The Problem of the “Nichts” (Rosenzweig) and the “Il y a” (Levinas) as a Correlate of the Human Identity

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Summary. The relation between the abyss of death and the human identity is constitutive for the thought of the dialogical thinkers Rosenzweig and Levinas. For Rosenzweig, the Nothing is the end point of Kantian thinking. Death, as the existential experience of this nothingness, was the reality of everyman during the violent decades at the turn of the century. Rosenzweig took this nothingness as the starting point for rethinking and safeguarding human identity. Human identity is a dam against nothingness. But human identity is also open to alterity. In his early texts, Levinas makes a similar move. The there is is the starting point of human identity. Levinas develops a dialectical phenomenology starting from death. Human identity is interpreted as hypostasis. But in Totalité et Infini, an important shift takes place. The starting point is now found in human identity as desire. The there is comes to the centre as the flip side of the elementale and human identity is interpreted as separation.

Keywords: Rosenzweig, Star of Redemption, Levinas, Totality and Infinity, human identity, nothingness, there is, hypostasis, separation, Kant, Nietzsche, Meinecke, Schelling.

Introduction

In Totalité et Infini, Emmanuel Levinas (1905–1995) writes that he is “impressed by the opposition to the idea of totality in Franz Rosenzweig’s Stern der Erlösung, a work
too often present to be cited” (Levinas, 1969, 28). The first possibility to compare the thought of the two dialogical philosophers can consist in studying the topics that Levinas indicates as important in Rosenzweig (1886–1929). Indeed, Levinas wrote three articles on Rosenzweig, he made fourteen references in books and articles, and three in the introduction to his own books (a famous one in the introduction to the German translation of *Totalité et Infini*), he spoke of Rosenzweig in two round table conferences and in nine interviews. Finally, he addressed a salutation to the famous Kasseler Conference on Rosenzweig in 1986. In these texts, Levinas indicated four topics in Rosenzweig, which were of special interest for his own thought: the irreducible subjectivity as rupture within totality, the interpretation of relationality, the empirical aspect and the relation between Judaism and Christianity.

Since a lot of research is made on these aspects, I would not repeat it, but ask how the way of thinking of Rosenzweig, which he himself characterized as a “new thinking” (Rosenzweig, 1999), makes the philosophy of Levinas possible (Anckaert, 2006). Stéphane Mosès, the famous Rosenzweig-researcher and Jewish philosopher, speaks of “a speculative gesture” (Mosès, 1987). I will elaborate this in three steps. I will sketch the concept of Nothing of Rosenzweig and the structure of the *Stern der Erlösung*; the influence of this structure on the early texts of Levinas, and the new place of the there is and of human identity as subjectivity in *Totalité et Infini*.

1. The Concept of Nothing of Rosenzweig and the Structure of the *Stern der Erlösung*

In the lead sentence of the *Stern der Erlösung*, Rosenzweig designates death as the starting point of his thinking. Death represents not only a philosophical crux, but is also a concrete, existential threat of man by the threefold ‘Nothing’. Rosenzweig undeniably links the Nothing with the critical philosophy of Kant:

> They are the nothings to which the dialectical critique of Kant reduced the objects of the three ‘rational sciences’ of his time, rational theology, cosmology, and psychology (Rosenzweig, 2005, 26).

In his first great Critique, Kant examines the possibilities and limits of knowledge (Kant, 1983a). Valid knowledge results from the synthesis of the formal structures

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1 The research for this article is based on the original texts. For the quotes, I use the existing English translations.

2 The first section of the bibliography consists of an exhaustive list of the original publications and English translations of the texts of Levinas referring to Rosenzweig.
of human mind with sensory perceptions. In order to discover some coherence in the multiplicity of reality, reason necessarily postulates the existence of God, world and man. However, man cannot acquire valid knowledge from these three ideas. As regulative ideas, they are the inevitable end terms of thinking. Since they are empty ideas that the knowing subject cannot perceive, no knowledge of them is possible. Should reason nevertheless attempt to gain knowledge about them, it would fall victim to transcendental illusion, the pre- eminent error of metaphysical cognition. Thus, for knowing reason, these ideas are in fact ‘Nothings’. It is impossible for reason to say anything meaningful on the existence of God, the reality of the world and the freedom of man. They constitute the limits of thinking. Rosenzweig summarizes his critical reflection as follows:

When we recognized that thought presupposed that thinking has to think the All, at that moment the content of philosophy, till now fundamentally simple, the All of thinking and being, unexpectedly shattered before our eyes into three separate pieces which are mutually opposed to each other in different ways that cannot yet be stated more precisely. Of these three pieces – God world man – we still strictly know nothing at all. They are the Nothings... (Rosenzweig, 2005, 26).

According to Rosenzweig, at the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century, the limits of rationality were also experienced as a concrete existential threat. Three experiences were crucial.

Nietzsche, in an unparalleled fashion, articulates the meaning of the cultural-historical death of God. One of his strongest texts, which Rosenzweig often alludes to, is entitled The Madman (Nietzsche, 1980, 480–482; Biser, 1973; Löwith, 1973). Nietzsche features a character, a parody of Diogenes, the twisted lunatic who lived isolated from the world in his barrel, deliberately mocking every common decency and searching for God in the marketplace using a lantern in broad daylight. This blind search in man’s bright city provokes laughter of the onlookers. Man finds himself confronted with the nonexistence of God. The genuine challenge of atheism is to be situated on the axiological plane of freedom. The value of human freedom is confronted with the freedom of God. However, when the latter freedom is discarded, man faces the dazzling abyss of nothingness. After radical atheism, it has become no longer possible to maintain God as the meaning of life. The Madman is the man who tears himself away from the world, closes in upon himself and finds himself facing the death of God. The existential consequence is the Nothing, the possibility of nihilism (Heidegger, 1950) that appears as disorientation: “Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not perpetually falling? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left?”
This lack of orientation is also present in the texts of Franz Kafka (Anckaert, 2017; Galli, 2000).

At the turn of the century, not only God, but also world history left man behind in helplessness. In the optimistic progressive thinking of the Enlightenment, man could experience progressive world history as a medium of continual humanization. In the nineteenth century, this belief underwent a crisis, the consequence of which is found in the advent of historicism of which Rickert is an important representant (Mendes-Flohr, 1988). Rosenzweig linked Rickert’s historicism to the historicism of the Neo-Hegelian Friedrich Meinecke, his teacher. In his book *Weltbürgerturn und Nationalstaat*, Meinecke tried to link historical-political reflection to the history of ideas (Meinecke, 1963). He defended the position that the realization of universal cosmopolitanism occurs in a dialectical way within the history of modern nation states. In the *Machtstaat*, the synthesis between state and people is accomplished. The universality is not realized through a formal perpetual peace as Kant advocated (Kant, 1983b), but through the emergence of a world-historical people that is the avatar of universal spirit. In Meinecke’s view, this constitutes the foundation of the *Realpolitik* (Ranke, Treitschke and Bismarck), which is the concrete synthesis between universality and particularity. His conservative Hegel-interpretation provided a legitimacy to Prussian politics. Rosenzweig designed his doctoral dissertation *Hegel und der Staat* from this interpretation (Rosenzweig, 1920). Although the insight in the historical nature of man is a great virtue of modern times, historicism raises inevitable questions. Rosenzweig denounced historicism for harboring a deadly relativism unable to satisfy the need for an ultimate meaning of history (Casper, 1967, 75). Rosenzweig clearly recognized the relativism or indifference present in the violence of the First World War that he considered to be the logical outcome of Western ontology.

Facing the lack of orientation of an atheistic universe and the ethical relativism and indifference of world history, man can only find his reason for existence within himself. The threat of indifference can invite escape routes to be taken and cancel human freedom. One can hold on to the illusion of an almighty God and grasp human freedom as a derivative of divine activity. However, human freedom is annihilated by placing it within the sphere of influence of the divine (= idealism and mysticism). One can also deny freedom by subordinating it to laws. Man is then regarded as a part of nature or history. Both solutions negate the meaning of human freedom. If we do not want to yield to the escapism of mysticism and naturalism, we must determine man’s place between God and the world. We face the task of depicting man as he is, as an indivisible given: “This indivisibility, this ‘In-divid-uality’ is the first thing that we must understand (begreifen) entirely, seize hold of (be-greifen), take as real” (Rosenzweig, 1998, 65).

After having followed idealistic philosophy to its absurd extreme, Rosenzweig faced the task of saving human identity. The aim of this critique was to safeguard the ultimate
dignity or freedom of man. In trying to do so, he took a very difficult path. He set himself the task of reconstructing the forms of God, world and man, starting from the final point of idealism. He joined the unaccomplished project of Schelling’s later philosophy (Schulz, 1955), as it is termed in his *Philosophie der Offenbarung*: “One is to state forcefully that what appears in the end is also already a start or the beginning” (Schelling, 1977, 132).

Rosenzweig wrote his *magnum opus* under the telling title *Stern der Erlösung*. It is a huge attempt to read the experience of a fragmented world as a portent of a redemptive perspective of unity. Starting from the experience of death, Rosenzweig works out the metamorphoses of the question of (1) the human identity of the ‘irreducible man’ into (2) the human identity as the ‘relational man’ who is (3) in the end directed toward truth. The ultimate outcome is an openness to life. Within this perspective, the opening and ending clauses of the *Stern der Erlösung* form an enclosure that evokes Abraham’s order of faith or the Mosaic exodus movement perfectly well. The massive “From death, it is from the fear of death that all cognition of the All begins” (Rosenzweig, 2005, 9) is responded to by a tender invitation “But whither do the wings of the gate open? You do not know? Into life” (Rosenzweig, 2005, 447).

In the first part of the *Stern der Erlösung*, Rosenzweig depicts human identity as irreducible to philosophical rationality. The unique experience of irreducibility before the abyss of death and the Nothing constitutes a pre-reflexive given. Individuality simmers the idealistic thinking up to the point at which it boils over. The logical-ontological parallelism gives way to the ontological pluralism. The world and God can also be thought of as irreducible substances, just as the human identity can. A structural split divides reality into three autonomous regions of being. Mythical language articulates the experience of irreducibility in a metaphorical manner. However, everyday reality does not consist in some void in which are then situated self-sufficient atoms, but of the mutual relatedness of man, world and God. *Stern I* describes the pre-rational *experience* of autonomy as irreducible identity, but interprets the fundamental separateness equally as a *transcendental* precondition for relationality. A non-violent relationality is only possible between autonomous centers (Schelling, 1927, 174; Rosenzweig, 2005, 61–62). In their separateness, human identity, God and the world form deep matrices or nodes of the network of relational reality. *Stern I* formulates a paradoxical relation between an experiential and a transcendental thought. The theme of autonomy is central. Over the course of the book, autonomy is developed into a relationship both with the exteriority and with transcendence. As a thinker of experience, Rosenzweig gives voice to the existential irreducibility of man. At the same time, this is an exploration of the possibility of developing an all-encompassing view of relational reality.

The second part of the *Stern der Erlösung* describes relationality as the development of man, God and the world. In his singularity, human identity is addressed in a unique manner by God who reveals himself. This existential revelation consists, first of all, in
an orientation of human freedom. Man is called on to realize, in freedom, his essential capacity to help the incomplete world; this ethical commitment means the redemption of the world. Language is a formative element of human freedom as an ethical commitment. Revelation is a discursive event through and through. This linguistic event is the unfolding of the mythical, metaphorical speaking which evokes primitive experiences. Simultaneously, revelation is an encompassing cosmological event. Revelation does not only take place within human intimacy, but is also a world historical event in which man has his place. God reveals himself as the creator towards the world. God creates the world from the height. This means the recognition of the independence of the finite world. Through revelation, man discovers himself placed within the all-embracing love that God spreads as his footprint throughout the world. Redemption is a cosmic event of the blossoming of love in the world. God reveals himself in a world that develops towards wholeness. The analysis of the dialogical language demonstrates diverse moments of dynamic relationality.

Stern II is a transformation of the paradox between experience and the transcendental into the paradox between existential experience and the global meaning of revelation. Autonomy is here developed into language.

The third part of the *Stern der Erlösung* is devoted to the truth event. The paradox of revelation is reiterated as the paradox of interiority and exteriority. Judaism lives the truth of revelation out of its interiority and identity. It detaches itself from the world history and institutes a liturgical time of its own. Truth is lived through as eternity. Christianity (and the people) experiences this truth as the call to realize eternal truth within history. The relation between eternity and time, as well as between liturgy and history determines the paradox of interiority and exteriority. Judaism and Christianity represent the aspect of truth, each in its own way. Truth, however, is never fully present. It is always ‘to come’.

Truth reveals itself as a transcendent openness in the figure of the Star of David. In this mystical figure, the first triangle forms a field having God, the world and man as its corners. The second triangle offers a perspective on the relations between these three vertices. The relation between God and the world appears as *creation*, the relation between God and man as *revelation*, and the relation between man and world as *redemption*. Whereas the separate triangles represent irreducible entities and relations, the transcendent truth is composed into one figure in the interconnection of the triangles. The truth is a figure which is structured around the openness at the heart of the hexagon which is circumscribed by the inner sides of both triangles. As a whole, the vertices are borne by the internal core of the void. The paradoxes are joined into a single shape.

The *Stern der Erlösung* is a progressive transformation of an initial paradox towards a growing transparency. The tension between experiential thought and transcendental thought has altered into the paradox of an existential and systematic thinking. In a subsequent transformation, the paradox appears as a tension between the interiority
of the existential revelatory experience and the exteriority of the cosmic revelation. In the light of eternity, the paradoxes form a composition. The topic of autonomy is introduced in *Stern I*, developed through language in *Stern II* and completed in a (trans) historical perspective in *Stern III*.

### 2. The Influence on the Early Texts of Levinas

With the concept of ‘the Nothing’, Rosenzweig accomplishes a threefold break with the idealist thought. It is by taking seriously the final point of Kantian philosophy and by attending to the irreducible experience of the death of God, world and man that Rosenzweig discovers a zero point for thinking. In a subsequent move, he constructs the positive form of God, world and human identity from this negative background. Human freedom then appears as the salvation of identity. Parallel to Rosenzweig’s threefold Nothing, Levinas speaks about the *there is*, an anonymous power of being which obliterates any identifiable difference. In Levinas’ texts, the concept of the *there is* undergoes an important semantic shift, linked to a renewed concept of human identity.

In the works of Levinas, a connection can be found between such early texts as *Le temps et l’autre* (Levinas, 1979) and *De l’existence à l’existant* (Levinas, 1981), on the one hand, and the important radio interview *Ethique et Infini*, on the other hand (Levinas, 1982). It was mainly Burggraeve who drew attention to this (Burggraeve, 1986). In his early works, Levinas offers a kind of ‘phenomenological dialectic’ of human subjectivity, in which he departs from Husserl and still more obviously from Heidegger. Here he depicts the vicissitudes of human freedom. The *there is* serves as a starting point. The human opposition to the anonymity of this neutral given occurs within hypostasis, enjoyment and intentionality. The choice for the term ‘hypostasis’ as description of the human identity is very fundamental. This originally egoistic process is completed by the relation of alterity, which is sketched as the confrontation with death, the erotic, and fertility. The dialectically depicted exodus-movement out of inhuman being resonates in such (French) titles as *De l’evasion* (Levinas, 1936/37) and *De l’existence à l’existant*. It is noteworthy that these works were preceded by a remarkable text on Hitler’s ‘philosophy’ (Levinas, 1934; Pollefeyt, 1996a; Pollefeyt, 1996b).

In these early works, Levinas anticipates some of the insights of *Totalité et Infini*. In the preface to the reissue of *De l’existence à l’existant* in 1981, he rightly designates these books as preparatory works (Levinas, 1981, 9). In fact, we can find there the main topics of *Totalité et Infini* in a nutshell. However, the structure of the thought pattern is quite different. The structure of the line of thinking in the early texts is maintained in *Ethique et Infini* in a slightly modified form. In this later text, the *there is* also forms the starting point for thinking. Levinas explicitly states there that thinking starts from trauma:
It probably begins through traumatisms or groping to which one does not even know how to give a formal form: a separation, a violent scene, a sudden consciousness of the monotony of time (Levinas, 1985, 21).

Starting from this line of interpretation, it might be possible to draw a fair parallel between the nothingness of the death experience in Rosenzweig and the *there is* in Levinas. With the concept of the *there is*, Levinas comes remarkably close to the threefold Nothing as Rosenzweig develops it. The *there is*, as a trauma, constitutes the starting point of thinking. Like Rosenzweig, the *there is* bears resemblance to the determinate idea of God and the concept of the world. The anonymous sea of being bears resemblance to the apogee of Western ontology. However, Levinas is thinking not so much of Hegel but of Heidegger here.

However, the *there is* of Levinas cannot be situated as rational as it is in the case of Rosenzweig. The *there is* is a limit concept, a dark reality wherein subjectivity and objectivity become lost. As an non-rational null point, the *there is* cannot be understood or described, but only discovered indirectly. Man only has ways of access to the *there is* through such things as experiencing of war, exotic art, participatory thinking of God... (Burggraeve, 1983). Levinas radicalizes Rosenzweig’s Nothing. Although Rosenzweig also stresses the non-rational character of the Nothing, Levinas explicitly refuses to conceptualize the *there is*.

3. The New Place of the *There is* and Subjectivity in *Totalité et Infini*

In his major work, Levinas attributed another and more secondary place to the *there is*. The *there is* here appears as an inner limit phenomenon when the *elementale* reveals its nocturnal side. The *there is* no longer constitutes the limit experience as a starting point for a critique of the reigning philosophy. This retreat of the *there is* in *Totalité et Infini* is accompanied by an even stronger interpretation of human identity, as a separation or break rather than hypostasis. Levinas’ earlier concept of hypostasis is developed as a reaction to the *there is*. In *Totalité et Infini*, the intentionality of separation is emphasized. In a new reading of desire, Levinas opposes the Hegelian concept of desire (by starting from the unity of the feeling and the felt within sensation) and against the primacy of the theoretical intentionalism of Husserlian phenomenology. No longer the *there is*, but desire forms the heart of the critique. This double interpretative reserve with respect to the place of the *there is*, on the one hand, and the reinterpretation of the concept of human identity and subjectivity in *Totalité et Infini*, on the other hand, should be taken into consideration when studying the similarity between Rosenzweig and Levinas. The *there is* seems to be less a starting point for the deployment of hypostasis than the
inner limit of separation as enjoyment. A fundamental difference is inserted into the dynamics of separation.

3.1. The *There is* as Inner Limit of Separation

Like Rosenzweig, Levinas relates the *there is* to the Nothing of the world, as well as to that of the gods and man. First of all, the *there is* appears as a suffocating quality of the elemental world which constitutes the environment of enjoyment. As Rosenzweig posits the tragic modes of man as a dam against nothingness, Levinas unfolds separation as the action of man as he takes up the burden of his own existence. The loneliness, into which this kind of existence leads, is overcome in the enjoyment within the *elemental*. The human identity as man’s separation introduces the indifference of the anonymous coordinates of existence, allowing for the selfish existence to be conceived as conatus essendi (Rosenzweig, 1984, 144–145; Levinas, 1974, f.i. 4, 6, 22).

In *Totalité et Infini*, separation, in contrast to the view of Rosenzweig, is marked by a double limit or negativity. The uncertainty of the time to come implies that the separation of the human identity can fall back into the *there is*. It is possible for man to be engulfed in the elemental, which is originally experienced as positive, and to lose himself within enjoyment. The intoxication of enjoyment can turn into the depersonalization of enjoyment. Death lurks behind any enjoyment. This implies that the *there is* is not only an external negativity that man wards off in a volitive dynamism but that the anonymity also constitutes the other side of man’s existence.

Moreover, it is possible for man to bring the *there is* back for others through the independent ‘economic’ existence he deploys with an eye to overcoming the uncertainties of enjoyment – a sort of existence that appears specifically as the settlement into a home as a place where work and thought are brought to rest. In the epiphany of the face, the central challenge is formed by the phrase “Am I not killing by the way I am living?” It is possible for man to expand his life in such a way that he builds a deadly hell for the other. Here, the *there is* shows not so much the characteristics of an anonymous power, but it also forms the flip side of the separated existence of man. What for one person is a killing power, for another is a consequence of his way of life. The impersonality of the *there is* is an aspect of the personal evil people inflict upon one another because of their concrete ways of life. Relying on Jos Defoort and his book *Law and Violation*, we can state that law, meant to bring violence to a halt, institutes itself a kind of violence: “For those who commit (legal) violence, concern is with justification of this violence. For those suffering, any justification is irrelevant” (Defoort, 1994, 142). Law, indeed, becomes effective only when it affects the bodies of those suffering. No one else evokes this as tellingly as Kafka in his remarkable narrative *In the Penal Colony* (Kafka, 2002, 201–248). With the sentence being literally inscribed upon his body, man no longer even knows that he is sentenced. The border between law and violence is paper-thin.
The convicted person experiences the execution of the sentence as brutal violence. Levinas links the violent border concept of the world with violence, and particularly with the violence of war. His allusions to the metaphors of war in the preface of *Totalité et Infini*, as articulated by Heraclitus and positively reiterated by Heidegger, can be understood from this.

The *there is* appears not just as a quality of an anonymous world which is marked by violence. As a limit or negativity, the *there is* shows itself in thinking God as well. In *Totalité et Infini*, Levinas writes that the separation within the sphere of le même indicates the break with the totality. Totality seems to be very close to the *there is*. If one conceives of this given as synchronous with the thought of a separated God – as is the case in Rosenzweig – gods appear as mythical. The gods can be described as “faceless gods, impersonal gods to whom one does not speak” (Levinas, 1969, 142). In his system, Rosenzweig could develop the mythical gods as a parallel to the tragic man. Levinas, by contrast, describes them in an asymmetrical fashion as the nocturnal continuation of elementary enjoyment. “The nocturnal prolongation of the element is the reign of mythical gods” (Levinas, 1969, 142). The gods are a dark future which represents a continual menace to the separated being: “Enjoyment is without security” (Levinas, 1969, 142). A participatory religious thinking is a chaotic experience that annihilates human separation. Infinity becomes a dimension of the finite identity.

Finally, the *there is* also bears resemblance to the disorientation of human existence that finds co-ordinates solely in its own being. According to Rosenzweig, after God is murdered, within a nihilistic universe, man could not find any foundation of meaning except inside of himself. The tragic existence of man leads to an ontological pluralism, in which each appears to be a wolf to the other.

### 3.2. Separation as Desire

Analogous to Rosenzweig’s construct of human identity, Levinas, in his early texts, worked out the concept of hypostasis. However, in *Totalité et Infini*, he writes about separation. As a process of self-identification, separation is the realization of an inner richness. Trained in Husserlian phenomenology, Levinas describes this process of self-identification as intentionality, enjoyment and representation, dwelling, possession and labor, as well as thought and work.

The text on the *Phenomenology of Eros* (Levinas, 1969, 256–266) can offer us important insights. In the final analysis, Levinas discovers in Husserl’s transcendental reduction a totalistic structure, since intentionality, although striving to allow the world to be as it appears, imposes a subject-object structure upon it. In the end, Husserl remains stuck in the nets of theoretical thought represented by the metaphor of light. Intentionality is believed to presuppose a certain ‘adequation’, which leads to the other to be reduced to an object: “If Husserl sees a subjectivity in the *cogito* without any support
outside of itself, this *cogito* constitutes the idea of infinity itself and gives it to itself as an object” (Levinas, 1969, 211). Levinas ignores the issue of ‘inadequation’ in Husserl and designates phenomenology as the final outcome of totalistic Western philosophy.

The erotic relation could well run counter to this because the desire for the other transcends itself and is actually made possible by alterity. The *theoretical* attitude is replaced with a *social* relation and the primacy of *identity* with the priority of the *other*. Eros renders any profanation impossible. This is why Levinas characterizes the erotic relation as a “pure experience” (Levinas, 1969, 260), as an experience that is, properly speaking, no longer an experience. This impossible experience is the heart of the critic rather than the *there is*.

At this point, Levinas surpassed phenomenology. The problematic of transcendental subjectivity is replaced with the transgressive relationality of erotics. In doing so, Levinas makes an important shift with regard to Rosenzweig. This shift again has to do with the localization of nothingness or the *there is*. Indeed, in *Totalité et Infini*, the *there is* cannot function as a starting point. By focusing on separation, which, however, realizes itself as an inner process, f.i. in the transcending dynamics of erotics, and not as a mere reaction to inhumanity, the negativity of nothingness is inserted into the dynamics of the subject. This goes together with the subject understood as Desire, which makes it possible to describe the erotic relations as non-theoretical intentionality: the other or the wife can never be the correlate of my theoretical intentionality. Rosenzweig does not have this phenomenological limit possibility at his disposal. Instead, he had to take recourse in a rather artificial way to the logic of origins of Cohen (Cohen, 1968) in order to join nothingness and human-being together in one thought.

4. Conclusion

In the early works of Levinas, we can indicate a double parallelism with Rosenzweig: the *there is* and the hypostasis seem to be a new reading of the Nothing and human identity. But in *Totalité et Infini*, the hypostasis is interpreted as separation which is an inner richness made possible by the alterity of desire. Levinas leaves behind the concept of intentionality of Husserl to interpret subjectivity in a radical relational perspective. The other is never the correlate of my desire. As a consequence, the *there is* is not the external limit of existence but the inner threat of separation. The separation can be perverted into violence towards the other and erotic desire can be perverted into profanation of the other.
Literature

An exhaustive lists of Levinas’ first editions and current English translations referring to Rosenzweig (some texts were reprinted, f.i. in Difficult Liberté a.o. – these re-editions are not taken up in our list).

1. Articles on Rosenzweig


2. References in books and articles


3. Introduction to own work


4. Round table conference


5. Interviews


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6. Salutation

Bibliography


