

Article

Untranslating Rabbinic Blood: Franz Rosenzweig's "Blood Community," the Ethical Monotheism of the Jewish Philosopher, and the State

Ezra David Tzfadya

Center for the Study of the Middle East (CSME) Indiana University-Bloomington, Bloomington, IN 47405, USA; etzfadya@iu.edu

Abstract

This article explores the concept of blood and the Jewish "Blood Community" (Blutgemeinschaft) in Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*. It looks at how this notion is deeply ensconced with literary and philosophic practices connected to "Rabbinic Thought." The article draws parallels between Rosenzweig's own interpretive practices and those of contemporary Rosenzweig scholars seeking to use his "Blood Community" to buttress the position of the (Jewish) philosopher in the Anglo-American public sphere. It highlights the "Blood Community's" role in allowing Rosenzweig to offer a universalist critique of the State and a particularist conception of Jewish identity.

Keywords: Franz Rosenzweig; modern Jewish thought; ethical monotheism; aesthetics; language; sovereignty; coercion; Talmud; Midrash; state

1. Introduction

The subdiscipline of Modern Jewish Political Thought currently seems keen on emphasizing (alternately, and consequentially) "The Talmudic," "The Rabbinic," or "The Midrashic" in the work of its canonical post-Spinozist, Enlightenment inspired normative thinkers.¹ In this tradition, German-Jewish philosophers' have, deserved or not, achieved outsized representation. Though there is much debate about which thinkers "belong" to this tradition of modern Jewish thought, one can safely draw a history from the founding father Moses Mendelssohn, who conceived of his oeuvre in reaction to Kantian and Spinozist inspired polemics against Judaism's inherent incommensurability with the discipline of Philosophy and enlightened citizenship, to post-WW2 emigres such as Leo Strauss and Martin Buber. They engage in this task even though a majority of these "primary source" thinkers held neither held rabbinic ordination nor formulated their thought within the idiom and textual form of Rabbinic commentaries, responsa, and sermons. Indeed, for many of these thinkers, one of their primary aims was to free Judaism and Jewish thought from the coercive epistemic and legal shackles of Rabbinic *halakha*.²

Yet for contemporary Anglo-American scholars of these thinkers, this newfound attraction to "the Rabbinic," or its "Talmudic/Midrashic" corollaries is often expressly linked to a desire to free themselves from the perceived a-political shackles of the field-defining, diasporist German-Jewish philosophic tradition.³ They find themselves in a historically novel contemporary situation where unprecedented Jewish political power exists both in diasporic (American) and statist (Israel) forms, with imperial and communal links between the two public spheres. In the contemporary academy, such structural theopolitical realities are to be analytically and normatively critiqued, whether such critique occurs in



Academic Editor: Sergey Dolgopolski

Received: 3 October 2025

Revised: 4 December 2025

Accepted: 8 December 2025

Published: 9 December 2025

Citation: Tzfadya, Ezra David. 2025. Untranslating Rabbinic Blood: Franz Rosenzweig's "Blood Community," the Ethical Monotheism of the Jewish Philosopher, and the State. *Religions* 16: 1553. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16121553>

Copyright: © 2025 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

service of ideational fortification or deconstruction of the contemporary Israeli-American State-based theopolitical axis of Judaism and Jews.

For some scholars, making thinkers as “Rabbinic” creates a seamless link between theopolitically “thick” and “authentic” forms of Jewish communal organization identified with the pre-Enlightenment *kahal* and the post-WW2, post-1948 era of American Judaism. In the United States, halakhically oriented Jewish communities both express themselves politically, and are in-turn “reformed” by, State-based politics and legal norms in a manner redolent of the constitutional processes described in Robert Cover’s “Nomos and Narrative” (Cover 1983). Such “Rabbinic” communities are forged by both a covenantal relationship with the Divine rooted in Revelation, and the social contract with which they enter into mutually fecund relationships with the legal systems of their host societies.⁴

Alternatively, some scholars wish to define the conceptual and normative thrust of Modern Jewish thought as “Rabbinic” to connect Jews, Jewish communities, and the Jewish intellectual tradition with an envisioned Late Antique Rabbinic corpus’s determination to separate itself from concerns of political life and public law in the pre-messianic “here and now.” Such a stance offers an “authentic” vantage point of theopolitical critique and provides for the Jewish “authenticity” of the critic even when such thought is intently questioning the legitimacy of the covenantal Rabbinic order achieved via social contract with a specific legal vision of religion-state relations in the diaspora.⁵ Often, by questioning this political order through the lens of “the Rabbinic,” they seek to make the Jewish tradition compatible with, and intelligible towards, an envisioned Rawlsian public sphere which prizes an ethical comportment fashioned by autonomous individuals who enter freely into associations with religious communities. Scholars of Jewish thought, in this schematic, are charged with “translating” the ethical script performed by Jews and Jewish communities.

Furthermore, as Julie Cooper has noted, the turn towards questions of “authenticity” are rooted in the often-futile wish to integrate Modern Jewish Political Thought within Political Science and its subdisciplines of Political Philosophy/Theory, and its sub-sub disciplines of “Comparative Political Theory” and the adjacent “Critical Legal Studies” (Cooper 2016). For the disciplines Political Science (not to mention Law) are intently focused on the vicissitudes of statist or supra-statist sovereignty such as the EU. With the tangible absence of an explicitly “Jewish” state, let alone states, for close to 2000 years since the Roman destruction of the Temple, scholars of Jewish Political Thought have needed to posit the Rabbinic corpus as reflecting either a deliberate a-political stance towards temporal statist sovereignty, or alternatively endorsing one of Spinoza’s most consequential propositions, albeit in a highly qualified and far more differentiated form. For Spinoza believed that the diasporist *Kahal* run by, or in conjunction with, Talmudically trained Rabbis, has textually sublimated and legally refashioned ancient Biblical-Mosaic theocracy by other means over generations and geographies in the European ghetto and Islamicate *khara* until its corporate dissolution. And without resorting to cynicism, such concerns are also practical. Compared to other *nomoi* associated today with the moniker “religion,” the number of Jewish authors and the number of texts that one can peg as “Jewish” are far from voluminous. The Rabbinic corpus must be marshalled for theoretical content, if only for the sake of number and variety sources.⁶

For their part, scholars of Jewish Late Antiquity textual traditions have been rendering the Rabbinic corpus increasingly philosophically fecund to contemporary Jewish political thinkers.⁷ They have sought to break free of the historicist and philological shackles of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* tradition and its “scientific” approach to Rabbinic literature, an approach permeated with the legacy of struggle with a hegemonic Christianity in both the academy and public sphere. This tradition had relegated the Rabbis of the Mishnah, Midrash and Talmud, with their perceived rote legalism and ghettoized Jewish provincialism, to a position inferior to the ethical monotheism of the Old Testament’s prophets,

Pharisaic Proto-Protestantism and the Philonic Greco-Jewish tradition with its medieval philosophic inheritors—Rabbinic Judeo-Islamic metaphysical rationalists. Furthermore, the Rabbinic authors of the Kabbalistic corpus were responsible for introduction intellectually unhelpful “myth” into the Jewish tradition, thereby leading to “backward” and “irrational” forms of Hassidic Eastern European populism mere miles from the intellectual hubs of Breslau and Königsberg, who also migrated into the German empire regularly due to the incessant Slavic nationalist violence directed against them.⁸

Pre WW-I German thinkers inspired by the Reform movement such as Abraham Geiger, along with those animated by Neokantian philosophy such as Hermann Cohen and Julius Guttman, translated the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* into a theological and philosophic form commensurate with Protestantism.⁹ On the other hand, many German-Jewish thinkers, especially those writing in the late Willhemine and Weimar eras such as Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber, positioned themselves in partial if not vehement opposition to this tradition. Yet both streams were engaged in an intellectual, political and spiritual, struggle against a hegemonic Protestant Christianity and, in the wake of Hegel, its secularized political form in the *Rechtsstaat*. And together they viewed both the halachic Rabbinic corpus of Late Antiquity and *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as scientifically, conceptually and spiritually stultifying.

But what is meant here by the “Rabbinic,” or its corollaries, the “Midrashic,” the “Talmudic,” How can one distill an “essence” of this vast corpus without committing the cardinal philosophic sin of essentialism, or the modern theological-legal sin of religious fundamentalism? How can one harness the “spirit” or conceptual building blocks of a vast legal compendia that appears to be structurally resistant to any notion of “spirit,” let alone a systematic philosophy or theology of the Divine, the Temporal and the Human? Should one show sympathy or resist this effort by scholars of Modern Jewish Political Thought to break free from “Religious Studies” or the Reform/Conservative seminaries and find their way into the journals and departments of Political Science and Law, thereby rendering their gates porous and their gate keepers pliant. Indeed, only then can these scholars perhaps establish “facts on the ground” that makes non-recognition impossible.

Yet perhaps we might be a bit more generous towards this attempt at quasi-utilitarian intellectual distillation of the Rabbinic tradition between the disciplinary bounds of the contemporary academy and the integrity of Jewish textual tradition. Indeed, one of these scholars of Modern Jewish Thought and the “Talmudic,” Elad Lapidot, has identified “The Talmudic” as fundamentally about a *polemos* of critique operating upon a logic of *makhloykes*, disputation between political epistemologies emerging out of discrete “peoples.” In this constellation “the Talmudic” frees the Greek *polemos* essential for the constitution of the public sphere from tired and politically weaponized polemics, from speech as mere content to be manipulated, deleted or ignored. “Essentialism” about Jews and Judaism, viewed by many academics as either utilitarian heuristics or philosophic dilettantism, can potentially allow Jews to engage in philosophic critique, and more importantly, to be critiqued by external actors in kind. In this manner, Lapidot bridges the Heideggerian imperative of a historicizing mode of philosophy with a form of ethically reverential Levinasian dialogism. If the Jewish tradition is to assert itself as both an object of study and a border-defining agent within the subdisciplines of comparative political theory and critical legal studies, then it must open itself to external critique in its very identity as “Jewish.”¹⁰

In this essay, I will focus on how two camps of scholar battling for the past, present and future of Modern Jewish Political Thought in the Anglo-American world, whom I term the “Ethical Monotheists” and the “Legal Covenantalists.” I will examine their efforts to render one of these German-Jewish thinkers, the luminary Franz Rosenzweig, into a Rabbinic avatar. Indeed, Rosenzweig’s thought offers a particularly rich case study upon

which to reflect on the recovery of the “Rabbinic” in modern German-Jewish thought for the sake of Jewish political thought in the diasporic academy today. For Rosenzweig’s oeuvre lies at a transitional juncture between the pre-WW1 Kantianism and Neokantianism of Mendelssohn and Cohen, the ethical monotheists par resistance, and those post-1933 canonical Jewish thinkers such as Buber, Strauss, Heschel and Levinas, whom, as Daniel Herskowitz has convincingly demonstrated, have had no choice but to operate in the shadow of Martin Heidegger’s philosophy, if only to resist his “problematic” conceptuality for the self-preservation of Judaism and Jews (Herskowitz 2020). Perhaps most critically—while many have sought to put Rosenzweig’s philosophy into dialogue with Heidegger, it was Rosenzweig’s tragically short life which prevented his robust engagement with Heidegger’s textual oeuvre during his lifetime, unlike his erstwhile colleague in translation Martin Buber. On the flip side, Heidegger himself claimed to be influenced by Rosenzweig’s magnum opus, the 1919 *Star of Redemption*.

Rosenzweig also offers up an irresistibly attractive and/or threatening proposition for those concerned with “authenticity” and the Jewish tradition. In his *Star of Redemption*, he refers to the existential condition of Judaism and the Jewish people as being inextricably bound with the notion of a “Blutgemeinschaft,” or a blood community. Rosenzweig’s Jewish *Blutgemeinschaft* places Jews on a different theopolitical plane from Christianity, allowing them to exist simultaneously both temporally and eternally, and most importantly, beyond a warlike temporality connected to terrestrial concerns. The Jewish *Blutgemeinschaft* allows the community of Jews to be uniquely open to the eternal call of a past revelatory event made present in the world, or *vergegenwärtigt*, reflected by the ‘miracle.’¹¹

In this paper, I will bring together work by the “ethical monotheist” camp, represented in this article by Jules Simon and Daniel Boyarin, with the work of “covenantal legalists,” represented here by David Novak and Leora Batnitzky. Each of these thinkers have situated their analysis of Rosenzweig’s *Blutgemeinschaft* within a broader articulation of what it means for modern Jewish thought to be authentically “Rabbinic.” On the one hand, Simon and Boyarin terms Rosenzweig’s Blood Community as an instance of “Midrashic” or “Talmudic” thought, respectively, in which “blood” is employed both aesthetically and linguistically to engender a dialogic form of Jewish relation with Christianity, a relationship necessary for a universalist critique of the State. On the other hand, Novak and to some extent Batnitzky turns to the *Blutgemeinschaft* for a notion of Jewish covenant, positing Rosenzweig in terms of a partial yet significant return to Rabbinic notions of Israel’s divine election and legal command by a transcendent God. They view Rosenzweig’s deployment of blood as a symbol for the limits of philosophy and the necessity of covenantal and social contract thinking. Both thinkers engage in “literary” thinking about blood as a symbol to bridge Rosenzweig’s philosophy, law and ethics, while simultaneously engaging in a form of apologetics to shore Rosenzweig’s notion of blood from the racialism of his time. In each of these cases, the “Rabbinic” (or alternatively the “Talmudic” or “Midrashic”) functions as a prism for contemporary political critique. Rosenzweigian notions of Jewish community’s concomitant ontological timelessness and epistemic historicity unshackled from historicism) can potentially shape both “The Rabbinic,” and in turn the ethics of the Jewish community and the Jewish individual vis-à-vis the State today.

The essay will proceed in the following fashion. I first present primary source material from Rosenzweig’s magnum opus, the *Star of Redemption*, where he employs the term “blood” and discusses the notion of Jews as a “Blutgemeinschaft.” I zero in here on the way blood functions in connection with Rosenzweig’s notion of the “miracle,” both in the Christian tradition and as a critique of the Idealist construction of the State and the epistemology of its violent imposition of law. We will pair Simon with a normative political theory of Judaism offered by Daniel Boyarin constructed through the allegorical prism of Rosen-

zweig's *Blutgemeinschaft*. Boyarin conceives of the *Blutgemeinschaft* in conjunction with his philosophy of Talmudic “*Judaïté*” or “*Yiddishkeit*,” rendering the blood community into a participatory notion of Jewish peoplehood constructed at the nexus of consanguinity and performative speech acts. This will set the stage for the discussion of Simon and Novak’s interpretive moves regarding Rosenzweig’s notions of blood and the Jewish *Blutgemeinschaft*, focusing on how they understand the connection between the literary dimensions of Rosenzweig’s “*Rabbinic*” philosophical theology, and the contemporary relevance of his political critique.”

2. Introductory Excursus: A Brief Introduction to Franz Rosenzweig’s Intellectual Biography

In such a brief exploration and contemporary contextualization of how one dimension of Rosenzweig’s thought has been adumbrated, it is impossible to provide a thick overview of Rosenzweig’s philosophy and intellectual biography.¹² Yet some introductory marks are essential, particularly when it comes to speaking about Rosenzweig’s relationship with both the rhetoric of “blood” and the relative Rabbinic character of his thought as presented in the *Star of Redemption*.¹³

One can argue Rosenzweig’s impetus in writing the *Star* was to prove the inherently violent nature of the idealist and absolutist conception of history and State advocated by Hegel.¹⁴ Hegel’s intellectual project, according to Rosenzweig, consistently strived for the coalescence of “*Denken und Sein*” through the politics of a robust state apparatus and warfare. Hegel’s State maintains its “ephemeral stability” by attempting to produce its own husk and content of truth through the behavioral reification of abstract thought. It achieves corporeality through the “authentic” violence it inflicts and inscribes on the human body, producing an image that coerces human worship of its totalizing power (Moses 2014, p. 260; also see Santner 2011). Only with violence can the state perpetually manifest itself as substantive and seemingly meta-historical in the realm of lived experience and endless historical repetition. In this vain, he posits Hegelian political thought as a secularized version of a totalizing Christianity, which

“at the expense of God’s transcendence...turns a people’s image of itself into an idol. When a people begins to worship itself, it cannot but worship what it takes to be the embodiment of the external form of itself: The State.” Batnitzky (2005, p. 165)

All interpreters of Rosenzweig would agree that he demands “thinking” consist of an essentially continuous representational endeavor charged with the subsequent production of its own aesthetic language. It is a language capable of provoking a certain type of engagement with not only an individual, but also a communal audience. This audience, however, must also be linguistically (and in turn, epistemologically) attuned to that source which provides it with a transcendent ethical imperative. Representation can undoubtedly provide philosophical-theological teachings, so long as it does not submit to the immortalizing of such *Lehre*.

The “*Sprachlichkeit*”, or linguistic nature, of Judaism and Christianity feature prominently in Rosenzweig’s oeuvre. Though raised in a secular German-Jewish household, the university setting initially drove Rosenzweig into the embrace of Christianity. He maintained an intense friendship with Eugen-Rosenstock Hussey, a secular Jew who had converted to Christianity and eventually rose to become one of the more prominent liberal historians of law in the early 20th Century. Their discussions helped Rosenzweig break away from the unchallenging philosophical and intellectual relativism that he claimed plagued the university environment at the time. Instead, he began to attach significance to the revelatory event as an impetus for philosophical and theological reflection, regardless of commitment towards a specific religious or philosophical tradition.

Indeed, Rosenzweig was on the path to convert to Christianity and assume an academic position. Yet the day before he was to convert, Rosenzweig attended a Yom Kippur service at a small Berlin synagogue (he wanted to convert to Christianity “as a Jew”) and was transfixed by the occasion, so much so that he broke off his scheduled conversion. The ceremony, while clearly monumental for Rosenzweig, did not in any way confirm Judaism as an absolute truth above all other faiths [Pollock \(2019\)](#). It did, however, lead him to the unavoidable realization that he was a Jew, a member of a certain *Blutgemeinschaft*, or “blood community.”

The contemporary interpreters of Rosenzweig we will examine, from the ethical monotheists to the legal covenantalists, will concur that Rosenzweig’s fundamentally revelation-based understanding of living in the world as a Jew orients his subsequent intellectual output. It convinced him of the necessity to consider Judaism as intertwined with a tenuous, yet ultimately redemptive, relationship with Christendom. Rosenzweig conceived of the *Star of Redemption* during the long breaks between the fighting, ceaselessly reflecting upon that transformational encounter on Yom Kippur and its relationship to the unprecedented violence of that war.

The divide in contemporary Rosenzweig interpretation we will examine in this article is ultimately torn between two vectors: the individualist elements emphasizing the linguistic-aesthetic encounter with “Others” (with “blood” as one such allegorical symbol embedded within a broader work of linguistically formed “Art”) and the forms of ethical autonomy this engenders in a world of difference rooted in the monotheist religions’ varying interpretation of Revelation’s command. The “Rabbinic” nature of the Blood community functions here as an aesthetically guiding performative script which both harkens back to Scripture and the Rabbinic Oral Law while also supplementing it via dialogic ethical encounter. In the words of Aaron Hughes, such an encounter between “The Rabbinic” and Rosenzweig will “allow present thinkers to anticipate” the Rabbis, thereby empowering Rosenzweig and his interpreters to “not lose sight of the mediated nature of past and future through the present” [Hughes \(2010, p. 53\)](#). Indeed, this reflects Rosenzweig’s notion about the very “*Zeitlichkeit*” of Jewish community, in which the present is neither fixed nor embedded in a teleology of progress. Such an orientation opens the space for continual theopolitical critique by autonomous individuals regardless of their Judaism or Christianity, a critique which anchors any universalist notion of Ethical Monotheism.

On the other hand, we will elucidate the claims of the legal covenantalists such as David Novak who emphasize Rosenzweig’s imperative of forming thick notions of Jewish community bound by the commanding imperative of Rabbinic Torah law. Blood functions here as a symbol for the bonds between individuals embedded within a community produced by Rabbinic interpretation of revealed scripture followed by legal implementation. Only through the Rabbinic *Blutgemeinschaft* can contemporary Jews in the Anglo-American context legitimately, authentically, and bindingly enter a social contract under the banner of State. In this scenario, the Jewish philosopher is also engaged in an exercise of “intelligibility,” albeit with the goal of making the terms of “covenant” and “contract” legible to all communities involved in the consecratory yet continual (re)production of both the community and “The State.”

3. Blood and the Blood Community in the Text of the *Star of Redemption*: Blood as Aesthetically Real Antidote to the State of War

“All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are liquidated theological concepts not only because of their historical development, but also because of their systematic fluidity, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts.” [Anidjar \(2025\)](#)

Mentions of Blood first emerge in the *Star* in the context of a discussion regarding the history of Christianity and Enlightenment. Students of Carl Schmitt would readily recognize Rosenzweig's insertion of blood at the nexus between miracle and martyrdom as lying at the core of any political theology. Rosenzweig writes that "by spilling their blood, {martyrs} demonstrate the solidness of their faith in the credibility of those who transmitted the miracle to them." In this fashion, an oath to God made at the original moment of a miraculous Revelation is transmitted and proved anew to a subsequent generation through a new act of witness [Rosenzweig \(2005, p. 107\)](#).

For Rosenzweig, it must be emphasized the miracle does not contain inherent or subsuming philosophical or sociological import. That is, the miracle in and of itself does not sustain the World with an assumed facticity of frequent occurrence in every historical epoch. The impact of a miracle, however, lies within certain potentialities understood a posteriori from the human dialogic hermeneutic and representational interpretation of these events. For even though the miraculous act of creation by God is embedded in a history that must exist as purely past, communal language allows for those events to properly orient the present to its messianic potential. As part of his polemic against Enlightenment thought, Rosenzweig claims that the miracle has become obsolete following the Enlightenment due to the fact that it "depressed miracle to the level of magic, conjurational if not cosmic: it appeared to be no more than a successful deception...it had turned miracle into something hedonish" (*ibid.*, p. 109). The historical claim of a miracle's occurrence is not, however, the flippant storybook recounting of a contrived magic trick. It is, rather, a historical event granted facticity by the very fact that the miracle is inherently predicted, witnessed, and remembered; that it

"is substantially a sign...that the individual miracle could hardly strike one as a miracle. It attracts attention by virtue of its predictedness, not of its unusualness. The latter is not its nucleus but only its "make up," though as such often necessary for its effectiveness. The miracle is that man succeeds at lifting the veil that hangs over the future. not that he suspends pre-destination. Miracle and prophecy belong together." (*ibid.*, p. 95)

A miracle is thus a forceful past event that can teach us conceptually about the necessity to peer into the future. It compels communities to view history as a form of prophecy capable of orienting the present into the future. A miracle's lesson does not simply teach us about tragic events that are doomed to repeat themselves in the future if not remembered properly. The prophecy gained by understanding a miracle's historicity lies, rather, in its capability to allow the miracle to attack the present effulgently through the sacred space provided by language, itself generated through aesthetic engagement with the created world. Indeed, a miracle ultimately becomes capable of orienting community around a certain aesthetic image consecrated in blood. The miracle of Revelation lies precisely in its anticipation by the created subject following creation as well as the historical image it creates for a future community.

Indeed, "blood" next reappears in a discussion on the relationship between Idealist Philosophy and its concept of Art in a subsequent section of Book 2. Rosenzweig claims that for Idealism it is Art, and Art alone, which can nourish the a priori nature of concepts within the broader philosophic schematic. Blood reflects a facticity which can allow for a form of witness powerful enough to penetrate the "shadow" of Idealism's ideational abstractions from and obfuscations of concrete life. Rosenzweig writes that

"for Idealism, art was the visible Real; in it the shadows from the realm of Ideals can drink in life at the edge of their subterranean world; remembering their own long life since swallowed up from the time where the blood of reality circulated in them, these shadows

thus assured themselves of a supplement of life...a reality begotten of the mind yet natural, in order to retrieve its good conscience." (ibid., p. 158)

Blood in this context once again assumes the role of protecting the capacity of humans to both bear witness to reality and engage in acts of interpretation. This process contemporaneously binds the present with both a mythic past and a redemptory future. Thus, the blood of Art both holds the Idealist system together while nonetheless pointing beyond it towards redemptive obsolescence as a "visible phenomenon of the Absolute" (ibid., p. 159). For it is Art which binds together Rosenzweig's primordial elements of God-Man-World set forth following Creation and witnessed by both Christians and Jews. Here one must distinguish this notion of the "Absolute" from Rosenzweig's primarily ontological critique of the notion of "The All." For the miracle witnessed across generations through the shedding of blood consists of an epistemological reference point. It is capable of in many ways coercively orienting temporality across generations.¹⁵

In many ways, this lays the basis for the political critique introduced in Part 3 of the Star. Here Rosenzweig discusses the ways in which the State (itself a product of Hegelian Idealism) and its capacity to inflict violence allows for the legitimacy of State law to transcend generations. The State defined here in a national sense as being aesthetically bound by the artistic image of blood, flesh, and territory.

Rosenzweig writes here that

"Coercion provides life with legal redress against law. By being coercive itself, the state remains hard on the heels of life. The point of all coercion is to institute new law. It is not the denial of law as one might think under the spell of cataclysmic behavior; on the contrary, it lays the basis for law. But a paradox lurks in the idea of a new law. Law is essentially old law. In the coercive act, the law constantly becomes new law. And the state is thus equally both lawful and coercive, refuge of the old law and the source of the new...At every moment the state is forcibly deciding the contradiction between conservation and renovation, between old law and new. It thus constantly resolves the contradiction, while the course of the people's life only delays the solution through the onward flow of time. The State attacks the problem, indeed the State is itself nothing but the constant resolution of this contradiction." Rosenzweig (2005, p. 333)

In this context divinity is incapable of issuing a binding ethical command rooted in the blood affirming Oath following Revelation and subsequent miracles. Therefore alternative structures must be created to prevent time from appearing as an endless flow leading towards perpetual sameness in the State which emerges from Idealist philosophy. Something else must function to orient communities and maintain order by acting as a transcendent sovereign. Such an entity or image must be capable of creating "new law" through the violent insertion of its commanding and coercive decision on the flow of life. Thereby community is sustained through the perpetuation of "old law", while successfully "denying time" by virtue of its self-propagated image as disentangled from the flow of time. It must be able to impose certain divisions within the human perception of time that allow for the perpetual renewal of national bonds and the seeming distinctness of individual eras within this endless flow of the same.

For Rosenzweig, it is the modern State that assumes this role in the era of nationalism and modernity with its invention of mythic violence. This constitutes an aesthetic force capable of both creating a certain commandment of law while simultaneously supplying its content. A State that justifies its right to sovereignty in the sheer force of its self-created law. Through this process, history can be ordered into seemingly distinct entities, and time can re-generate itself in an orderly progression of the same without individuals becoming keen to such sameness. The State transforms the divine violence of history's representa-

tional command (the witness of the martyr's spilled blood) into an aesthetized blood-based mythic violence conjoined to law. In denying the past's role as purely past, the State robs man of the ethically charged potential of an individual or a *nomos'* singular "aus sich heraustreten," a process which allows itself to be transformed by the encounter with Others. Instead, the Nation-State forces the individual's retreat onto a deanimated, violated, self; a self that lacks the revelatory and hermeneutic impulse towards communal bonds. It batters the redemptive possibility of life that such a community encodes and offers.

Indeed, Rosenzweig's *Star*, in its resuscitation of Judaism and Christianity as complementary *nomoi* in the present, offers a solution to the political theology proposed by Carl Schmitt and his notion of the *State of Exception* De Wilde (2006, pp. 188–200). Rosenzweig agrees with Schmitt that the Nation State's sovereignty maintains itself by translating certain theological concepts into a seemingly secular language, thereby assuming a mythic power to establish a specific ordering of time. The sovereign is that entity or person that can decide when the Nation-State and its Law demand reconstitution and renewal, with the criterion of renewability and transmission acting as the basis of the community's very linguistic sociability and function. It does so by situating itself both outside the community of law and within it, much like the function of miracle. Indeed, the modern State's act of judgment together with the theological miracle function as necessary and transformational acts of a power which insert themselves into temporality. Thus, the State may appear to possess a mythic quality capable of posing as transcendent eternity. The State of Exception designates the power of a sovereign within law to dialectically intervene into the temporal legal sphere. It thereby transforms the aesthetic groundwork of the State's linguistic discourse with its citizens, hence preserving its operation and continuity. Schmitt writes that

*"The exception is that which cannot be subsumed; it defies general codification, but it simultaneously reveals a judicial formal element: the decision in absolute purity. The exception appears in its absolute form when it is a question of creating a situation in which judicial norms can be valid... There is no rule that is applicable to chaos. Order must be established for judicial order to make sense. A regular situation must be created, and the sovereign is he who definitely decides whether this situation is affective."*¹⁶

For Rosenzweig, such an ordering of time around a humanly created sovereign demands a negation of human singularity. It does so because of its inherent appropriation of the category of death and the oath of collective allegiance emerging from the martyr's spilled blood, "as the state demands precisely that the death of individuals be meaningful" Batnitzky (2005, p. 166). In the context of Christianity and Judaism, death allows language to function with an aesthetic aura. It connects independent theological events with the present as purely past entities relevant to singular individuals engaged in meta-ethical deliberation. Instead, violent death is used by the State to produce and perpetually reproduce the aesthetic image of its claim to legitimately wield a sovereign imperative over the flow of everyday life through its legal command. Such an imperative attempts to maintain and possibly change the ordering of time in the present.

Yet this total insertion of eternity's supposed image into temporality can only result in even more violent reaction. For the passage of time incessantly demands human action to bridge ruptures within the political identity of the State, thereby redeeming it. When the eternally transcendent is affixing a finite meaning to language, redemption must become a necessarily attainable goal from within temporality. Language's lack cannot (dys)function as a problematic process ensconced in vicissitude and uncertain of eventual resolution, or the arrival of a miracle harkening back to Revelation. Aura must be restored as fully imminent and mimic the imperative of truth in the present because the potentiality and the possibility of language's redemption are depleted of their ability to orient the present

through the spatial imperative provided by linguistic lack. In this situation, the Other can no longer remain Other because its reminder of the lack within language becomes utterly unbearable instead of necessarily uncomfortable and potentially redemptive. Indeed, hatred and violence aimed at the elimination of the Other become the only method to preserve the self while reacting to the image of the State's sovereignty. This constitutes a vain aesthetic mandating the completeness of aura in the present at the expense of miracle's ethically violent commanding imperative. Rosenzweig describes war as the moment where State sovereignty fully obliterates the integrity of the historic event as well as the redemptive power latent within the dialectically temporal and transcendent Christian martyrial aesthetic described at the beginning of our discussion. Almost mockingly, he describes war as

“that condition in which the vanity of temporal things {Dinge} and temporal goods—which tends at other times to be merely fully and permanently infused into temporality as it is with the State, arresting a aesthetic aura onto the State and a pious phrase—takes on a serious significance, and it is accordingly the moment in which the ideality of the particular attains its right and becomes actuality. The higher significance of war is that, through its agency (as I have put it on another occasion), the “ethical health of the nations is preserved in their indifference towards the permanence of finite determinacies, just as the movement of the winds preserves the sea from that stagnation which a last calm would produce—a stagnation which a lasting, not to say, perpetual peace would produce among the nations.”...Since sacrifice for the individuality of the state is a substantial relation of everyone and therefore a universal duty, it itself becomes, as one aspect of the ideality (as distinct from the reality) of particular subsistence (Bestehen), at the same time a particular relation with an estate of its own—the estate of valour—attached to it.”

[Rosenzweig \(2005, p. 331\)](#)

This passage underscores Rosenzweig's fear of bringing the sovereign and the realization of redemption fully into the inherent distinctiveness of temporality's aesthetic creations, as Schmitt attempts to do. The “finite” quality of a particular aesthetic in such a constellation risks obliteration in favor of a valorization that compels deleterious violent actions. For Rosenzweig such idolatrous “valorization” of a political aesthetic, an aesthetic continually made sacred within temporality, risks shunning the impulse latent within dialogic language that commands ethical behavior. Dialogic language allows the category of existence to “reveal itself precisely in multiplicity and dispersion” [Moses \(2006\)](#).

Schmitt's insertion of a mythic sense of eternity onto an image produced in the temporal realm requires perpetual communal action that will allow it to remain both as a substantiating element of the communal present as well as a force capable of spontaneous insertion into temporality at a moment of danger. It must stabilize law within the present while also maintaining the capability to execute and embody a pure, transformational decision when the stable continuity of its self-fashioned temporality is at stake.

Then it may be able to possess full aesthetic aura, whose most appropriate definition for both Rosenzweig and Schmitt is, in the immortal words of Walter Benjamin, “the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experience” [Benjamin \(2019\)](#). Transmissibility indicates precisely that quality which allows the transcendent sovereign to fluidly fluctuate between stabilization and intervention, thereby ensuring the continuity of community within a certain ordering of historical time. The intervention into experience as manifested through state violence, however, renders the individual response to experience within history lifeless.

Thus we can turn to a core passage in Part 3 of the *Star* where Rosenzweig describes the Jewish Blood community's joint relationship with Christianity in securing redemption for all mankind:

"Christianity must proselytize. This is just as essential to it as self-preservation through shutting the pure spring of blood [des reinen Quells des Bluts] off from foreign admixture is to the eternal people. Indeed proselytizing is the veritable form of its self-preservation for Christianity... In the eternal people, procreation bears witness to eternity... In place of the corporeal flow of the one blood [fleischlichen Fortströmens des einen Bluts] that bears witness to the ancestor in the engendered grandson [in Judaism], here [in Christianity] the outpouring of the spirit must establish the communion of testimony in the uninterrupted stream of baptismal water." Rosenzweig (2005, p. 341)

Rosenzweig is here at his most "particular" in his description of the "Jewish Blood Community." David Biale correctly cautions us not to overlook the chauvinism in this passage, where Rosenzweig "create[s] hierarchies between higher and lower races," where it is "Jews alone who preserve the purity of their blood, while the nations of the world promiscuously change their ethnic identities as their religion proselytizes" Biale (2007, p. 204). Yet in the grand schematic of Rosenzweig's critique of Idealism and the retrieval of Pre-Enlightenment notions of the "miracle", God must somehow dislodge the State after its post-Enlightenment assumption of the role of miraculous law giver. This ensures that the modern State and its coercive power to spill the blood of its citizen martyrs is defanged. An aesthetic encounter of Christianity with the blood of the Jewish community, instead of the union of flesh and blood in the figure of the martyred soldier, is ultimately necessary. The aesthetic encounter preserves the space for a universal critique by both Christian and Jew alike of the State, a State which Rosenzweig certainly believed cannot be abolished before Redemption. We will explore in the coming section how Jules Simon's "Midrashic" Rosenzweig advances such a form universalistic critique.

We must also note that in this entire discussion, Rosenzweig also builds upon yet ultimately departs from Hermann Cohen's Neokantianism (itself also a corrective to Hegelian Idealism). Cohen's philosophical perspective attempted to demonstrate the unity of Jewish ethical monotheism and the morality of the *Rechtstaat*. Here coercion is deployed by a legal order only because it is not advanced enough philosophically Mueller (1994). It is in this sense coercion is exigent without being necessary. When the material vicissitudes of lived social experience and the imbalances of human psychology impede individuals from acting in concordance with philosophic ideals, a legal order deploys coercion as a certain stopgap mechanism. Coercion might be necessary as an immediately corrective act because society is not sufficiently educated philosophically to deal with a legal offense in a non-coercive manner. Philosophic persuasion and the proper understanding of legal concepts, not coercion, should be deployed against legal transgression. Correct understanding of law as emanating from morality and ethics, along with the absence of material suffering, obviate any need for coercion.¹⁷

Yet Claudius Mueller subtly references Rosenzweig's political-theological critique of Cohen's Neokantian model as it relates to Law and the State when he notes that

"Logically, the general conceptual normativity of law, in Cohen's mind, functions similarly to the conception of coercion. Legal normativity is based on a concept, that it itself explicates. The legal concept is comparable to the principle of coercion in that implies both a direction and a reference point. There are sign posts built upon these reference points, and it is thus implied that those that these sign-posts will be uncovered and explored. The logical meaning of the generality of the legal norm appears in real life in the underpinnings of law, that the judge cannot say that law has gaps and that he cannot

find law to match his particular case...This implies that law has a presiding generality."
 Mueller (1994, p. 38, translation is my own)

In this constellation, philosophizing coercion is not only unnecessary because it consists of a corrective social act beneath the dignity of philosophy. It is also necessary because it exists parallel to philosophy as a potentially competitive normative force: "the legal concept is *comparable to coercion* in that it implies both a direction and a reference point." One can observe a certain resonance with how Rosenzweig conceived of both the blood-ensconced miracle and the role of Art in Idealist philosophy, where Art consists of a necessary and blood-based representation of reality capable of imposing its will on the concept-based system.

Indeed, I believe that Rosenzweig helps us arrive at an explanation as to why a philosophic idea of coercion would stand in conflict with a certain ideal of the philosophic endeavor as tradition neutral (thereby leading to the "particularism" of his Jewish and Christian *nomoi*). Philosophically recognizing that legal coercion employed by a State apparatus (or the Divine) must exist beyond a specific exigent act of corrective violence indicates something vital. An epistemological position harkening back to Created reality outside of philosophical or theological thinking is necessary for the survival of thought itself.

Furthermore, if we were to interpret Rosenzweig in light of Mueller's explication of the legal concept's coercive corollary, the direction of coercion pertains to the creation of new law. Simultaneously, the reference point for that act of coercion is a necessarily violent *act* of political that both conserves and renovates the normative order. As it regards the State-based order which has emerged from Idealism, Rosenzweig would accede to Schmitt's anti-Aristotelian analytic of political theology. He would not, however, acquiesce on a normative level. Schmitt is correct in observing that a multiplicity of states each control the production of meaning through acts of violent decision, demanding that citizens martyr themselves and spill blood for the State. This process occurs within the bounds of a fundamentally fractured normative order Pourciau (2005, pp. 1066–109).

Such an order is defined against an "enemy" whose "foreignness is identified...as constituting a radical opposition to and negation of itself," thereby becoming the entity against which war must be waged Lapidot (2024, p. 65). It is precisely against this notion of the Other's negation as grounds for self-definition which the ethical monotheists will address in the coming section,. They provide a "Rabbinic" vision inspired by Rosenzweig that offers a normative solution to the *problematic* painted above.

4. Ethical Monotheism Between Art, the Nation-State, and the Jewish Blutgemeinschaft

Rosenzweig ultimately departs from the Schmittian political theology embedded in the Hegelian image of State by introducing the Jewish *Blutgemeinschaft*, or blood community, into the theopolitical equation. This concept builds upon the cornerstones for Rosenzweig's rhetoric of "blood" introduced in our previous discussion—the nexus between language, art, and the politics of the (temporally translated) revelatory miracle.

To further ground the discussion of the *Blutgemeinschaft* in Part 3 of the *Star*, Rosenzweig introduces the notion of blood as part of a dialogic imperative emerging out of the Biblical text *The Song of Songs*. In this discussion, blood functions aesthetically and visuously as part of the image of loving marital commitment between the Jewish community and the Divine. Then, in part 3 of the *Star*, Rosenzweig proceeds to explicate a vision of the Jewish blood community as existing outside of time and disconnected from territory and soil, "*ausserhalb einer kriegerischen Zeitlichkeit*." Rosenzweig thereby provides a dialogic reference point for Christianity to aesthetically orient its *nomos* to its original oath of Revelation anew in each generation. As we observed in the previous section, it is Rosenzweig's

Jewish *Blutgemeinschaft* which prevents Christianity from succumbing to the allure of the Hegelian State's redemptive aesthetic of violence deployed in the place of a divine miracle.

The contemporary "Ethical Monothesists" we have identified earlier insert their interpretations of Rosenzweig as a "Rabbinic" (or alternatively "Midrashic" or "Talmudic") thinker into these discussions. They thereby point to their own normative visions for contemporary Jewish political thought based on these passages., Rosenzweig hereby grounds a dialogical theopolitics mediated aesthetically into the heart of Jewish communal and intellectual activity. It constitutes a deliberate essentialism on their part in which Jewish "blood" oscillates between the poles of a tangible object, in which blood and Divinity unite., and, the literary device of similes and allegories that overflow any kind of bounded meaning. In this coming section, we will first explicate the "Midrashic" blood of Jules Simon's Rosenzweig, which emerges from the ethical aesthetics of Rosenzweig's own "Midrash" of the *Song of Songs* in which a rhetoric of "blood" once again bubbles to the surface.¹⁸ We will conclude by linking Simon's Midrashic Rosenzweig with Daniel Boyarin's notion of "consanguinity" derived from Rosenzweig's notion of the *Blutgemeinschaft*. Boyarin turns to Rosenzweig to cement his view of a rich communal Jewish ethical monotheism that is not reduced to the modern category of "Religion" redolent with Protestant notions of private belief tied to voluntary association.¹⁹

For Jules Simon the "Midrashic" reflects a timeless imperative of ethical critique that is historically and linguistically embedded. Such critique goes beyond any ontological reification and the discrete bounds of any temporal "Law." Rosenzweig's Midrash, he claims, is "based on a complex analysis of speech thinking refracted through an ethical lens that introduces a radically new way of dealing with texts, the world and other humans" Jules Simon (2020, p. 217). It produces a messianic aura of neighborly love enacted autonomously by a Jewish individual, and the Jewish community in which she is embedded. It is a love based on a commanded linguistic imperative emerging from revelation.

In his article, "Rosenzweig's Midrashic Speech Acts: From Hegel and German Nationalism to a Modern Day Ba'al Tshuva," Simon draws on scholars of Midrash such as Jacob Neusner, Gary Porton and Barry Holt to advance two core principles of what in his mind counts as "Midrashic." The first principle relates to a clear interpretive relationship to the accepted canonical text of Revelation, the scriptural Torah. The second relates need to resolve crisis and reaffirm continuity with the traditions of the past, thereby instantiating a hermeneutic practice of determining the ways in which scriptural passages could speak to the issues of the day. The two elements are linked through Rosenzweig's understanding of language and interpretation, his own "Midrash," which consecrates just such a bridge (ibid., pp. 219–20).

Indeed, to begin his discussion of the *Song of Songs*, Rosenzweig himself meditates on the literary devices behind his hermeneutics of that Biblical book. His goal here is to push back against what he perceives to be the legacy of Spinozist bible interpretation, responsible, in his mind, for removing the Divine from the biblical narrative and instead rendering it into a mere romantic tale between a man and a woman. German Spinozists, in his mind, welcomed "the negation of God's love for the individual soul" Rosenzweig (2005, p. 214). The ultimate consequence of just such a removal is to negate the capacity of the Divine to penetrate temporality through a miraculous, amorous, and discursive relationship with mankind. For "in language the difference between immanence and transcendence is extinguished" (ibid.).

Rosenzweig speaks to his own core hermeneutic principles at the outset of this discussion, which aim to ensconce dialogic language and its interpretation within the husk of Revelation. For both Simon and contemporary normative Jewish thinkers such as Benjamin Sommer, this inserts Rosenzweig's own biblical interpretation into the ranks of "Oral Torah," despite

his paucity of Rabbinic textual knowledge compared to those thinkers otherwise part of the Modern Jewish Philosophy Canon Sommer (2015, pp. 134–35). Rosenzweig speaks about language being “more than simply a comparison, if it is truly simile—and therefore more than simile,” while in the *Song of Songs*, the “allegory of love, as allegory, goes through the whole of Revelation,” and emerges “more than an allegory” Rosenzweig (2005, p. 216). He disrupts any kind of logocentric congruence of the signified with the signifier when he declares that “God’s word must immediately hold the relationship of the lover to the beloved” (ibid.).

Yet at the close of this discussion, Rosenzweig insists on going beyond the notion of a singular love with the Divine, or the love between an I and a You. Per his own hermeneutics, he must move beyond the allegory of individual love of the Divine to the consecration of marriage between the community of Israel and the Divine. In a section titled “The Miracle Made Public” he writes that

“the soul aspires to this realm of brotherliness, beyond the love between I and You, where the dark portents of the impersonal communal life that the natural community of the same blood intimates had been marvelously fulfilled. This realm, the covenant of a supra-national community, felt in a completely personal way and yet fully present in the world, are no longer offered to it through the love of the lover.” (ibid., p. 219)

Yet in this closing discussion of the *Song of Songs*, Rosenzweig intimates that the revelatory overflow imbued by the dialogic encounter between the biblical text and the individual is but one step in the unfolding of revelatory speech. For speech ultimately turns silent in its emergence into the plurality of religious communities and must once again be engaged. This imperative reignites language’s effulgent and miraculous overflow such as to epistemologically orient temporal politics.

Indeed, Simon uses this discussion to make a pivot into political ethics. He posits Rosenzweig’s notion of communal blood as the basis not for consecrating an ontology of chosenness, but rather for political critique. For Simon’s, the Jewish community is grounded by a

“messianic aesthetics referring to the embodied ways in which Rosenzweig’s commitment to the ethical norms inherent in the teachings and life practices of Jewish faith traditions and communities assume their distinctive lived world expressions.” Jules Simon (2020, p. 217)

Such a community is produced in an a-historical fashion which is nonetheless temporal. It consists of individual Jews gathered in learning communities, such as Rosenzweig’s own *Lehrhaus*, from which they emerge into the Christian (or secularized Christian) public sphere. In this space, they perform their timeless ethical duty, reminding Christianity that messianic completion is out of their reach. For Simon, the crucial point here is that the particularistic Jewish *Blutgemeinschaft*, precisely in its relationship with Christianity in the eventual redemption of mankind, is tied epistemologically to a universalist mode of political critique.

Thus for Simon, Jews perform “the Midrashic” via embodied speech acts which continually harken back to “revelation as a privileged linguistic moment.” In this manner, they produce a universalist mode of dialogic aesthetics Greenberg (1996, p. 281). Jews wrestle with questions of ultimate meaning in a manner which dialectically interacts with the metaphysical “truths” of the diasporic sociopolitical contexts in which they find themselves. In this manner, Rosenzweig departs from the logocentric Idealist and Neokantian perception of the capacity of reason perched vis-à-vis the ideal of an utterly transcendent God as an autonomous and eternal source of Jewish thought and action. The embodied Jewish midrashic speech acts are both formed and stand in judgement of the historical

moment in which individual Jews live. A redemptive messianism of love points towards eternal disembodiment as an impossible possibility.

In summary, Rosenzweig establishes the Jewish *Blutgemeinschaft* on a communal level to dislodge the State's capacity to unilaterally "make new law." For Simon, Rosenzweig the Jewish community represents the type of Midrashic "great analogy" (*großen Gleichnis*) that bridges the "sensual/transensual" in the manner of a marriage Jules Simon (2011, p. 136). That marriage is made relevant in "the ineluctability of the social, political, and historical dimensions of life in the structures of his *Star*. In fact, language enlivens the very movements of those structures" (ibid.). For Rosenzweig's ultimate goal, according to Simon, is the rejection of temporal tyranny by all (ibid., p. 146).

It is this imperative of resisting the tyranny of the State as part of a consecrated Jewish "speech act" which motivates Daniel Boyarin to anchor what he views as an anti-statist notion of "the Jews" precisely out of the consanguine notion of Rosenzweig's *Blutgemeinschaft* Boyarin (2021, 2024). Boyarin is concerned with the normative construction of a Jewish ethical monotheism which transcends the realm of depoliticized voluntary private belief and association and instead turns to a repeatedly performed and represented Judaism of ritual praxis and speech acts, which he terms *Judaïté*. Rosenzweig's notion of Jewish existence as essentially procreative and consanguine can be connected to "the performance of being Jewish, because existence within the community produced by its representations is performative" Boyarin (2021, pp. 56–57).

At the center of Boyarin's *Judaïté* is a concept of "Talmud," which grounds and nourishes the Jewish need to "speak, sing, recite, write, narrate... and otherwise represent" (ibid., p. 54). Such a grounding occurs, ala Rosenzweig, within time rather than land and history, with Talmud representing and nourishing the "imbricated and intertwined" nature of Jewish communal existence from which one could not "pull one thread and say this is the "religion" of the Jews without the entire fabric unraveling and disintegrating".²⁰

On the one hand, Boyarin's Talmudic ethical monotheism, like Rosenzweig's, cannot be distilled to a Hegelian sense of spirit or measured against Kantian imperatives. But equally as important, "Talmud" also cannot be reduced to, or instrumentalized as, commanded *halakha* cum law to produce Jewish modalities of political and ethical action. For Boyarin,

"at the very beating heart of such narratives, practices, representations, scripts, doings, all the performances that produce Judaïté and Judaitude, is Torah, primarily but not necessarily or only, the study of the Talmud (with all of its ramifications for forms of Jewish speech and speech practices) and the performance of the Jewish doings whether or not they are conceived of as divine commandments." Boyarin (2024, pp. 89–90)

Indeed, Boyarin advances the claim that it is precisely through an embodied *Blutgemeinschaft* constituted by viscous speech acts which allows for both a non-racist and non-legalist Jewish critique of temporal state sovereignty to take place. Boyarin's named foe in his manifesto is on the nationalist, racist and territorially based sovereignty claimed by the modern nation state, with a particular critique of Israel as a Jewish state. Such a nation state would unite blood and soil through martyrdom, political decisionism, and friend/enemy distinctions within a Hegelian Idealist teleology of Spirit. This is a critique which echoes Rosenzweig's own theopolitical objections to Zionism.²¹

Thus for both Boyarin and Rosenzweig, blood now becomes both an allegory and more than an allegory. The metonym of *Blutgemeinschaft* is rendered into an allegory for the procreative reality of Jewish peoplehood. Yet it also constitutes more than this one allegory because the linguistic regeneration of this community is contingent on its inherently participatory and exposed nature grounded in "Talmud." The *Blutgemeinschaft* is open to both the "naturalization" of the convert, and "the call of other Jews, the living and the

dead” to engage in ethical praxis and speech Boyarin (2021, p. 53). This call, for Boyarin, resists reduction to the “memory of martyrdom,” which we have seen anchors both Christological communal association as well as secularized notions of State sovereignty (ibid., p. 54). In turn, this prevents the reification of a closed biologically based Nation-State unit. Jews may be bound by blood within the husk of eternity, but it does not mean that their constitution as a temporal community is immune from critique by others, or the imperative to engage in critique of both Self and Other.

In the coming section, we will identify a position on Rosenzweig and the “Rabbinic” which goes against the grain of the non-Statist and non-legal ethical monotheism latent in Simon and Boyarin’s notion of the *Blutgemeinschaft*. This line of interpretation seeks to orient Rosenzweig’s thought for the assertion of a thick and legally bound Rabbinic *nomos* which can co-produce the modern State in contract with other religious communities. In turn, the State can ensure the Jewish people the space to legally fulfill the terms of their covenantal relationship with God rooted in *halacha*.

- (1) These thinkers are, amongst other concerns, are occupied by the following core questions, questions whose answers should be rooted in a philosophical theology negotiating divine revelation and *aggadic* theology on the one hand, and halakhic-legal precept, human reason, and ethics on the other (see Novak 2012; Batnitzky 2012; Seeskin 2012).
- (2) How should Jews constitute themselves as a political community committed to both Diaspora and diasporic forms of knowledge, while nonetheless providing intellectually rigorous and historically sensitive ideational value to the existence of the Nation-State?
- (3) How should Jews respond to the contemporary crisis of Enlightenment liberalism in the face of populism, rising antisemitism, assimilationism and anti-Zionism?
- (4) How might the “Rabbinic” shed light on how should Judaism’s non-Jewish “theopolitical neighbors” should view Jewish difference if they wish to resist monopolizing universalist commitments relating to political identity emanating from Christianity or its secularized political theologies?

These thinkers view the Talmudic tradition as a form of “political constitution,” one that describes how Jew’s engage in a covenant with God and an ensuing “social contract” with both themselves and their non-Jewish neighbors. In the United States of America and following the destruction of the Holocaust, Jewish philosophers fluent in the German-Jewish tradition represented by Rosenzweig are confronted with a legal culture that some argue make no absolute claims over conceptions of meaning, and in turn ethics or morality. In German terms, there is an explicit absence of a “*Leitkultur*” that can be derived from Law.

Jewish Philosophers such as David Novak thereby derive covenantal notions of God’s election of Israel as an exclusive membership-based community and “contractual” notions of a Jewish community’s constitution. They link an individual Jew’s apprehension of the Biblical “covenant” (*Brit*) with God and the social contract they make with their host country such as the United States alongside other religious communities in a diasporic era of pluralism. In the case of the United States, it the Jewish community’s acceptance of its Constitution on terms commensurate with the Biblical covenant by God that was made constitutional on a communal level by Rabbis. The Jewish community and the individual Jew’s actively participate in public life and the legal system of the country “as Jews.” Contrary to the ethical monotheists represented by Simon and Boyarin, there can be no concept of individual autonomy from Jewish perspective in this political context unless a Jew rabbinically and legally “knows where-from he comes” (in Novak’s parlance) into the contract with the Constitution.²² He needs to understand why, based on philosophic, theological and legal reasons derived from the Rabbinic tradition which are articulated be-

yond “American values,” he should remain within Constitutional strictures beyond rote adherence to legal statute under the threat of coercion.

Thus, in the *Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People*, Novak wants to pull us away from the soft messianism of ethical liberal love produced by individualistically conceived revelation and towards communal law Novak (1995). He believes Rosenzweig initiates the effort to retrieve the Rabbinic Biblical conceptions of God’s election of Israel from, and in turn for, modernity. He wants to free Jews and Jewish thought from what he terms “the Spinozist inversion” of concepts of the Jewish community’s election, a notion he anchors further into Hermann Cohen’s transcendent idealism. As we observed in our previous discussion of the *Song of Songs*, Rosenzweig himself blamed Spinoza for removing the agency of the Divine to dialogically encounter the present through language.

In Novak’s vision of the “Spinozist inversion,” it is the fashionable metaphysics of a given age which is given the power to influence election of the Divine, rather than Divine election of Israel. Whether such human election is connected to a pantheistically perceived state of nature permeated by the Divine, ala Spinoza, or guided by a timeless human reason producing ethical reasoning and praxis, ala Cohen. These legal theologies have served historically to condition the People of Israel to elect the Divine, instead of the other way around. Thus, the Spinozist inversion has also dictated that the Biblical election of God is to be read in metaphorical terms, a metaphor which ultimately “de-Judaizes” Jews and depletes Divine, Rabbinic and State authority (ibid., pp. 22–49).

For Novak, the “Rabbinic” conception of Israel’s Election and constitution as a community is based in a four part motion. First, God elects the People of Israel, and subsequently the People enter into a covenant with God before their leaders—the Rabbis and the institution of the Nasi or the *Rosh Golah*. The leaders engage in a continual negotiation with the societies in which they live for the establishment of a social contract, a contract that then becomes binding via the “*dina de malchuta dina*” principle (ibid., pp. 1–20).

It must be said Novak does not reject Simon’s approach to Rosenzweig and Jewish community. Indeed, he embraces it. Yet he insists that it must be complimented by an insistence on a legally binding covenant with the Divine under rabbinic authority in order to truly understand either Rosenzweig’s true “Rabbinic” intentions, or alternatively, to unlock the potential for his thought to energize the effort of Jewish philosophic theology under the conditions of Jewish legal contemporality. Novak admits that Rosenzweig does not fully bring us back to what he calls the Rabbinic doctrine, but executes the necessary philosophic U-turn. For Benjamin Sommer, this incompleteness can be correlated with Rosenzweig’s own position towards Halakha, torn as it was between command and uncoerced obedience.²³

For in Novak’s approach to Rosenzweig, “if revelation is to be a Jewish event, then the communal factor of this revelation is essential. Jewish law is covenantal and collectively normative. Although more than law per se, it entails law necessarily” Novak (1995, p. 85). Perhaps predictably, he jumps to Rosenzweig’s notion of the *Blutgemeinschaft* in the sociological Part 3 of the *Star of Redemption* for support on this matter.

“Thus blood kinship (Blutsverwandschaft), brotherhood, nationhood, marriage, in sum all human relationships (Beziehungen) are established in creation... All have their prototypes in the animal kingdom, and through the rebirth of the soul in revelation, all are first animated with a soul (beseelt) in redemption. All are rooted in the community of blood (Blutgemeinschaft) which in turn is the nearest creation (Schöpfungsnachste) among them... man ...knows that he is to love, and to love always the nearest and the neighbor. And as for the world, it grows in itself, apparently according to its own law (eigenem Gesetz)”. (Rosenzweig 2005, pp. 306–7)

For Novak, the Jewish community is more than just a collection of Jews experiencing revelation and redeeming the world through love. They are community with “its own

law” that must temporally go beyond “Revelation” as political actors and become legal subjects of both the Jewish *nomos* and the State in their own right. For Novak the temporal experience of Jewish community as one constituted by Rosenzweig’s notion of the *Blutgemeinschaft* is central, even if ultimately non-redemptive on its own terms. “The ethical imperative is not constitutive of either Jewish community or the state in which Jews participate. It is rather, a hopeful after-effect of communities and individuals accepting and following the law and (re)forming the *nomos* in their respective age. Individuals must be ontologically rooted in the legal commitments towards their respective communities, an ontology of election rooted in divine praxis, in order to begin the kind of philosophic orientation promoted earlier by Simon. Otherwise, “respect for the autonomy of the Jewish tradition” will be lost Novak (2012, p. 99). Indeed, Novak’s perspective here appears to reflect Leora Batnitzky’s “symbolic” understanding of the *Blutgemeinschaft*, in which she indicates that blood is a philosophic construct that is meant to ultimately undermine the priority of philosophic constructs,” where the Jewish people ultimately exist “beyond reason” Batnitzky (2005, pp. 74–76).

Building on Novak’s insights, Leora Batnitzky has argued that American Jewish philosophy can build upon, yet ultimately eclipse the tradition of German-Jewish philosophy embodied by Cohen and Rosenzweig precisely because America allows for Judaism to “be political” just like it (at least in theory) does for all national-religious *nomoi* Batnitzky (2012, p. 16). Indeed, Batnitzky also claims that Rosenzweig’s self-contained Jewish blood community symbolically functions, in Zohar Maor’s formulation, as a “model for all mankind,” hence allowing for a form of legally managed political pluralism of communities Maor (2021, p. 94). As Robert Cover has demonstrated in his landmark article *Nomos and Narrative*, America’s unique constitutional structure allows for the legal recognition of an infinite plurality of unique, meaning-producing communities Cover (1983, pp. 4–68). American Jews do not need to perform intellectual and physical contortions to define themselves their faith solely in terms of private belief and voluntary communal association. In this vain, Jewish philosophy also need not confine itself to the realms of ethics and existentialism. Both Batnitzky and Novak claim that Anglo-American Jewish philosophy should be able to comment on the major political issues of the day, as well as answer the question of “for what reason can or should Jews acquire democratic virtues” Batnitzky (2012, p. 16).

Indeed, unlike the German context, the American legal context is particularly sensitive to the ideas of rhetorically gifted and conceptually systematic Jewish philosophers. In both religious law and secular state law, debates of legal philosophy can have a profound impact not only on the outcome of particular legal cases, but in the creation of political identities within American constitutional culture. That impact can be discernible via a judge’s reasoning in a specific case, or a particular arrangement that is made in evaluating, adjudicating, and prioritizing the claims of various factions, religious or otherwise, in a constitutional debate.

As Novak notes, “all major issues of public policy, for which a Jewish opinion is sought, inevitably wind up in secular court cases—often landmark cases.” Jewish philosophers are uniquely positioned for such cases because “they are experienced in exercising a maximum of reason and a minimum of authority within the Jewish community,” thereby making them “best suited to persuasively bring the ethical riches of the Jewish tradition into public moral discourse in democratic society Novak (2012, p. 103).

Indeed, in the sphere of law, the American-Jewish academic philosopher, along with the religious intellectual is often capable of abstracting his thought from the strata of particular jurisprudential and legal texts and sustaining an argument based on the perceived dictates of reason. This mode of argumentation can be combined with the empirical and theoretical “data” provided by the legal sphere. In this sense, the Jewish philosopher pos-

sesses the unique ability to provide authoritative guidance as both an insider and an outsider when it comes to legal issues. She thereby assumes an aura of impartiality, a metaphysical judge if you will, capable of mediating between the hermeneutically generative exigencies of lived political/legal experience and a certain sense of metaphysical objectivity reliant on philosophic Truth emanating from human reason or divine will. In this constellation, it may be said that the philosopher is potentially capable of wielding some degree of influence that both limits and enhances the political realm.

One might imagine Boyarin's objections to this legalistic interpretation of Rosenzweig. Novak's Rosenzweig exhibits a certain comfort with the institution of State and a halachically shaped Jewish *nomos* guided by Rabbis, adhered to by Jews, and represented by philosophers. Boyarin is cognizant that we live in an age where meaning creation within the State (and one could argue the Jewish Nation) oscillates between the poles of pluralistic debate on the one hand, and a fight to coercively impose the meaning of meaning on the Other (Kauffmann (2000)). Boyrain's Roseznweig would claim the State is far too vulnerable to regime capture to be trusted with a contractual relationship with such a covenantally conceived *Blutgemeinschaft*. The bare life of Talmudic practice and political critique would need to suffice to preserve both the nation and the ethical health of a State conceived in explicitly non-nationalistic terms.

5. Conclusions

Against the grain of the analyses put forth in our discussion, Zachary Braiterman has explicitly claimed that we should not view Rosenzweig's thought in "Talmudic" or "Rabbinic" terms. He views Rosenzweig's elevation of Biblical Revelation and its effulgent, cacophonous, and linguistic power as representing the defining elements of a German-Jewish philosophic universe. Referencing Robert Gibbs' work on Rosenzweig and Levinas, this is a universe concerned with, to a greater or lesser extent, "a nonexclusive, undogmatic universalism; the primacy of ethics; cooperative community; prophecy and messianic politics; material existence and the body; devotion to Jewish law; and a critique of the state."²⁴ He sees "Talmud" as largely unengaged with these topics, with the Rabbis concerned with putting distance between themselves and any robust divine voice of Biblical Revelation claiming sovereign theocratic rule and thereby removing the legitimation of violence from both divine and human hands. Instead of prioritizing forms of speech, textuality, and practice orienting themselves to the potential of experiencing the fulness of creation, revelation, and redemption in the "Jetztzeit," Braiterman identifies the Talmudic with other elements: The desacralization of everyday religion, the evaporation of metaphysical thinking, resistance to the idolatry of divine sovereignty, and the movement from text and speech to the imperfect mediation of individuals, communities, and politics through images redolent with deficiency and gesture. According to Braiterman,

"Our own visual culture calls attention to the following: religion is indeed steeped in figures; revelation is appearance and the semblance of appearance; end-time pathos has burnt itself out; the closed quarter of community opens out into larger circuits, human creation is polymorphous and perverse. If something continues to happen in contemporary culture that looks and sounds like revelation, it does so as an image-mediated form, not as a voice, but as the daughter of a voice (bat kol). In distinct contrast to Buber and Rosenzweig's heavy reliance on Scripture, contemporary religious thought that builds off their efforts will come to resemble Talmud". (ibid., p. 261)

For Braiterman, Rosenzweig put too much trust in the theological-political system of his imagination, believing all speech and praxis mediated by its fixtures to encompass the full potential of Biblical Revelation if not its redemptive realization. Talmud, instead, represents the instruction to remain informed to "the self-critical ironies that absence can

bring to religion,” which only then can generate the image universes capable of engendering politically liberal forms of critique (ibid., p. 257). “Instead of prophetic religion and the absolute,” Braiterman wishes to set up

“rabbinic parsing” as a formal prototype for a type of transcendental gesture essential to liberal politics and religion. The rabbis avoid the traps set by competing images of absolute power, divine or human, insofar as they understand the hedging of sovereign power, both human and divine.”²⁵

Yet can political critique practiced by “rabbinic parsing” now confront what many scholars of religion have identified as the inexorable “reenchantment” or “de-disenchantment” of the public sphere, a process “sovereign Jews” are helping drive? In such a context, should biblically resonant notions of creation, revelation, and messianic redemption, concepts which Rosenzweig consciously shaped to defy idolatrous deification into merely allegorical images, be stripped of their power to intervene through speech and praxis into the metaphysical “midrashim” that communities, Jewish or otherwise, narrate about themselves? For such Midrashim mediate between the allegory of a blood community’s eternal existence and the need to exist as “more than mere allegory,” which is achieved via speech. To paraphrase Boyarin, only through metaphysically replete speech can we answer the question “What is the Jews?,” and thereby render the *Blutgemeinschaft*, and the empowered individual Jewish “agents” who comprise it, into both an object and agent of critique.

Indeed, both ethical monotheists and legal covenantalists we have analyzed in this text would agree that Rosenzweig had a “Rabbinic” notion of the interaction between a Jewish *nomos* conceived as eternal that must be pulled towards history and the temporal by its Christian other. Rosenzweig’s image of Christianity remains tethered to a permanently unredeemed temporality rooted in the coterminous yet non-symbiotic relationship between “Church and State.” He roots his own political critique of current events from that vantage point.

Yet the performance of a Law rooted in the commandment of Revelation was not, in Rosenzweig’s schematic, to be rooted in the otherwise robust ontology of his existence-based systematic thinking, or a Jewish community interfacing with, and modulated by, the State. Instead, revelation was to be conceived as rooted in an individual miraculous encounter, and subsequently communicated dialogically with a fellow Jew, both in concrete time and across history. This schematic, however, was dependent on the Jewish communal *nomos* existing on a plane moving away from historical time, ceding a part of “the saeculum” to both the Church and the State. “The Christian operates alongside and in dialogue with this timelessly “eternal” yet ultimately temporally incomplete Jewish *nomos* to prevent a messianic synthesis emerging from the Christian universalist aspiration to eternal transcendence. In this vain, Rosenzweig, rejected the secular and Religious Zionist notions that modernity offers an entry into history on Jewish terms through the totalizing synthesis offered by the State. Yet at the same time, the Jewish community produces a *nomos* that epistemically orients temporality, and in turn is itself epistemically oriented by such temporality. It seeks to escape time by returning to creation via revelation, but is turned back towards revelation and history by the need to exist on the temporal plane of a land consisting of two rivers, one of blood, and another of water and soil—a *Zweistromland* of Christianity and Judaism.

Ultimately, Rosenzweig’s position of critique is not rooted in the legal constitution of community in covenantal and contractual bonds, but a legal constitution that is rooted in the Rabbinic polemic and discursive practices of “Midrash” adumbrated by Simon. The literary hermeneutics of a perfected scripture are studied coterminously in Rosenzweig’s Lehrhaus with the metaphysical truths advanced by German idealism, and in turn a dialectic process ensues in which both stand in judgement of one-another for the sake of

each-other. This process rejects idolatrous philosophic, theological, and political reifications of sanguinity into zoological conceptions of particular races and the demand that the individual shed blood for the state to enact its sovereignty. Judaism and Christianity are thus rendered “Rabbinically” into humanly embodied texts enlivened interpretively by the image and textualization (*Verschriftlichung*) of blood. A Jewish community defined by particularist “blood-based” membership stands both before Sinai and the ethical demands of citizenship. The traveling homeland both timeless and historical is juxtaposed against the German Reich *cum*. The American Republic, *cum* the Jewish Community in Israel-Palestine, each dialectically modulating the sovereign contours of one-another for the sake of one another.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ This trend can be seen beyond our current example of Franz Rosenzweig. It extends to such thinkers as Hermann Cohen, Walter Benjamin, and Emmanuel Levinas (especially poignant because of Levinas’ own philosophic “Talmudic” readings. See *Emmanuel Levinas’s Talmudic Turn: Philosophy and Jewish Thought* by Ethan Kleinberg (2021, Stanford University Press). For a capstone work reflecting this turn in Modern Jewish Thought see Weiss (2023). This is a turn in Modern Jewish Philosophy redolent of the turn to Rabbinic literature in literary theory inaugurated by theorists trying to understand the consequences Derridean post-modern, post secular deconstruction. See Susan Handelman (1982). *The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*. (Albany: SUNY Press). For a historical contextualization of this process in literary studies see Catlin (2022).
- ² For a nuanced and conceptually synthetic overview of the contested status of commanded halakha as “law” in Modern Jewish Thought, see Yonatan Y. Brafman (2017), “New Developments in Modern Jewish Thought: From Theology to Law and Back Again,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Judaism and Law*, ed. Christine Hayes (New York: Cambridge University Press), pp. 287–314.
- ³ See Batnitzky (2009, pp. 7–44). For a resolutely anti-statist reading of the Kahal’s relevance to Modern Jewish Political Thought in both Israel and the Diaspora, see Jones (2023).
- ⁴ We will go into more depth on philosophical approaches to these socio-legal developments later in this essay by referencing the thought of David Novak and Leora Bantnitzky.
- ⁵ Santiago Slabosky, a contemporary philosopher at the vanguard of efforts to decolonize Jewish thought, has reflected on his own impulse to posit Talmudic Aramaic as the language most “authentically Jewish” when pressed. See the introduction to Slabodsky (2005).
- ⁶ For the most significant and systematic effort to harness the Rabbinic corpus for the discipline of Political Science, see Walzer et al. (2006, 2008, 2018).
- ⁷ Rabbinicists such as Christine Hayes, Sergey Dolgopolski, and Daniel Boyarin have been at the forefront of these efforts, albeit with differing polemic and methodological hues. For an approach contrasting Biblical, Ancient Greek and Rabbinic law made legible through the categories of comparative legal theory see Hayes (2017). Much more rooted in philosophic rhetoric and concepts, though nevertheless articulating a Rabbinic alterity to Philosophy, see Dolgopolski (2009). For Dolgopolski, Talmud “must be mapped as a scholarly art vis-à-vis the major intellectual projects and traditions of The West-philosophy, rhetoric, sophistry, and most specifically, the philosophic arts of logic, grammar and rhetoric.” See p. 1. Finally, Daniel Boyarin explicitly melds expertise in Rabbinics, contemporary Critical Theory (which had long featured in his Rabbinic analysis), and normatively inclined Modern Jewish Thought in Boyarin (2016). We will return later to Boyarin’s “Rabbinic” treatment of Rosenzweig’s Blood Community later in this essay.
- ⁸ With Gershom Scholem’s oeuvre spanning academic and normative reflections on the Kabbalistic tradition and Jewish modernity, the study of kabbalah could also bridge its sophisticated majesty with the modern age outside of both Hassidic provincialism and halakhic legalism. Indeed, the Rabbis of the Talmud and their Halakhic *Weltanschauung* were also to be left behind in service of Scholem’s metanomian approach to Jewish law even though nearly all the masters of the kabbalistic canon were also

rigorous halakhic thinkers. For an excellent conceptually synthetic approach to Scholem and the topic of law, see Vatter (2021, pp. 133–90).

- 9 For the definitive study on the relationship of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement with Protestant theology, see Wiese (2005).
- 10 See Lapidot (2020). In this manner, Lapidot echoes and “geopolitically” builds upon Sergey Dolgopolski’s notion of Talmudic forms of dialogic speech as intrinsically precluding both a priori or teleological notions of pre-existing or eventual “agreement.” Indeed, Dolgopolski insists that no utterance exits the mouth of a sage in the Talmud if not to sharpen and clarify the conceptual contours of a “disagreement,” a performance of rhetoric which serves to unite the classical elements of rhetorical training (delivery, invention, memory, refutation, and example). See the introduction to Dolgopolski and Redfield’s (2024) *Talmud and Philosophy: Conjunctions, Disjunctions, and Continuities*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), pp. 4–5.
- 11 Through Herskowitz’s recent exhaustive work of intellectual history on the embeddedness of Protestant theology within the veins of the *Star*, our interpretive focus on the “Rabbinic” nature of Rosenzweig’s work might seem like an act of anachronistic folly. We would instead contend that our focus on the contemporary reception of Rosenzweig as “Rabbinic,” and analysis of Rosenzweig’s own claims within the *Star* regarding its practice of *midrash*, does more than illuminate our own theopolitical moment and the perhaps overly particularistic inclinations of Modern Jewish Philosophy today. Reading this paper in the shadow of Herskowitz’s work illuminates the “Judeo-Christian” legacy within which notions of authentic “Rabbinicness” are now articulated, a simultaneous blurring and distinction of the two “religions” that would have likely made Rosenzweig himself quite proud. See Herskowitz (2025).
- 12 For a seminal intellectual biography of Franz Rosenzweig, see Mendes Flohr (2008).
- 13 For an excellent historical mapping of Rosenzweig’s employment of blood in his discussions of Jewish peoplehood across his oeuvre, see Dagan’s (2002, 2009). Dagan traces Rosenzweig’s preoccupation with blood from within a variety of different epistolary genres, highlighting its origins in the “ethnicization or biologization” of Jewish peoplehood in his early thinking. Yet as Rosenzweig’s thought matures, Dagan observes “terms like ‘blood’ and ‘procreation’ {to be} part of a picturesque image, an image of self-enfolded, a religious, enthusiastic existence” that connects the “corporeal” with the “cognitive...through the experience of sacred time.” (“Jewish Blood,” pp. 153–54). In turn, he ties blood to Rosenzweig’s mythic rendering of Judaism into a religion of self-sufficient isolation, its “blood bondage” in active juxtaposition with Christian temporality, and the Jewish individual as a happily lonely man of faith. In fact, Dagan pushes back against the *Blutgemeinschaft* as representing a “Rabbinic” element because Rosenzweig’s notion of eternal diasporic exile did not entail any kind of deficient lacking in need of messianic or alternative forms of repair.
- 14 Rosenzweig’s *Hegel and the State* has finally received a masterful translation in Rosenzweig (2024). For the only English language manuscript length study of *Hegel and the State*, see Josiah Simon (2014).
- 15 For the authoritative study on Rosenzweig’s notion of the “All,” one which argues for a greater confluence of his thought with Cohen and Neokantianism than is generally assumed, see Pollock (2009).
- 16 Carl Schmitt as quoted in Santer’s *On Creaturely Life*, p. 16
- 17 For a masterful study on the linkages between Cohen’s legal thinking and his Jewish philosophy, see Hollander (2021).
- 18 We will be primarily analyzing Jules Simon (2011, 2020, pp. 213–38).
- 19 This discussion philosophically undergirds recent conceptual similarities which scholars such as Daniel Weiss and Miguel Vatter have identified between Rabbinic understandings of State sovereignty and Rosenzweig’s critique of War. Both Weiss and Vatter have explored how both Rosenzweig and the Rabbinic tradition advances a form of “Jewish Constitutionalism” which eschews temporal claims over “absolutist” forms of temporal sovereignty, instead insisting that ultimate sovereignty be reserved for the Divine. In turn, the Jewish “*Blutgemeinschaft*” constitutionally bears witness to such forms of attenuated sovereignty. While Weiss’ and Vatter’s work is now more widely known today in the field of Modern Jewish Thought than Simon’s regarding the German-Jewish thought’s relationship with Rabbinic conceptuality, our exploration in this coming session will instead focus on the literary and aesthetic dimensions of Rosenzweig’s work which in turn engender the conceptual moves ultimately proposed by Weiss and Vatter related to Jewish critiques of State sovereignty. See (Vatter 2021; Weiss 2023).
- 20 See (Boyarin 2024, p. 39). This notion of Talmud as the grounding in time for a Jewish *nomos* is most thoroughly fleshed out in his *A Traveling Homeland* referenced earlier. Rosenzweig would likely identify with Boyarin’s notion of Talmud as coeval with blood as the essentially binding, indissoluble, and element of Jewish praxis and speech. As Rosenzweig noted “It is essentially impossible to make a Talmudic passage comprehensible to someone who doesn’t already understand it. In a sense, one would have each time to open up an entire picture atlas of Jewish history, Jewish faces, Jewish life to go along with it.” See Rosenzweig (2000, pp. 267–68). Yet both Boyarin and Rosenzweig would also claim that though being irreducible to anything but Jewish existence, Talmud also requires an *aus sich heraustreten* to sustain the performance of Jewish life and the mission of a broader *Tikkun* within both eternity and “today.” This would constitute an essential imperative of intergenerational “witnessing” that Dana Hollander has noted “represents the assurance of this continuous event of Zeugen,” where witnessing is indivisible from creation. See Hollander (2008, p. 122).

- ²¹ It is beyond the scope of this essay to more fully address Boyarin's critique of Jewish sovereignty as claimed by the State of Israel. For more on Boyarin's stance, which he articulates in dialogue with the historiography of Zionism, see [Boyarin \(2021, pp. 75–78\)](#). Zachary Braiterman has suggested that Rosenzweig's post *Star of Redemption* turn towards a simultaneous embrace of Judaism and Germanism in a shared public sphere, and away from Judaism conceived within the boundaries of the home, synagogue, and Beit Midrash, moved him more closely to the camp of secular Cultural Zionsim expressed by Ahad Ha'am. In this he was "navigating between Hermann Cohen's Anti-Zionism and Buber's Zionsim." Rosenzweig, he notes, was particularly struck by Tel Aviv's secularist weaving of Jewish time, as reflected by closures of services on the Shabbath, and the simultaneous normative acceptance of profane activity in violation of the Sabbath. See [Braiterman \(2008, pp. 179–81\)](#). For further conceptual and historical discussions on Rosenzweig's rejection of Political-Zionism and his privileging of Jewish exile, see ([Meir 2020, pp. 83–96](#); [Kimche 2022, pp. 183–20](#); [Dubow 2021, pp. 592–616](#)).
- ²² For the core contours of Novak's view of Jewish covenantalism see [Novak \(2000\)](#). For his views on Judaism and social contract, see [Novak \(1992\)](#).
- ²³ See [Sommer \(2015, pp. 132–33\)](#). As noted earlier, Sommer points to Rosenzweig's increasing Halakhic adherence towards the end of his life as evidence for this philosophic approach to his legacy.
- ²⁴ See [Braiterman \(2008, pp. 260–61\)](#). He is referencing [Robert Gibbs \(1992\)](#). *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- ²⁵ See [Braiterman \(2014, p. 242\)](#). His normative vision for such Talmudism is articulated in the essay [Braiterman \(2011\)](#). Braiterman appears to yearn to return Jewish thought to forms of aesthetic thinking comfortable with American bourgeoisie modes of Jewish communal association and individual agency unburdened by the crisis rhetoric post-9/11 and Second Intifada.

References

- Anidjar, Gil. 2025. "Blood", Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon. Available online: <https://www.politicalconcepts.org/blood-gil-anidjar/> (accessed on 1 October 2025).
- Batnitzky, Leora. 2005. *Idolatry and Representation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Batnitzky, Leora. 2009. From Politics to Law: Modern Jewish Thought and the Invention of Jewish Law. *Diné Israel* 26: 7–44.
- Batnitzky, Leora. 2012. Coming After: American-Jewish Thought in Light of German Judaism. In *Jewish Philosophy: Perspectives and Retrospectives*. Edited by Raphael Jospe and Dov Schwartz. Boston: Academic Studies Press.
- Benjamin, Walter. 2019. The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Biale, David. 2007. *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol Between Jews and Christians*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Boyarin, Daniel. 2016. *Traveling Homeland: The Babylonian Talmud as Diaspora*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Boyarin, Daniel. 2021. *The No-State Solution: A Jewish Manifesto*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Boyarin, Daniel. 2024. Bad Faith: Why Jews Aren't a Religion. In *New Paths in Jewish and Religious Studies: Studies in Honor of Professor Elliot R. Wolfson*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press.
- Brafman, Yonatan Y. 2017. New Developments in Modern Jewish Thought: From Theology to Law and Back Again. In *The Cambridge Companion to Judaism and Law*. Edited by Christine Hayes. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Braiterman, Zachary. 2008. *The Shape of Revelation. Aesthetics and Modern Jewish Thought*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Braiterman, Zachary. 2011. After Germany: An American Jewish Philosophical Manifesto. In *Jewish Thought for the 21st Century: Personal Reflections*. Edited by Aaron Hughes and Hava Tirosh Samuelson. Leiden: Brill.
- Braiterman, Zachary. 2014. The Patient Political Gesture: Law, Liberalism, and Talmud. In *Judaism, Liberalism, and Political Theology*. Edited by Martin Kavka and Randi Rashkover. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Catlin, Samuel J. 2022. The Rest Is Literature: Midrash and the Institution of Theory. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA.
- Cooper, Julie. 2016. The Turn to Tradition in the Study of Jewish Politics. *Annual Review of Political Science* 19: 67–87. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Cover, Robert. 1983. Nomos and Narrative. *Harvard Law Review* 97: 4–68.
- Dagan, Haggaï. 2002. The Motif of Blood and Procreation in Franz Rosenzweig. *AJS Review* 26: 241–62. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Dagan, Haggaï. 2009. Blood and Myth in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig. In *Jewish Blood: Reality and Metaphor in History, Religion, and Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- De Wilde, Marc. 2006. Violence in the State of Exception: Reflections on Theologico Political Motifs in Benjamin and Schmitt. In *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Postsecular World*. Edited by Hent de Vries. New York: Fordham University Press, pp. 188–200.
- Dolgopolski, Sergey. 2009. *What is Talmud? The Art of Disagreement*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Dolgopolski, Sergey, and James Redfield, eds. 2024. *Talmud and Philosophy: Conjunctions, Disjunctions, and Continuities*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Dubow, Jessica. 2021. Judaism's Other Geographies: Franz Rosenzweig and the State of Exile. *Jewish Quarterly Review* 111: 592–616. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Gibbs, Robert. 1992. *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Greenberg, Yudit Korenberg. 1996. The Hermeneutic Turn in Franz Rosenzweig's Theory of Revelation. In *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age*. Edited by Steven Kepnes. New York: NYU Press.
- Handelman, Susan. 1982. *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Hayes, Christine. 2017. *What is Divine About Divine Law: Early Perspectives*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Herskowitz, Daniel. 2020. *Heidegger and His Jewish Reception*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Herskowitz, Daniel. 2025. *The Judeo-Christian Thought of Franz Rosenzweig*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, A British Academy Monograph.
- Hollander, Dana. 2008. *Exemplarity and Chosenness: Rosenzweig and Derrida on the Nation of Philosophy*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Hollander, Dana. 2021. *Ethics Out of Law: Hermann Cohen and the Neighbor*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hughes, Aaron. 2010. Precursorship and the Forgetting of History: Franz Rosenzweig and Saadya Gaon on the Memory of Translation. In *New Directions in Jewish Philosophy*. Edited by Aaron Hughes and Elliot Wolfson. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Jones, Meirav. 2023. Fleshpots in the Promised Land: On the Possibility of Zionism Without Negating the Exile. In *The King is in the Field: Essays in Modern Jewish Political Thought*. Edited by Julie Cooper and Samuel Hayim Brody. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Kauffmann, Clemens. 2000. *Strauss und Rawls: Das Philosophische Dilemma der Politik*. Berlin: Dunker & Humblot.
- Kimche, J. J. 2022. Excellence in Exile: Jewish Exceptionalism in Anti-Zionist Thought. *Modern Judaism* 42: 183–208. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Kleinberg, Ethan. 2021. *Emmanuel Levinas's Talmudic Turn: Philosophy and Jewish Thought*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Lapidot, Elad. 2020. *Jews Out of the Question: A Critique of Anti Anti Semitism*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Lapidot, Elad. 2024. Talmudic and Jewish Logo-Politics. In *Talmud and Philosophy: Conjunctions, Disjunctions, Continuities*. Edited by Sergey Dolgopolski and James A. Redfield. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Maor, Zohar. 2021. Rosenzweig's Ideal of Community: Blood, Prayer, and Redemption. *JSQ* 28: 94–116. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Meir, Ephraim. 2020. Rosenzweig and the Cohen-Buber Dispute on Zionism. *Archivio di Filosofia* 88: 83–96.
- Mendes Flohr, Paul. 2008. *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Moses, Stephane. 2006. From Rosenzweig to Levinas: Philosophies of War. In *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Postsecular World*. Edited by Hent de Vries. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Moses, Stephane. 2014. *System and Revelation: An Introduction to Franz Rosenzweig's Thought*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mueller, Claudius. 1994. *Die Rechtsphilosophie des Marburger Neukantianismus in der Auseinandersetzung zwischen Hermann Cohen, Rudolf Stammler und Paul Natorp*. Frankfurt: Mohr Siebeck.
- Novak, David. 1992. *The Jewish Social Contract: An Essay in Political Theology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Novak, David. 1995. *Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Novak, David. 2000. *Covenantal Rights: A Study in Jewish Political Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Novak, David. 2012. Jewish Philosophy in North America. In *Jewish Philosophy: Perspectives and Retrospectives*. Edited by Raphael Jospe and Dov Schwartz. Boston: Academic Studies Press.
- Pollock, Benjamin. 2009. *Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pollock, Benjamin. 2019. *Franz Rosenzweig's Conversions: Doctrinal Change and Conversion to Judaism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Pourciau, Sarah. 2005. Bodily Negation: Carl Schmitt on the Meaning of Meaning. *MLN* 120: 1066–99. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Rosenzweig, Franz. 2000. *Philosophical and Theological Writings*. Edited and Translated by Paul W. Franks, and Michael L. Morgan. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Rosenzweig, Franz. 2005. *Star of Redemption*. Translated by Barbara Galli. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Rosenzweig, Franz. 2024. *Hegel and the State*. Translated by Josiah Simon, and Jules Simon. Foreword by Myriam Bienenstock, Afterword by Axel Honneth. New York: Routledge.
- Santner, Eric. 2011. *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Seeskin, Kenneth. 2012. Covenant and Social Contract: Classical Judaism and Classical Liberalism. In *Jewish Philosophy: Perspectives and Retrospectives*. Edited by Raphael Jospe and Dov Schwartz. Boston: Academic Studies Press.
- Simon, Josiah. 2014. *Franz Rosenzweig's Hegel and the State: Biography, History and Tragedy*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of German and Scandinavian, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, USA.
- Simon, Jules. 2011. *Art and Responsibility: A Phenomenology of the Diverging Paths of Rosenzweig and Heidegger*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Simon, Jules. 2020. Rosenzweig's Midrashic Speech Acts: From Hegel and German Nationalism to a Modern day Ba'al Teshuvah. In *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish Theology*. Edited by Steven Kepnes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Slabodsky, Santiago. 2005. *Decolonial Judaism: Triumphal Failures of Barbaric Thinking*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Sommer, Benjamin. 2015. *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Vatter, Miguel. 2021. *Living Law: Jewish Political Theology from Hermann Cohen to Hannah Arendt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Walzer, Michael, Menachem Lorberbaum, Noam J. Zohar, and Ari Ackerman, eds. 2006. *The Jewish Political Tradition: Volume II: Membership*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Walzer, Michael, Menachem Lorberbaum, Noam J. Zohar, and Madeline Kochen, eds. 2018. *The Jewish Political Tradition: Volume III: Community*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Walzer, Michael, Menachem Lorberbaum, Noam J. Zohar, and Yair Lorberbaum, eds. 2008. *The Jewish Political Tradition: Volume I: Authority*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Weiss, Daniel. 2023. *Modern Jewish Philosophy and the Politics of Divine Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wiese, Christian. 2005. *Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany*. Translated by Barbara Harshav. Leiden: Brill.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.