1978).

the sacred source, the creative ground of existence, the mystery of God, but, one may say, to make the world more 'Goded' than it would be, but for our action and participation with the divine. Note too, speech is not the antithesis of action, but a moment within the formation of action; speech recruits and requests, commands etc. I have used the word speech here in a special way, a way which is central to Rosenzweig and which Rosenstock-Huessy would provide an elaborate defence of in his *Sociology* (sections which deal with this have appeared in English in *The Origins of Speech*)<sup>24</sup> as not to be confused with mere babble or informal routinized chat – but with speech that is commanding, world forming. The concern is with speech as a power that transforms. Speech that must be listened to 'Audi, ne moriamur. Listen, lest we die; or: listen and we shall survive.'<sup>25</sup> If this sounds melodramatic, that is because as philosophers we are generally accustomed to taking the things back into the study, as if the study were the adequate arena of thinking, whereas speech thinking generally takes events as the furnace of speech.

The most elemental grammatical feature of speech is the same as the most elemental feature of thought, the name, which through circulation enables communion. Since Plato it is also the name that has invariably been raced past so that philosophers could get to ideas or concepts and reasons. Because Hamann emphasized the name and the living word, not the concept or idea, he was not seen for what he was by Kant and Hegel, for whom the concept and idea [in Kant let us add intuition] takes priority over the name. An important feature of the name is its historicity, a historicity that is a circulatory process and not just the result of a reflective one, but one that people respond to or pass over on the basis of their experiences. Moreover, it is primarily through a people's loves (its triumphs and concordances) and its catastrophes, traumas and hates (its wars and revolutions) that the names that most *matter*, that we most draw upon in our appeals and commands, the names that become deeply woven into our institutions and social memory and that are passed on between generations, are formed.

If then we see speech in this manner we see it is not at all a 'tool' which we try to attach to an experience, as if it were a label which we put on objects which the foolish need to be reminded are not the objects themselves.<sup>26</sup> Names are as little labels as experiences are objects. Speech - vital speech - forms experience because it is part of the calling and response of creation and the world.

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<sup>24</sup> *The Origins of Speech*, introduced by Harold Stahmer, (Norwich, Vt.: Argo, 1981).

<sup>25</sup> *Speech and Reality*, 22.

<sup>26</sup> This is a recurrent theme in Rosenstock-Huessy, see especially "Es Regnet" Oder Die Sprache steht auf der Kopf in Volume 1, *Die Sprache des Menschengeschlechts*, pp. 35-85.

To return to my opening salvo about the apophatic: one reason that the apophatic has become such an issue within philosophy again today can, I think, be gauged by what writers such as Bataille and Derrida, indeed the poststructuralist tradition generally, thinks about tradition and language, and the animosity towards any kind of essentialism and the call to new taxonomies and new possibilities (also recall Foucault's use of Borges in *The Order of Things* or Deleuze's tactic of de-territorialization). These reactions are also part of the entire anti-Cartesian thrust that mobilized the movements of Dadaism and surrealism. It is a response to a tradition experienced as tyrannical – it is, though, as I also noted in an earlier footnote of Chris Boesel's, a response within and by language. Curiously, the apophatic gesture taken by deconstructionists and post-structuralists within the linguistic turn, by reproducing the Saussurian dualism so conspicuous in the systemic significance of *langue* and *parole*, signifier and signified, fails to completely reformulate the philosophical terrain in the manner of Hamann, Rosenzweig and Rosenstock-Huussy and speech-thinkers. They are caught up in the binary of unsaying and saying precisely because of an implicit and irrevocable alterity that clings to the philosophical binaries that it deploys in order to refute them. Not surprisingly this suggests (much as Hegel would argue against Fichte and the younger Schelling who had also wanted to expunge the dualisms they found in Kant) a surreptitious retention of the very transcendence that it seeks to escape from: those who speak endlessly of the King who has been executed still live under his reign, even if he is now a spectre.

Two things have followed from this. First, Levinas would become no longer a figure in opposition to Derrida, but a comrade in spirit, as ethics seeped into post-modernism/ post-structuralism when charges of nihilism became unbearable for a movement needing to demonstrate its political credibility and show that its Heideggerean roots were not to be equated with the poisonous fruits of Heidegger's own fascist turn. Secondly, there were all manner of theological anticipations and affinities in the apophatic gesture of what seemed at first a nihilistic or purely secular philosophical gesture of defiance against the father (whatever that father was – the logos, the phallus, Hegel, Husserl, Reason, structuralism etc.). Mark C. Taylor in *Erring: a Postmodern A/Theology*, Kevin Hart in *Trespass of the Sign*, and Robert Magliola (a Carmelite lay Buddhist) in *Derrida on the Mend* were amongst the first to 'smell' the theological implications of post-structuralism and post-modernism, though now post-structuralist theology is as common place as social theorists writing books on St. Paul.

If we briefly contrast Rosenzweig and Rosenstock-Huussy, on one side, with Karl Barth and post-structuralist a/theology we again see how the apophatic gesture of the post-structural is the gap that reintroduces the absolute alterity of transcendence.

Neither Rosenzweig nor Rosenstock-Huessy are apologists for, or appealing to God's transcendence or His absolute alterity.<sup>27</sup> Indeed this was precisely their antipathy toward Barth, an antipathy that compelled Rosenstock-Huessy, immediately having read Barth's *The Epistle to the Romans*, to dash off a letter telling the unsuspecting (and very irritated) Barth precisely what was wrong with this way of representing God.<sup>28</sup> For his part, Rosenzweig was equally non-plussed by Barth's aphophatic alteritism: 'After a long drought, today we have a theology, mostly protestant, that leaves nothing to be desired as to the accuracy. We have it now: that God is wholly other, that to talk about him is to talk Him away, that we cannot say what he does to us.'<sup>29</sup> Rosenzweig would write to Buber of Barth's 'colossal negations' leaving nothing but a whitewash wall...[of] indifferent authenticity.' Why this negativity – were Rosenzweig and Rosenstock-Huessy not happy that God was again being spoken of after years in the wilderness since the pronouncement of his death? Note, that unlike some sociologists today, who are relieved after the widespread failure of the discipline to factor in the spiritual needs and symbols of people, they were not wishing to defer to the sacred as such. On the contrary they both held that people invariably look for some god or other to bow before – whether that God is sex, money, a leader, the nation, Reason etc.<sup>30</sup> We are the creature that sacralises; likewise, for them, idolatry is not the exceptional response of people to the plethora of forces that surround us, but the typical response. Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* is at pains to point out how Jews and Christians were untypical in not just having one God, but in worshipping a God who renounced creation for redemption, the natural goods of life, not for ascetic or mystical reasons to have a mystical experience, nor to escape the wheel of life and death and suffering, but in order to participate with creation so that it becomes lovable beyond natural death. The first commandment of Yahweh – the proscription on worshipping other gods – is the Hebrew recognition of the 'natural' tendency, or temptation, to commit idolatry. Redemption, as Rosenzweig emphasizes, requires that a people say 'No' so that natural actions be reappraised in conformity to the commandment of love. Saying No and saying Yes, and knowing when to say which is a kind of switch in the chain of

<sup>27</sup> Note the references to Karl Barth by the self-consciously post-modern theologian Mark C. Taylor in *After, God (Religion and Postmodernism)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) Chapter 5 passim.

<sup>28</sup> For further details see my 'Rosenstock-Huessy's Anti-Transcendent Critique of Karl Barth,' in *The Cross and the Star: The Post-Nietzschean Christian and Jewish Thought of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig*, edited by Wayne Cristaudo and Frances Huessy (Cambridge: CSP, 2009), pp. 277-289.

<sup>29</sup> *Franz Rosenzweig, and Jehuda Halevi, Translating, Translations, and Translators*, translated by Barbara Galli, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1995), pp. 204-205

<sup>30</sup> See chapter 1, 'Which Spirit to Serve: The Stirring of the Living, Loving God,' in my *Religion, Redemption and Revolution: The New Speech Thinking of Franz Rosenzweig and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

possible worlds. The God of Jews and Christians does indeed prefer the redeemed world over the original creation. And for speech thinkers, God's commandments are commandments about how we relate to each other and to the world.

Thus for both Rosenzweig and Rosenstock-Huussy, Barth had missed the critical point of how the biblical God is implicated in the world-making of his people. This all-important difference is overlooked in the one book length treatment of Barth and Rosenzweig by Randi Rashkover, *Revelation and Theopolitics: Barth, Rosenzweig, and the Politics of Praise*.<sup>31</sup> But Rashkover's reading of Rosenzweig is all too typical of the North American academic reading of Rosenzweig, and the consensuses upon which that reading takes place: ethics and politics are taken as the primary modalities within which Rosenzweig, indeed anyone important, should participate. That is to say, the consensus that dominates North American, and to a large extent all geo-academic 'regions' which are shaped by prestigious North American universities and their university presses and conferences which spread the consensus, is that nothing could be more encompassing or important than ethics or politics or art (which is ostensibly the other two by another practice). The price paid for this emphasis and consensus when it comes to reading Rosenzweig is the diminution of the philosophical anthropological character that makes his work so unusual; for Rosenzweig dwells upon the far more elemental layers of world and people making than either ethics or politics – and, I will not address it here, but suffice it to say that his view of the highest art being religiously applied art is about as unfashionable a claim as it is possible to make, but he provides powerful reasons for this counter intuitive claim.<sup>32</sup>

This is very closely related to a point so manifestly obvious in the *Star* yet insufficiently appreciated in most commentaries on it: it is precisely the triadic interplay of God -Man -World that is the all important interplay that distinguishes the Jewish and Christian orientations to life: the God of Jews and Christians is a loving God who wants to redeem His creation; He is driven by a deep need of love to love beyond His own Creation and to love along with his created. Concomitantly, Rosenzweig argues that the tragedy of the pagan life-world is precisely that these three 'poles' or primordial names by which we orientate our existence are ever approached in isolation, that is in their alterity. That the apophatic reproduces this aspect of the pagan should not be surprising precisely because, although there are Jewish and Christian mystics who belong to the apophatic tradition, the tradition is one in which the same disjuncture that exists between speech and reality (and thus between Man

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<sup>31</sup> Randi Rashkover, *Revelation and Theopolitics: Barth, Rosenzweig, and the Politics of Praise* (London: T and T.Clark, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> See chapter 11 'Beyond the Idol of Art, Part 1: Rosenzweig and the Role of Redemption in Art,' in *Religion, Redemption. Revolution*.

and World) exists between God and Man. The theology of Rosenzweig, and if I may (with some caution) use this term for Rosenstock-Huussy, is one which is emphatically anti-metaphysical in its traditional usage – *The Star* opens with a (resolutely non-Platonist/non Aristotelian) metaphysical, meta-logical, and meta-ethical analysis to curtail Reason's exaggerations – to put reason and its claims back into existence, not as immanent in a Hegelian sense but simply as an aspect within life. What comes out of this is the observation that the triadic relationship between God - Man - World, when understood as relationship, is but the basis of another triad – Creation, Revelation and Redemption. And it is this doubled triad that is the symbolic core of the Jewish people and, for Rosenzweig, this 'shape' 'radiates' upon their inimical Christian brothers and sisters who also are called to act by the same loving God of the living and the dead of revelation.

If we turn briefly to post-structuralist theology for a moment we see that its connection with the apophatic is invariably due to the very semantic heritage of the neo-Platonic tradition (which we again recall has, at least in the West, a pride of place in the apophatic tradition). I think Mark C. Taylor's work well illustrates the issue. In his early book *Erring: A Post Modern A/Theology*, Taylor states that 'In the absence of transcendence, interiority and depth give way to a play of surfaces.'<sup>33</sup> *Erring* is a paean to this play of surfaces and an enthusiastic call to embrace a theology without transcendence. Thirty years later, in a work weighed down by a firmer Barthian grip, we see that Taylor has agonized seemingly endlessly over a metaphysical dyad that should have long been abandoned were the liberation as fulfilling as it initially seemed. Soberly, stoically, he writes: 'Transcendence whatever its guise can never be completely negated; immanentization always engenders transcendentalization, which in turn is sublated without being completely obliterated.'<sup>34</sup>

As philosophically compact as Rosenzweig is, one will never find a sentence remotely comparable to this. We might put it this way – and this is definitely how Rosenzweig and Rosenstock-Huussy would see it – the entire formulation remains too steeped in the Greek tradition of thinking that is philosophy. And it is that tradition which creates the vocabulary, the *names* for dealing with the tragic reality of the collective encounter (and Rosenzweig does not deny the possibilities of personal encounters, let alone the reality of mystical encounters by all manner of pagans, but his brief is *peoples* not individuals) which does not articulate the doubled triadic

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<sup>33</sup> Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Post-Modern A/Theology*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp.15-16.

<sup>34</sup> *After God*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 393-394. For Barth's presence see chapter 5 passim.

interplay which he argued is but the grammatical thread that transpires between God's word and His people.<sup>35</sup>

Let us conclude this paper by reaffirming the importance of what we may express theologically – God's presence in the world is a spoken presence. Let us bear in mind that this is not a metaphysical statement but a metaphorical one. All speech is metaphor, which is why unsaying is not 'not saying' but an understandable attempt at de-essentializing that takes place within a metaphysic, that I have suggested it does not sufficiently liberate itself from.

Let us also add, by way of an affinity we share with the apophatic aspect of the post-structuralist theologian/social thinker, that the great danger with the elevation of the word is that speech becomes a substitute for action, that words become merely words, and that words rather than being the clearing and the spur, as well as the vehicle for the divine's entrance into the world, become but the fuzz and blur that covers over and closes out the sacred character of creation. When words lose their sacred significance we are left with this one being who is so diabolical that the Other reality becomes ever more venerable. And being absolutely Other it becomes the nothingness onto which we project, the phantasmic which Feuerbach, Marx and Nietzsche, each in their own way, had seen as the curse that had closed humanity off from its possibilities and vitality. Words lose their sacred significance when the world itself has been so desacralized that what one wants from it no longer bears any resemblance to the sacredness of its source and the plenitude of its possibility – or, more prosaically, when it is not lovable. Mundane reality is, then, the reflection of the mundane spirit that is really the death of all spirit. It is brute power or routine action followed and activated by routine speech, it is utterly predictable, an endless burden and *planned*; it is diabolical (or if we prefer Freud's formulation, a death drive) precisely because it is contrary to life as such; nothing doing nothing. 'Why,' asks Baudrillard perfectly expressing the symptom of a spiritually suicidal age, 'is there nothing rather than something?'<sup>36</sup>

The mundane that is absolutely mundane closes off the irruption by taking a past entrance into the real, a past and singular moment of creation, as the adequate action/rule/idea to encompass reality – such encompassing is suffocation. Note that this is not to say that order is diabolical – we rightly speak of a 'divine order', and what is meant by that is a particular order the source of which impregnates the relationships that form a pattern. But divine order is always a living order, an order of living creatures

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<sup>35</sup> See chapter 3 of my *Religion, Redemption and Revolution*.

<sup>36</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, translated by Chris Turner. (New York: Verso, 1996), p. 2.

and living relationships – relationships between each other and the source of that otherness and the power of concordance that is love itself. Moreover, we need pattern to have orientation, but when the divinity is absent from an order and order is all that remains – then the order is but a husk. Politically this is the problem with those types of conservative thinking which seek to protect or resurrect an order that no longer contains anything sacred. Idolatry always mistakes the created for the creator in its supplication and veneration (just as Milton’s Eve worships the tree of knowledge’ after succumbing to Satan’s temptation). Against the idolatry of the conservative is the idolatry of the radical whose utopian flight, as Franz Rosenzweig so perceptively argued in *The Star of Redemption*, bypasses the neighbour who is there to be loved for the not-yet of the abstract neighbour to come – thus does love, as abstract flight, become its antithesis because it is not embedded in or participating in the reality that is the basis and condition of our nurture. For such an act of flight must have real consequences – one is reminded of defenders of communism who would say communism was never really tried; thus does the abstraction remain truer than reality, which, of course, was one of the things that Marx violently opposed, and why he insisted he was not a utopian. And in spite of Eric Voegelin’s deep animosity to what he took to be Marx’s intellectual dishonesty, Voegelin is part of that same tradition as Marx and Nietzsche to the extent that his hostility to Gnosticism is not because of its failure to understand the need that is expressed so powerfully in the Book of Exodus, the escape from real enslavement, but the conflation of the world of earth and toil for that of the heavens that would have us be the angels of heaven when all our realities demand our attention here and now. And any real future must be built out of the potencies in the order we inhabit and the grace (the unknown and incalculable) that comes to us (not from us) to activate the unknown.

What is true of loving action here is no less so of speech – for speech which is not alive is speech which maintains the reified world of the non-existent, or the phantasmic. It is the speech that depletes rather than replenishes – speech that serves death rather than creation. Such dead speech is truly instrumental – and it makes instruments of us as we all become instrumentally engaged so that there is no real engagement. Living speech warns us of the dangers of this and enjoins us to acts of solidarity where our solidarity is of the spirit and not merely a resource. That is why it is divine.

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