

Death, Love, and Life
In the thought of
Franz Rosenzweig

Session 2: Singularity of Self

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What are Human Beings? Personality and Self

Star of Redemption. 72-73

What is this true being of man? ... he is not when knowledge comes to a stop, but before it begins; and it is only because he is before knowledge that it happens that he still is after and that he shouts his victorious cry: "I am still here" to all knowledge, however completely it may imagine that it has put him into the vessels of its universal validity and its necessity. His essence is precisely that he does not let himself be put into a bottle, that he is always "still there," that, in his particularity, he always says what he thinks of the universal's pretensions to domination...

Urzell to Star of Redemption. 52-53

Thus, I say: philosophizing reason stands on its own feet, it is self-sufficient. All things are grasped in it, and ultimately it grasps itself (the only epistemological act, against which nothing can be said because it is the only one that occurs not according to the form $A=B$, which is the form of knowing actuality and of actuality, but rather according to the form of *logical* knowing $A=A$).¹² After it has thus taken up everything within itself and has proclaimed its exclusive existence, man suddenly discovers that he, who has long been philosophically digested, is still there. And indeed not as man with his palmbranches—whom the whale has long since swallowed up and he can spend the time by singing psalms in the whale's belly—rather as "I, who am indeed dust and ashes." I, a completely common private-subject, I fore- and sur- name, I dust and ashes. I am still there.

Star of Redemption. 77-78

The Self is simply closed in itself. It owes this to its rootedness in the character. If it were rooted in the individuality, so if the defiance had thrown itself on the particularity of man facing others, on his indivisible participation in universal humanity, it is not the Self, the Self closed in itself and not looking outside itself that would have sprung up, but the personality. As the origin of the name already indicates, the personality is man, he who plays the role assigned to him by fate, one role beside others, a voice in the polyphonic symphony of humanity. It is really a “highest good of the children of the earth”—one for each of them. The Self has no relation with the children of men, always only with one man alone, with the “Self ” precisely... The personality is always one among others; it is compared; the Self is not compared and it is incomparable...

Many statements about the personality are possible... As single statements, they follow the diagram $B=A$ where all the statements about the world and its parts are prefigured..... For the Self, there are no derived statements, only the one original statement $B=B$; likewise for God and the world there is no plurality of statements

Star of Redemption. 78

What does free will will? Its own character. So free will becomes the will of defiance, and the defiance of the will is condensed with character into the configuration of the Self. Symbolized in the equation $B=B$, the Self thus stands directly facing God....

It is as Self, truly it is not as personality, that man is created in the image of God. In contrast to the world, Adam is really exactly “like God,” only the world is pure finitude where the latter is pure infinitude—with good reason the serpent addresses man only in the whole of Creation. As finished Self, man no longer has the complex relationship with the world as the elements had before their meeting in the And: he is quite simply an equal, yet about whom the contrary is stated.

פיצד מאימין את העדים על עדי נפשות, היו מכניסין אותן ומאמיין עליהן. שָׁמָא תאמרו מאמד, ומשמועה, עד מפי עד ומפי אדם נאמן שמענו, או שָׁמָא אי אתם יודעין שסופנו לבדק אתכם בדרךישה ובחקירה. הוּו יודעין שלא כדגי ממונות דיני נפשות. דיני ממונות, אדם גותן ממון ומתכפר לו. דיני נפשות, דמו ודם ורעיותיו תלויין בו עד סוף העולם, שכן מצינו בקנו שהרג את אחיו, שְׁנַאמַר (בראשית ד) דמי אחיד צעקים, אינו אומר דם אחיד אלא דמי אחיד, דמו ודם ורעיותיו. דבר אחר, דמי אחיד, שְׁהִיָה דמו משלה על העצים ועל האבנים.

לפיכך נברא אדם יחיד, ללמד, שכל המאבד נפש אחת מישראל, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו אבד עולם מלא. וכל המקיים נפש אחת מישראל, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו קיים עולם מלא. ומפני שְׁלוֹם הבריות, שלא יאמר אדם לחברו אבא גדול מאביך. וְשָׁלָא יהו מיניו אומרים, הרבה רשיות בשמים. ולהגיד גדלתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, שאדם טובע כמה מטבעות בחותם אחד וכלן דומין זה לזה, ומלה מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא טבע כל אדם בחותמו של אדם הראשון ואין אחד מהן דומה לחברו. לפיכך כל אחד ואחד חב לומר, בשבילי נברא העולם.

וְשָׁמָא תאמרו מה לנו ולצרה הזאת, והלא כבר נאמר (ויקרא ה) והוא עד או רצה או גע אם לוא יגיד וגו'. וְשָׁמָא תאמרו מה לנו לחוב בדמו של זה, והלא כבר נאמר (משלי יא) ובאבד רשעים רנה:

How does one intimidate the witnesses in capital cases? They would bring them in and intimidate them: “Perhaps you will speak from conjecture, or from rumor, or a witness from another witness, or we heard from a trustworthy person.” Or “Perhaps you do not know that our plan is to examine you with inquiry and investigation. You should know that death-penalty cases are not like cases of monetary compensation: cases of monetary compensation: a person gives money and atones for himself. Death-penalty cases: his blood and the blood of his offspring hang over him until the end of the world. For thus we find with Cain who killed his brother, as it is said: Your brother’s bloods cry out to me. It does not say ‘your brother’s blood’ but ‘your brother’s bloods’—his blood and the blood of his offspring. Another interpretation: Your brother’s bloods: that his blood was cast over the trees and over the stones.

In accordance with that, the human being was created singly to teach you that if anyone destroys one soul from Israel, Scripture accounts it to him as if he destroyed a full world. And if anyone preserves one soul from Israel, Scripture accounts it to him as if he preserved a full world. And for the sake of peace among people, so that a person will not say to another, ‘My father is greater than your father.’ And so that the heretics will not say, ‘There are multiple powers in the heavens.’ And in order to tell of the greatness of the Holy One Blessed Be He: For a person mints several coins with one mold, and they all resemble each other, while the King of Kings of Kings, the Holy One Blessed Be He, mints each person in the mold of the first person, yet there is not one who resembles another. In accordance with that, each and every person is obligated to say, ‘For me was the world created.’

And perhaps you will say, ‘What is this distress to us?’ But is it not already said, Although able to testify as one who has either seen or learned of the matter, he does not give information, etc. But perhaps you will say, ‘What is it to us to become liable for the blood of this person?’ But is it not already said, And in the destruction of the wicked, there is joy.”

Hannah Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism, 299-302

The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man

These facts and reflections offer what seems an ironical, bitter, and belated confirmation of the famous arguments with which Edmund Burke opposed the French Revolution's Declaration of the Rights of Man. They appear to buttress his assertion that human rights were an "abstraction," that it was much wiser to rely on an "entailed inheritance" of rights which one transmits to one's children like life itself, and to claim one's rights to be the "rights of an Englishman" rather than the inalienable rights of man...

The pragmatic soundness of Burke's concept seems to be beyond doubt in the light of our manifold experiences. Not only did loss of national rights in all instances entail the loss of human rights; the restoration of human rights, as the recent example of the State of Israel proves, has been achieved so far only through the restoration or the establishment of national rights....

The world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human. And in view of objective political conditions, it is hard to say how the concepts of man upon which human rights are based—that he is created in the image of God (in the American formula), or that he is the representative of mankind, or that he harbors within himself the sacred demands of natural law (in the French formula)—could have helped to find a solution to the problem.

The survivors of the extermination camps, the inmates of concentration and internment camps, and even the comparatively happy stateless people could see without Burke's arguments that the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human was their greatest danger.

Freud. Civilization and Its Discontents

The assumption of the existence of an instinct of death or destruction has met with resistance even in analytic circles... I know that in sadism and masochism we have always seen before us manifestations of the destructive instinct (directed outwards and inwards), strongly alloyed with egotism; but I can no longer understand how we can have overlooked the ubiquity of non-erotic aggressivity and destructiveness and can have failed to give it its due place in our interpretation of life.

I remember my own defensive attitude when the idea of an instinct of destruction first emerged in psycho-analytic literature, and how long it took before I became receptive to it. That others should have shown, and still show, the same attitude of rejection surprises me less. For "little children do not like it" when there is talk of the inborn human inclination to "badness," to aggressiveness and destructiveness, and so to cruelty as well. God has made them in the image of His own perfection; nobody wants to be reminded how hard it is to reconcile the undeniable existence of evil— despite the protestations of Christian Science—with His all-powerfulness or His all-goodness.

Lacan. Ecrits

The ferocity of man towards his fellow man [semblable] surpasses all that animals can do, and at the threat it throws to all nature even the carnivores recoil in horror.

The Self is Born in Sexuality/Death Drive

Star of Redemption, 79-80

The birth date of the Self is a different one from that of the personality. For the Self and the character each have their date of birth; one day they are there... The Self invests man one day like a soldier in arms and takes possession of all the goods of his house. Up to this day—it is always a definite day, even if man no longer remembers it—man is a piece of the world even before his own consciousness; no later age of life ever again attains the concreteness of the child. The breaking in of the Self robs him in one blow of all the riches and all the goods that he claimed to possess. He becomes very poor, he has no more than himself and knows only himself, no one knows him any longer; for there is no one there besides him. The Self is the lonely man in the hardest sense of the word. The “political animal” is the personality.

So, on a definite day, the Self is born in man. Which day is it? The same as the one where the personality, the individual, dies to enter into the death of the genus. It is precisely this moment that allows the Self to be born. The Self, the daimon, not in the sense of Goethe’s orphic stanza, where the word designates precisely the personality, but in the sense of Heraclitus’ words, “The daimon of man is his ethos,” this blind and mute daimon, enclosed in itself, which surprises man for the first time in the mask of Eros, and from then on accompanies him throughout his life up to that moment where it removes its mask and reveals itself to him as Thanatos.

The Metaethical Self

Star of Redemption, 81-82

For the Self, all this is only something that it has; it does not live in the world as does the personality; for it, it is not the air it breathes in its existence; the atmosphere of its existence is only itself. The whole world, and especially the entire ethical world, is behind it; it is “beyond” —not as if it did not need it, but in the sense that it does not recognize the laws of the world as its laws: they are mere presuppositions that belong to it without having to obey them. For the Self, the world of the ethical is merely— “its” ethos; nothing more of it has remained. The Self does not live in an ethical world; it has its ethos. The Self is meta-ethical.

Moshe as a Singular Self

שמות פרשת שמות פרק ב

(יא) וַיְהִי בַּיָּמִים הֵהֵם וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל אָחִיו וַיֵּרָא בְּסִבְלָתָם וַיֵּרָא אִישׁ מִצְרִי מִכָּה אִישׁ עִבְרִי מֵאֶחָיו:

(יב) וַיִּפֶן כֹּה וְכֹה וַיֵּרָא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ וַיִּדַּע אֶת הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּטְמְנֵהוּ בַחֹל:

(יג) וַיֵּצֵא בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁנִי וְהַיּוֹם הַשְּׁנִי אַנְשִׁים עִבְרִים נֹצִים וַיֹּאמֶר לְרַשָּׁע לָמָּה תִּכֶּה רַעֲדָה:

(יד) וַיֹּאמֶר מִי שְׂמֹךְ לְאִישׁ שֶׁר וְשֹׁפֵט עָלֵינוּ הֲלִהְרַגְנִי אַתָּה אָמַר כְּאֲשֶׁר הִרְגַתְּ אֶת הַמִּצְרִי וַיֵּרָא מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אָכֵן נֹדַע הַדְּבָר:

(טו) וַיִּשְׁמַע פְּרַעֲזָה אֶת הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה וַיִּבְקַשׁ לְהַרְגוֹ אֶת מֹשֶׁה וַיִּבְרַח מֹשֶׁה מִפְּנֵי פְרַעֲזָה וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ מִדְיָן וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל הַבְּעָרָה:

(טז) וַיִּלְכְּדוּ מִדְיָן שִׁבְעַת בָּנוֹת וַתִּבְאֲנֶנּוּ וַתִּדְלַגְנָה וַתִּמְלֶאנָה אֶת הָרְהֻטִים לְהַשְׁקוֹת צֹאן אֲבֵיהֶן:

(יז) וַיְבֹאוּ הָרַעִים וַיִּגְרְשׁוּם וַיִּקָּם מֹשֶׁה וַיּוֹשְׁעֵן וַיִּשְׁקֵן אֶת צֹאנָם:

Maimonides. Guide for the Perplexed, 2:45

The first of the degrees of prophecy consists in the fact that an individual receives a divine help that moves and activates him to a great, righteous, and important action – such as the deliverance of a community of virtuous people from a community of wicked people, or the deliverance of a virtuous and great man, or the conferring of benefits⁶ on numerous people. The individual in question finds in himself something I that moves and incites him to the action, and that is called the spirit of the Lord...

Know that such a force did not abandon Moses our Master from the moment he reached a man's estate. It was because of this that he was moved to slay the Egyptian and to reprove the one who was in the wrong among the two men that struggled. The strength of this force in him shows in the fact that when – after having been filled with fear and having fled – he came to Midian as a stranger full of fear and saw some wrong that was done, he could not refrain from putting an end to it and was incapable of patience with regard to it, as it says: But Moses stood up and helped them.

The Self Reveals Itself in the Tragic Hero

Star of Redemption. 8:

In the tragic, however, the misfortune loses all autonomous power and meaning; it belongs to the elements of particularity upon which the Self imprints the seal of its defiance, always this same seal—*si fractus illabatur orbis: oh, may my soul die with the Philistines!*

Star of Redemption. 9

That the fear of death knows nothing of such a separation in body and soul, that it yells I, I, I and wants to hear nothing about a deflection of the fear onto a mere “body”... For man does not at all want to escape from some chain; he wants to stay, he wants—to live.

Devarim Rabbah 11:10

This teaches that ten times was it decreed that Moses should not enter Eretz Israel, but the harsh decree was not finally sealed until the High Court¹ revealed itself to him and declared: ‘It is my decree that you should not pass over,’ [as it is said,] *For thou shalt not go over this Jordan* (Deut. in, 27)...

When, however, Moses saw that the decree against him had been sealed, he took a resolve to fast, and drew a small circle! and stood therein, and exclaimed: ‘I will not move from here until Thou annullest that decree.’ What else did Moses do then? He donned — sackcloth and wrapped himself with sackcloth and rolled himself in the dust and stood in prayer and supplications before God, until the heavens and the order of nature were shaken...

What did God do? At that hour He had it proclaimed in every gate of each of the heavens, and in every Court, that they should not receive Moses’ prayer, nor bring it before Him, because the decree against him had been sealed...

Sammael the wicked angel, the chief of all the accusing angels, was awaiting the death of Moses every hour, saying, ‘When will the time or the moment arrive for Moses to die, so that I may descend and take away his soul from him.’...

Meanwhile there remained unto Moses only one hour. Whereupon Moses said to God. ‘ Master of the Universe, if Thou wilt not bring me into Eretz Israel, leave me in this world so that I may live and not die. ’ God thereupon said to Moses: ‘ If I will not slay you in this world, how can I bring you back to life in the World to Come? And what is more, you make of My Torah a fraud, for in My Torah it is written by your hand, *And there is none that can deliver out. of My hand*’ (Deut. xxxn, 39). Said Moses to God: ‘ Master of the Universe, if Thou wilt not bring me into Eretz Israel, let me become like the beasts of the field that eat grass and drink water and live and enjoy the world; likewise let my soul be as one of them.’...

When Moses saw that no creature could save him from the path of death, he thereupon exclaimed, ‘ *The Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice; a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and righteous is He*’ (ib. xxxn, 4). What did Moses do? He took a scroll and wrote down upon it the Ineffable Name, nor had the Book of Song¹ been completely written down when the moment of Moses’ death arrived. At that hour God said to Gabriel: ‘ Gabriel, go forth and bring Moses’ soul.’ He, however, replied: ‘Master of the Universe, how can I witness the death of him who is equal to sixty myriads, and how can I behave harshly to one who possesses such qualities?’ Then [God] said to Michael: ‘Go forth and bring Moses’ soul-’...

When Sammael saw Moses sitting and writing down the Ineffable Name, and how the radiance of his appearance was like unto the sun and he was like unto an angel of the Lord of hosts, he became afraid of Moses and declared: ‘Of a surety, angels cannot take away Moses’ soul.’ Now before Sammael showed himself to Moses, Moses knew of his coming, and when Sammael caught sight of Moses trembling, fear took hold of him, as of a woman in travail, and he had not the effrontery to speak to Moses, until Moses said to Sammael, ‘ *There is no peace, saith God, concerning the wicked* (Isa. LVII, 21). What are you doing here?’ He replied: ‘I have come to take away your soul.’ Moses asked him: ‘Who sent you?’ He replied: ‘ He who created all the creatures.’ Moses then said to him: ‘You shall not take away my soul.’ Whereupon he replied: ‘The souls of all who come into this world are delivered into my hands.’ Whereupon Moses said: ‘I have greater strength than all who come into this world.’...

Away, wicked one, from here, you must not speak thus, go, flee before me, I will not surrender my soul to you.’ Immediately Sammael went back and reported to God. Whereupon God commanded Sammael, ‘Go, and bring Moses’ soul.’ Straightway he drew his sword from the sheath and placed himself at the side of Moses. Immediately Moses became wroth, and taking hold of the staff on which was engraven the Ineffable Name he fell upon Sammael with all his strength until he fled from before him, and he pursued him with the Ineffable Name and removed the beam of glory [halo] from between his eyes and blinded him. Thus much did Moses achieve. At the end of a moment, a heavenly voice was heard, declaring: ‘The end, the time of your death has come.’ Said Moses to God: ‘Master of the Universe, remember the day when Thou didst reveal Thyself unto me in the bush and didst say to me, *Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel from Egypt* (Ex. ill, io); remember the time when I abode on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights, I implore Thee, do not hand me over into the hand of the Angel of Death.’ Thereupon a heavenly voice was heard saying to him: ‘Fear not, I myself will attend to you and your burial.’...

Forthwith the Holy One, blessed be He, summoned the soul from the midst of the body, saying to her: ‘My daughter, I have fixed the period of thy stay in the body of Moses at a hundred and twenty years; now thy end has come, depart, delay not.’ Whereupon she replied: ‘Master of the Universe, I know that Thou art the God of all spirits and all souls, the souls of the dead and the living are in Thy keeping, and Thou hast created and formed me and placed me within the body of Moses for a hundred and twenty years. And now, is there a body in the world purer than the body of Moses in which there has never been an offensive smell, nor worm nor maggot, nor any kind of vermin; therefore I love him and I do not desire to leave him.’ Whereupon God exclaimed: ‘Soul, go forth, do not delay, and I will raise thee to the highest heavens and will place thee under the Throne of Glory next to the Cherubim, Seraphim, and other troops of angels.’ Thereupon the soul replied...

I implore Thee let me remain in the body of Moses.’ Thereupon God kissed Moses and took away his soul with a kiss of the mouth, and God, if one might say so, wept [as it is said], *Who will rise up for me against the evil-doers? Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?* (Ps. xciv, 16).

What Can't We See Human Singularity?

Rosenzweig, Urzelle, 66

And indeed the comportment of B=B toward A=B is an aggressive one, directed toward transformation, that from A=B toward B=B in contrast only a theoretical-skeptical (disbelieving) [comportment] that contents itself with mere reinterpretation, mere explanation of B=B as “properly” A=B.

What Marks its Place?

Understanding the Sick and the Healthy, 80-82

When, then, is a name required, and what happens to man when his name is spoken? Here, again, the answer is simple. It can be seen most clearly in the case of the somnambulist [one who is sleep-walking] or a person only half alive. He is forced into the presence of mind, to the internal, to himself. And where was he before? He dwelt in the past, in the “external,” completely dominated by it. He was a particle in the world, ruled by its laws- laws which are always laws of the past and which always act from without. His name liberated him from these laws. It recalls him from the world in which he was imprisoned, and returns him to his Self which, once his name is uttered, is free of the past, devoid of the external. Suddenly, hearing his name spoken, man knows that he is himself. He recognizes that he as the ability to begin again...

תולדות יעקב יוסף דברים פרשת כי תצא

כי הנשמה הוא בחינת השם, כמו ששמעתי ממורי, ונתן מופת - בקריאת שמו והוא ישן נתעורר מהשינה וחזרת הנשמה לגופו וכו'. וזהו שרימז הרמב"ם עורו ישינים, והכוונה כאמור.