TIME OUTSIDE HISTORY:
POLITICS AND ONTOLOGY
IN FRANZ ROSENZWEIG'S AND MIRCEA ELIADE'S REIMAGINED TEMPORALITIES

by **Liisi Keedus**[1]

'The study of history … no longer holds the centre of my attention,' wrote Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), a young German Jewish philosopher in 1918, having returned from the Balkan front of World War I (Rosenzweig 1999: 25). Before joining the army as a volunteer, Rosenzweig had completed a brilliant doctoral dissertation *Hegel and the State* under the guidance of Friedrich Meinecke, one of Germany's most esteemed historians. The work was an exercise in historically oriented philosophical research, as well as expressed confidence in the modern state as the promise of transcendence from individualist subjectivity – as a higher and more superior reality. Now the young author himself called it a book that 'could no longer been written' (Rosenzweig 1962: xiii). Nothing seemed more grotesque to him than the Hegelian idea of rational history as a march towards progress, culminating in the modern state. Instead, history had come to mean war, violence and ruin; it was little else but a stage for an irrational and brutal struggle for power.

Indeed, 'we find ourselves once again in the pre-Hegelian position,' noted Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) in the immediate aftermath of the next World War (Eliade 1959: 140). He dedicated the final chapter of his first major theoretical contribution, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (1949), to what he phrased as the problem of 'terror of history' – and the chapter resonated with his interwar political and literary obsession with rethinking historical time. The Hegelian concept of historical necessity had been practically applied to justify, if not compliant in 'all the cruelties, aberrations, and tragedies of history' (Eliade 1959: 148). As a Romanian scholar and novelist, Eliade was keen to point out that while history may have once embodied a new kind of purely human freedom for major European powers, for secondary peoples, or 'nations marked by the "fatality of history"' it meant 'continuous terror' (Eliade 1959: 152) – 'sufferings and catastrophes' (Eliade 1959: 142) without either hope, consolation or meaning. Yet it was more than the senselessness or cruelty of recent events that Eliade sought to capture when highlighting the 'despair' that he argued had set on the human condition framed by historical consciousness. Perhaps even

[1] The research for the final draft of the paper has received funding from the European Research Council under Grant Agreement No. 757873 (Project BETWEEN THE TIMES).

more importantly, Eliade's modernity was marked by an abysmal finitude, transience, and by what was in fact a failed promise of freedom – the fact that man was not the maker of history but simply subsumed by it –, 'exhausted' by temporality in its new, entirely 'desacralised' and hence for Eliade, barren existence. The price the West had paid for confining its horizons to the exclusively historical temporality was, in Eliade's at least in this respect Spenglerian narrative, its loss of rigor and creativity.

In several ways, Rosenzweig's and Eliade's critiques erupted and evolved within much broader currents of anti-progressivism fuelled by the experiences of the newly dehumanised world after the Great War. The War had its roots, or so reasoned especially the younger generation, in the imperialism and industrialisation of the nineteenth century. Yet the nineteenth century was also 'the century of history': in the more general sense because of the popularization of historical consciousness, especially national consciousness based on a sense of shared history, but also with its widely shared sense that temporality had an inherent meaning, purpose and direction (Koselleck 2004). National histories were written, state museums founded, as well as collective memories created through art, architecture, fiction and drama. Past versions of unchanging and universal natural law and natural right were increasingly contested as static and constructed, and replaced by organic understanding of individual human communities with their own unique dynamic of development – for the evaluation of which no universal viewpoint existed (Meinecke 1972). It was only its later critics that characterised this worldview in its various forms as 'historicist' and in this sense 'historicism' was by its birth an anti-term. For these mostly young critics, this modern replacement of transcendent truth and morality had translated into moral relativism wherein Might coincides with Right (Rosenzweig 1962: 88ff) and anthropocentric messianism that culminated in the global slaughter (see Mosès 2008; Myers 2003). Moreover, like for Rosenzweig and Eliade, for their many contemporaries, endowing history with inherent linearity, coherence and meaning had resulted in a new and desperate hollowness of human time. This total history had devoured the individual man into the imagined mankind, it had also turned every single act or deed into a stepping stone inevitably subordinate to the next one to follow. The modern man still longed to be greater than his mortal life – but now it had come to mean submersion into and identification with the anonymous and ghastly flow of history (see Benjamin 1969; Arendt 1961; Strauss 2013; Myers 2003).

Yet what makes Rosenzweig's and Eliade's at least to some extent stand out, or peculiar, in this wider stream of discontent with the previously dominant historical paradigm was that they additionally adopted an outcast's perspective, as it were, on the flow of history,

and consequently, into their attempts to radically reimagine temporality. Rosenzweig was a German Jew, and his parents' generation had taken it for granted that their community was seamlessly integrated in the German life and culture – and indeed, the young thinker himself had volunteered to join the army (Glatzer 1998). Now, this seemed like both an ill-placed illusion and a dangerous mistake for Rosenzweig and his like-minded Jewish peers who all rejected the previously inevitable-seeming process of assimilation of the Jewish minority into the German nation – soon the dominant position among the young Weimar Jewish intellectuals (Myers 2003). Similarly, Eliade's formative experience as a Romanian was that of living at the margins of history. He also shunned from advocating his country's entrance into the progressivist history and historical consciousness, and turned this seeming lack into a source of inspiration instead.

Both Rosenzweig and Eliade used their experiences as outcasts as a basis of their criticisms of the idea that human existence is primarily historical and historically conditioned. But in addition, they expanded on this experience theoretically, placing their communities as if outside, or even beyond history, and using this alternative relation to history as a basis of an alternative temporal ontology – which then in turn had a much wider reception than only within their immediate audience. Moreover, they also translated their experientially and politically grounded novel conceptions of time into methodological revolts against dominant historical approaches in the human sciences. In what follows, I will explore the ways in which these seemingly distinct concerns became synchronic in their thought, as well as suggest that these efforts resonated with their readership significantly beyond their specific scholarly fields. Also, while the anti-historicist revolt is more familiar from accounts of Weimar intellectual and cultural history (Gordon and McCormick 2013; Keedus 2015), I want to pave way to an understanding that it is only a distinctively European narrative that can capture the full ramifications of this consequential rupture in thought.

'It walks unperturbed through history': Rosenzweig's Jewish eternity

During the war, Rosenzweig abandoned his youth adherence to the idea of the unique and historic mission of the German nation and nationalism as historicism's political descendant. 'Nationalism expresses not merely the peoples' belief that they come from *God* ... but that they go *to* God. But now peoples do have this belief, and hence 1789 is followed by 1914–1917, and yet more 'from ... to's' (Rosenzweig, cited by Mosès 2008: 29). The consequences of the divinization of a nation were for Rosenzweig, like for many others, arrestingly plain to see, as were the implications of the Hegelian reasoning that the unfolding of history,

including its wars, is not only the unfolding of necessity but also an expression of morality. Yet in his major philosophical work, *The Star of Redemption* (1920), Rosenzweig did not so much seem to be arguing that Hegel had misunderstood the course of universal history of emerging and decaying nations but rather suggesting that his reflections were arrestingly right (Mosès 2008: 35ff). Nonetheless, Rosenzweig saw a number of problems with this, of which I will briefly outline only two, as well as refused to grant this historicity totality or see it as the only temporality.

First, when modern communities had shed their faith in the Christian promise of eternity, the state became an attempt 'to give the peoples eternity in time'. Yet 'the State is the ever-changing form under which time moves to eternity step by step' (Rosenzweig 2004: 352). All the 'world nations', and this distinguishes them from the Jewish people, can preserve longevity beyond a generation 'only by safeguarding a place for (themselves) in the future' (Rosenzweig 2004: 317) and 'appropriate from its permanence a guarantee of their own permanence. Their will to eternity clings to the soil and to ... the territory' (Rosenzweig 2004: 318). Land, however, is conquered, and as the people on it perishes, even if the land persists, so 'the earth betrays the people' (Rosenzweig 2004: 318)). In other words, there is an irreconcilable discord between the nations' hope placed in the teleological movement of time and their desire to preserve themselves in this change. On the one hand, nations are not only born but also devoured by the universal history, and the 'sweetness' of the sense of national belonging is inseparable from the 'bitterness' of the presentiment of its death 'however far off' (Rosenzweig 2004: 324). On the other hand, aside the external forces played out in wars, the internal dynamic of states is no less violent. Permanence within the state is just as elusive: the positing of law seems to halt the ceaseless alteration, yet 'since time cannot be denied, movement triumphs' (Rosenzweig 2004: 353). Without this change, a people would not be alive, yet the contradiction between the new and the old law is always settled by 'violence'. 'Therefore war and revolution are the only reality that the State knows' (Rosenzweig 2004: 553).

Secondly, Rosenzweig shunned the historicist idea of linear, teleological time that, he argued, contained the secularised notion of redemption which is not only self-contradictory – as it would mean the completion of history, or the cessation of time. Further, its horizons and vision of the final condition are inevitably narrow and confined to the logic of the already existing convention – which it translates into *the* reality. The only time that it can imagine is irreversible, causal, and continuous, and while change and movement are the essence of history, these are composed of the mere quantitative accumulation of the very same logic.

There is only a variety of combinations of the same reality, repetition of war and violence, with no imaginary space for radical alterity (Rosenzweig 2004: 235–44; Mosès 2008). Rosenzweig's criticism is evasive and scattered – and can probably be grasped only in contrast to his own concept of Jewish redemption – but Stéphane Mosès has helpfully captured its understanding of progress in terms of organic evolution, and in this sense as condemned hope (Mosès 2008: 49ff). There is hope inscribed in each human act that the final victory belongs to the Good, 'but the realization of that hope must inevitably be postponed from day to day, as a horizon that retreats indefinitively as we approach it' (Mosès 2008: 50). So on the one hand, this hope is limited to mere quantitative change, excluding any radical transformation, and on the other, the movement is towards both an endlessly retreating and an impossible goal.

However, in contrast to all the 'peoples of the world', Rosenzweig's Jews voluntarily render themselves to political infertility and thereby refuse to participate in the Hegelian cycle of triumph and fall of other nations. They live at the margins of history, which is first of all sealed by the fact that they don't have a homeland: it is over territories that wars are fought but from this too the Jews distance themselves (so while Rosenzweig was anti-assimilationist, he was by no means a Zionist, which has made his legacy in Jewish thought controversial). Instead, their community and its eternity is based on the significance of religion rather than politics for their identity, their experience of proximity to God, as well as a continuity of 'blood' and sense of electedness – and this communion is secured precisely by detaching themselves from politics, and thus from history (Rosenzweig 2004: 317–55). 'The Jewish spirit', Rosenzweig emphatically declared, 'breaks through the shackles of time. Because it is eternal and aims for the Eternal, it disregards the omnipotence of time. Indeed, it walks unperturbed through history' (Rosenzweig, cited in Myers 2003: 103).

From the perspective of world history or history of other nations, the Jews could be seen to be renouncing life itself – 'the true eternity of the eternal people must remain always foreign and annoying to the State and to world history' (Rosenzweig 2004: 354). Yet for Rosenzweig this merely means distancing themselves from transience sealed by the flow of emergence and disappearance of nations. It also means that the Jews are the only community that survive this necessity: if temporal life is denied to them, it is 'for the sake of eternal life. ... It cannot fully and creatively also live the historical life of the peoples of the world, it is always somehow between a worldly and a holy life' (Rosenzweig 2004: 323). From the perspective of historical time, the Jews are separated from each other and they lack a visible communion, yet it is through the creation and participation of their 'own eternity' that they

ensure their continuance across and beyond time. Noteworthily, Rosenzweig granted this concept of timelessness at least potentially universalist implications, relating it to the promise of peace: 'The Jew is the only man … who cannot take war seriously, and therefore is the only genuine "pacifist"' (Rosenzweig 2004: 351).

What creates then this 'eternity not as the twelfth stroke of the world clock, but as that which coincides with the present of every hour'? (Rosenzweig 2004: 325) Firstly, the living of Rosenzweig's Jews in a nonhistory is warranted by the religious tradition and its ritual life, resulting in 'a static temporality, structured year after year by identical cycle of religious holidays, a lived eternity … in the spaces of sacred time' (Mosès 2008: 44). In contrast to the historical times of secular chronology, already in the annual cycle of liturgical time, the Jews experience proximity to God, their community, their shared past and their awaited future – with all being simultaneously and really present. Historical time is not eliminated, but participating in symbolic time allows one to transcend it. For example, Exodus is not merely commemorated at Passover, or remembered as a *past* event in daily prayers, but celebrated each time as a *presently* occurring event and thereby renewed – and thus it is 'the cycle of the year (that) guarantees its eternity to the eternal people' (Rosenzweig 2004: 352). These festivities are traces of eternity in the otherwise monotonous flow of quotidian time, offering a moment into a radically different reality.

Secondly, in contrast to the hope for progress that places the final end to indefinite future, the promise of redemption inserts the future into the present (and the past). Redemption is the central concept in Rosenzweig's thought and he used it to articulate – not the relation between God and the world – the collective human initiative that is defined by a waiting for a better world and acts upon it (Rosenzweig 2004: 221ff). Unlike the hope for progress, this hope – which Rosenzweig called redemption – is not historical but symbolic. It is the miracle against all odds, a new beginning, an act or a stroke of lightning, the exception that defies the law, in other words, the moment when normal ways of human history are breaking down (Rosenzweig 2004: 271). Unlike the hope for progress, it is not a distant horizon but can appear unexpectedly at any time; there is no infinite path leading to it, but it is inherently interruptive; instead of an accumulation or improvement of the familiar, it is an intrusion asserting a radically and qualitatively new world (Mosès 2008: 49ff). This hope both represents radical alterity but in a way is at the same time lived and immediately present through rituals and symbolism – nonetheless remaining, as noted, a category articulating the relation between man and the world.

Rosenzweig's extraordinary dedication to practical and open-minded Jewish community work – in which he engaged despite debilitating illness that left him unable to talk or write and led to his untimely death at the age of 42 – may well be seen to exemplify and explain what he might have meant by this category of expectation-defying, miracle-like alterity. To Rosenzweig, the Jewish experience of timelessness in any of the above senses was nothing that was simply there as present and available. To the contrary, it had been concealed from his own post-assimilationist generation and one of the ways to regain it was – not merely to wait and hope – but to seek it in the past yet untouched by history (see Löwith 1942). This too was no simple task and for this purpose, Rosenzweig founded what was to become an immensely popular Free Jewish Study House (*Freies jüdisches Lehrhaus*) in Frankfurt. The adult learning institution sought a path of return to one's Jewish roots through knowledge of their pre-modern sources, and reflection of their immediate impact on contemporary Jewish life – and notably, was boycotted by the Frankfurt orthodox Jewish community (Brenner 1996: 69–128).

The Study House was a strikingly multi- and interdisciplinary educational and cultural institution, as well as the driving force behind several prominent Jewish publications, including the nationally distributed and widely read monthly magazine *Der Jude*. The school also brought together intellectuals and social activists from the entire political spectrum, from the Left to the Right, but also from very different fields, such as law, politics, religious studies, sociology, philosophy, arts and aesthetics. Although there was considerable diversity between the instructors and their methods, Rosenzweig's purpose was to encourage didactic innovation. This could mean a variety of experiments, but one of the most conspicuous among them was the rejection of historical learning. Instead, Rosenzweig reportedly asked his students to begin instruction with whatever moved them in their daily lives, and then the class jointly explored the past Jewish sources that might be relevant for addressing these issues. The emphasis was on one's immediate emotional bond to the tradition and its untying from the mediation of historical knowledge. Interestingly, Rosenzweig's source of inspiration for Jewish timelessness and how to practice it in one's own daily life, was his frontline encounter with the Balkan and later, other Central and Eastern Jews, whose metahistorical aloofness, even absence from their political contexts and whose unmodern religiousness fundamentally differed from the assimilated German and French Jews (Mosès 2008: 44).

‘Condemned to history’? Eliade’s plural time

Against the historical consciousness of the West, Eliade similarly set what he would call ‘ahistorical’ cultures and nations, like the nations of the Balkans. He too deemed the latter as a sort of misfits both in the sense that, first, any teleological or holistic historical narrative seemed absent from their lives, and second, they had always been subject to history making by external, more significant powers. First, what Eliade pejoratively called ‘progressive history’ justifies the ‘historical nations’ embarking on civilising missions upon others. Secondly, it also forces experiences conflicting and dislocated within the narrative of progress – like those of compatriots, for whom it would have been nothing short of obscene to endow with some inherent meaning what had been forced upon them as ‘continuous terror’– into oblivion, insignificance, even, in the historical sense, into inexistence (Eliade 1959: 139ff). To adopt the inherently hierarchical historical consciousness by these so-called secondary people would mean not only to be erased and engulfed by it, but also to internalize one’s inferiority, dislocation, and perhaps even, senselessness.

Like Rosenzweig, Eliade embarked on a quest for a new vision of history that would move not only beyond the belief in humanity’s progress, but also the spirit of assimilation and politico-cultural imperialism. On the one hand, Eliade’s verbalism ‘terror of history’ was certainly rooted in the familiar European apocalyptic mood that the occidental culture was at its dusk. This Spenglerian diagnosis also identified the modern historicist stance, described as retrospective, passive and relativist, as one of the root causes of the West’s loss of rigour, creativity and even vitality. The modern historical consciousness is marked by focus on change, desire for novelty, pleasure in the fleeting moment of the present, but it lacks exemplary models to follow and instead the empty notion of progress is taken as such a model (Wittkau 1994). We reject transhistorical norms and ideals to inspire to – which for Eliade were source of creativity and meaning. On the other hand, as we saw, the young Romanian author’s ‘terror of history’ expressed his judgement on the idea that some nations are more progressed than others (Eliade 1961b; Eliade 1959: 152n). Yet on neither front did he advocate a resigned position and like Rosenzweig sought to break out from a simple narrative of decline, focusing his explorations, instead, on alternative experiences of temporality and possibilities contained therein.

Already at a very young age, Eliade became obsessed with the problem of time and its non-Western and pre-modern perceptions. While he drew inspiration from the combination of static and cyclical temporalities of his fellow countrymen, he additionally spent several years in India where he became particularly captivated by local multi-layered experiences of

temporality. Anecdotally, as he returned he began experimenting with radically cutting sleeping hours so as to gain more time for study, as well as embarked on his life-long search methods to manipulate psychosomatic time, for example, precisely through peasant symbolism and Indian religious practices. His preoccupation with radically rethinking time is particularly conspicuous in his highly popular fictional work, where we see him as anything but resigning to Western conceptions of temporality (see esp. Călinescu 1988). His protagonists can shift temporalities from present to past in 'enchanted' and 'forbidden' locations, from profane to sacred times to retrieve loved ones lost in the war and depart again with them, or change their age through ordinary yet miraculous moments of alterity. While time is a central motif in his novels, it is neither chronological nor continuous, but far more ambiguous, often bordering the fantastic, where ordinary events and time formed all of a sudden a bridge to the transcendent, the supernatural and the extraordinary. These interruptions are rare yet real openings to escape the inherent 'despair' that Eliade believed was inscribed into completely profane, historical time (see esp. Călinescu 1988).

Eliade did not reserve the possibility of transcending historical time only for fiction, far from it. 'How is it possible to resolve the paradoxical situation,' is the recurrent question of his later academic work,

> created by the twofold fact that man, on the one hand, finds himself existing in time, *condemned to history*, and, on the other hand, knows that he will be 'damned' if he allows himself to be exhausted by temporality and by his own historicity and that, consequently, he must at all costs find *in the world* a way that lead into a transhistorical and atemporal plane? (Eliade 1982: 242–3)

Dedicating much of his scholarly attention to exploring this question, he preserved his youth fascination for the 'cosmic Christianity' of his native Romania as one example of a culture and way of life underpinned by its 'heterogeneous' temporalities. Pre-Christian (in Eliade's judgement, Romanian Christianity had not shed its pagan elements) and non-Western cultures not only experienced time as such fundamentally differently, but most significantly for Eliade their 'profane time' remained entwined and enjoyed an access to absolute alterity, to 'sacred time' (Eliade 1987: 71; Eliade 1958: 388).

For Eliade, sacred, symbolic time is the time of either, first, the taking place of a ritual when one steps into sacred time, and second, during the performing of a mythical model through which one passes into a sacred story or a myth, and thus also into a sacred time. The commonest example is that each New Year's Eve marks the recreation and reordering of the world. It is a promise and a chance for a renewed life, both for an individual and a

community, while at the same time preserving a sense of permanence and purpose that ot only extends beyond but also set itself against historical instability and arbitrariness (Eliade 1987: 85ff). Through symbols and rituals, men can participate in the 'eternal present of the mythical event' (Eliade 1987: 89), in the universal and timeless structure of the world. They speak of and direct the individual towards symbolic, poetical and mythical knowledge, they provide a connection between a person as a microcosm to the macrocosm, as well as give coherence to time – and so relieve men from the anxieties, arbitrariness and contingency of their historical situatedness.

While historical time is irreversible, Eliade's mythical time, like Rosenzweig's ritual time, is reversible and repeats the time of the beginnings. When one participates in this practice of repetition, one not only commemorates the time of the beginnings, but relives and participates in the sacred, in the most real mode of being. Profane time transforms into sacred time through recreating the primordial beginning, thus through memory which is in turn creative action. Eliade's 'beginnings' are more immediately related to the sacred, transcendent, universal (Eliade 1987: 68ff). This ahistorical mode of temporality, Eliade insisted, is also associated with the impulse to create, and since creation is constitutive of the Eliadean human condition, his judgement on the homogenously historical time of modernity is that it traps Western cultures in a state of infertility (see Cave 1993: 83).

It seems, nonetheless, that instead of Eliade's modernity having successfully and definitively 'desacralized' time, it has merely settled into a temporary confusion (Eliade 1987: 89, 201ff). Like Rosenzweig, Eliade seemed to suggest that the experience of symbolic and sacred time has not altogether vanished, but remained 'ground and model of all human history' (Eliade 1967: 178), 'a paradigmatic history which man has to follow and repeat, in order to assure the continuity of the world, of life and society' (ibid: 180). In this sense, continuity between archaic mythological thought and modern life has not been completely broken, and both in his scholarly work and in his fiction, Eliade sought to disclose 'the nonhistorical portion of every human being' (Eliade 1961a: 13), the 'primordial' dimensions of existential and religious experience that 'belong to man as such, not to man as a historical being' (Eliade 1964: xiv). While the sacred is irreducible, it is not opposite or separable from the profane, it is contained in, defines and qualifies the secular (Eliade 1987: 68ff). The quotidian life reduced to homogeneous time may indeed be incomprehensible, void of meaning and even obscene, yet when it opens itself up to what Eliade presented as plural time, the everyday life too may acquire an explosion of meanings. The quotidian and the

miraculous are bridged in the unconscious, and for example archetypes immerse through symbols present in our only apparently ordinary routines (Călinescu 1988: xiii–xiv).

Furthermore, Eliade argued that myth and its social and spiritual functions are mistakenly labelled as mere fiction or superstition, and ought to be understood instead as endeavours to 'reveal the *truth par excellence*' (Eliade 1967: 171). The human imagination is mythological by its very structure and mythologies are necessary both for individuals and communities for orienting themselves in the world. While in his later work, Eliade did not explicitly explore the political and social implications of his argument – or in fact seems to leave these intently undeveloped – his interwar political writings centre on the problem of history and action (Eliade 1990). This is not to say that they fill the gap left in Eliade's later work but rather, that they testify to the political thrust behind his lifelong engagement with rethinking human time.

In the late 1920s and 1930s, the young Eliade was an active and outspoken member of prominent and publicly ambitious intellectual groupings, such as *Generation '27* and *Criterion* – which both called for 'rejuvenating' the culture and the nation. For this aim, the crisis of historical consciousness represented an unprecedented promise and opening instead of conveying a sense of threat. Eliade's articles in the daily newspaper *Cuvântul* set forth his vision of Romania that, rather than remaining a perpetual follower of the allegedly progressive but imperialist and colonialist West, would explore its own specific 'path'. In the groupings' manifestos, *A Spiritual Itinerary* (1927) and *The White Lily* (1928), its affiliates announced themselves 'anti-1848-ers', 'parricidal', 'autochthonous' and 'experiential': 'We were the first generation that was not previously conditioned by a historical objective to be achieved' (Eliade 1994: 38). Moreover, the 'young generation' ought to act without delay – they ought to create their own culture while there was still time. However, in the 1930s, Eliade's optimism turned into an active support for Romania's neoorthodox and fascist Legionary movement, and this has discredited his declared pursuit of the Romanian version of 'neither Left nor Right' or of some sort of a political new way (Boia 2011: 21-47, 90ff, 161ff).

In the newly traumatised world, pre-1914 notions of teleological history not only seemed eerily misrepresentative of modernity, but ideological accomplices of nationalism and imperialism as mainsprings of the War. The historical self-conception of Western man was no longer testifying to his greatness and creativity but bespoke the human ability to commit previously unimagined atrocities. The certitude of the historically self-constituting man had entered the dusk of its credibility – and Rosenzweig and Eliade both found

themselves in the already post-metaphysical, but also in the newly post-humanist age. One of their shared responses was the attempt to articulate a novel anti-historical temporal ontology – one that was both within the reach of and tangible for the human condition but at the same time transcended it. This attempt required nothing less than exploding the perceived circular structure between the ontological framework based on history as continuity and causality, political ideology of progress, ethics of historical relativism, and additionally – as will be elaborated in what follows – epistemological claims of the historical nature of all knowledge.

The past without history: Rosenzweig's and Eliade's hermeneutic revolts

The Frankfurt Study House was one of the epicentres of a series of hermeneutic upheavals that rattled the German humanities and social sciences in the 1920s. Its extraordinary methodological innovativeness can largely be traced back to Rosenzweig's personal openness and encouraging stance towards experimentation in teaching and scholarship, but also to the intense social engagement and interdisciplinarity of its many and very diverse lecturers. Regular instructors at the school included the educationist Ernst Simon, the sociologist Leo Löwenthal, the economist Franz Oppenheimer, the cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer, the psychologist Erich Fromm, the philosophers Leo Strauss and Martin Buber, the critic and women's rights' activist Bertha Pappenheim, and the scholar of Jewish mysticism, Gerschom Scholem, among many others. Their interests and teaching of course varied, yet one of the recurrent patterns for several of them was their rejection of historical methods and search for alternatives.

For example, while Rosenzweig's own pre-war dissertation, *Hegel and the State,* was in a number of ways a conventional Diltheyan exercise in German historical-philosophical interpretation, his subsequent teaching and writing, as well as directorship of the Study House, sought to break with the established tradition of German historical scholarship. The teaching at the school paid particular heed to engagement with the Jewish earliest sources – the distant past – yet consciously ignoring historical methods as distortive of the past (Rosenzweig 2002; Löwith 1942). In other words, its attraction to the distant past was at the same time a rejection of recent history and it's the domination of historical scholarship. According to its critics, the historicist imperative to historicize and contextualize the pursuit of the truth and of faith was blind to their own belonging to a particular, history-centred era. It claimed the historical contingency of all truths, yet at the same time the universal applicability of that of its own – and thus contained not only a tension but possibly misdirected the approach to sources that were paradigmatically differently constituted

(Keedus 2015). Thus instead of previously dominant emphasis on the contextual interpretation, Rosenzweig and several other Study House scholars advocated a closely text-bound reading that underlined the intactness and autonomy of the textual sources. The meaning of the text was only obscured by references to its historical context; instead, the reader ought to be guided, for example, by the text's specific integral clues, its component parts: its narrative structure, style, language and use of metaphors (Myers 2003: 68ff)

Another ambitious project was Rosenzweig's and Martin Buber's translation of the Hebrew Bible into German. They avoided translating the text into a more familiar sounding literary German and instead made it as literal as possible, calling their work 'Verdeutschung' ('Germanification') of the text. Often this meant coining neologisms in German, breaking conventional grammar and syntax rules. They rejected the idea that one could somehow retell or present the content of the Bible in the modern language, omitting for example some of its mythical and dogmatic elements. This was to not only to distort the message itself, but also to confine engagement with biblical texts within contemporary frameworks, and this sense, limit their potential to expand one's horizons. Thus instead, the translation needed to preserve the text's 'uncanny' difference from modern mentality and confront the reader with an entirely different imagination – only in this manner opening a genuine possibility to see, feel, and think beyond the contemporary convention. The holy text's 'command' upon the Jew entailed the promise of radical disruption of one's habitual reality and perception, and thereby of responding anew to these biblical sources, but this promise could only actualise through preservation of the sense of strangeness, dislocation and 'uncanniness' (Rosenzweig 2002). The category of 'uncanniness' has a more generally central place in Rosenzweig's thought (as well as for other Lehrhaus teachers), as he also used it to describe Jewish self-contained isolation and difference in the world (see Blond 2010; Batnitzky 2000: 83ff, 99ff) – hence its preservation in the past texts and rituals becomes at least doubly important.

Eliade, who has been called an 'antihistorian of religion,' (Dudley 1976: 44–8) indeed explained his 'phenomenological' methodology in contrast to the 'historical' approach (Eliade 1963). While he claimed that his own work was cross-disciplinary, one of his reproaches against historical scholarship was still that it tended to erase the autonomy of the study of religion, subsuming it, for instance into the history of art, literature, general history and so on, until the subject matter has just about dissolved (Eliade 1955). It has been pointed out that Eliade's methodological anti-historicism is based on at least three uses of 'history' (Strenski 1973; Allen 1988). Firstly, he reproached historians for presenting 'chronicles', an antiquarian recording of events or sets of events. Secondly, Eliade's 'historical positivism,'

with its alleged scientism and empiricism, omitted the complex web of human intentions and meanings. Thirdly, he believed historical study of religion was too immersed with specific cultural contexts to pay heed to what for Eliade were obvious 'transhistorical' and 'prehistorical' elements of the sacred and which, moreover, 'condition the lower or historical meanings' (Allen 1988: 549).

On the one hand, Eliade acknowledged that the sacred can only become manifest within a particular historical, spatial and cultural context. He even claimed that there 'is no such thing outside of history as a 'pure' religious datum… Every religious experience is expressed and transmitted in a particular historical context' (Eliade 1968: 250). On the other hand, he was wary of thereby making religious experiences reducible to nonreligious domains of human life (Eliade 1958: xiii). Moreover, Eliade insisted that there is 'no religious form that does not try to get as close as possible to its true archetype, in other words, to rid itself of 'historical' accretions and deposits' (Eliade 1958: 462). Focused on a study of cross-cultural resemblances in religious practices and phenomena, he insisted these cannot be explained by reference to a common historical origin. He argued that these were evidence for non-historic myths and symbols, for nonhistorical, ontologically transcendent structures and phenomena, such as archetypes. Thus while historical research is necessary, it remained for Eliade a mere secondary means for the higher level of scholarship that would be dedicated to recognising transhistorical structures and meanings. Strictly historical scholarship is unable to establish that religious phenomena are specific to certain historical periods or societies. At best, historical research can demonstrate that particular contexts are favourable for the manifestation of one or another type of religious phenomena or experience. 'So at some point the historian of religion must become a phenomenologist of religion, because he tries to find meaning. Without hermeneutics, the history of religion is just another history – bare facts, special classifications, and so on' (Eliade 1973: 101–6).

Rosenzweig wrote on a variety of topics, including Jewish education, religion, history and politics, yet it was the interdisciplinarity of the Jewish Study House that sealed the unprecedented scope of his legacy across disciplinary boundaries. Despite his too early death his thought and life work continued to inspire and engage thinkers from many fields (Anckaert, Brasser and Samuelson 2004), among whom were Walter Benjamin, Karl Löwith, Jacob Klein, Emil Fackenheim, Emmanuel Levinas, Jacob Taubes, and Jacques Derrida, in addition to those mentioned as Study House instructors. Needless to say, Rosenzweig reception moved through these scholars from inter-war Germany to post-war Israel, the United States, and other European countries.

Eliade's reception has been similarly multidisciplinary and possibly geographically even wider. He spent several interwar and postwar years in Portugal and France, emigrating to the United States in 1956, where he established his reputation as the key figure in founding the field of history of religions or comparative study of religions. His academic work has been translated into all European and several Asian languages and while his universalist ambitions in comparative religions have been at the very least controversial, their global impact in cultural and gender studies, but also anthropology and even art history has remained monumental.

Conclusion

Let us conclude with a tentative answer to the overdue question – why consider Rosenzweig and Eliade in tandem? After all, they thought and wrote in strikingly different contexts, partly in different times, had divergent scholarly and political aims, and even their attempts to rethink time are only partly convergent.

First of all, their respective discontents with a variety of historicisms – and concurring ontological, political and methodological mentalities – are exemplary of the wider tide of anti-historicism(s) across interwar Europe, the transnational reach of which is seldom considered. Of this reach, even without considering other thinkers with similar concerns elsewhere, speak their extraordinarily vast audiences and intensely interdisciplinary engagement with their scholarly work. Secondly, while themes such as fascination with the distant past and endeavours to access it without the mediation of 'history', interest in the supra-historical human condition, assertion of the fragmentation and discontinuity of the human world and time, and emphasis on defamiliarization in exploding conventions are more familiar from avant-garde arts, music and literature, both Rosenzweig's and Eliade's works are illustrative of inserting the avant-garde *topoi* in interwar scholarship. More specifically, we saw how they translated their experience of the contemporary crisis and political criticism of its causes into a novel ontology and methodological experimentation, weaving the former into the very fabric of the latter. Third, I further argued that what distinguished Rosenzweig's and Eliade's thought from the wider discontent with 'history' were their experiences as outsiders, even if conditionally so, on the basis of which they constructed not only an alternative relation to history but new, at least potentially universal, temporal ontologies. Fourth, Rosenzweig's and Eliade's proposals alike on rethinking human temporalities and constructing bridges between the past, present and future were doubtless unconventional and compelling, even if highly controversial. While today's 'presentism' is our very own

challenge to answer, the two thinkers' boldness in criticism, language and imagination may nonetheless continue to inspire experimentation and questioning beyond the conventionally reasonable – especially as the subject matter itself, the human time, can only partly be confined within the language of *ratio* (as they too amply remind us). Lastly, their universalist quests for transcending temporal transience, for caesuras of eternity in midst of human time, appear themselves deeply contextually rooted. Nonetheless, potentially more illuminating than pointing at this tension as a matter of the past, would be to use Rosenzweig's and Eliade's work to reflect on the similar situatedness of our own theoretical approaches to historicity – on how these are rooted in our hopes and fears, as well as shaped by our aims and revolts.

References

Allen, D. (1988), 'Eliade and History', *The Journal of Religion*, 68 (4): 545–65.

Anckaert, L, Brasser, M., Samuelson, N., eds (2004), *The Legacy of Franz Rosenzweig: Collected Essays,* Leuven: Leuven University Press.

Arendt, H. (1961), 'The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern', in *Between the Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, 41–90, New York: Viking Press.

Batnitzky, L. (2000), *Idolatry and Representation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered,* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Benjamin, W. (1969), 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt, 253–64, New York: Hartcourt.

Boia, L. (2011), *Capcanele istoriei. Elita intelectuală românească între 1930 şi 1950*, Bucharest: Humanitas.

Blond, L. (2010), 'Franz Rosenzweig: Homelessness in Time', *New German Critique*, 111 (3): 27–58.

Brenner, M. (1996), *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Călinescu, M. (1988), 'Introduction', in M. Eliade, *Youth Without Youth and Other Novellas*, i–xxxix, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Cave, D. (1993), *Mircea Eliade's Vision for a New Humanism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dudley G. (1976), 'Mircea Eliade as the "Anti-Historian" of Religions', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 44 (2): 44–8.

Eliade, M. (1955), 'Mythology and the History of Religions', *Diogene*, 3 (9): 96–116.

Eliade, M. (1958), *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, London: Sheed and Ward.

Eliade, M. (1959), *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, New York: Harper.

Eliade, M. (1961a), *Images and Symbols*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Eliade, M. (1961b), 'History of Religions and a New Humanism', *Journal of Religion*, 1 (1): 1–8.

Eliade, M. (1963), 'The History of Religions in Retrospect: 1912–1962', *Journal of Bible and Religion*, 31 (2): 98–109.

Eliade, M. (1964), *Shamanism*: *Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Eliade, M. (1967), 'Cosmogonic Myth and "Sacred History"', *Religious Studies*, 2 (2): 171–83.

Eliade, M (1968), 'Comparative Religion: Its Past and Future,' in W. Ong (ed.), *Knowledge and the Future of Man*, 245–54, New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston.

Eliade, M. (1973), 'The sacred in the Secular World', *Cultural Hermeneutics*, 1: 101–13.

Eliade, M. (1982), *A History of Religious Ideas*, Vol. 2, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Eliade, M. (1987), *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York: Hartcourt.

Eliade, M. (1990), *Profetism românesc*, Bucharest: Roza vinturilor.

Eliade, M. (1994), *Fragmentarium*, Bucharest: Humanitas.

Glatzer, N. (1998), *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing

Gordon, P. and McCormick, J., eds (2013), *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Keedus, L. (2015), *The Crisis of German Historicism: The Early Political Thought of Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Koselleck, R. (2004), *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Löwith, K. (1942), 'M. Heidegger and F. Rosenzweig or Temporality and Eternity', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 3 (1): 53–77.

Meinecke, F. (1972), *Historicism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*, London: Routledge and K. Paul.

Mosès, S. (2008), *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Myers, D. (2004), *Resisting History: Historicism and its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rosenzweig, F. (1962), *Hegel und der Staat*, Aalen: Scientia Verlag.

Rosenzweig, F. (1999), *Franz Rosenzweig's 'New Thinking'*, ed. A. Udoff, New York: Syracuse University Press.

Rosenzweig, F. (2002), *On Jewish Learning*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Rosenzweig, F. (2004), *The Star of Redemption*, University of Wisconsin Press.

Strauss, L. (2013), *On Tyranny*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Strenski, I. (1973), 'Mircea Eliade: Some Theoretical Problems', in A. Cunningham (ed.), *The Theory of Myth: Six Studies*, 43–52, London: Sheed and Ward.