

UNIVERSALISM AND THE JEWISH EXCEPTION:  
LACAN, BADIOU, ROSENZWEIG  
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*Who can count the dust of Jacob,  
Number the dust-cloud of Israel?*

— *Numbers, 23:10*

The question of universalism was a centrally divisive issue in epistemology and ontology from Plato through the Middle Ages. Since the Enlightenment (if not already with Saint Paul), universalism became the definitive problematic in theology, ethics, and political theory, where it has remained a central issue, as exemplified in recent work by Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, Étienne Balibar, and many others. In the Western political-theological imaginary, Judaism has often played the role of “particular” to Christianity’s “universal” — a polemical conceptualization that has in turn spawned vigorous debate and response within Jewish philosophy in the last two centuries, including major statements by Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, and Michael Walzer. I want to address the question of “Jewish Universalism” with special attention to the psychoanalytic and philosophical insights elaborated by Badiou and Jacques Lacan as they bear on the “new thinking” of Franz Rosenzweig. Lacan’s thinking in the seventies revolved around a new definition of the fundamental trauma that he had long called “the real” in terms of what he called the “impossibility” of the sexual relationship. The non-relationship between men and women, according to Lacan, involves incommensurable modalities of universalism, and distinct structures of subjectivity. Lacan’s thinking, as developed in parallel but by no means identical ways by Laclau, Žižek, and Badiou, can help us approach the paradoxical question of a particular, *Jewish*, universalism, and from there, to return to the urgency of the universal today.

This project involves broaching three fundamental questions. First, there is the general or abstract question, *what is “universalism”?* For many critics and theorists today, “universalism” is synonymous with Eurocentrism or Western imperialism, and as such is understood as always existing at the expense of particular people and cultures, which are absorbed into a “we” that ignores and ultimately eliminates their specificity. But is this necessarily the case? Moreover, are universals

subject to empirical verification in particular examples, or are they purely theoretical assertions or ideals, indifferent to actual situations and circumstances? Can such universal statements be truly absolute, or do they necessarily involve tacit or explicit borders beyond which they do not function, historically specific moments before and after which they might not hold, or exceptional cases in which they do not apply? To extend this question, does a universal principle *require* at least one exclusion, an exception that “proves the rule,” a constitutive exception without which it *cannot* hold?

Secondly, I want to ask the particular question, *what is Jewish universalism?* Indeed, can there be such a thing as a *particular* universal, a universalism that is defined in terms of a specific group of people or body of texts? Jewish Universalism in turn poses the question of election: does “election” simply contradict the ideal of universalism, or can a universalism be embodied or exemplified by a particular “chosen” people? Does the idea that the Jews were *chosen* by God as his special treasure vitiate the countervailing claim that election was not merely for the sake of the redemption of the Jews, but the entire world? In the *Star of Redemption*, the German-Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig presents a model of Judaism and Christianity as *dual universalisms*, with distinctive projects, sometimes at odds, and even hostile to one another, but each with its own logic of the universal. Bringing Rosenzweig into dialogue with the very different projects of Lacan and Badiou, we might call these modalities the Christian *All* and the Jewish *not-all*. These are not so much complementary as *supplementary* projects, in the sense that each one brings out something lacking in the other and each presents itself as excessive to, or unthought by the other. This essay focuses not on the Jewish-Christian relationship, but rather on the Jewish not-all as it takes shape between the distinctive projects of Lacan, Badiou, and Rosenzweig.

I build this conception of the Jewish not-All from biblical and rabbinic texts read in conjunction with philosophical and psychoanalytic interventions; together they present the nodes of what I would call a *subtractive theology* – not a “negative theology,” but one that strives to articulate itself in *positive* terms as the decompletion of the All, as the fidelity to a liberating event in which heaven and earth were, once and for all, rent asunder. Finally, I want to consider the consequences of Jewish universalism for the idea of universalism as such. That is, *what is universalism after Jewish universalism?* What does Jewish thinking or experience offer to the notion of universalism? To continue in this Hegelian structure of thinking, is there an individual or “concrete” universalism that is not specific to Jewish texts or ideas, but can only be thought by passing through them? My hope is to show not only that Jewish thought includes a very strong concept of universalism, but that this thought has much of value for non-religious thinking, indeed, for thinking as such.

### UNIVERSALISM IN PSYCHOANALYSIS: LACLAU, LACAN, BADIOU

Although already active in various Pre-Socratic thinkers, universalism is given its “classical” formulation in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. For Plato, the world of appearances we inhabit, filled with particulars of perception, vagaries of opinion, and limited possibilities of knowledge, is merely the shadow of a higher reality of universal ideas or forms, which remain unperturbed in their eternal truth and essential goodness.

Whereas Plato is usually associated with the philosophical position that became known as “Realism,” which argues that general or abstract ideas exist independently of particulars, Aristotle is frequently identified as the source of the opposed position, “Nominalism” (although his thinking is complicated on this topic, and he cannot be said to fully endorse the ideas that come to be associated with that name). Aristotle reframes Plato’s notion of an ontological spectrum of universal reality and particular appearances in terms of modes of causality. For Aristotle, the universal is the “formal cause” or “substantial form” that gives rise to the particular objects gathered together under its name. Moreover, the universal is primarily a mode of logical reasoning, as in a proposition of the type “All x is y.”<sup>1</sup> The difference between Plato and Aristotle on universals opens the way for the later debates among “realists,” “nominalists,” and “conceptualists” that will remain the dominant philosophical issue through Scholasticism and beyond.<sup>2</sup> In the Neo-Platonic theory of “emanations,” the essential reality of transcendental ideas communicates itself to the multiplicity of individual things, which retain greater reality, truth, and goodness the closer they remain to their source. Ernesto Laclau argues that the salient characteristic of the classical paradigm is its lack of any notion of mediation: whether we understand universals as ontological or epistemological entities, a particular cannot transform or otherwise affect a universal, but only reflects it, to a greater or lesser extent. Although the sphere between the universal and the particular constitutes a continuum, it can only be traversed in one direction, descending into increasing degrees of aberration and degeneration.

While the Platonic concept of universals involves the assumption of an essential continuity between universal and particular, what Laclau calls the “Christian” model (although it involves a complicated infusion of both Platonic and Aristotelian ideas) assumes their fundamental *discontinuity*. Such nominalists as Ockham break with the objective universalism of the realists by arguing that universals only exist in the mind, as purely subjective constructs. By assuming that God is fully free in his construction of the natural world, which need not reflect divine models, nominalism opens up the possibility of empiricism and ultimately the development of secularized universalist principles of reason. In the temporality of the mortal world, we have no access to the truly universal perspective that is God’s alone; until the end of time, we will see only “through a glass, darkly” — that is, only particulars, disconnected from their higher meaning. The eternal

world of God is absolutely discontinuous with the temporal world of human beings, and it is only through the miraculous act of *incarnation* that the divine and human worlds momentarily come together.<sup>3</sup>

While the nominalist logic of Christianity constituted a break with classical and Neo-Platonic realism, in which universals “emanated” or expressed themselves in the world of particulars, the Christian model also involved the hypostatization of reason, leading to what Laclau describes as a third model, the “modern” notion of the universal/particular relationship as a *dialectic*. For Hegel and Marx, the particular is neither dependent nor independent of the universal, but potentially *embodies the universal in itself*. For Hegel, the real of particulars is identical with the rationality of universals; the apparent contradiction between them dissolves in the movement towards the absolute Idea. Hegel’s notion of the “concrete universal” dialecticizes the opposition between Nominalism and Realism, following the nominalist path in breaking with both Aristotelian notions of predication and Neo-Platonic models of emanation. For Hegel, Scholastic Nominalism allows the truth of Christian universalism to emerge: “The universal is the One, but not abstract; it is conceived or thought of as comprehending all things in itself. With Aristotle the universal was, in a judgment, the predicate of the subject in question....With Plotinus, and especially with Proclus, the One is still incommunicable, and is known only by its subordinate forms. But because the Christian religion is a revelation, God is no longer therein the unapproachable, incommunicable, a hidden mystery.”<sup>4</sup> For Hegel, the universal includes the particular in itself: “thought (and the universal) is not a mere opposite of sense: it lets nothing escape it, but outflanking its other, is at once that other and itself.”<sup>5</sup> The dialectic of universal and particular presents the fundamental operation of *thinking*, and lies at the heart of the project of philosophy itself. Hegel’s dialectic of history exemplifies what Balibar calls “fictive universality,” by which he does not mean that it is not real, but that it has to do with institutions and representation through which a version of universalist reality is “constructed.” Fictive universality works by producing identities that “transcend the limitations and qualifications of particular identities,” through the “*internal* process of individualization: virtual deconstruction and reconstruction of primary identities.” This is always at the cost, however, of the imposition of “normalization” that implies, for better or worse, exclusions and limitations.<sup>6</sup>

Marx follows Hegel’s dialectical account of universalism in his notion of the Proletariat, which is a particular social body that can itself constitute a universal class, without the need of any divine miracle or special figure of incarnation. Laclau argues that the failure of history to play out in the ways predicted by Marx has demonstrated the limitations of dialectical universalism. The inadequacy of the dialectical conceptualization of the universal in terms of the totality of the means of production and the projected liquidation of class structures has led to a retreat in political and cultural theory to new particularisms, and to post-modern skepticism about all forms of universal assertions. As Laclau writes:

This whole story is apparently leading to an inevitable conclusion: the chasm between the universal and the particular is unbridgeable — which is the same as saying that the universal is no more than a particular that at some moment has become dominant....However, I will argue that an appeal to pure particularism is no solution to the problems that we are facing in contemporary societies. In the first place, the assertion of pure particularism, independently of any content and of the appeal to a universality transcending it, is a self-defeating enterprise. For if it is the only accepted normative principle, it confronts us with an unsolvable paradox. I can defend the right of sexual, racial and national minorities in the name of particularism; but if particularism is the only valid principle, I have to also accept the rights to self-determination of all kinds of reactionary groups involved in antisocial practices.<sup>7</sup>

The cultural critics who have eschewed universalism as such, choosing instead to embrace one or another mode of particularism or globalism, have often found themselves in uncomfortable situations, where the defense of the other's right to his or her particularity (in Levinas' terms, the respect for the radical alterity of the other) comes up against another notion of the other's rights. Laclau argues that, whether we do so implicitly or explicitly, we always have recourse to a universal principle or transcendental claim when faced with such dilemmas. At bottom, the extreme particularism of, for example, some versions of multi-culturalism is merely another version of classical universalism that fails to recognize itself as such. Radical particularism is nothing more than the endorsement of the status quo as the ground that allows such "separate but equal" cultural expressions of desire that are tantamount to, and come with the same consequences as, apartheid.

Laclau insists that the competing rights or desires that make up the social world produce antagonisms that can neither be tolerated in their particularism nor resolved under one of the three traditional modes of the universalist umbrella. Hence he presents a *fourth* model, by arguing that the relationship of particular social agents is "impossible" as such; it cannot be guaranteed or underwritten by any universal principle or entity. But it is precisely insofar as the subject is *not* fully inscribed into a totalizing social sphere, insofar as its demands and desires are not fully met, that another mode of the universal emerges:

The universal is part of my identity as far as I am penetrated by a constitutive lack, that is as far as my differential identity has failed in its process of constitution. The universal emerges out of the particular not as some principle underlying and explaining the particular, but as an incomplete horizon suturing a dislocated particular identity....The universal is the symbol of a missing fullness and the particular exists only in the contradictory movement of asserting at the same time a differential identity and canceling it through subsumption in the non-differential medium...all political identity is internally split, because no particularity can be constituted except by maintaining an internal reference to universality as that which is missing....The universal...does not have a concrete content of its own (which would close in on itself), but is an always receding horizon resulting from the expansion of an indefinite chain of equivalent demands. The conclusion seems to be that universality is incommensurable with any particularity, but cannot, however, exist apart from the particular.<sup>8</sup> (28; 31; 34)

For Laclau, a certain “universalism” remains as the necessary horizon that sutures conflicting particulars without conflating their real differences. His theory of antagonism, however, is not merely “the war of all against all,” the struggle of individual wills for self-expression. Instead, he proposes a notion of the social field in which particular subjects are radically divided from each other and *in themselves*, by their conflicting demands articulated in relation to incompletely realized universals. For instance, if my demands as a subject living in relation to an idea of democracy are defined by the concept of “equality,” they will conflict with my neighbor’s demands, which are articulated in terms of a notion of democracy defined, for example, by “freedom.” In each case, subjectivity is determined as a *failed* particularization of a universal that is itself experienced as *lacking* something, and in each case the universal is framed in different terms. It is only by understanding myself in terms of universal principles that are *not* fully reflected in my individuality (and hence that constitute me as a *lacking* subject) that my particularism can be anything other than the foreclosure of alterity. The struggle for hegemony, for Laclau, involves the attempt of various particular social agents to represent themselves as the embodiment of the absent universal, but the success or failure of any subject is contingent, since there is no authentically universal social value or principle to be represented. Balibar’s notion of a “symbolic” or “idealistic” universality that would go beyond both “real” universalism (i.e., globalization) and “fictional” universalism (constructed Alls based on nation, religion, and so on) names this ultimate horizon of the universal *equaliberty*. The symbolic or *ideal* universal arises from “the infinite claims” which the individual makes against the institution that would normalize him or her according to the protocols of “fictional” universalism. This is a model of universalism as an ideal that produces the subject as infinite “insurrection,” that is, as resistance against any conditions placed on universalism. The ultimate ideal, moreover, is that “equality” and “freedom” must be thought together, as inseparable terms of a single universal principle — *égaliberté*, the impossible, necessarily infinite question that motivates the struggle for universal liberation. Nevertheless, there will always be multiple, and non-harmonious versions of such ideals. Thus, the question of the universal remains a “permanent source of conflict,” that is necessarily multiple.<sup>9</sup>

These models of another universalism presented by Balibar and Laclau develop out of arguments Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have made in their groundbreaking *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. There, the argument about the contingent relationship between divided subjective particularities and the failed totalities that form their horizon leads to the deconstruction of the notion of society itself: “The incomplete character of every totality necessarily leads us to abandon, as a terrain of analysis, the premise of ‘society’ as a sutured and self-defined totality.”<sup>10</sup> Laclau and Mouffe use Lacan’s notion of the *point de capiton*, the primary signifier whose articulation with the larger symbolic network constitutes the subject, to account for the partial

fixations or “nodal points” through which discursive hegemony is constructed in the absence of any intrinsically unified social structure. The Lacanian notion of the real continues to serve as a point of reference for both Laclau and Balibar in their accounts of the conditions of universalism.<sup>11</sup> We will need to follow the Lacanian elements of Laclau and Mouffe’s argument concerning the impossibility of the social, back to their source. The real, according to Lacan’s later formulations, is most precisely defined by the impossibility of the *sexual* relationship, which in turn involves two distinct modes of universality: “masculine” and “feminine.”

For Lacan, men and women cannot come together in a relationship of intersubjectivity since each is based on a radically different model of the universal, the particular, and the exception. Individual men participate in a universal group of “all men” understood as a unified symbolic system that is granted imaginary closure by the supposition of an exception, a mythical primal father who enforces (but is not subject to) the law of the limited circulation of goods and pleasures that organizes the group. A man is a particular example of the universal category of Men, which is defined as a closed set whose members are equally subjected to this single exception. Women, on the other hand, are no more free of the phallic law than men, but for them it functions without the principle of exception. Women are thus *radically singular*, not examples of a class, or members of a closed set, but *each one an exception*, or members of an open set— a metonymic series of particular women, into which each woman enters “one by one.” Hence there is no common denominator for subjects who locate themselves as women, nor any way of characterizing “women in general,” unlike the case for men, who *are* determined by the assumption that there is a closed set Man.<sup>12</sup> In his essay “L’Étourdit,” Lacan suggests that mankind elaborates itself in its encounter with the impossibility of the sexual relationship as “men” and “women” in two distinct modes of universalism: “It’s from there that we must find two universals, two ‘alls’ sufficiently consistent to separate the speakers — who by virtue of being that, believing themselves to be beings — into two halves such that they don’t entangle themselves too much in their enmeshment, when all is said and done.”<sup>13</sup>

According to Lacan, there are *two modes of universalism* corresponding to the “All” that delimits the field of the masculine subject and the “Not All” that opens up the place of the woman. To use Levinas’ famous opposition, if the universality of male speaking beings constitutes a *totality*, that of women opens onto *infinity*. And between the two there is no commensurability nor complementarity, but indeed a *supplementarity*, as two tangled “halves” that together form no whole.

Lacan’s account of the exceptionality that defines the man’s universality goes back to Freud’s revision of Darwin in the myth of the primal horde he presents in *Totem and Taboo*. The brothers who form the members of the group “all men” are constituted as such by their common remorse for having killed the Father who had limited their access to pleasure by keeping it all for himself: all women, all resources, all freedom — the All, in its mythical plentitude, is what this figure of

selfish enjoyment is imagined to have had to himself, while depriving his sons. Each man exists as a part of the totality of Men insofar as after the Father's death he is marked by "castration," the result of the internalization of the paternal prohibition as a symbolic agency whose rigorous denial of satisfaction or wholeness continues to increase. The group of All Men binds itself together as a unified group enclosed as a homeostatic order with the imaginary integrity of mutual love precisely in order to deny the castration that each individual man suffers. The father has been expelled, but in the process he is *transcendentalized*, as a spectral projection of unavailable pleasure, mythical lost plenitude; he is the great exception who proves the universal rule of the phallic signifier. The group reenacts its originary constitution in new exclusions wherever symbolic remnants of the Father's body and its excessive, traumatic enjoyment can be located — scapegoats, pariahs, or criminals who can serve as the focus for the persistent aggressivity they suffer.

Freud suggests that this principle by which the patriarchal group defines itself as the universal of "All (minus One)" has historically been based on one exclusion in particular, that of the Jews. Recall his bitterly ironic comments in *Civilization and Its Discontents*:

It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness....In this respect the Jewish people, scattered everywhere, have rendered most useful services to the civilizations of the countries that have been their hosts; but unfortunately all the massacres of the Jews in the Middle Ages did not suffice to make that period more peaceful and secure for their Christian fellows. When once the Apostle Paul had posited universal love between men as the foundation of his Christian community, extreme intolerance on the part of Christendom towards those who remained outside it became the inevitable consequence.<sup>14</sup>

In Freud's analysis of anti-semitism, the Jews constitute the impediment to imaginary totality for Christian civilization, preventing its closure, despite its thematization of "universal love between men" as its founding principle. The Jews thus hold the ambivalent position of "Primal Father" for Christian civilization, as the progenitor, the source and embodiment of the law *that has been killed*, from whose heteronymous tyranny the Christian world has received dispensation, but which nevertheless persists. Those unconverted, obstinate Jews who remain are disturbing reminders of the expense of Christian universalism and its limitations, hence they provoke more violence — not because Christian universalism is not as inclusive as it claims to be, but precisely *because* it is universal, because it participates in the (particular) universalism of the All.

Lacan's work on the notion of the "not-all" is the crucial opening for new models of universalism found in the work of Žižek, Badiou, Monique David-Ménard, Joan Copjec, Eric Santner, and others. In the not-all, based on the logic of feminine sexuality, a new possibility of an *infinite* universalism emerges, one that is *open* on all sides. The fundamental logic of inside/outside that

structures Man's universalism makes the border the critical zone, and anything that appears in that position is a source of anxiety, whether in the guise of the singular figure of the sovereign who enforces and transgresses the paternal law from the outside, or in the multiple obscene materializations of the father's lost *jouissance*, spectral objects that return from exile to haunt the All from the inside. The antagonism, the failed subjectivization, and the struggle for hegemony that define the conditions of political universalism for Laclau can thus be viewed as symptoms of the problematic of the universalism of the All — and indeed, conditions of political universalism as such. But the universalism of the not-all must also be thought, for we are “not-all political.” This is not to suggest that there might be some reserve from politics, as some space of the ethical or the aesthetic that could be bracketed or held in abeyance from the conditions of sovereignty and the political universalism of the All. Without the *infinitism* of the not-all, however, we have no way of thinking politics as anything but “war by other means,” or the narcissistic struggle for closure that, no matter how much it might expand its sense of the “we,” still depends on the logical exception for its total rule. The universalism of the All is intrinsically a homeostatic, self-defensive system: like the dialectic of the pleasure and reality principles, its first imperative above all else is the conservation of its own systematicity.

Lacan's logic of the woman's not-all introduces the function of infinity into universalism, and constitutes a key reference in Žižek's and Badiou's conceptions of the universal. For Žižek, the exception does not so much “prove” the rule, in the sense of confirming its universality in the very contingency of its manifestation, but *is itself elevated to the status of universal*. Žižek's work has been absolutely central to the elaboration of the political and philosophical consequences of the not-all, as well as to the critique of the various weak modes of the “All” that underlie the particularisms of much of current cultural studies. In *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek emphasizes that “the Lacanian notion of the Universal...involves a constitutive exception,” asserting that “the basic premise of symptomal reading is thus that every ideological universality necessarily gives rise to a particular ‘extimate’ element, to an element which — precisely as an inherent, necessary product of the process designated by the universality — simultaneously undermines it: the symptom is the example which subverts the Universal whose example it is.”<sup>15</sup> Žižek's notion of “symptomal reading,” as the articulation of the universal in terms of the condensation of the example and the exception, is a commentary on the Lacanian account of subjectivity as determined by an internal exclusion of the *objet a*, the fragment of *jouissance* that falls away from the Other. The key point here is that what is most *subjective* in the subject is precisely this bit of radical foreignness at its heart, which is universal condition of subjectivity. The only link that fully connects one subject to another is that each is de-termined by such an object, the “exception” at the heart of the universal.

Žižek has pointed to a key difference between Laclau and Badiou's notions of the function of the subject and the meaning of truth in relation to universals:

For Laclau, every hegemonic operation is ultimately 'ideological.' For Badiou, in contrast, a Truth-Event is that which cannot be 'deconstructed,' reduced to an effect of an intricate, overdetermined texture of 'traces'...So if, against the deconstructionist and/or postmodern politics of 'undecidability' and 'semblance,' Badiou...wants to (re)assert *truth as a political factor*, this does not mean that he wants to return to the premodern grounding of politics in some eternal neutral order of Truth. For Badiou, *truth itself is a theologico-political notion*: theological insofar as religious revelation is the unavowed paradigm of his notion of the Truth-Event; political because Truth is not a state to be perceived by means of a neutral intuition, but a matter of (ultimately political) engagement. Consequently, for Badiou, subjectivization designates the event of Truth that disrupts the closure of the hegemonic ideological domain.<sup>16</sup>

As Žižek indicates, Laclau's thinking on the question of universals is ultimately deconstructive, insofar as their function in the end is ideological, or are at best the necessary but inauthentic props for subjective transformation. The subject is the agent that hegemonizes a universal, effectively making it function as such, for its own interest. For Badiou, on the other hand, the subject is precisely the interruption of a hegemonic ideological "situation," the point where a new truth can emerge at the point of ideological failure, and in the process produce a subjective universal — the subject as universal. If the politics of the All define the world as it goes along in its daily course (the "situation," in Badiou's sense), the politics of the *not-all* presents the possibility of what Badiou calls an *event*, something new that can irrupt from within a situation, and force it to fundamentally reconfigure itself.

Badiou's thinking is organized around the claim that *mathematics is ontology*, although it rarely recognizes itself as such; hence the work of philosophy is not to talk about being (which only mathematics can do with any specificity), but to articulate and explicate what it is that mathematics is doing when it does ontology. On the other hand, it is up to philosophy to open the question of what it is that is *not* ontology, that is, what *subtracts itself from being*, and this is what Badiou calls an "event." For Badiou the question of philosophy is not so much why there is something rather than nothing (indeed, the only substance he attributes to being is the *void*), but *how does something happen*, how does something new occur in the structure of being, in the situation in which we find ourselves. It is precisely in the event that, according to Badiou, the universal punctually arises. If what we call "knowledge" is a function of the symbolic economies of being, the event marks the possibility of what Badiou calls *a truth*, which is a hole in knowledge, something subtracted from the certainties of our situation. The subject, for Badiou is a function of the *fidelity* to an event that emerges as a truth in one of four discursive fields that he describes: Science, Politics, Art, and Love. Each truth has its own mode of event (to use some proper names: in science, Galileo; in politics, the French Revolution; in art, Schoenberg; in love,

Abelard and Heloise, or, closer to home, my beloved and me), and each has its own possibility of universality in the fidelity to such an event.

Badiou has presented “Eight Theses on the Universal,” which we shall summarize: 1) The proper medium of universalism is *thought*; there is no objective universalism, only *subjective*. 2) Every universalism is *singular*; no sublation of particularity to universality is possible. Hence 3) a universal is not of the order of being, but is an *event* interrupting being. 4) A universal first emerges as a *decision* about something undecidable; as an event disappears, it leaves behind it a *statement*. 5) The universal singularity is presented as the *consequences* that emerge from an event. 6) The act that expresses this universality is *univocal* (not equivocal); this act inaugurates a series of *fidelities*, infinite consequences. 7) Every universal singularity remains open, incomplete, “not-all”; its trajectory is infinite. 8) Universalism is the faithful construction of an *infinite generic multiplicity*.<sup>17</sup>

For Badiou, universalism is something that happens in thinking, it is a *way of thinking* that involves *decision*, *fidelity*, and *act*. As such, it cannot be demonstrated objectively or determined by its inclusiveness, but is manifested in the *subject* born in the decision to be faithful to it. Moreover, universalism must be distinguished from any ideology of the particular and the general, however inflected. Something becomes universal not in its generalization, but precisely as a *rupture* in a system of particulars and generalities, an “impossibility” that materializes in the structure of necessity, possibility, and contingency. A universalism is the result of a truth process that is never complete; it can never result in a closed set, such as a list of determinate “human rights,” but always remains open, infinite. Badiou’s key theorist of the universal, of course, is Saint Paul.<sup>18</sup> Paul’s fidelity to the event pointed to by the declaration “Christ is resurrected” is exemplary of the new subject of the universal, insofar as it demonstrates the *real consequences* of the decision to be faithful, no matter how fictional the statement involved: “The claim ‘Christ is resurrected’ is as though subtracted from the opposition between the universal and the particular, because it is a narrative statement that we cannot assume to be historical.”<sup>19</sup> It is an *undecidable* statement, and in its subtraction from dialectical universal/particular thinking, it *breaks* with the entire social-conceptual conditions in which it arises, and declares them indifferent to the event. Paul’s theorization of a *sameness*, the indifference of obeying the law or not, the irrelevance of being a man or a woman, a Greek or a Jew, is not meant, according to Badiou, to eradicate differences, but to avoid the polarizing differences that breed absolute antagonism.<sup>20</sup> Difference is obvious and ubiquitous; it does not require much, Badiou suggests, to encounter the otherness of the other. The real challenge, however, is to find *sameness* in the universality of the subject that arises in its fidelity to an event. Badiou writes, “Paul’s maxim, which is that of the dissolution of the universalizing subject’s identity in the universal, makes of the Same that which must be achieved, even if it includes, when necessary, altering our own identity.” For Badiou, Paul is the subject who aspires to think universalism, to live it and be faithful to the event not by exiting the world in which it emerged, but in being the exception within that world: “Only what is

an immanent exception is universal.”<sup>21</sup> For Badiou, the history of Christianity is by and large a betrayal of Paul’s universalism, but Paul remains the exception to its rule.

My project here is to articulate a notion of an *intensive* Jewish universalism that is supplementary to the *extensive* account of Christian universalism that develops from Paul’s thinking. Badiou’s eighth thesis, that states universalism is constructed as a “generic multiplicity” or “generic set” (a key idea that Badiou borrows from the mathematician Paul Cohen) is of central importance. A “generic set” is a set that is included in a situation without belonging to it, that is, without being proper to it or presented in it — without being discernable in the terms of the situation. The process of a truth, according to Badiou, is the elaboration of a subset of elements that, although invisible and insignificant from the perspective of the situation, remain faithful to the event and testify to its truth. There are no positive predicates other than this fidelity that unifies the elements of generic sets, keeping it *open*, as “sets made up of infinitely many members that share no common characteristic and conform to no common rule.”<sup>22</sup> Badiou’s idiosyncratic symbol for the generic set in *Being and Event* is  $\wp$ , suggesting that the paradigmatic instance of such a set is the set of *not-all women*.

The principle of *exception*, in the logic of the universalism of the All, is one of *sacrifice*: the primal sacrifice of the father for the sake of the *jouissance* that he is imagined to possess; the sacrifice of their hopes for free *jouissance* that the group of brothers must accept as the condition of their ongoing co-existence after the murder of the father; and, the periodic sacrifice of the remnants of expelled *jouissance* that remain and remind the brothers of their crime can provide occasions for the satisfaction of their aggressivity in its re-enactment. Thus, the category of “All men” is universalized by the sacrifice of the exception. The group of “not-all women,” however, is not without limitation. Indeed, the principle of limitation that marks a woman is that there is *no exception* to it. But if there is something nevertheless crucially “not-all” in feminine sexuality that infinitizes its universalism, it functions not by means of sacrifice, but by decompletion or subtraction. The All is decompleted in the case of a woman, insofar as the field of women has no unity, no closure, no totality. There is no scene of primal sacrifice that constructs an imaginary fullness that was lost, and which must be compensated for, as is the case in the sacrificial logic that underwrites the notion of “All Men” and the concept of Being itself.

Badiou terms this decompletion of the All of Being the *act of subtraction*.<sup>23</sup> Subtraction is not part of an economy of restoration; it is not sublimated into a higher unity, it is not part of a balance sheet of “pluses” and “minuses.” Subtraction is a purely immanent act which opens the place for a universal truth, and for the articulation of a subject in the space of its decompletion.<sup>24</sup> The event that ruptures a situation does not occur through the addition of something new, a catalyst or seed crystal dropped into it, but when something falls out and is no longer comprehensible in the terms and principles that govern the world of the situation. A *hole* emerges in a system

of reality when we can no longer decide the meaning of some particular object, or no longer discern the valence of some distinction, when we stumble on something that we cannot name. Most importantly, “subtraction” is when a group (a multiplicity), emerges in the whole that is determined by no predicates (no characteristics), other than its infinite fidelity to the event itself, and in its coalescence it gives body to an impossibility that forces the reconstruction of the whole in fundamentally new terms. Each of these points is sublimely relevant to the Jewish question, to the question of *Jewish universalism*.

### JEWISH UNIVERSALISM: THE CASE OF FRANZ ROSENZWEIG

Even if Jewish writers first came into contact with philosophical universalism directly from Greek sources, it is probably Saint Paul who first compels the Rabbinic world to pick up the gauntlet of political-theological universalism and respond to its challenge. Christian Neo-Platonisms and Augustinian theology developed the universalist world-historical implications of Paul’s “mission to the Gentiles” with philosophical arguments about nature, mind, and God, which Jewish authors from Philo through the Kabbalists could borrow from as needed to justify their projects. Even so, it is not until the Enlightenment that Jewish thinkers felt required to mount a systematic defense of Judaism against accusations of “tribalism” and “exclusivism” in terms of universalist principles retrieved from biblical, Rabbinic, and Kabbalistic texts with the intension of measuring up to Greek and Christian concepts of the All. The most concerted of modern Jewish apologetic efforts is that of the great Neo-Kantian philosopher, Hermann Cohen. Cohen not only strived to reinvigorate Kantian principles of reason, but modeled his *oeuvre* after that of Kant, writing three primary treatises (epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical) and a late text echoing Kant’s *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, in both its title and primary assumptions, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism* (1919). Cohen argued that Jewish thought and Kantian practical reason share notions of transcendental origins and teleology, hence both operate under the necessity of the structural presupposition of God, rather than particular metaphysical beliefs. Cohen’s rationalized Judaism aspired to a kind of Protestant purity that would, he imagined with tragic bad timing, be realized in a great German-Jewish synthesis.<sup>25</sup>

With Franz Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption* (1920), however, a new encounter between “Judaism” and “philosophy” takes place, one that breaks with the defensive approach to Jewish universalism, competitive with Christian models, as well as the assimilationist attempt to reconcile Judaism and with Enlightenment reason. Instead, Rosenzweig presents Judaism and Christianity as parallel modes of existence, parts of a common universalist mission — though at times uneasy neighbors, with separate, distinct agendas. Contrary to the common understanding of Christianity, as the religion that has already welcomed the Messiah, and Judaism as the religion that remains tied to the quotidian world of minute legal observance, patiently waiting for

the Messiah's ever-deferred advent, Rosenzweig argues that it is the Jews who inhabit eternity now, and the Christians who engage in world-historical expansionist struggle, unfolding their universalist mission according to the logics of history and empire. In the *Star*, Judaism is the "fire" of eternal life, and Christianity is the "rays" by which the fire's light expands ever outward. The essential truths of the two religions have less to do with credos, doctrines, and observances than with ways of being in the world — modes of temporal existence and subjectivity that function as component parts of a universalism that can be finally realized only by each religion following its distinct agenda.

If the Christian drive to expand to the nations defines a universalism of the "All," it only does so insofar as there is an *exception* to its totality, the *Jew*, who cannot simply be included in the Christian dispensation without giving up, precisely, his or her Judaism. Moreover, this exclusion is already part of the very structure of Jewish self-understanding as being "chosen" for a priestly role, to be "a light onto the nations," which is conceived more as an excessive burden on an undeserving people than an exceptional favor or a sign of special merit. The Christian understanding of universalism is based on a *sacrificial* logic — Christ must die so the world as a whole can be saved; indeed, his very *Jewishness* must be eliminated, so that those who accept his sacrifice may show themselves to be the true "chosen" people, who are worthy because of their faithfulness to faith itself. Jewish universalism, on the other hand, *sacrifices sacrifice*, which it replaces with a logic of *substitution* (that is, the substitution of the ram for the child, in Abraham's "sacrifice" of Isaac, the *Akeda*) and *subtraction* (for a literal example, the removal of the foreskin in circumcision). To the extent that it presents itself in these terms, the Jewish exception introduces a universalism of the "not-all" hitherto unknown in the world.

In *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig begins by framing his argument as a challenge to Idealism. He argues that the unicity attributed to the world by idealist philosophy is only a function of the unity of the logos used to conceptualize it; both are demonstrably false, or at most their relationship is contingent, and to deny the "totality of being" and "the unity of reasoning" as he does is once again to "throw down the gauntlet to the whole honorable company of philosophers from Ionia to Jena."<sup>26</sup> But rather than retreating from Idealism to a particularist or culturalist position, Rosenzweig presents a renewed account of universalism, one that takes its departure from the thinking of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche rather than that of Kant and Hegel. In the *Star*, Rosenzweig criticizes Idealism as a defensive formation against the reality of individual deaths, which "give the lie, even before it has been conceived, to the basic idea of philosophy, the idea of the one and universal cognition of the All" (5). In the encounter with the singularity of a life and the particularity of its death, the illusory totality of the All fragments into three initially unrelated elements, God, World, and Man — three "not-alls," we might say, that exist in self-reflexive isolation from each other. Rosenzweig writes, "the hitherto fundamentally simple content of philosophy,

the All of reasoning and being, unintentionally split up for us into three discrete pieces which repelled each other in different but as yet not clearly apprehensible fashion. These three pieces are God, world, and man....We mean to restore them, not as objects of a rational science but, quite the contrary, as ‘irrational’ objects” (19). These elements are “irrational” not conceptually, but in the sense that a number (such as the square root of 2) can be irrational — real but infinite in expression, without completion or periodicity. Rosenzweig is not arguing in a Kantian mode for the limitation of the knowability of these three concepts, but that they are infinite in their presentation of self-difference. Initially, there is nothing that links God, world, and man; indeed, they “repel” each other, insofar as each implies modalities of thought that contradict or at the very least completely ignore those of the others. Ultimately, they will enter into correlation with each other by means of language and along the paths of interaction that Rosenzweig will call “creation,” “revelation,” and “redemption.” But at the level of their initial descriptions via “metaphysics” (God), “metalogic” (world), and “metaethics” (man), they remain isolated fragments, real but irrational — neither “nothings” nor “everything,” but three *some things*.<sup>27</sup>

The *Star of Redemption* is not a theological project, an attempt to know God or to justify his ways to man; indeed, Rosenzweig insists that it is not even a “Jewish” book, but a work of philosophy, *tout court*. It is a systematic thought experiment that leads to some knowledge, or in Badiou’s sense, to a *truth* that arises from the contradictions in knowledge, a truth that we cannot presuppose from the beginning. The decision to take this path, Rosenzweig argues, is precisely that: to make a *choice*, one that involves neither the presuppositions of Idealism, which moves from death as “Nothing” to the thought of “Everything”; nor those of Negative Theology, as a kind of proto-deconstruction which relentlessly criticizes the possibility of making any positive statement whatsoever, refusing to choose, and reduces every “something” to a “nothing,” where finally, Rosenzweig writes, “atheism and mysticism can shake hands” (23). Instead, what Rosenzweig calls “The New Thinking” will chose to begin with nothing and to move to “something,” to say *yes* to “not nothing.” Unlike the dialectical logic of Idealism and the inductive method of negative theology, Rosenzweig’s first guide for this journey or gesture of thought will be mathematics. Rosenzweig’s mathematical symbology, a sequence of equations of the sort “A=A,” will be algebraic in structure, but will also require an element of the calculus — in particular, Hermann Cohen’s account of the “infinitesimal,” which, in Rosenzweig’s elegant description, borrows “all the characteristics of finite magnitude with the sole exception of finite magnitude itself” (20).<sup>28</sup> For Rosenzweig, Cohen’s thesis on the infinitesimal method is the key text in his otherwise Kantian (all too Kantian) thinking, a decisive break with the Idealist tradition: “in the place of the one and universal nothing, which, like the zero, could really be nothing more than ‘nothing,’ that genuine ‘non-thing’ [*Undings*], [Cohen] set the particular nothing whose fruitfulness refracted into realities” (Galli trans., 29). For Rosenzweig, the infinitesimal is the “particular nothing” — more than

Idealism's reification of death as Nothing yet less than the lifeless somethings of empiricism, hence the best starting point for a philosophy of origins that would presuppose neither no thing nor Nothing. The notion of the infinitesimal will ultimately be criticized by mathematicians as a theoretically incoherent entity and will yield to more productive forms of calculation; for Rosenzweig, however, it represents a powerful attempt to think outside of the dialectical relationship of empirical particularism and idealist universalism.<sup>29</sup>

For Rosenzweig, the idea of the universe as *created* must be distinguished from classical ideas of "generation" [*Erzeugung*] and Neo-Platonic notions of "emanation," which, he argues, are the direct antecedents of Hegelian Idealism. In both classical and Neo-Platonic thought, the world is understood as a universal or set of universal categories made up of particulars that express it: "The enduring essence of the structured world was the Universal, or more precisely the category which, although itself universal, yet contains the individual within itself, indeed steadily brings it forth from within itself" (120). This protocosmic world is a steady state universe without temporal or spatial coordinates, characterized simply by its persistence in being. The world of creation, however, implies not only something radically external to it, a creator, but also an instability that Rosenzweig calls, in quasi-Heideggerian fashion, *existence* [*Dasein*] in opposition to being:

In the world which manifests itself as creature, this enduring essence is converted into a momentary essence 'ever renewed' and yet universal. An unessential essence thus....It is: existence. Existence, in contrast to Being, means the universal which is full of the distinctive and which is not always and everywhere but, herein infected by the distinctive [*Besonderen*], must continually become new in order to maintain itself. The world is a firm configuration out of which existence emerges and which it denies in its constant need for renewal....For what existence lacks is Being, unconditional and universal Being. In its universality, overflowing with all the phenomena of the instant, existence longs for Being in order to gain a stability and veracity which its own being cannot provide. (120-121)

The world of created *Dasein* in its very universality lacks the fullness of *Sein*, the "All" of the protocosmic world of Greek thought. For Being to be created is for it to be *decompleted*, destabilized, thrown into the transience of existence, "infected" by the singularity of its existence, yet precisely as such attaining an "overflowing" universality. Creation is both a punctual originary intervention, from a hypothetical point outside of being, and the ongoing becoming of being, ever repeated and renewed. Rosenzweig describes the differences between the world as understood by Idealism and the metalogical world, leading ultimately to the notion of the *created* world of *Dasein*:

In contrast to the all-filling world of Idealism, the metalogical world is the wholly fulfilled, the structured world. It is the whole of its parts. These parts are not fulfilled by the whole, not borne by it: *the whole is simply not All* [*das Ganze ist eben nicht All*], it is in fact only a whole. Accordingly many paths lead from the parts to the whole. Indeed, to be quite precise, every part — insofar as it is really a part, really individual — has its own path to the whole, its own trajectory. From the universe of the idealistic view,

on the other hand, which fills all its members and bears every single one of them, only one single path leads to these members. (51-52; emphasis added)

Unlike the universal All of Idealism, according to Rosenzweig, the universalism already immanent in the metalogical notion of the world is *not All*; its wholeness is *produced* by its parts, rather than presumed as a unifying template to which parts must conform. Each part relates to the whole as a singular real thing, joining the universal along its own singular and idiosyncratic path, as one in a series of heterogeneous parts; whereas for Idealism reality is attributed only to the idea of an originary and ultimate universal, the truth which expresses itself or “emanates” in relatively less-true particularities.

The “logic of the Idea” (which for Rosenzweig encompasses Platonism and Neo-Platonism, and much of the history of philosophy through Fichte and Hegel) assumes the priority of the universal and its “emanation” or expression in particular predicates, hence it can be symbolized algebraically as “A = B.” In “the logic of creation,” the universality of creation is secondary, the result of a transformation enacted on the multiplicity of being, which Rosenzweig symbolizes as “B = A”: “the chaotic plentitude of the distinctive is the first thing created in the creation, and...the universal consists of the ‘given’ vessels [*gegebenen Gefäße*] placed there by the creator, into which the distinctive is funneled as it bubbles forth freely in creation” (139). This is only a momentary containment, Rosenzweig suggests; we cannot simply reverse emanation in order to conceptualize creation, which would be, so to speak, to put old wine in new jugs. It is the illusion of Idealism to imagine that the universalism of creation can be fully explained outside of the perspective of revelation, which constitutes a *linguistic* intervention or interruption of the whole. Logic must be supplemented by language, the word and its grammatical ordering and rhetorical wandering.

The image of the universal as the “‘given’ vessels” is a reference to the key Lurianic Kabbalistic doctrine of “the breaking of the vessels” [*Shevirat HaKelim*]: in this esoteric account of creation, the “vessels” God fashioned as receptacles for his originary creative outpouring of light could not hold the over-fullness of creation, and shattered, exploding in a “Big Bang” of vessel shards and broken elements of light. The world we live in is made up of those fragments; and it is mankind’s duty to “repair the world,” to complete God’s botched job of creation. This catastrophic account of creation implies a fundamental disequilibrium of the universe, which is not one with itself, not harmonious or fully planned, but chaotically plural, a multiplicity. In the ontology of the created world, in Jewish mysticism and in Rosenzweig’s conception, being is not homeostatic; it is *missing something* or *overflowing*, uneasy in itself, and the living experience of this fact constitutes the very essence of *Dasein*.

In the famous letter to his cousin Rudolf Ehrenberg of 1917 that became the *Urzelle*, the germ-cell of the *Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig connects his notion of the created world with

Schelling's notion of God's self-creation from the "dark ground" or abyss [*Abgrund*], and links both to the Lurianic Kabbalistic concept of *tsimtsum*, God's creation of the world through contraction into himself.<sup>30</sup> The earliest reference to this concept is found in *Sefer Yetzira* ("Book of Creation"), the oldest work of Jewish mysticism and the source of the system of *sefirot* (the ten ideal numbers that stand for the ten aspects of God) that became central to Kabbalah.<sup>31</sup> The book begins, "With 32 mystical paths of Wisdom engraved [*chakak*] Yah, the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel ... And He created His universe with three books, with text, with number, and with communication."<sup>32</sup> Aryeh Kaplan glosses this passage by pointing out that the Hebrew word *chakak*, meaning to engrave, cut, inscribe or write, "usually has the connotation of removing material," and is also the root for *chok*, meaning a ruling or decree, "since rules and laws serve to remove some of the individual's freedom of action."<sup>33</sup> Unlike the Biblical account of creation where God speaks the world into existence, *Sefer Yetzira* presents the God of the Tetragrammaton (here called by the abbreviation *Yah*) as *writing* the world into existence through a kind of pre-originary legislative chiseling out that inscribes law into stone. The language of creation is the *counting* of the real, or, as Rosenzweig writes, a "re-counting" [*er-zählenden*], a numerical procedure of computation.<sup>34</sup> This is creation by the *removal* of something: a hollowing out or limiting, that, in the sixteenth-century teaching of Isaac Luria, compiled by his student Chayyim Vital as *Etz Chayyim* ("Book of Life"), became known as the moment of creation called *tsimtsum*:

You should know that before the emanations were emanated and the creations created, a most supreme, simple light filled the whole of existence. There was no vacant space, no aspect of empty space or void, but everything was filled by the simple light of the Infinite [*Ain Sof*]....When it arose in His simple will to create worlds and emanate emanations...then the Infinite contracted itself at midpoint, in the exact center of its light, and after he contracted that light and withdrew away from that mid-point to the sides surrounding it, it left a vacant place, — an empty space, and a void.<sup>35</sup>

From the account of the creation of the world as an act of engraving or inscription in *Sefer Yetzira*, Luria expresses a radically new notion of creation by God's self-*contraction* or decompletion. *Tsimtsum* responds to the question of how something that is not God can come into being, if God is ubiquitous and omnipotent. A space must be cleared for creation, if it is to be other than merely an extension of God, his "emanation," as the Neo-Platonists and Spinozists argued. Hence prior to his emanation, God must create a *nothing* at his absolute center by contraction: rather than creation *ex nihilo*, from out of nothing, *tsimtsum* implies that creation is first *the creation of a nothing*, a void that will itself embody the essential being of the universe, insofar as it is *not-God*.<sup>36</sup> Although some Kabbalists implicitly see this as voluntary exile or self-banishment, *tsimtsum* is not an act of self-sacrifice, as in the Christian account of God's sacrifice of himself on the cross. For in the process of contraction, God *purges himself*, eliminating the elements of evil that were part of his original All. As Gershom Scholem writes, "the whole ensuing process, in which these powers of [stern, ultimately evil] judgment are eliminated from, or 'smelted out'

of, God is a gradual purification of the divine organism from the elements of evil.” It is a “free act of love” on God’s part, but it is also a relief for him to create an area that is not-God, into which he can expel being like a waste product.<sup>37</sup>

The notion of *tsimtsum* became a controversial element of Kabbalah, often excluded insofar as it seemed disturbingly contradictory of more canonical accounts of creation. Kabbalah, of course, is itself a highly esoteric doctrine, only in recent years a part of New Age culture and “Pop” Judaism. But there are elements of this notion of creation by decompletion or emptying-out in the Torah itself (which of course is the ultimate source for mystical writings), as well as the more “orthodox” rabbinical interpretations of them. Recall the famous scene of creation in the beginning of the Book of Genesis: “The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array. On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and he ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had done” (Gen. 2:1-2). The Rabbis ask, if the world was finished on the sixth day, what did God still have to create on the seventh day in order to finish the work that He had been doing? Why doesn’t it say that he finished his work on the sixth day and then rested on the seventh, as most people probably misremember the text as saying? The midrashic response is that it was *rest itself* that was created on the seventh day: “And what was created therein? Tranquility, ease, peace, and quiet.”<sup>38</sup> Once again, rather than creation *ex nihilo*, the Jewish universe is a function of the creation of *a nothing*.

In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan associates the notion of creation *ex nihilo* with Heidegger’s account of the potter’s fashioning of a thing around a void:

Now if you consider the vase from the point of view I first proposed, as an object made to represent the existence of the emptiness at the center of the real that is called the Thing, this emptiness as represented in the representation presents itself as a *nihil*, as nothing. And that is why the potter, just like you to whom I am speaking, creates the vase with his hand around this emptiness, creates it, just like the mythical creator, *ex nihilo*, starting with a hole.<sup>39</sup>

The key element of the Judeo-Christian notion of creation is the production of a void, which opposes the Biblical tradition to the Aristotelian notion that matter is eternal. For Lacan the “introduction of a gap or a hole in the real” defines the distinctively human act of “the fashioning of a signifier,” the originary rupture that allows for modern science and modernity as such to emerge: “modern science, the kind that was born with Galileo, could only have developed out of biblical or Judaic ideology, and not out of ancient philosophy or the Aristotelian tradition.” This is the beginning of the Nominalist break — not the origin of transcendental universalism, as multiculturalist critics of the Judeo-Christian tradition have assumed, but its displacement: “In other words, the vault of the heavens no longer exists, and all the celestial bodies, which are the best reference point there, appear as if they could just as well not be there. Their reality, as existentialism puts it, is essentially characterized by facticity; they are fundamentally contingent.”<sup>40</sup>

Rosenzweig concludes the section on creation in *The Star of Redemption* with a “grammatical analysis” of the first book of Genesis, where the word “good” [*tov*] is used six times to characterize creation. The Rabbis do not fail to notice this anomaly, and Rosenzweig picks up the exegetical debate and draws it into philosophy. After having deemed the things of his creation “good” five times, God concludes by creating man and woman, and now, looking at “all he had made,” he finds it “*very good*” [*tov ma’od*]. The Rabbis do not make what might be the expected comment, that human beings are the crown of creation, hence are especially singled out as “very good.” Rather, they cannot help but follow the phonetic resonances of the passage by reading the phrase *tov ma’od* as *tov mot* — hearing the intensifier “very” as its near homonym *death*, which would make the line mean something like the Stoic thought that “it is good to die.” A series of midrashic interpretations struggle to make sense of why “death” might appear as the culmination of creation, precisely in the place of the most good. In what sense is death involved in the “goodness” of creation? Rosenzweig writes, in the last words of the section of the *Star* on creation:

Within the general Yea of creation, bearing everything individual on its broad back, an area is set apart which is affirmed differently, which is ‘very’ affirmed. Unlike anything else in creation, it thus points beyond creation. This ‘very’ heralds a supercreation within creation itself, something more than worldly within the worldly, something other than life which yet belongs to life and only to life, which was created with life as its ultimate, and which yet first lets life surmise a fulfillment beyond life: this ‘very’ is death. The created death of the creature portends the revelation of a life which is above the creaturely level. For each created thing, death is the consummator of its entire materiality. It removes creation imperceptibly into the past, and thus turns it into the tacit, permanent prediction of the miracle of its renewal. That is why, on the sixth day, it was not said that it was ‘good,’ but rather ‘behold, very good!’ ‘Very,’ so our sages teach, ‘very’ — that is death. (155)

In Rosenzweig’s interpretation, creation is completed by the addition of something beyond it or other than it, “something more than worldly within the worldly,” and something that at the same time takes something vital away from it, death as “something other than life which yet belongs to life.” This is death, in Heidegger’s sense, as the uniquely human horizon of being, death itself as *created* rather than natural or merely the absence of life. Death is not merely good too, as the other side of life, but *very good*, and as such institutes the possibility of comparison, differentiation, and non-identity; death is what displaces humanity from creation, as a “supercreation” [*Überschöpfung*] that *decompletes* the universe in which it lives and dies, and constellates its multitude as the “not all” of creation. If to begin with, creation is the lack in the infinite field of God, creation itself is now constituted as lacking, and humanity will be that part of creation that, in Revelation, is called on to *think* its own lack, to take on the textual question of “the goodness of death” as *its* question.

But, as Rosenzweig immediately goes on to write, beginning the section of the *Star* on Revelation, “Love is strong as death” — a quotation from the Song of Songs. If the work of genesis

involved the construction of the universe (and a universalist ontology) by subtraction, death was the universal subtractive principle that de-completed creation. The generations of humanity that issue from creation only become subjects insofar as they feel themselves to be *loved* by God, in an absolute present. If the ontology of creation produced the multiplicity of the object world in a radical past, revelation produces a *subject*, similarly through subtraction and limitation. Grammatically, according to Rosenzweig, the passage from Creation to Revelation is the shift from the accusative to the nominative case: “As the object of experience, however, the noun ceases to be thing. It no longer exhibits the basic character of the thing, that of a thing among things. Now it is subject and hence something individual. On principle it occurs in the singular” (186). The subject of revelation, the beloved of God, is radically *singular*, defined by a proper name rather than a general interpellation into a group. Unlike creation, which presented an ontological universalism, in which the world is imagined as radically lacking something, being incomplete, but *equally* and indifferently so for the *not-all* of creation, the universalism of revelation is a function of the particularism — even, the *exclusivism* — of election, and hence introduces a political dimension.

Judaism contains elements of a political or ethical universalism from the very beginning, so to speak — in the narrative of creation that opens the Book of Genesis, culminating with the fashioning of man and woman in God’s image, the Bible purports to present an account of *all* mankind. Moreover, the first person we can call a “Jew” in the Bible is Abraham, who will not only be the father of all the “Children of Israel” through Isaac and Jacob, but of “many great nations” — Christian and Muslim and otherwise — who will each have their destinies to fulfill, their own contributions to world history to make, and finally their own “blessing,” and place in a messianic era to come. The narrative of liberation from bondage in Egypt in the Book of Exodus represents an even more profound mode of political, or subjective universalism. If the Greek principle of “democratic” universalism involved the extension of voting rights to the “demos,” *including* those who had been without social or political power as symbolically equal to the traditional ruling class, for the people constituted from the mixed multitude in the Exodus, the principle of their gathering remains the collective memory of previous alienation. Whereas the generations from Abraham to Moses had been defined according to a principle of genealogical continuity, from this transitional moment the definition of the people, *Ha Am*, dramatically expands, and they will thereafter be redefined by their common liberation from a bitter domination that will continue to inform and qualify their sense of belonging as well as their ethical imperatives. In Leviticus 19:34, for example, the Jews are commanded to love the stranger as themselves, “for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

The story of Exodus is not only universalist in its affective history for those people who will call themselves Jews as well as for those who will see themselves as *like* the Jews, but also in the non-genealogical principle of inclusiveness that emerges in the narrative itself at that point in

the narrative. The Bible describes the people constituted in the flight from Egypt as including a “mixed multitude” or heterogeneous “riffraff” [*erev rav*] (Exodus 12:38), which, according to the medieval French commentator Rashi, refers to “a mingling of various nations who had become proselytes.” Moreover, beyond the principle of inclusiveness that emerges at this moment in the narrative and allows *anyone*, forever after, to see themselves as aligned with the multitude that bands together to escape from Egypt, the Bible constitutes here *a new thought* on the universal, by essentially interconnecting or even equating universalism with *freedom*. “Freedom,” however, is presented in ways that do not correspond to post-Enlightenment notions of individualistic freedom, whether the abstract universality of enfranchisement or “freedom of choice,” or even the negative definition of “freedom from” slavery. Recall that Moses repeatedly asks Pharaoh to “let my people go,” not in the name of some abstract principle of freedom or Human Rights, nor for the political freedom of a nation of their own, but *so that they might serve the Lord* (Ex. 7:18), that is, exchange one type of servitude for another, voluntary, one. Freedom itself, the escape from Egypt into the desert, is not the subjective event that produces a new universalism; rather, it creates the necessary preconditions of subjectivization, in the constitution of the people as a *multitude*, no longer defined exclusively by genealogical continuity.

If the story of oppression and liberation in Exodus provides Judaism with an element of political inclusiveness, there is still something that appears to contradict this universalism in the principle of *election*. Indeed, we might say that the constitutive contradiction of Jewish political identity, between universalism and particularism, can be located in the relationship of *exodus from Egypt* and *revelation at Sinai*. On the one hand, what could be more universal in Jewish political identity than the cause of freedom, the flight from bondage in Egypt? On the other, what has defined the Jewish people more precisely and divided them more decisively from the rest of the world than their acceptance of the yoke of the commandments? For the Rabbis, the revelation and assumption of the Torah is not understood as the ratification of a political treaty or the construction of a social contract between free, informed, and consenting agents, but more like a Kierkegaardian leap of faith: a pledging of fidelity prior to understanding and in excess of free will.

Recall two famous midrashim cited by Bialik and Ravnitzky in their collection *The Book of Legends*. First, commenting on “‘And they stood under the mount’ (Exod. 19:17). R. Avdimi bar Hama said: The verse implies that the Holy One overturned the mountain upon them, like an inverted cask, and said to them: If you accept the Torah, it is well; if not, your grave will be right here.” In another midrashic account, the Jews are the only people who (wisely or foolishly) choose to accept the yoke of the law. Here, however, God makes them an offer that they can’t refuse. This notion that the law is accepted without subjective choice, without consideration or reflection, is presented as the proof that they merit the law: “R. Simai expounded: When Israel hastened to say, ‘We will do,’ before saying, ‘We will hearken,’ sixty myriads of ministering angels came

down and fastened two crowns upon each and every one in Israel, one as a reward for saying, 'We will do,' and the other as a reward for saying, 'We will hearken.'"

This reference to Ex. 24:7 understands the fact that "do" [*asah*] comes before "obey" or "hear" [*shama*] in the Israelites' response to God's revelation as an indication that they accepted the commandments before they fully understood or even really heard them. The revelation at Sinai is not the presentation of the law as a positive body of prohibitions and requirements, but, first of all, and essentially, the *revelation of revelation itself*, a pure act of articulation that is not made to a subject, but that *makes* a subject. When the Bible introduces the revelation, writing "And God spoke all these words, saying" (Ex. 20:1), the tradition understands this redoubling as suggesting an inhuman density of God's voice. The sound is incomprehensible, a thundering that kills and resurrects the listener with each word, "something that is beyond the human mouth to articulate or the human ear to absorb." At the same time, God's voice, according to the Rabbinic tradition, divides itself, mutating "into seven voices, and the seven voices into seventy languages, so that all the nations might hear it...Just as a hammer that strikes a rock causes sparks to fly off in all directions, so each and every word that issued from the mouth of the Holy One divided itself into seventy languages."<sup>41</sup> The moment of revelation is a punctual interruption that articulates a particular people at a precise moment as a generic multiplicity, with no common traits other than pure subjectification. From a point of singular density, the revelation translates itself for the entire world.

Its universalism is also *temporal*, a present tense eternity, insofar as the Bible and the tradition of its interpretations understands it as directly addressing all future generations, and including in it the entire history, still unfolding, of its interpretations:

R. Isaac said: At Mount Sinai the prophets of each and every generation received what they were to prophesy, for Moses told Israel, 'But with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day' (Deut. 29:14). He did not say, 'That is not standing with us here this day,' but 'That is not here with us this day,' a way of referring to souls that are destined to be created. Because as yet these had no substance, Moses did not use the word 'standing' for them. Still even though they did not as yet exist, each one received his share of the Torah.<sup>42</sup>

All people who respond to the call of the revelation will hear it *directly*; they will all retroactively have been present at Sinai, to be equally shattered and subjectified by the divine roar. Moreover, the revelation depends upon those future generations, its singularity requiring their infinite multiplicity. As Levinas, one of Rosenzweig's most conscientious (if often tendentious) readers, writes, "It is as if a multiplicity of persons — and it is this multiplicity, surely, that give the notion of 'person' its sense — were the condition for the plentitude of 'absolute truth,' as if each person, by virtue of his own uniqueness, were able to guarantee the revelation of one unique aspect of the truth, so that some of its facets would never have been revealed if certain people had been absent from mankind."<sup>43</sup> Although the revelation was an absolutely singular event whose laws

are binding only for those to whom it was addressed, anyone can, so to speak, choose to have been chosen. This Jewish notion of universality, moreover, does not depend on the possibility of becoming a totality: the fact that anyone can enter the covenant and rightfully claim to have been present at Sinai does not mean that everyone should or someday will, or that those who do not will suffer on that account. The universality of the revelation is an ever-expanding horizon of singularities, an enunciation that is both too full and infinitely regenerating.

I would suggest that the revelation at Sinai is the *event*, in Badiou's sense, that interrupts the ontological situation from creation to the Exodus and articulates the people as a generic multiplicity, with a new experience of subjectivity and universality. If the statement that man and woman are created in God's image in Genesis implies an abstract universalism, of the form "all people are created equal," this could be understood as contradicted by the notion of election in Exodus where a particular people is selected for special favor and a promised land. However, as Levinas and many others have argued, election is not particularism as much as *exceptionalism*: the Jews are chosen, separated from the totality of the world, *for the sake of the other's equality*, so that what was abstract can be made a *concrete universal*. The event at Sinai launches a universality of the not-All, which indexes a contracting divinity (Creation), enumerates the heterogeneity of its social body (Revelation), and faithfully recalls the subject's responsibility to the neighbor (Redemption). Jewish universalism is *fidelity to the Sinai event*, in which the emergence of the Law gave materiality to the antagonism of the social order, forever sundering heaven and earth, God and Man, and repeating the originary decompletion of the cosmos in Creation, the subtractive ontology of *tsimtsum*. The Covenant is simultaneously an act of binding and unbinding: the creation of a new law, a new legal order and a new situation of being, but at the same time, the infinite continuation of the project of liberation, of unbinding, that the Exodus initiated—that is, Jewish universalism is not thought despite the particularism of chosenness, but *because* and *through* election. The Jews are chosen by God not for any good reason, not on account of any characteristics or qualities, but arbitrarily, and contingently. If they follow the terms of the covenant, according to God's criteria, they will be blessed, if not they will suffer; but their success or failure is not based on anything intrinsic to them. If they emerge as a subset of humanity, it is as a *generic* subset, without any principle to differentiate them from the whole of mankind other than their fidelity itself to revelation. As Yeshayahu Leibowitz writes, "The Judaism of Moses is arduous. It means knowing that we are *not* a holy people...The people of Israel were not the chosen people but were *commanded* to be the chosen people."<sup>44</sup>

Near the end of the *Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig explains the concept of "election" through the familiar prophetic language of the "remnant," those chosen few who remain true to the event of their subjectification (whether at Sinai or Cavalry). Whereas the mission of Christianity and its secular developments is to "spread over the world," expanding the universalism of the "All," Judaism's mission is to decomplete the All, to step out of the totality for the sake of infinity:

All secular history deals with expansion. Power is the basic concept of history because in Christianity revelation began to spread over the world, and thus every expansionist urge, even that which was consciously purely secular, became the unconscious servant of this expansionist movement. But Judaism, and it alone in all the world, maintains itself by subtraction, by contraction, by the formation of ever new remnants....In Judaism, man is always somehow a remnant. He is always somehow a survivor, an inner something, whose exterior was seized by the current of the world and carried off while he himself, what is left of him, remains standing on the shore. (404-405)

Rosenzweig opposes the inclusiveness of Christianity to the exclusiveness of Judaism. As Eric Santner indicates, however, Rosenzweig's account of the Jew as "remnant" does not only indicate the "stuckness" of the Jews, their stubborn persistence in their particular ethnic ways despite universal world-historical progress, but the Jew as the materialization of "a certain *rupture* with the time and space of ethnic and national histories."<sup>45</sup> In addition, Slavoj Žižek suggests, in glossing this passage, that this rupture is both *in and for* the world and *in and of themselves*: "Thus the Jews are a remainder in a double sense: not only the remainder with regard to the other set of 'normal' nations, but also, in addition, a remainder with regard to themselves, a remainder in and of themselves."<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Rosenzweig's account suggests that the exceptionalism of "election" is itself made up of three modalities of decompletion, which are *constitutive* of the very universality that they are exceptions to: *contraction* [*Verengung*], the mythical origination of the world as the materialization of the void, as a hole in God where the multiplicity of creation can emerge; *subtraction* [*Subtraktion*], in which a particular people is arbitrarily chosen as the subject of revelation, thereby removed from the All and thereby constituting a new subjectivity of the not-all; and the "ever new remnants" [*immer neuer Reste*] left over and left behind in the world historical expansion of the All, as the promise of its redemption from its own expansionism, its own imperialism.

If we can agree that any universalism whose principle of inclusion is limited to a particular people, nation, ethnicity or other marked class of individuals is no universal at all, can we define Jewish universalism as a subjectivism? That is, is there a Jewish perspective or subjectivity from which the universal can be thought, a Jewish way of *thinking* universalism that applies to all people, Jew and gentile alike? A mode of utopianism, perhaps, a universalism of the mind, but one that has *consequences*, that makes things happen or that expresses its fidelity to an event that has happened, and in the process allows it to persist?

Rosenzweig certainly leads us in this direction. His "star of redemption" systematically constellates the three primal elements that replace the shattered All: the relationships of God and world in creation, God and man in revelation, and man and world in redemption. These three moments, organizing the Jewish experience of temporality, also institute three modes of universalism:

- The absolute past, in which the world originated or was created in its *universal multiplicity* and heterogeneity.

- The ever-renewed present initiated with the declaration of the law at Sinai and sustained by fidelity to the law, when revelation's punctual interruption into creation constitutes a *subjective universality* from out of the situation of multiple peoples and nations.
- The indefinite future wherein lies the possibility of *universal subjectivity* — not in eschatological time, but as a discontinuity within every present moment, the irruption dividing each moment from itself as a “not yet,” and which bears the face of the neighbor.

This final, “redemptive” aspect of Jewish universalism, for Rosenzweig, is realized in the love of the neighbor. Neighbor-love grows according to the logic of the not-all, one by one, as each particular other enters into the universal position of neighbor, infinitely expanding, always open. For Rosenzweig, this expansion must be distinguished from the natural-historical growth of the world, and paradoxically, requires finally the dissolution, or at least the suspension, of election:

But facing this silent, automatic growth of Creation, the loving work of man on earth remains free; such that he may perform it as if there were no Creator, as if Creation did not come to join in with his action: ‘The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, but the earth he gave to the children of men.’ To the children of men and *not to the community of Israel*: in the received love and in the trust, it knows it is unique, but *in the act of loving, it knows it is a child of men*, quite simply, it knows only the ‘anyone,’ just the other and nothing more — the neighbor [*in der Geliebtheit und im Vertrauen weiß sie sich nur als Menschenkinder schlechtweg, kennt sie nur den Irgendjemand, den andern schlechtweg, den – Nächsten*]. (Galli translation, 270-271; emphasis added)

In the universalization of subjectivity that is the work of neighbor love, Israel steps *out* of the status of election, knows itself simply as part of mankind, no longer, or at least not for that particular moment of facing the other as neighbor, is Israel exceptional. Or perhaps better, at that moment the universal is itself made up of nothing but exceptions, each other a neighbor, the one we are enjoined to love as ourselves. In this final frame, Jewish universalism does not designate the members of the covenant, but the possibility of a morality that, although enabled by the covenant, extends beyond its limits, constituting an ever-expanding moral sphere that, by definition, *must not* be exclusively Jewish. The subject who responds to the call of covenantal election exceeds the very moral universe that he or she helps to build, by the fact of *being held responsible for its infinite expansion*, for the rigorous generosity that should be extended to all people. The covenant establishes a link between the world of symbolic values and something that remains exterior or unassimilated to that world, a connection between the “moral” and the “divine” that is predicated on the disjunction between the two — that they cannot be brought together in a totality. In marking the gap left by this self-contraction, the event at Sinai not only sets the laws and conditions of the human moral universe, but also prevents it from achieving closure. The event at Sinai launches a universality of the not-All, which indexes a contracting divinity (Creation), enumerates the heterogeneity of its social body (Revelation), and faithfully recalls the subject's responsibility to the neighbor (Redemption).<sup>47</sup>

1. Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 228.
2. For a helpful conceptual history of Universalism through the Middle Ages, see Alain de Libera, *La querelle des universaux: de Platon à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1996).
3. Laclau argues that this model is the origin of later notions of the “privileged agent of history,” the single individual who expresses a universalism transcending his particular identity.
4. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: The Lectures of 1825-1826*, vol. 3, ed. Robert F. Brown, trans. R.F. Brown (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 85.
5. Hegel, *Logic*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 31.
6. See Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene* (New York: Verso, 2002), 157, 160.
7. Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (New York: Verso, 1996), 26.
8. *Ibid.*, 28, 31, 34.
9. Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, 173.
10. Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 2d ed. (New York: Verso, 2001), 111.
11. See Laclau, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, (New York: Verso, 2000), 64-73. “In a somewhat Lacanian way,” Balibar distinguishes three meanings in universalism: “real,” “fictional,” and “ideal.” *Politics and the Other Scene*, 170.
12. I discuss this material in greater detail in my essay, “Towards a Political Theology of the Neighbor” in Slavoj Žižek, Eric Santner, Kenneth Reinhard *The Neighbor: Three Essays in Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
13. “C’est à partir de là qu’il nous faut obtenir deux universels, deux tous suffisamment consistants pour séparer chez des parlants, — qui, d’être des, se croient des êtres — deux moitiés telles qu’elles ne s’embrouillent pas trop dans la coïtération quand ils y arrivent.” Jacques Lacan, “L’Étourdit,” in *Scilicet* 4 (1973): 12. Thanks to Frank Reinhard for assistance with this translation. See Monique David-Ménard’s commentary on this passage in her outstanding book on universalism in psychoanalysis and philosophy, *Les Constructions de l’universel: Psychanalyse, philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), 107-9. My thoughts here and throughout are indebted to her work.
14. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), 21:114.
15. Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (New York: Verso, 1999), 181. See also his contributions to the joint venture with Laclau and Judith Butler, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, and his forthcoming *The Universal Exception* (New York: Continuum, 2005).
16. Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 182-183.
17. See Alain Badiou, “Eight Theses on the Universal,” in *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (New York: Continuum, 2004), 143-152.
18. Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) 108. Badiou argues that Paul did not himself produce a universal, but *theorizes* it around the “fictitious” event of the resurrection. Even though religion is the source of some of the first and best theories of universalism, for Badiou, it cannot *be* universal, insofar as it does not participate in the truth procedures of science, art, politics, or love.
19. *Ibid.*, 107.
20. Badiou argues that the concentration camp is not, as some have argued recently, the site of the elimination of all difference in the sameness of Death, but the locus for delimitating the “absolute difference” between Jew and Aryan. The aim of the camps is to eliminate the universalism that Badiou associates with the injunction to love the neighbor: “The address to the

other of the ‘as oneself’ (love the other as yourself) was what the Nazis wanted to abolish. The German Aryan’s ‘as oneself’ was precisely what could not be projected anywhere, a closed substance, continuously driven to verify its own closure.” Ibid., 110.

21. Ibid., 111.
22. Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 132.
23. Badiou describes four aspects of its plurality: 1) the not-all produces an *undecidable* statement that is subtracted from the norm of the All; 2) an *indiscernible* difference emerges that is subtracted from the Difference the All requires between inclusion and exclusion; 3) a *generic* subset of the All emerges, one which cannot be constructed according to specifiable functions or determinate predicates, and hence is subtracted from the All, eliminating its possibility of self-identity according to a unary trait or primary signifier; 4) the paradox of the singular *unnameability* of a term that falls away from the All, which is uniquely exemplified by the not-all itself, which names nothing, merely indicates that not everything can be named. He writes: “We have the undecidable as subtraction from the norms of evaluation, or subtraction from the Law; the indiscernible as subtraction from the marking of difference, or subtraction from sex; the generic as infinite and excessive subtraction from the concept, as pure multiple or subtraction from the One; and, finally, the unnamable as subtraction from the proper name, or as a singularity subtracted from singularization.” Badiou, “On Subtraction” in *Theoretical Writings*, 109. See also Francois Wahl, “Le soustractif,” the introduction to Badiou’s *Conditions* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), where “On Subtraction” originally appeared. Compare Badiou’s notion of subtraction to Lacan’s account of the emergence of a subject in the gap where a signifier falls out of the symbolic order of the Other.
24. If subtraction opens the place of the infinite, according to Badiou, it is not itself infinite, nor an absolute principle of reduction: “Subtracting lies at the source of every truth. But subtraction is also what, in the guise of the unnamable, governs and sets a limit to the subtractive trajectory. There is only one maxim in the ethics of a truth: do not subtract the last subtraction.” Badiou, “On Subtraction,” 116.
25. See Jacques Derrida’s essay on Cohen and the Kantian/ Jewish synthesis, “Interpretations at War: Kant, the Jew, the German,” trans. Moshe Ron, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 135-188.
26. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 12. Subsequent references will appear parenthetically within the text. I have also consulted the newer translation of *The Star*, trans. Barbara Galli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005) and cite it when it corrects the errors and mannerisms that plague the Hallo translation.
27. In *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, Rosenzweig’s simplified account of the *Star*, he distinguishes the project of the New Thinking from those of Idealism, mysticism, and science, which all presuppose some “essence” beyond, within, or in the possibility of perfect representation of the object: “Our answer is, however, characterized by a lack of presumption, quite unlike those answers which insisted on plumbing the ‘deeper regions’ in order to demonstrate ‘essence.’ The latter pretended to ultimate profundity, while our does not desire to be profound, but prefers to keep to the surface. It does not wish to speak of an ultimate issue but of primary ones. It does not wish a person to remain with it. It must be just a beginning. It does not claim to be a truth – it does, however, aspire to *become* truth.” The “somethings” of world, man, and God are superficial, in the sense of topological surfaces rather than strata, infinitely complex but exactly as they appear. The truths they imply are not ontological or transcendental but immanent *productions*, or events. *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, trans. Nahum Glatzer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 70.
28. Originally published in 1883 as *Das Prinzip der Infinitesimalmethode und seine Geschichte*; reprinted in *Hermann Cohens Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 2, ed. Albert Görland and Ernst Cassirer (Berlin, Akademie-verlag, 1928).

- For a very helpful commentary on Cohen's notion of the infinitesimal see Lydia Patton's dissertation "Hermann Cohen's History and Philosophy of Science," available on her webpage <<http://home.uchicago.edu/~patton>>.
29. We might suggest the notion of the *empty set* developed in Cantorian set theory as another approach to the question of an element between "nothing" and "something" on which coherent structures of mathematical thinking can be established. We can only speculate what Rosenzweig might have thought of Cantorian set theory (which he makes little or no direct reference to), and the possibility it represents of constructing a complete mathematics from out of the empty set alone.
  30. Rosenzweig, "'Urzelle,' to the *Star of Redemption*" in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, trans. and ed. Paul W. Franks and Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 57.
  31. See *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation*, ed. and commentary Aryeh Kaplan (Boston: Weiser Books, 1997). The date of *Sefer Yetzira* is uncertain, but it is referred to as early as the sixth century C.E.
  32. *Sefer Yetzira*, 5. The "32 mystical paths" refer to the ten *sefirot* plus the 22 letters of the Hebrew Aleph Bet.
  33. *Ibid.*, 13.
  34. See Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, Galli trans., 200.
  35. Hayyim ben Joseph Vital, *The Tree of Life: Chayyim Vital's Introduction to the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria*, trans. Donald Wilder Menzi and Zve Padeh (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1999), 12-13.
  36. This notion of the essential void of being has interesting parallels in Badiou's arguments in his fourth meditation, "The Void: Proper Name of Being," in *L'être et l'événement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), 65-72.
  37. Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 111. "The goal of all those processes that began with *tsimtsum* – i.e., the concentration of these seeds, the 'roots of severity,' in the center of 'Ein-Sof' – was to make the light of the Infinite ever clearer, purer, and more harmonious. The very thought of Creation disturbed the harmony of the potencies within the 'Ein-Sof.'" Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in Kabbalah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 83.
  38. *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. H. Freedman (New York: Soncino Press, 1983), 78. See also Julia Reinhard Lupton and Kenneth Reinhard, "Lacan and the Ten Commandments," *diacritics* (in press).
  39. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 121.
  40. *Ibid.*, 122.
  41. *The Book of Legends*, ed. Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), 81.
  42. *Ibid.*, 81.
  43. Emmanuel Levinas, "Revelation in the Jewish Tradition," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 195.
  44. Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 86.
  45. Eric Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 114.
  46. Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 131.
  47. This paper is the first part of a longer discussion of this third element of Jewish universalism, keyed to Rosenzweig's notion of Redemption and based on the *universalization of the subject*.