

TRANSLATION

IN MEMORY OF MOSHE SWARCZ

by ZE'EV LEVI*

Professor Moshe Swarcz was still a young man when a malignant disease put an end to his life. As chairman of the Department of Philosophy at Bar-Ilan University, Swarcz did much to mold the department. He considered secular and Jewish philosophy to be a single, scientific, intellectual discipline and thus dealt with problems common to them in those terms. It was one of our most serious and promising departments. Swarcz's untimely death is a great loss not only to those near to him, but to all lovers of philosophy in Israel as well.

The integration of the fields of Jewish ethics and secular culture in modern times, its successes and failures, especially with regards to the background of classic German philosophy, was one of the chief concerns reflected in the philosophy of Moshe Swarcz. He dedicated both of his books – “Language, Myth and Art, a Study of Modern Jewish Thought” (Shocken, 1967)¹ and “Jewish Thought in Relation to Secular Culture” (Shocken, 1976)² – to the problems involved in these concerns. There was something tragic or rather spiritually elevating, in the fact that Swarcz was among those saved from the camps at the end of World War II. He said, at the close of the war, that he would never again set foot on German soil, but he was intellectually tied to the great thinkers of classic German idealism – Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, particularly with regards to their work in esthetics. This perhaps explains the fact that, although he severely criticized the illusion of that long-

* Dr. Ze'ev Levi teaches Jewish philosophy at the University of Haifa. The above article first appeared in Hebrew and was entitled: “פרופ' משה שוורץ ז"ל” in the Israeli daily *Haaretz* (23.12.77), p. 16, and was translated by Irvin B. Fishel.

1 שפה, מיתוס, אמנות; עיונים במחשבה היהודית בעת החדשה הוצ' שוקן, תשכ"ז.
2 הגות יהודית נוכח התרבות הכללית, הוצ' שוקן, תשל"ו.

ed for symbiotic relationship between Jewish and Western culture which prevailed in Jewish circles, especially in Germany, from the 19th century until the Holocaust, he never ignored the positive consequences of this meeting point for modern Jewish thought. Jewish philosophy never developed in a vacuum. On the contrary, it always reached its most impressive and original achievements as the result of a meeting with a secular philosophy. Thus, the philosophy of Philo of Alexandria came into existence on the background of contemporaneous Hellenistic philosophy; the ornate Jewish philosophy of the Middle Ages which flourished through a reliance upon Greek and Arabic philosophy, and the new Jewish thought which first developed out of classic German philosophy.

Consequently, when Moshe Swarcz dealt with this last mentioned philosophic contact, namely that of the new Jewish ethics with classic German philosophy, he had, like every thinker, certain primary subjects and concerns which especially drew his attention. These concerns themselves explain which philosophies he particularly favoured and why. Thus it seems to me that it is best to relate to the realm of philosophy and to the particular philosophic problem which led him to his field of interest and placed him at its center. The realm was esthetics and the problem was the meaning of the term revelation in modern, philosophical religious thought, both Jewish and non-Jewish. In addition to these, Swarcz dealt with the problem of myth in modern thought. Thus it is not by chance that the philosophers most important to Swarcz were F.W. Schelling and F. Rosenzweig, since their philosophies are of a kind in which faith and revelation occupy a place of major importance. The title of Swarcz's first book "Language, Myth and Art" was clearly intended to emphasize the three central ideas in Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*, each of which is treated methodologically in each part of Swarcz's book. The influence of his teacher, S.H. Bergmann of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is felt in this study. (Under Bergmann's guidance, Moshe Swarcz wrote his dissertation on "Perception of Myth in the Work of Schelling"³ soon to appear in a revised and enlarged version under the title "From Myth to Revelations: a Study of the Late Philosophy of Schelling and Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*".⁴ Bergmann too, had a similar spiritual affinity for these two philosophers. Proof of this, among other instances, is his introduction to the Hebrew translation of Rosenzweig's *Zweistromland*⁵ and various articles on Rosenzweig's work. In addition to these, the third volume of Bergmann's "History of Modern Philosophy"⁶ (to be published this year) is dedicated for the most part to Schelling. Besides Schelling and Rosenzweig one must mention the Jewish religious philosopher S.L. Steinheim. Steinheim, who wrote in the middle of the past century, is a sort of intermediary figure whose philosophy also centered on the idea of revelation. Swarcz was greatly preoccupied with Steinheim's most important book *Die Offenbarung nach dem Lehrbegriffe der Synagoge* (4 vols., 1835-65). This text served as the central point in his last lec-

3 "התפיסה הריאליסטית של המיתוס במישנתו של שלינג"
4 ממיתוס להתגלות: עיונים בפילוסופיה המאחרת של שלינג וכוכב הגאולה של רוזנצוויג.
5 פראנץ רוזנצוויג, נהריים, הוצ' מוסד ביאליק, תש"ך.
6 תולדות הפילוסופיה החדשה.

tures at the Theological Institute in Switzerland, now so greatly impoverished by his death. Both Schelling and Steinheim, as well as Rosenzweig, negate any attempt to equate religious content with philosophy. This is in contrast with the medieval Jewish philosophers who with the exception of Judah ha-Levi, represented in these or similar terms the conception of twin axiomatic approaches, to the same ends. In their opinion the divine can be comprehended just as it can be achieved by revelation. This in turn is in contrast to the opinion of Hegel and Ranke, and their followers in modern secular and Jewish philosophy. They maintained that both religion and philosophy have the same content even though religion attains it by means of metaphor ("prefigurations of thought" in Ranke's terminology) which is a more facile way of understanding, while philosophy reaches the same goal by means of ideas. Thus Rosenzweig, Schelling and Steinheim taught that revelation is capable of and intended to attain meaning which mere rational understanding is prevented from reaching due to its limitations. Revelation in their view represents a power of comprehension unlike any other, at its foundations rests faith, which has a power to belittle rational understanding when the subject under consideration is transcendental in nature. This idea which was, despite certain nuances, common to all three of the philosophers cited above, fascinated both S.H. Bergmann and Moshe Swarcz, and served them as an ideological basis for a religious humanism of considerable scope. This was reflected in an expression of which Bergmann was particularly fond, "science which believes." This expression more than any other explains the methodological approach which guided Moshe Swarcz in his philosophical works. Swarcz held that comprehension of the religious concept of revelation, or at least an understanding of it as a religious phenomenon which is part of human existence in modern times, could be reached by means of a discursive study. No matter what the final conclusion which the philosopher may reach, whether opposed to use of the intellect or simply circumlocating the intellect, he is none the less required as a philosopher to maintain a basically intellectual approach to the subject under consideration. He cannot soar on the heights of rhetoric, but must build his statements carefully in full knowledge of the scientific nature of philosophy. Thus Swarcz was able to research those approaches in modern idealistic philosophy which are opposed to intellect, such as the works of Kierkegaard and Schelling's philosophy of revelation, with an entirely scientific methodology without denying his philosophical affinity for such an anti-rationalistic approach. When Swarcz investigated Buber and Rosenzweig, Kierkegaard's and Schelling's representatives in modern Jewish thought, he never compromised on intellectual examination and analysis. Like his teacher S.H. Bergmann, Moshe Swarcz never allowed the concept of *ratio* to lose its central importance and radical meaning. Love of philosophy in his works remained quite separate from the rigorous methodology of philosophic investigation. This is perhaps the reason that, despite the clear-thinking which marked Swarcz's lectures and philosophical works, they present to the listener or reader an intellectual challenge which is far from small. It requires an effort to follow the philosophic assumptions of M. Swarcz. They are laid out in an intellectual framework in which each statement is an extension of the previous one. However, anyone who came into contact with him, or with his books and articles, can bear witness

to the fact that the effort was worthwhile even if they do not agree with all of his options on the subject under discussion.

The study of the influence of anti-rationalistic approaches in secular philosophy on modern Jewish thought never reduced Swarcz's understanding of such influences to the generalization of a one-way process. He never taught that secular philosophy was the active agent and Jewish thought the passive factor in the relationship, that the former gave and the latter absorbed. Rather he felt that the influence was reciprocal, that Judaism also enriches secular philosophy by means of its spiritual treasures. Swarcz's point of view was based on the concept common to other Jewish thinkers such as Rosenzweig, Buber, Bergmann and Baruch Kurzweil that Judaism represented a source of spiritual energy which, if I may use Henri Bergson's famous expression, also raises the level of western civilization by its influence. It is perhaps correct to say that each of the great meetings of secular and Jewish thought mentioned above actually awakened and set in motion similar spiritual forces which lay hidden in Judaism. The challenge came from the outside and the uplift, so to speak, came from within.

I have tried to present a few of the lines of thinking in the philosophy of Moshe Swarcz. Certainly, there is not enough space here to include all of his work in Jewish thought; I have only hinted at his work in esthetics which constitutes a major part of his philosophical research. I first came in contact with Moshe Swarcz by means of his lectures on esthetics from Kant to Croce. A teacher and advisor grew to be a friend and companion; now this friendship has been brought to a close in a sudden and cruel fashion. This is not the place, however, to enlarge on the personal aspect of our relationship, rather this too must be in the spirit of the departed. In closing, I will say only that although the man was an estheticist in the full sense of the word, esthetics was for Swarcz not merely an inseparable part of thought but intrinsic to existence. This belief was expressed by the gracefulness of his being and the delicacy of his soul.

May his memory remain a blessing forever.