

**(Fragment) Religion and History:  
Rosenstock-Huessy, Rosenzweig, and Buber  
in the Journal *Die Kreatur* (1926-1930)**

Michael Edward Moore

**Part One: Turning-Toward**

Between 1926 and 1930, discussions of the problem of religion and history involving Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy were published in the short-lived journal *Die Kreatur*, explicitly founded to provide a space for inter-faith discussions, so as to bring religious differences and mutualities into dialogue.<sup>1</sup> The journal was the vehicle for a group of scholars who had assembled around the concern for religious dialogue, called the Patmos Circle. Edited by Martin Buber, Joseph Wittig and Viktor von Weizsäcker, the journal published many important essays, including for example, the first published work by Walter Benjamin.

Linking Buber, Rosenzweig, and Rosenstock-Huessy, all of whom were affiliated with the journal, we can speak of a triangular exchange of influences, and moreover, the period in which the journal was published was a time fraught with political and social pressures, in which religious thought had a particular searching intensity. In order to understand the essays and discussions connected to *Die Kreatur*, it is necessary to take some account of the historical context, and the religious-philosophical situation that provoked this intervention on the part of the Patmos Circle. The journal was a response to the cultural and religious situation following World War One, in a period that has been called post-religious, and which to some extent defined itself as post-religious, so that the academic study of religion, undertaken by Gershom Scholem and others in the period between the two world wars

---

<sup>1</sup> *Die Kreatur* was published by Verlag Lambert Schneider. Only three volumes appeared: 1 (1926/1927); 2 (1927/1928); 3 (1929/1930).

has been termed (in a study by Steven Wasserstrom) *religion after religion*.<sup>2</sup> Protestant Christianity had to some extent lost much of its own intellectual impetus, as many intellectuals developed a religious interpretation of Hegel in place of traditional theologies. It is remarkable therefore that in the case of the Patmos Circle, one can speak of a *turning-toward* religion and an avid search for new modes of religious authenticity and ways of living – with religion.

During a long phase of peaceful existence in the bosom of bourgeois-liberal Europe, of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century, Judaism had affirmed the close ties which had developed between the Jews of Germany and German culture: the bonds between *Judentum* and *Deutschtum*. As Amos Funkenstein explains, *Wissenschaft des Judentums* took the helm of Jewish culture, to such an extent that historians served almost as “high priests of culture,” preparing the way for the further evolution of Judaism into a rational, ethical monotheism, in line with neo-Kantianism, and the cultural project of Hermann Cohen.<sup>3</sup> Once freed of “obsolete characteristics,” with the guidance of historical research and philosophical clarification, it was believed that Judaism would all the more readily, and all the more thoroughly, ally itself with German culture.<sup>4</sup> Historical study was basic to the effort to conform Judaism to the historical ethos of civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), in which the philosophy of Hegel had come to the fore, having an effect similar to that experienced within Protestant Christianity.<sup>5</sup> It must be borne in mind however, that that world of German Judaism was soon to be utterly destroyed.

---

<sup>2</sup> Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Amos Funkenstein, “Franz Rosenzweig and the End of German-Jewish Philosophy,” in: *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 275-305. See p.295.

<sup>4</sup> Baeck’s *The Essence of Judaism* (1905) was a further confirmation of the ideals of liberal Judaism in the vein of Cohen: Leo Baeck, *Das Wesen des Judentums* (Frankfurt-am-Main: J. Kauffmann, 1926); Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p.41.

<sup>5</sup> Funkenstein, “Franz Rosenzweig,” pp.295-296.

When Hermann Cohen published an essay entitled: “Germanism and Judaism” (*Deutschtum und Judentum*), Franz Rosenzweig wrote a review.<sup>6</sup> Against Cohen’s placid vision of a ‘religion of reason,’ that would lend support to ongoing assimilation, and lead to the transformation of Judaism into ethical monotheism, Rosenzweig remarked: “A nation always concentrates its strength in those spots where it senses danger; in the next few decades it will be the *galut* (exile, dispersion)...that must prove the inner strength of Judaism.”<sup>7</sup> Here was an entirely different approach to the essence of Judaism, by looking inward religiously and asserting the distinctiveness of Judaism, what I am terming here “turning-toward.”

The introductory essay which opened the first number of *Die Kreatur*, signed by its three editors, Buber, Wittig, and Weizsäcker, opened a horizon of exile before all three of the religious positions represented. It was suggested that: “religious transformations out of which no other liberation is at hand than the messianic, have the extreme need and firm discipline of exiles.”<sup>8</sup> Exile was thus recognized as part of the existential framework of messianic longing, both as a spiritual condition of being far from home, and as a powerful sensation of wandering over the face of the earth. In this kind of exile “a fusion of the personal and collective experience” takes hold.<sup>9</sup> The historical situation in Germany certainly heightened these sensations. But to note it once again, “es keine andere Befreiung gibt als die messianische” : the desperate longing of those in exile was understood as a messianic longing shared by Jews, Protestants and Catholics.

---

<sup>6</sup> Hermann Cohen, *Deutschtum und Judentum, mit grundlegenden Betrachtungen über Staat und Internationalismus* (Gießen: A. Töpelmann, 1918).

<sup>7</sup> Nahum M. Glazer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York: Schocken, 1953), p.33. “Religion of reason” is an expression of Cohen’s, cf. Hermann Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, Bruno Strauss, ed. (Wiesbaden: Fourier Verlag, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> “Religionshafte Sonderungen, aus denen es keine andere Befreiung gibt als die messianische, haben die Not und die Zucht von Exilen” Opening editorial, *Die Kreatur* 1 (1926), 1.

<sup>9</sup> On exile and “historical symbols” – Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p.277. Note that Idel does not accept Buber’s interpretations of Hasidic thought (pp.162-163), while recognizing the value of his dialogic.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, an excruciating sense of impending disaster hung over central European Jewish culture, which could be heard, perhaps, in Gustav Mahler's unfinished Tenth Symphony (1910) – a Mahler who, nonetheless, resolutely identified himself with Viennese culture.<sup>10</sup> Martin Buber (1878-1965) was a product of this Vienna and received his education in this same highly cultivated milieu, receiving a Ph.D. from the University of Vienna, with a dissertation about individuation in the writings of Nicholas of Cusa and Jacob Böhme.<sup>11</sup> After 1904 Buber put aside his explorations of abstruse Christian philosophical-theological writings and dedicated himself to recovering the Hasidic tradition, a turning point in his own development. Buber's *turning-toward* Judaism was an implicit rejection of the doctrine of progress found in an increasingly secular Judaism, in favor of “experience in the sense of irrational, ecstatic inwardness.”<sup>12</sup>

Here was an entirely different road to the ‘essence of Judaism.’ On the other hand, Buber never wavered in his desire for openness and dialogue with representatives of other religions and other religious positions. Buber's openness and promotion of the ideal of speech, helped provide a basis for the activities of the Patmos Circle and the publication of *Die Kreatur*, between 1926 and 1930, about which more in a moment.

---

<sup>10</sup> “I am a confirmed Viennese” – quoted in: Hilde Spiel, *Vienna's Golden Autumn 1866-1938* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), p.167. In 1985, George Steiner assessed the cultural situation of fin-de-siècle Vienna in a remarkable lecture for a British television show: “Vienna 1900,” filmed for London Weekend Television; directed by Kim Evans (Princeton: Films for the Humanities & Sciences 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Martin Buber, *Zur Geschichte des Individuations-problems. Nicolaus von Cues und Jacob Böhme*. Ph.D. diss. University of Vienna, 1904. Buber's dissertation was translated into English by Sarah Scott: Martin Buber, “On the History of the Problem of Individuation: Nicholas of Cusa and Jakob Böhme” in: *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 33 (2012: 371-401).

<sup>12</sup> Quoting: Martin Jay, in *The Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture 1096-1996* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p.396. On Viennese intellectual life and the situation of Jewish thinkers, see William M. Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History, 1848-1938*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp.214-217.

In Germany, the disastrous aftermath of the Great War called into question the entire framework of late-nineteenth century Jewish liberalism, within which Jewish emancipation and increasing social success had reached a high point, but were met with increasingly hostile anti-semitism.<sup>13</sup> Following the disastrous outcome of the war, Jewish veterans found that their contributions to the war were despised. An aggressive core of anti-Jewish sentiment had a wider response in a society shaken by subversion and revolution. What were known as the “ideas of 1914” involved a wholesale rejection of the Enlightenment, heightened nationalism and a desire for authoritarian state control.<sup>14</sup>

## Part Two: Wahrheitssphären

German idealism, especially the philosophy of Hegel, had established the groundwork for a particular understanding of Lutheranism and its connections to the Wilhelmine state, as the resolution of dynamic historical and spiritual forces. This was the outcome of Hegel’s vision of history as “Spirit emptied out into Time.”<sup>15</sup> With Hegel, too, philosophy could lay claim to the same terrain as theology.<sup>16</sup> The intellectual atmosphere of this Hegelianism tended to put an end to certain discussions, just as it elevated the state.<sup>17</sup> As Rosenzweig expressed it in the *Star of Redemption*:

---

<sup>13</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp.866-871.

<sup>14</sup> Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Imperial Germany 1867-1918: Politics, Culture, and Society in an Authoritarian State*, trans. Richard Deveson (London: Arnold, 1995), pp.210-212.

<sup>15</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), [C. (DD.) Absolute Knowing: 808]; p.492

<sup>16</sup> “Philosophy is theology.” Cited in: Frederick Beiser, *Hegel* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p.147. On Hegel’s supposed reactionary tendencies, p.140.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. the classic essay by Hajo Holborn, “German Idealism in the Light of Social History,” in: *Germany and Europe: Historical Essays* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1970), pp.1-32.

around 1800, philosophy worked out its self-imposed tasks, which was to know the All by means of thinking; by understanding itself in the history of philosophy, nothing more remains for it to understand.<sup>18</sup>

Rosenzweig studied Hegel extensively, under the direction of F. Meinecke, and published *Hegel und der Staat* in 1920.<sup>19</sup> A further source of closure was emerging from the aggressive stance of the “ideas of 1914.” One response among intellectuals both Jewish and Christian was a revival of messianic ideals and a tendency to *imagine* anarchism in politics.<sup>20</sup> The flame of Nietzschean radicalism burned in many a Jewish breast, and provided the atmospheric intensity of the Jewish revival: a mood extending from Gershom Scholem to Martin Buber. The attitude of Buber returns us to the question of *Die Kreatur*, as we can now define Buber’s stance as he helped launch this project: Judaism could be retrieved as a *Lebensphilosophie*, by turning toward Hasidic sources as a mystical primordial experience far from the familiar bourgeois sensibilities of secular neo-Kantianism.<sup>21</sup>

The editors of *Die Kreatur* wanted to bring together the intensity of conflict and dialogue between integral, separate, but intimately connected religious existences, which bore the promise of entering into the Kingdom together, however differently construed:

To us these are not imaginings, mad cloudy forms, but rather practical stable spheres of truth (*Wahrheitssphären*), which may not melt away any sooner than in the reality of the Kingdom.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Star, p.114.

<sup>19</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, *Hegel und der Staat*, 2 vols. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1920); reprinted in 1 vol. (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1962). Rosenzweig had in fact moved away from his fascination with Hegel by the time he had published this work.

<sup>20</sup> Anson Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals Between Apocalypse and Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), p.30.

<sup>21</sup> Rabinbach, *In the Shadow*, p.35. Although it should be recalled that Rosenzweig had been a student of Cohen and remained personally close to him.

<sup>22</sup> “Beständige Wahrheitssphären, die nicht eher als in der Wirklichkeit des Reiches aufschmelzen dürfen.” *Kreatur* 1 (1926), 1.