

Death, Love, and Life in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig

Redemption: Loving the Neighbor

Sigmund Freud. Civilization and Its Discontents. 747-748

'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' ... Let us adopt a naive attitude towards it, as though we were hearing it for the first time; we shall be unable then to suppress a feeling of surprise and bewilderment. Why should we do it? What good will it do us? But, above all, how shall we achieve it? How can it be possible?

My love is **something valuable** to me which I ought not to throwaway without reflection. **It imposes duties on me for whose fulfilment I must be ready to make sacrifices.** If I love someone, **he must deserve it** in some way...

He deserves it **if he is so like me in important ways that I can love myself in him;** and **he deserves it if he is so much more perfect than myself that I can love my ideal of my own self in him.**

Again, I have to love him if he is my friend's son, since the pain my friend would feel if any harm came to him would be my pain too—I should have to share it.

But if he is a stranger to me and if he cannot attract me by any worth of his own or any significance that he may already have acquired for my emotional life, it will be hard for me to love him. Indeed, I should be wrong to do so, for my love is valued by all my own people as a sign of my preferring them, and it is an injustice to them if I put a stranger on a par with them.

But if I am to love him (with this universal love) merely because he, too, is an inhabitant of this earth, like an insect, an earth-worm or a grass-snake, then I fear that only a small modicum of my love will fall to his share... What is the point of a precept enunciated with so much solemnity if its fulfilment cannot be recommended as reasonable?

Three Religious Responses to Revelation

Mysticism

Star of Redemption, 223-224

Man defined only as an object of divine love is cut off from the whole world and closed in himself. For any normal sensibility, there is in any mysticism something disquietingly and even objectively dangerous. Mysticism turns into the cloak that renders the mystic invisible. His soul is open to God, but because it is open only to God, it is invisible for the rest of the world and cut off from it. **With an arrogant sense of security, the mystic turns the ring on his finger, and immediately he is with “his” God and has nothing more to say to the world. This is possible only because he wants to be absolutely nothing other than God’s favorite. In order to be so, in order, that is, to see nothing other than the one track running from God to him and from him to God, he must deny the world, and since it will not let itself be denied, he must actually dis-own it...** This relationship of the pure mystic with the world, which is fundamentally an immoral relationship, is absolutely necessary for him, if indeed he wants to confirm and safeguard his pure mystical state. The world necessarily closes itself off to the closure of the arrogant man. And man, whom we have already seen open up, instead of coming alive as speaking figure, is swallowed up again in his enclosure.

The Zealot

Star of Redemption. 289-290

The zealot, the sectarian, in short all tyrants of the Kingdom of heaven, instead of accelerating the coming of the Kingdom, sooner delay it; by leaving their nearest unloved and reaching for the second nearest, they are precluded from the multitude of the ones who, moving forward, in a broad front, piece by piece of the ground, each the one nearest to him, conquer, occupy,—inspire; and their forestalling, their personal preference for the second nearest does not render any pioneering service to those following; for it remains without effect; the arable land, prematurely ploughed by the zealot, bears no fruit; only when its time has come—and it comes for it, too—only then does it bear fruit; but then the whole work of cultivating has to be done again afresh; the first sowing has rotted, and it certainly requires the obstinate foolishness of scholars to claim in view of the rotten remains that this is “actually” “already” the same that is later ripened into fruit.

The Sinner

Star of Redemption. 291-292

Prayer for the death of the other thus demands that the other remain in eternity what he already is from the beginning of the world: created thing—Other; however, one would himself like to be Self, awakened to his own life, and thus one who simply outlives, one who outlives all that is eternally “other.” An eternal wall of separation must stay standing between the I and all others. The bridge that leads from the I to the he, from Revelation to Creation, and above which it is written: Love your other, for he is not an other, not a he, but an I like you, “he is like you”—the I that prays for the death of the other refuses to walk on this bridge; he wants, just like the mystic, whose secret sin the honest sinner, the criminal, openly expresses, to stay thoroughly in Revelation and leave Creation to the “others”; thus the sinner, the candid criminal, like the mystical dealer in mysteries, denies Redemption; for what else is redemption but that the I learns to say you to the he?

Letter to Edith Hahn. January 16, 1920

Believe me, a person who loves will no longer tolerate anything dead around him. And since love teaches him “not to run away,” there’s nothing left for him, whether for good or ill, but to love. (More precisely, for good *and* ill.) “As He loves you, so shall you love”—this passage from the Talmud, which effects the transition in *my book* from revelation to redemption, from “And thou shalt love the Lord, thy God.” (Deut. 6:5) to “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Lev. 19:18), is a great passage and means nothing else. We never awaken for our own sakes; but love brings to life whatever is dead around us. This is the sole proof of its authenticity. You see, I can no longer write a “book,” everything now turns into a letter, since I need to see the “other.”

Loving the Other who is like you but not you

Franz Rosenzweig, Star of Redemption

p. 234

The neighbor is therefore only a representative; he is not loved for himself, he is not loved for his beautiful eyes, but only because he is just there, because he is just my neighbor. In his place- in this place that is for me the one neighboring on me- there could just as well be another person; the neighbor is the other

p. 257

It is not said to him by God to do unto his neighbor what he would like done to himself. This practical form of the commandment of love of the neighbor, serving as a rule of conduct, really only designates the lower negative limit; the commandment forbids crossing over this limit in action, and already for this reason alone, it will be better to express it, even outwardly, in a negative form. For man must love his neighbor as himself. Like himself. Your neighbor is "like you." ... "Like you," hence not "you."

p. 292

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Letter to Gritli, September 11, 1918

That's why I don't erase what I know about someone from others. All images of a person that circulate around the world belong to him, and if I want him completely, then I include all these images, including the caricatures, pamphlets, even the hate songs, in my image of him. Why shouldn't there be laughter, pity, even horror in love? I want to love people completely, just as they are, I don't love angels, I love people who "are like me", who have everything that is dark in their soul, also has what I have in mine.

Love as Hesed (uncommanded: free and radical)

Star of Redemption. 232-233

God's commandments, at least those of the "second Table," which specify the love of the neighbor, have this form without exception: "Thou shalt not." They are capable of wearing the clothing of the law only as prohibitions, only as markers delimiting that which is absolutely inconsistent with love of the neighbor; their positive character, their "thou shalt," enters exclusively into the form of the one and general commandment of love. The commandments that are clothed in the coat of positive laws mainly concern laws of worship, of the gestural language where love toward God is expressed, that is to say the carrying into effect of the "First Table." The worldly work, and above all the highest work is a totally free and unpredictable love.