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Linear Time Vs Now Time: Towards A Critical Conception Of Time In Marx, Benjamin And Rosenzweig

Juan Carlos Durán
University of Texas at El Paso

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LINEAR TIME VS NOW TIME: TOWARDS A CRITICAL CONCEPTION OF TIME IN
MARX, BENJAMIN AND ROSENZWEIG

JUAN CARLOS DURAN
Master's Program in Philosophy

APPROVED:

Jules Simon, Ph.D., Chair

Steve Best, Ph.D.

Stefan Gandler, Ph.D.

Stephen L. Crites, Jr., Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

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LINEAR TIME VS NOW TIME: TOWARDS A CRITICAL CONCEPTION OF TIME IN
MARX, BENJAMIN AND ROSENZWEIG

by

Juan Carlos Duran, BA Philosophy

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this thesis is to open a conversation regarding the role of the linear conception of time that serves as the driving force of the modern and capitalist conception of human history, and that conceives it as a timeline based on progress. The idea of modern progress establishes a civilizing tendency of development in history that prioritizes the future and rejects the past. The linear time conceives of traditional constitution of life of the oppressed people of the past as obsolete and old, and associates ‘modern’ behaviors in order to establish a bourgeois and utilitarian relation with nature devoid of metaphysics and myth. The task of this work is divided into three chapters, each of one of which focuses on the development of the topic towards a critique of the linear conception of time. The first is a presentation of Marx’s conception of history as a critique of capitalism and the bourgeoisie but that is influenced by the linear conception of time. The second chapter is an interpretation of Walter Benjamin’s critique of the linear time through Franz Rosenzweig’s ‘Jetzt-Zeit’ conception of time in order to formulate the necessity of a new dimension of historical materialism and criticize capitalism and modernity. The last chapter is a presentation of Franz Rosenzweig’s ‘Jetzt-Zeit’ from its Jewish roots to which is needed in order to comprehend the way in which Benjamin criticizes capitalism as a religion.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most representative aspects of modernity is linear time, where human history is conceived as a timeline. Latin American Philosopher Bolívar Echeverría (1941-2010) holds, “modernity is a determinant aspect of a group of behaviors that appear since many centuries ago in social life, and that the common understanding recognizes them as discontinuous and even opposed—that is its perception—of the traditional constitution of that life, behaviors that are called ‘modern.’ Furthermore, it concerns a group of behaviors that would be in the process of substituting for the traditional constitution of that ‘modern’ life after considering it as obsolete, that is to say, as inconsistent and ineffective”¹*

Echeverría’s understanding of modernity as a group of behaviors that conceives traditional life as obsolete and ineffective is, for this thesis, important because of how I situate that conception of modernity with respect to the manifestation and representation of linear time, which also conceives the traditional constitution of life as obsolete and old, juxtaposing modern behaviors with traditional life-ways. In both cases, modernity involves not only a disdain for the traditional conception of life centered on the past, but it also involves a civilizing tendency that establishes a unifying principle for social life centered on the substitution of the ancestral for a new economic logic based on science and technology to secularize political and social life. From this perspective, to secularize means to logically establish a necessarily ‘linear and civilizing’ *progress* that prioritizes a utilitarian relation with nature devoid of metaphysics and myth.

¹ Echeverría, *¿Qué es la modernidad?*, 7-8. *

“la modernidad es la característica determinante de un conjunto de comportamientos que aparecen desde hace ya varios siglos por todas partes en la vida social y que el entendimiento común reconoce como discontinuos e incluso contrapuestos -esa es su percepción- a la constitución tradicional de esa vida, comportamientos a los que precisamente llama “modernos”. Se trata además de un conjunto de comportamientos que estaría en proceso de sustituir esa constitución tradicional, después de ponerla en evidencia como obsoleta, es decir, como inconsistente e ineficaz” Translated by Juan Carlos Durán.

This civilizing tendency of ‘modern’ history is informed by a conception of linear time, in the way that it appears as the culmination of a civilizing process of progress, and in which humans leave behind their ‘uncivilized’ past—as obsolete, inconsistent, and ineffective—in order to aim their attention towards the ‘new’ future. The normative historical conception of modernity is based on the culmination of this linear conception of time, and has become the most recognized tradition of Western philosophical thought. The modern, linear conception of time provides a conception of history that gives us a version of history that progressively evolves as several stages of human progress. This evolving progress of humanity is then supposed to culminate in an ideal future of human maturity. This conception of time is typical of the kind of Enlightenment thinking which promises the rational illumination of mankind through the knowledge of science and technological practice, which were used as ‘blunt’ tools of emancipation and progress of humanity that would enable them to rid themselves of old and obsolete myths and religions. The most representative philosopher of this period of history is Immanuel Kant but we can also include Hegel, Voltaire, Montesquieu and perhaps even Rousseau, but also the whole group of *Los científicos* of pre-Revolutionary Mexico influenced by August Comte led by Gabino Barreda and Justo-Sierra. Even though, I don’t address these philosophers of the enlightenment and *Los Científicos* in Mexico in my work, I consider them as a starting point in my work.

However, above and beyond those thinkers is Karl Marx whose linear conception of time incorporates the dimension of historical materialism and, most importantly for my thesis, the demand for revolution through historical materialism.

On the other hand, Walter Benjamin conceives revolution through a messianic conception of time based on Now-Time, a concept that was influenced by Benjamin's reading of Franz Rosenzweig's philosophy, with his own peculiar conception of *Jetzt-Zeit*.

The main work that I will be doing in my thesis project is to present the conceptual relations between linear time and a bourgeois conception of history that, in fact, disables the capacity for revolution, instead of promoting the kind of progress that is needed for creating an *actual* world-transformative revolution, because it closes off the opportunity to look backwards to the past and the possibility of historical redemption. One of the most important parts of my thesis, will be the way in which I propose new possibilities to think about 'redeeming' revolution conceived on the basis of 'linear' civilized progress, with the conception of messianic time that I elaborate out of the philosophies of Rosenzweig and Benjamin.

CHAPTER 1: TOWARDS A DIFFERENT CONCEPT OF TIME IN MARX

Marx's political and revolutionary appreciation of Marxism as a secular and materialist philosophy involves not only a critique of the capitalist exploitation of man, but a harsh critique of religion and idealism. Such appreciation opens up the possibility to confront this conception of secularity with the idea that the Marxist idea of emancipation is profoundly inspired by a secular conception of the messianic time through his idea of classless society.

The notion of normative and positive emancipation is a central concept in Marx's philosophy, and this is because this notion inspires most of the main Marxist concepts, such as class struggle, alienation, exploitation, alienated labor, and many others. However, following Walter Benjamin's statement in his theses *On the concept of history*², that Marx had secularized the idea of messianic time through the notion of classless society in history, and how it cannot be conceived without a secular idea of messianic time. This distinction made by Benjamin in his thesis XVIIa*³, between Marx's notion of classless society and the messianic time, opens up a crucial topic to present. This is because Marxism is a philosophy that conceives the creation of a new society based on the idea of a classless society and which will be the result of combating the devastating consequences of capitalism.

Following the previous idea of classless society in Marx, this idea is profoundly influenced by the notion of time referred to as the conception of linear time. The notion of linear time conceives and understands history as a developing process constituted by historical stages that progress towards communism. Communism becomes the main goal of mankind, which can be interpreted as a secular paradise on earth. It is my assumption that, if the notion of linear time

² Benjamin, *On the concept of history*.

³ *Thesis XVIIa is a thesis that is not available in the first German editions and that Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben discovered in 1981 as a typewritten text containing this thesis. It is often referred to as the XVIIa thesis, so the numbering of the *Gesammelte Schriften* would not be modified. However, this thesis is also often referred to as the XVIII Thesis, as it appears in the document T4.

in capitalism is not criticized and transformed from its deep philosophical roots, the exploitation of man and poor people will continue. Our concept of time must be modified in order to have a different perspective that helps transform our understanding of the history of mankind. This is because the linear narrative of history possesses a quantifiable aspect that reduces the lives of human beings into quantitative elements (numbers) and processes of production that are measurable and that serve as the driving force of capitalism.

In the *Grundrisse*⁴ for a critique of alienation, Marx points out:

"The bourgeois economists are so much stuck in the image of a certain historical stage of development of the society that the necessary objectification of the social powers of labour appears to them inseparable from the necessity of alienation of these powers as against live labour"⁵.

In the previous quote, from this aspect of time, phenomena such as alienation, are derived as an empty experience of human creation that reduces human creativity into an instrumental, mechanic and meaningless practice that impoverishes the experience of life and creativity. Following Benjamin's critique of the linear conception of time, this is due to the conception of time followed by capitalism, and that impoverishes and lacks the transformative power to think in the possibility of creating a different world without alienation.

The new notion of time considered revolutionary to criticize capitalism from its roots of exploitation is Benjamin's notion of time, "*Jetzt-Zeit*", which means, "now-time". This notion has relevance to Marx's ideas of class struggle, classless society and emancipation, but it won't be possible to perceive such relevance, if historical materialism is not able to be in relation with theology.

⁴ Marx, *Grundrisse*.

⁵ Avineri, *The Social & Political Thought of Karl Marx*, 105.

However, if we could understand and interpret Marxism from a different concept of time, it would prepare for a better critique that can be applied to our actual context. This would open a new possibility for a revolutionary transformation of how we analyze and interpret current devastating capitalist realities.

The revolutionary shift in the “Jetzt-Zeit” conception of time allows one to criticize the emptiness of the linear conception of time, so the humans would be able to live the present developing a critical thinking directed to address and develop, the potential of no alienated labor. This can be likened to the process of artistic creation, directed to the transformation of people’s lives, while introducing a different conception of man based not only on economical production, but expanding human creativity and revolution.

Any possibilities by having a new experience of life, starting from the experiences and visions of the oppressed and the forgotten ones that are part of history, and which for the most part cannot even be considered as humans, because they are not part of the history, but only as a part of the engine of progress. This relates, on Benjamin’s part, the idea of messianism with the idea of redemption, namely, that we do not get to have a ‘paradise’ time until and unless all the suffering people of the world, and maybe all of the suffering beings, are not suffering anymore.

MARX’S NOTION OF EMANCIPATION

In the essay “*On the Jewish Question*”⁶ written in the autumn of 1843, Marx advances the conception of emancipation by way of a criticism of a contemporary bourgeois theory of politics, which was based on the conclusion that, human emancipation requires the ending of the division between man as an egoistic being in “civil society”, and man as an abstract

⁶ Marx, *On the Jewish Question*.

citizen in the state. His critique is based on his interpretation of the Hegelian conception of Modern State, that establishes the idea of the civil citizens as members of an abstract conception of man and society. The abstract citizens conceived in the Hegelian conception of civil society are considered as independent and egoistic individuals, whose individual interests get subsumed by an abstract conception of the civil society. This means that, independent individuals who have self-interests, then seek other individuals to form associations and then corporations in what is called civil society, but that are then 'subsumed' in or under the state.

For Marx, this conception of the State and the civil society is a bourgeois expression of individuals and society, whose interests are founded on the bourgeois conception of history and the predominance of the ruling class.

For this reason, Marx's conception of the Hegelian Modern State with its alienated civil society, is based on the way that he conceived how the working class citizen from Civil Society is separated from the concrete experience of the work of his labor in the world. The modern state of civil society conceived by the Hegelian conception does not represent the real needs and interests of the citizens, but on the contrary, they become part of an alienated dimension of the society. That's why Marx, in this early writing, suggests that the first step for the emancipation of man should consist, first of all, in the recognition of this alienated social dynamic in the society. And, secondly, in the liberation from the abstract conception of life that is distanced from the concrete life of the oppressed human being. Marx points out the following:

Every emancipation is a restoration of the human world and of human relationships to man himself. Political emancipation is a reduction of man, on the one hand to a member of civil society, and independent and egoistic individual, and on the other hand, to a citizen, to a moral person. Human emancipation will only be completed when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a species-being;

and when he has recognized and organized his own powers (forces progress) as social powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as political power.⁷ As shown in the previous quote, the emancipation is considered by Marx as a restoration of the man himself, and a new way to liberate himself from the forces of abstraction that are constituted by the Hegelian Modern State. The political emancipation would consist then, in how to transform the members of civil society that are considered independent and egoistic individuals into a real citizen that is a moral person. This is important because for Marx, human relationships are constituted by material and concrete relationships that are based on everyday life experiences and not only under the abstractions of such relationships. For this reason, Marx points out that "human emancipation will only be completed when the real man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen".

On the other hand, another important aspect of this is the fact that, the concrete and real human relationships, to which Marx refers, show that the 'abstract' conception of the citizens of civil society are 'abstract' because they are not constituted by the real experience of oppression of the oppressed classes. Those real experiences can only be seen when we take into account the actual experiences of oppression, which is not possible for the citizens of *bourgeois* civil society, since they do not experience oppression but, rather, they benefit by oppression of others, in material ways, etc. And thus they can 'abstract' from the phenomenon of actual experiences of oppression. Conceived of as real persons. This is to say when we move away from the abstract conception of the citizen represented by the bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie is represented then by the Hegelian conception of the state that only represents the bourgeois class. The man as a member of civil society that is represented by the ruling class is as Marx points out, a "*non-political* man-necessarily appears as the *natural*

⁷ Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 46.

man. The rights of man appear as natural rights because conscious activity is concentrated upon political action. Egoistic man is the passive, given result of the dissolution of society, an object of direct apprehension and consequently a natural object”.⁸

The rights of the non-political man can appear as natural rights only if they are inherent in an illusory human nature. But, on the contrary, this supposed nature of man is as Marx points out, historical and contingent and thus not illusory. The selfishness and individualistic relationships of the citizens of civil society are social constructions created by the ruling bourgeois class of society and are therefore not constitutively part of human nature. The expressions of individuality and selfishness are represented only by a small portion of society, the bourgeois class.

As a result, the abstract conception of the state and of human life represented by the ruling class results, for Marx, in the practice of alienation:

“Objectification is the practice of alienation. Just as man, so long as he is engrossed in religion, can only objectify his essence by an alien and fantastic being; so under the sway of egoistic need, he can only affirm himself and produce objects in practice by subordinating his products and his own activity to the domination of an alien entity, and by attributing to them the significance of an alien entity, namely money”⁹

The objectification as a practice of alienation is an important comparison between the conception of alienation and religion made by Marx. The process of objectification that establishes an abstract conception of the state and the civil society ruled by the bourgeois class is similar to that created by religion with the man in need of support. There exists an essential connection between the celestial need that is represented in Christianity and that is transmuted into terrestrial need. For this reason, Marx holds that “In its perfected practice the spiritual egoism of Christianity

⁸ Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 46.

⁹ Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 52.

necessarily becomes the material egoism of the Jew, the celestial need is transmuted into terrestrial need, subjectivism into self-interest”¹⁰.

This transmutation of celestial need transmuted into terrestrial need is essential to understand Marx’s critique of religion as a specific practice of alienation. The relation that humans establish with religion is through the production of objects and all their activities always related to an external entity and thus, incapable of making their own decisions in their life. The individual is incapable to face the problems of his everyday life and needs an external entity to deposit his insecurities and needs. This would become some kind of fetishization of himself and a lack of real relationships that get him linked to others as a communion. For this reason, Marx holds that the religion of Christianity establishes a spiritual egoism that perpetuates the material egoism represented by Judaism. Judaism in his words can attain universal domination that turns alienated man and alienated nature into alienable, egoist, and huckstering.

This statement is important because it is possible to perceive Marx’s conception of Judaism. Judaism is the reason for which the society cannot be emancipated entirely. For this reason, he suggests the abolition of Judaism from society so it can become emancipated and liberated from the Jewish conception of huckstering and egoistic need:

As soon as society succeeds in abolishing the *empirical* essence of Judaism-huckstering and its conditions-the Jew becomes *impossible* because his consciousness no longer has an object. The subjective basis of Judaism-practical need- assumes a human form, and the conflict between the individual, sensuous existence of man and his species-existence, is abolished. The *social* emancipation of the Jew is the *emancipation of society from Judaism*.¹¹

It is well appreciated in this quote Marx’s animosity towards Judaism and the huckstering aspect that is implicitly involved in his conception of the Jew. For Marx, the Jewish are conceived as

¹⁰ Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 52.

¹¹ Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 52.

the main problem of society for emancipation, and this is because they are considered as the social impossibility of society to free themselves from the huckstering culture of the Jew. From Marx's perspective about religion, even Christianity has been re-absorbed by Judaism. Christianity is conceived as a spiritual and refined religion that helps Judaism to be more relevant. Marx holds that "Christianity is the sublime thought of Judaism. Judaism is the vulgar practical application of Christianity. But this practical application will only become universal when Christianity as a religion has accomplished the alienation of man from himself and from nature"¹² There is a dialectical materialism in Marx that leads to rejecting the Jewish condition of huckstering. Such a critique means for him the impossibility for Judaism to become a real and universal religion that has a deep and profound theoretical framework capable of theorizing for the emancipation of the man, but only practical needs that induce the man to practicality and practical needs.

Marx's critique of Judaism is based on his desire to promote his dialectical materialism because of his understanding of the historical-material role that Judaism and, by extension, Christianity played in the formation of the modern capitalist nation-state. This included the critique of Jewish messianism as it relates to material reality and what Marx calls hucksterism and practical egoism. In order to create the condition for the possibility of his conception of revolutionary end-time, Marx needs to create that kind of a typology of Judaism in order to create a counter ideology, that is, the proletariat. Despite this aversion towards Judaism and Jewish 'material or huckster' culture, we find in Marx a profound connection between the Jewish conception of temporal-material emancipation that inspires a similar conception of linear time for Marx and for Marx's revolutionary transformation of society.

¹² Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 52.

The consideration of Judaism by Marx in this point is as a crude practical need that conducts man to self-interest and individuality due to its main focus on practical life. For this reason, he points out, “The social emancipation of the Jew is the *emancipation of society from Judaism*”. Such a claim has been considered as Marx’s antisemitic attitude against Jewish people and Judaism. However, despite there is this existing aversion towards Judaism and Jewish culture, there exists a profound connection between the Jewish conception of emancipation that is profoundly inspired in the conception of linear time in which Marx’s Marxism is inspired for the transformation of the society.

MARX’S LINEAR CONCEPTION OF HISTORICAL TIME

The linear conception of time that is considered by Benjamin as homogeneous empty time interprets the world just as Ranke’s Historicism does. Ranke’s Historicism is the historical trend that conceives history and the past as ‘the way it really was’, establishing a causal nexus among various moments in history, and therefore, presenting them as a sequence of events, especially those that had survived through time. Such historical moments considered as relevant and important for “universal history” are the victor’s vision, as Benjamin points out. Consequently, what a historical materialist should do, is to consider the historical vision of the oppressed, but this will only be possible when the process of historical materialism conceived as objective and philosophical, gets involved with theology, considered as subjective and aesthetic.

In Marx’s conception of historical materialism, we also have a philosophy that considers the nature and origins of oppression, specifically, the oppression of the working class. However, in order to better understand Benjamin’s critique of linear time for my thesis and in the chapters that follow, it is crucial to understand the unity of theory and praxis in Marx, which consists in understanding both our capacities of interpreting the world and subsequently, our

capacities of transforming it. Such a conception of interpreting the world involves in the first place, to have the capacity of understanding the dynamics, the historical and material movements of space and reality, that present how reality has been historically formed through the economic and material dialectics of social dynamics. This capacity of interpreting reality through such an understanding of historical and material conditions, opens up the possibility of a potential transformation of reality, in the sense that it establishes a connection with the possibility of transforming the current state of things. Such a capacity of transformation of reality is recognized by Marx as ‘praxis’.

PRAXIS

Praxis is the active capacity of transforming reality but that contains a theoretical understanding of the social causes and movements of reality, in order to transform the current state of things. Following Marx, the conception of ‘praxis’ has a theoretical aspect that is necessary for the practical and transformative actions of reality to take place. This relation posited between theory and practice is understood, for Marx, as a dialectical relation that exhibits a tension between the understanding of the world and the transformation of reality for the creation of a new society. In order to get to this dialectical relation, however, Marx ‘leaned’ on his reading of Hegel and Hegel’s understanding of the possibility of ‘philosophy’ achieving self-realization or self-actualization in knowing itself as ‘actualized’ Spirit vis-à-vis the world:

This possibility of self-actualization determines the dialectical relationship between philosophy’s comprehension of the world and its ability to change it. In Marx’s opinion, theory must evolve an adequate interpretation of the world before it will be able to change it. The history of philosophy is the continuous search for such an adequate picture of the world. Once such a picture has been formed, it dialectically abolishes itself as a reflection of reality and begins to determine the shaping of a new reality.¹³

¹³ Avineri, *The Social & Political Thought of Karl Marx*, 136.

The dialectical relationship between theory and the practical dimension of transformation of reality is crucial to understand, since it allows the comprehension of praxis, not only as an idealistic approach of understanding reality, but it is about seeking its transformative capacity to change its current state of oppression. The significance of this approach on praxis is due to its relevance of conceiving the political dimension of philosophy, which means to adopt not only an attitude of critical thinking towards the understanding of reality, but also towards its transformation. According to Avineri, the theory must have an adequate interpretation of the world before it will be able to change it. This means to have a deep understanding of the world, its political causes and social context, but also to be able to wait for the perfect moment to change reality. To affirm this latter point, is to be able to recognize the political dimension of praxis and its revolutionary capacity of transformation.

The political dimension of praxis is then crucial to understand the notion of revolution in Marx, since it opens up the possibility of creating a new reality that involves a particular conception of self-consciousness that abolishes itself to be realized in the future. The realization in the future of philosophy means to turn itself into a reality that is able to perfect philosophy in order to transcend it and transform it.

According to Marx the lack of practical and transformative aspect of praxis is what represents traditional materialism. Which is inclined to only interpret the world but without a transformative potential to change it.

The capacity of praxis to transform reality is conceived as a human action that revolutionizes existing reality but which presupposes that that action of transformation, depends on the social conditions in which the human being develops. This is because, as Marx points out, the human being is someone who is determined by their social and political context. However, it

is important to highlight that in order for *revolutionary praxis* to be realized, it needs a *passive element*, as Marx recognizes. This passive element is constituted by the material needs of the oppressed class that give rise to the possibility of realization: “Revolutions need a passive element, a *material* basis. Theory is only realised in a people in so far as it fulfills the need of the people... Will theoretical needs be directly practical needs? It is not enough that thought should seek to realise itself; reality must also strive towards thought.”¹⁴

It is important to indicate how for Marx actualizing the idea of revolution is profoundly linked to the conception of praxis. This is because revolution needs to adopt a theoretical framework that is able to conduct the practical transformation of reality which, as historical and material, is bound up with the practical needs of the oppressed class. To affirm this is to say that the oppressed class or proletariat are the leading force of revolution. This is due to the fact that the needs of the proletariat are mainly constituted by practical needs instead of theoretical problems. Taking into account that the proletariat faces practical problems is to recognize the passive element that is the material basis for the revolution. This material basis is, therefore, that which prepares the practical element in the conception of praxis for the emancipation of the human and the one that is capable of creating the transformation of reality through revolution.

The revolution will then necessarily result from the material activity and the oppressed social life of the proletariat that will create the new future society. This also entails that the proletariat will necessarily become aware of their current state of oppression in which they find themselves. This praxis-based revolution should then lead to a new future society

¹⁴ Avineri, *The Social & Political Thought of Karl Marx*, 139-140.

which would be expressed by a new type of human being that is able to socialize with his fellow-proletarian and that feels part of the whole proletarian group inside a social organization:

Revolutionary praxis has thus a dialectical aspect. Objectively, it is the organization of the conditions leading towards ultimate human emancipation. Subjectively it is the self-change the proletariat achieves by its self-discovery through organization. Through its organization the proletariat prepares the conditions for its self-emancipation. Organization and association, even considered apart from their immediate aims, constitute a crucial phase in the liberation of the workers. They change the worker, his way of life, his consciousness of himself and his society. They force him into contact with his fellow-workers, suggest to him that his fate is not a subjective, particular and contingent affair but part of a universal scheme or reality. They make him see in his fellow-proletarians not competitors for work and bread but brothers in suffering and ultimate victory, not means but co-equal ends. The end-results of the revolution are thus historically formed and determined during and by its occurrence.¹⁵

For Marx it is important to recognize that in order to make the revolution possible it is necessary for the proletariat to have a revolutionary consciousness that will be influential in changing the circumstances of the material world in which they live. So when the consciousness of the proletariat is revolutionary it means that the revolution is already taking place, that is, that a dialectical relation with the material world exists that takes the form of ‘praxis’—integrating a theory of revolution with a consciousness that conducts to a practical revolution. As Avineri points out, if such a consciousness is lacking, then the revolution lacks the transformative capacity of actually changing reality.

For Marx, the first step to have a revolutionary consciousness means to be aware of the historical position that the proletariat has in history, and then be able to transform one’s own activities towards the creation of a new world. For this awareness of the historical position in history, Marx justifies the existence of the International, which is an organization of the working class members that are impelled to change the current state of things with their class-consciousness through their own activities. The International is then the result of the organization

¹⁵ Avineri, *The Social & Political Thought of Karl Marx*, 143.

of the working class in order to conquer the trans-national political power of the ruling classes. Thus, the transformation of the current world into a new world becomes a political movement, and the ideal of revolution that gets inspired by this force of transformation. However, despite its relevance for the working class and its struggle against the bourgeois ruling class, this movement is still conceived from a linear conception of time. By this I mean, that the transformation of the current world promoted in the International had a belief in social progress, but in order to achieve a better stage of progress in human history, the needs of the working class would have to be satisfied. Moreover, to achieve such a satisfaction, that is, to achieve social progress for the working class through class struggle, is nonetheless still inspired by a promising future understood as an aspiration for socialism and communism. This is to say that socialism and communism will be the historical stages that will only be reached in the future to satisfy the working class' needs. The linear conception of time promotes the idea of progressing through social revolution in order to be able to reach an ultimate goal in the future, which is the *abolition of classes*. In Benjamin's words, Marx's work is constituted by three basic concepts:

Three basic concepts can be identified in Marx's work, and its entire theoretical armature can be seen as an attempt to weld these three concepts together. They are the class struggle of the proletariat, the course of historical development (progress), and the classless society. The structure of Marx's basic idea is as follows: Through a series of class struggles, humanity attains to a classless society in the course of historical development. = But classless society is not to be conceived as the endpoint of historical development. = From this erroneous conception Marx's epigones have derived (among other things) the notion of the "revolutionary situation", which, as we know, has always refused to arrive. = A genuinely messianic face must be restored to the concept of classless society and, to be sure, in the interest of furthering the revolutionary politics of the proletariat itself.¹⁶

Following Marx's idea of the course of historical development, the constitution of the proletariat as a political party is crucial to achieve the main aim of the social revolution which is the

¹⁶ Benjamin, *On the concept of history*, 403.

abolition of classes. Such an abolition would result from economic struggles and economic movements that entails both political and economic forces. Thus, the party of the proletariat is necessary in order to mobilize the fight against the political power of the exploiters. However, the *abolition of classes* as the main aim of the social revolution cannot be conceived without the work of theory. This is because Marx conceives praxis as the way to justifiably theorize the social, historical dimensions of exploitation. We need to know about the alienation and oppression of the working classes in order to be able to change those conditions. This is one of the most remarkable aspects of the theoretical dimension of Marx's theory of praxis, as one of the bases for the viability of practical and transformative revolution.

However, as Avineri points out, Marx's theory of history can be conceived as a form of human redemption that can be realized in the present through revolution which can be conceived as a kind of eschatology of history. Such an eschatology conceives the destiny of humanity in a profound relation with the end times of human history as a resolution of the class struggle. For my thesis, it is important to point out the specific way that the historical dimension of Marx's perspective gives meaning to the transformation of reality through the process of revolution. This is in opposition to Hegel's historical synthesis that conceives human history as a dialectical tension that gets resolved by the present generation to achieve its culmination through a super-historical essence represented by the Absolute Spirit. Again according to Avineri, the radical difference between these two historical conceptions lies in the fact that while Hegel conceives the process of dialectical tension as the culmination of history, Marx sees the dialectical tension as the beginning of true history, namely, the history of class struggle. This is because Marx considers that the process of resolving class opposition has not yet occurred, while Hegel conceives that it has already been resolved.

On the other hand, Marx also rejects the idea of the Absolute Spirit as a valid criterion to conceive human history because it is an abstract conception of history that negates the real material world and, more importantly, negates the real needs of the proletariat.

The importance of these statements lies in the significance given to the present to realize the transformation of reality and to highlight as well the existent tension between Hegel's dialectics and Marx's eschatological approach to conceive human history. This is due to Marx's conviction that revolution is imminent and unavoidable:

This tension between eschatology and dialectics implies that Marx sees the political activity of the proletariat creating the conditions that would facilitate the realization of the revolutionary objectives so that the proletariat would be ready when circumstances would make this realization unavoidable.¹⁷

Marx's eschatological approach lies in the fact that in order to create revolution, it is necessary to facilitate such a historical process as a conscious awareness of the working class to intervene in history, avoiding the passive and quietistic attitudes of some leaders of revolutionary movements. Therefore, we need a theory of praxis that Marx uses to develop a creative and transformative consciousness as a prelude, which is able to induce revolution. From Marx's perspective, this transformation is crucial in order to develop a new kind of human to dwell in a new society, constituted by critical and aware persons able to realize their creativity and thinking in a world without property, without exploitation, and without class distinction.

In order to understand the development of the new kind of human that Marx conceives for his historical conception, it is necessary to understand how the linear conception of time is influenced by the idea of the stages of socialism. The idea of the stages of socialism takes into account the phenomenon of linear continuity in history and which serves to structure how humans transform themselves into new kinds of humans. However, in order to be able to

¹⁷ Avineri, *The Social & Political Thought of Karl Marx*, 251.

understand the process of human transformation we need to understand the role that specific and material conditions of the material world play in realizing the development of that human history. This is what Marx understands as the development of communism. But, just as Marx also pointed out, it is not possible to predict the successful actualization of communism in advance because that ‘final’ stage is itself determined by the specific contexts of each of the other previous stages. In other words, it is not possible to be aware of the relation of that final stage to any one of the previous stages at any specific moment in which those stages are taking place precisely because of their ‘specific and material conditions’.

But the idea of understanding the specific conditions of the context means to be able to only minimally delineate the conditions and features of a future society. It is only possible to delineate the features of a future society if we have the capacity to be aware of the conditions that would enable the transformation of a new society. Hence, Marx conceives the development of communism as a set of stages that resists the representation of a gradual perfection of communism. In such stages, what he means by a dialectical process is one that occurs as the “dialectical unfolding of the principles of *existing* society” based on existing tensions in that society. As Avineri points out, with:

the description of the unfolding of existing historical forces, he must describe the development of communism as a set of stages. . . . If these stages represented different degrees of the gradual perfection of communism, they would be a dispensable, arbitrary device, only complicating an already complicated picture. But these stages are necessary for the dialectical unfolding of the principles of *existing* society. Each represents a further *Aufhebung* of these principles [of two existing ‘material’ forces struggling against each other]. The description of future society becomes a posthumous analysis of the passing of the bourgeois world: the historicity of Marx’s description of communism is thus strongly emphasized against *a priori* ‘systems’ of the so-called utopian socialists.¹⁸

¹⁸ Avineri, *The Social & Political Thought of Karl Marx*, 221.

The representation of the material of the opposing forces through dialectical movements is crucial to understand, because it is through these stages, that there exists the possibility to break up the a priori systems that had belonged to idealistic and socialist utopian conceptions of society. What Marx wants to criticize is the attempt of current philosophy of history to avoid the idealistic approaches that fall into a bourgeois conception of human history. To understand this is to approach to a more clear understanding of his idea of communism. Marx does not understand communism as an ideal to which reality has to adjust itself, but in recognizing the revolutionary moments in which reality can be transformed. For this reason, according to Avineri, Marx points out that:

‘Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things’. Or as he puts in the Manuscripts, ‘Communism is the necessary form and the dynamic principle of the immediate future, but communism is not itself the goal of human development- the form of human society’.¹⁹

To affirm that communism is not an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself, is to affirm that the development of future society is not created in an idealistic idea of future, but in the internal tensions of existing reality. This means that the existing society will find a way that based on the current material conditions, will provide the realization of perfection and universalization in the present, which can be considered as the future.

The relevance of this conception of communism represents the viability of the transformation of reality as a negation of the state of things of the present. This approach offers the materialistic approach that is needed for a real change in the world in order to dialectically negate the current state of oppression of the oppressed working class and the creation of a new reality.

¹⁹ Avineri, *The Social & Political Thought of Karl Marx*, 222.

The future plays a significant role, for Marx, in a dialectical relation with the present, which can only be conceived on the basis of a material foundation that attends to the specific and material needs of the working class and which, thus, provides the building blocks for the future. This dialectical relation is crucial for understanding the impossibility of any kind of transformation of reality that would be based on an idealistic ideal, which depends on the invention of reality entailing the emptiness of an abstract concept of society and history. Marx means to establish a dialectical relation between the present and the future as intrinsically joined in which the future is conceived not as an ideal, but as a permanent creation in the present.

This is because the avoidance of idealism is the main goal of Marx's historical materialism. And the way of achieving it is through the recognition of the present as a key factor of transformation that is profoundly linked with the future and the past. This means that in order to promote a radical transformation of reality it is necessary to recognize the existent dialectical tension between the past, the present, and the future.

According to Tomlinson the recognition of this dialectical relation between past, present and future is, in the existential-phenomenological tradition, known as 'temporalization':

Broadly speaking, temporalisation means *the active production of a dynamic difference and relation between the past, the present, and the future*. In this regard, if 'temporality' signifies a dynamic relation between the past, the present and the future, temporalisation is the active production of temporality. This is the sense in which, after Martin Heidegger, the movement of existence 'temporalises itself'- it is the creation of the three primary coordinates of human time. The concept of temporalisation is quite crucial, because it is the philosophical basis upon which the possibility of a temporal reading depends. Insofar as a 'temporal reading' of anything – a concept, a practice, a phenomenon, etc. – is sustainable, it must provide an account of temporalisation in order to ground its reading.²⁰

The dialectical relation established as temporalisation is important because it promotes the recognition of the production of temporality as a process of recognizing each time or event as

²⁰ Tomlinson, *Marx and the Concept of Historical Time*, 6.

different and unique, but also recognizing the active temporal relation that is maintained between each event, concept, or practice. What granting a ‘temporal reading’ to everything means, is to conceive of the relations between this and that event or practice in terms of an active production of temporality. In a few words, to read and interpret reality from a temporal perspective.

Tomlinson’s ideas about ‘temporal reading’ help us to better appreciate the temporality of Marx’s conception of historical materialism which then enables us to better understand the social relations that are involved *as* temporally created within the capitalist historical stage. Following Tomlinson, to understand the specific stage of capitalism it is necessary to understand Marx’s materialist concept of history as a concept of historical time. Without the reading of the materialist concept of history it is impossible to understand his conception of time, which presupposes an understanding of the social production of the means of life. We need to understand the temporality of social production in order to differentiate between the creation of the means of satisfying existing needs and the creation of new needs. Accordingly, the categories of labor and need are also crucial to understand a concept of historical time in Marx. Tomlinson says in this regard:

The transhistorical categories of labour and need are important, because they introduce the possibility of constructing a concept of historical time out of Marx’s work. Indeed, if there is a single question that guides this thesis, it is this: *how do we reconstruct Marx’s materialist concept of history as a concept of historical time?* The answer to this question begins with a temporal reading of the materialist concept of history. Specifically it begins with a temporal reading of the ‘first historical act’ – the social production of the means of life, which is, as we will consider, internally differentiated between the creation of the means of satisfying existing needs and the creation of new needs. And what we will discover with this reading is that the materialist concept of history enables an incipient conception of historical time which deviates from – in fact stands in opposition to – the predominant framework through which historical time is comprehended: historicism, which is to say – after Benjamin – the suffocating confines of ‘homogenous, empty time.’ Therefore one of the premises of this thesis is that a temporal reading of the materialist concept of history – the first but by no means the only step towards developing a concept

of historical time in Marx – de-codifies the codified tradition known as ‘Historical Materialism’²¹

The relevance of this statement lies, in the first place, in recognizing the main categories of labor and need for understanding capitalism as a historical stage that creates a specific linear and empty temporality that dehumanizes humans. And in the second place, it is relevant to understand the necessity of reading the materialist concept of history from a temporal reading perspective that involves the creation of a temporal framework that establishes a temporal reading from the tradition of Historical Materialism.

According to Tomlinson, the relevance of understanding such categories of labor and need in capitalism is in order to highlight how the capital totalizes human history and temporalizes it in such a way that it appears as a progressive linear conception of time. This means to establish connections through each historical stage following a successive pattern of continuity that empties human history and human experiences. For this reason, Tomlinson points out that the capitalist mode of production of capital historicalises the reality in such a way that it establishes the concept of ‘abstract labor’.

The concept of abstract labor is the result of a way of temporalizing time, which offers a specific way of interpreting and analyzing human history. For this reason, “the totalizing and temporalizing power of abstract labour is a fundamental dimension of capital’s historicalising power”.²²

Abstract labor appears as the most significant form of totalization and estrangement of real humans lives since it provides life to something that should not be conceived as a living form, abstract labor. The form of abstract labor which is a form of capitalist

²¹ Tomlinson, *Marx and the Concept of Historical Time*, 5.

²² Tomlinson, *Marx and the Concept of Historical Time*, 9.

linear conception of time not only abstracts from real labor an abstract form of labor but it also establishes a historical dynamic that in order to exist it never stops. This means that abstract labor and its conception as an infinite and unlimited conception of human production presents the dynamics that inspire the progressive and successive dynamics in human history. For this reason, Benjamin conceives in such a historical progressive movement, the emptiness of linear time, which impoverishes human experiences and human creativity. Is thus this inclination of infinite progress and abstract conception of productivity which tends to become a fiction and illusion from which the present is profoundly inspired by.

CHAPTER 2: THE LINEAR CONCEPTION OF TIME

In order to understand the *Theses on the concept of history*²³ of Walter Benjamin, it is necessary to understand the context in which these theses were created. According to Stefan Gandler, it is possible to understand them only if they are considered as a profoundly materialistic writing which are considered as an intent to radicalize Marx's non-mechanistic critical materialism. Such a radicalization of historical materialism is due to the presence of theology in Benjamin's thought. Theology in Benjamin's thought is crucial to expand the criterion and scope of materialism to introduce concepts such as a new conception of time.

For Benjamin, theology introduces ideas that expand the limits of a bourgeois conception of time and how it was conceived as linear and homogeneous which then limited the focus of humans to their roles in materialistic and practical concerns such as the productive relations between classes. Politically, such a conception of time also resulted in the decreased ability for social democracy to be able to radically fight against National Socialism.

In order to understand this radicalization of the *Thesis on the Concept of History* it is important to understand first of all, that the linear concept of time involves the establishment of a standardization of human experiences that conceives such experiences as equal and does not allow them as diverse and different, reducing the actual diversity of their differences.

For Gandler, it is important to point out that in the field of physics the concept of time had already been transformed by Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, whereas in the social sciences and philosophy the concept of time had not been transformed and thus, was not able to support a radical critique of the bourgeois conception of time.

Albert Einstein's theory of relativity introduced a radical critique of the linear, progressive and absolute conception of time in physics established by Isaac Newton, which

²³ Benjamin, *On the concept of history*.

transformed the conception of time as absolute and independent to one that is understood through relations, as a relativity and plurality of times that highlights the differences of the relations between objects and human beings. In the field of physics, the acceptance of the theory of relativity offers an epistemological rupture that is not evident in the social field of knowledge and this is because, as Marx pointed out, for the capitalist economy that is based on the bourgeois and dominant class, linear time serves as the criterion of measurement to compare and measure what is incomparable and unmeasurable. By “incomparable and unmeasurable” I mean, the “unmeasurable” plurality of human works of distinctively different or “incomparable” human beings.

According to Gandler, although Marx had not developed the critique of linear time as explicitly as Benjamin does, Marx prepared the field to focus on the critique of time from the establishment of the concept of value that is developed by the capitalist political economy. In this sense, Gandler holds the following:

The acceptance of the theory of relativity in philosophy and social sciences would tear the existing order down. Marx prepared the field in which Benjamin reveals through certain methods and legacies from theology. Benjamin’s revelation is strictly materialistic since it recognizes the linear, uninterrupted and direction defined time as an ideological construction that is not based on any material foundation. It is the exit door of this political-economical and social system in which apparently there is no exit, without the need of a messianic salvation- in the classic sense of the term, as a salvation that comes from outside of society.*²⁴

It is through theology and in taking ‘non-human’ elements which helped Benjamin to find a radical solution to the problems that the bourgeoisie capitalist conception established as an

²⁴ Gandler, *¿Por qué el ángel de la historia mira hacia atrás?*, 9. *Con la aceptación de la teoría de la relatividad para la filosofía y las ciencias sociales, se derrumbaría sin piedad todo el orden existente. Marx preparó el terreno teórico en el cual Benjamin hace esta gran revelación a la cual llega con la ayuda de ciertos métodos y herencias de la teología. La revelación de Benjamin es estrictamente materialista porque se basa en el conocimiento de que, el tiempo como algo lineal, ininterrumpido y con dirección definida, es una construcción ideológica que no se basa en ningún sustento material. Es la puerta de salida de este sistema político-económico y social aparentemente sin salida, sin la necesidad de una salvación mesiánica- en el sentido clásico de la palabra, como una salvación que viene de *afuera* de la sociedad.

homogenous and empty human experience. While Marx prepared the field of the critique of the bourgeois conception of history through his critique of the concept of value, Benjamin introduces the messianic element to critique such a bourgeois linear conception of time. The messianic element that Benjamin introduced with respect to 'time' was to find new epistemological dimensions that are capable of establishing new relations with the world and nature, and which would have a deep impact in developing new forms of socialization. For example, Benjamin says that there exists a weak messianic force in every generation of human beings that recognizes in the past the necessity of redemption and the potential of actualizing the past in the present.

From Simon's perspective, the phenomenon of Benjamin's and Rosenzweig's messianism is not a logical concept to employ into categorical thinking but a historically embodied belief that shapes humans minds and structures their actions. Simon points out:

I begin with the awareness of how messianism was not simply some arbitrary logical concept that was lying around, so speak, for these or others to pick up and stipulatively employ, but instead, should be understood as an historically embodied belief that has shaped minds and structured actions and communities in profound ways and continues to guide and inform the hopes and dreams of billions of humans as it has done for millennia.²⁵

The relevance of this quote lies in the fact of considering the phenomenon of messianism as a belief that provides awareness in human minds in order to inspire human actions that provide a sense of community. This implies the understanding of a historical awareness that involves a different way of living in community based on a historical approach that connects past generations with present generations. For this reason, Benjamin points out that there exists a *weak messianic force* in every human generation that can provide a different epistemology based on a different conception of time that considers the past in the present. This is in opposition to how we consider the past as something that has already passed and is dead, in the sense that there

²⁵ Simon, *Aesthetics and politics: Reflections on love and the origins of love*, 135.

is nothing else to do with it because it already had passed. Following this idea, Benjamin suggests in his thesis II that “our coming was expected on earth” by the forgotten ones of the past to redeem and bring into life their dreams and projects in the present. This is what Benjamin considers to be the weak messianic force namely taking up in the present writings and voices from the past.

The weak messianic force of every human generation is from Benjamin’s perspective, given to the present generation by the past generations establishing a commitment-relation between the past and the present. Such a commitment-relation offers the past generations the right to claim their frustrated projects and dreams in order to be redeemed in the present by the present generations. In this sense, it is important to point out the relevance of considering the past as an open dimension. This means, to change the idea of conceiving the past as something that had already passed and that there is nothing else to do with it. In opposition, to consider the past as an open dimension, means to be open to the possibility of thinking about how the past can be changed by taking into consideration the rights of the past generations to be recovered and redeemed by the present generations. This idea is very important because it emphasizes a critique of historicism, which conceives of the past as an eternal image that had already passed and in which there is nothing else to do. Benjamin points out in thesis XVI the following:

Historicism offers the “eternal” image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past. The materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called “Once upon a time” in historicism’s bordello. He remains in control of his powers-man enough to blast open the continuum of history.²⁶

The “eternal” image of the past offers a traditional perspective about historical knowledge, positioning the past of human history as something without movement and is static. This supposes that the idea of the past that we have in the present does not involve the present, and

²⁶ Benjamin, *On the concept of history*, 396.

therefore, it is not possible to change it. On the contrary, to think in the presence of a weak messianic force in the way that Benjamin does, is to think of the past as a moveable dimension that remains open and can that be changed in any time by the present that thinks about it. In order to grasp what Benjamin means by redeeming the past in the present, it is necessary to understand how such a weak messianic force ‘redeems’ the past by showing how different conceptions of measuring time in the past have been forgotten because they were oppressed and lost the ‘battle’ to record and measure time.

Gandler helps us to understand this form of oppression in how he deals with different modes of measuring time, in past generations, that were used to relate to the world and thus ordered our relationships, schedules, and activities. In order to differentiate different conceptions of time, it is important to recognize the predominance of linear time as the predominant conception of time that humans adopted in order to measure time and thus organize our activities in a linear and quantitative way. He holds that in order to establish a linear conception of time it is important to be able to recognize in the past, the predominant use of the clock as a tool specifically designed to measure time in a quantitative way that does not recognize significant qualitative aspects of time. The clock, Gandler says, is:

“The only tool that can “measure” time are clocks, but they don’t do other thing that to measure their own auto-produced timing, in other words: the clocks are just measuring tools of previously produced oscillations whose main intention is aimed towards an eternally and ideal repetition of the same characteristics. The idea of repetition of equally qualitative moments is the base of construction of the clocks, and which suggests us an objective and linear existence of time, purely quantitative and without specific properties. This idea of the linear time is a relatively old idea, but that obtains its actual strength with the emergence of cheaper and more precise clocks, this is, ubiquitous tools with an economic form that is based exclusively on the quantitative aspect of value or the linear time.^{27*}

²⁷ Gandler, *¿Por qué el ángel de la historia mira hacia atrás?*, 47-48. *El único instrumento que puede “medir” el tiempo son los relojes, que en verdad no hacen otra cosa que medir su propio ritmo auto-producido, o dicho en otras palabras: los relojes no son otra cosa que contadores de oscilaciones anteriormente producidas con la intención de tener un movimiento que se repite en lo ideal eternamente con las mismas características. La idea de la repetición de

The relevance of the clock establishes a new relation with the world, focusing entirely on the quantitative value of time and canceling the qualitative aspect of time. The measure of moments in a quantitative way establishes an impersonal relation between the human beings and the world, inspiring an objective dimension that focuses exclusively on the movements of the clocks that measure the time but leaving behind the qualitative moments lived by humans. The introduction of the clock allowed those past generations who adopted this mode of time standardization to generalize forms of production to measure time in more exact ways, offering the possibility to unify schedules, geographic scales and calendars. The unification of calendars is a clear example of the unification of conceptions of time into a unique conception of linear time.

In this sense, Gandler recognizes the predominance of the clock as a tool to measure time through the influence of the European Gregorian calendar. In order to recognize the battle between different conceptions of time in the past, Gandler himself ‘rescues time’ for us from the past in how he draws attention to the what that the Gregorian calendar was used to influence the way that linear time created new social forms to measure life and our daily activities in a more generalized but exactly ‘standard’ way.

As he points out, the Gregorian calendar finds itself in the middle of a battle of calendars in the past in which there existed a conflict about the interpretation of human history. This is because the debate of human history was mainly focused on the lack of a concept of the number “0” in the Gregorian calendar. In the time that the European calendar was invented, there was no way to count the year “0”, and thus did not allow for the possibility of counting the year

momentos cualitativamente iguales es la base de construcción de los relojes que a su vez nos sugieren la existencia objetiva de este tiempo lineal, meramente cuantitativo y sin cualidades específicas. Esta idea del tiempo lineal es relativamente vieja, pero alcanza su fuerza actual con la aparición de relojes cada vez más exactos y baratos, es decir omnipresentes y con la forma económica que se basa exclusivamente en el aspecto cuantitativo del valor o del tiempo lineal. Translated by Juan Carlos Durán.

number 0 and jumping from the negative number of -1 to number 1. According to modern mathematics, the Gregorian calendar that we take as the most objective form of time in human history and our lives, shows its limits in relation to modern mathematics that recognizes the number concept of 0 as a valid concept of number.²⁸ This distinction is important because this reflection opens up the possibility to think critically about the main influence in which the conception of time is inspired on and we are able to recognize its objective aspect as a specific result from the socio-cultural base in which it was created. This means that its objectivity depends on the cultural and social environment in which it was formed.

The relevance of this distinction is due to the analysis of other conceptions of time that we need to recover from the past if we take seriously the role of theology as Benjamin and Gandler suggest. This is possible if, as Benjamin says, we are able to recognize the weak messianic force that has been given by the past to the present in order to transform, in a more critical way, the way that we think in terms of time and thereby recognize how ‘past generations’ have constructed our historical orientation:

The nature of this sadness becomes clearer if we ask: With whom does historicism actually sympathize? The answer is inevitable: with the victor. And all rulers are the heirs of prior conquerors. Hence, empathizing with the victor invariably benefits the current rulers. The historical materialist knows what this means. Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which current rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried in the procession. They are called “cultural treasures”, and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For in every case these treasures have a lineage which he cannot contemplate without error. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great geniuses who created them, but also to the anonymous toil of others who lived in the same period. There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just such a document is never free of barbarism, so barbarism taints the manner in which it was transmitted from one hand to another. The historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from this process of transmission as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.²⁹

²⁸ The concept of “0” and which is different from the Gregorian-based linear model calendar, is considered to be invented by ancient Indian cultures and the Mayan culture in what is now considered as part of Mexico.

²⁹ Benjamin, *On the concept of history*, 391-392.

This is what is meant by regaining the ‘right to redeem’ that comes from the past. On the other hand, it is important to point out what Gandler means by the right to redeem that comes from the past. The right to redeem comes from a peculiar conception of time in which a different conception of the past is involved. It means to have the capacity to stop the linearity of time in which the movement of history unfolds. This involves including in history those who are conceived as the anonymous ones that construct human history. Such a move, of including the anonymous in history, creates a different conception of the past that introduces how past generations have a ‘right’ to be redeemed in the present. These claims for redemption mean that we have to recognize the past as something alive but as an ephemeral image that suddenly appears for an instant in the present and then disappears. Like the image of a lightning. In order to be able to recognize such a surprising flash of the past like lightning, it is necessary to stay out of the positivist conception of time that represents the past as a stationary dimension in the line of human history. In opposition to this positivist conception of the past, it is necessary to recognize the dimension of the past as something that is always in movement and that our thinking must be open enough to be able to recognize its evanescent presence.

Another way of talking about this is that, according to Simon, the historical past, when it is redeemed, brushes “against the grain” of the “victor’s march” in the present. This is possible through the conception of redemption (Erlösung) that can be found in Franz Rosenzweig’s *The Star of Redemption*³⁰ (*Der Stern der Erlösung*), in which the conception of redemption means to “loosen something from” or “to free or to liberate something”.³¹ This is the messianic character of redemption that we need to assume to have a different conception of time, Jetzt-Zeit, in order to be able “to redeem” those who have been lost or ‘stuck’ in the past because

³⁰ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*.

³¹ From a private conversation with Simon on April 9th 2020.

they were ‘forgotten’ in a linear construction of time (and events) that put them outside of our memory of the past -- to redeem someone or something means to bring that something or that someone to life, to vitality.

What Benjamin wants us to be is to become collectors of human history by bringing up to life little ‘lost’ fragments of human history--and put them into a new ‘story’ with a new kind of time:

Class struggle, which for a historian schooled in Marx is always in evidence, is a fight for the crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist. But these latter things, which are present in class struggle, are not present as a vision of spoils that fall to the victor. They are alive in this struggle as confidence, courage, humor, cunning, and fortitude, and have effects that reach far back into the past. They constantly call into question every victory, past and present, of the rulers. As flowers turn toward the sun, what has been strives to turn-by dint of a secret heliotropism- toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history. The historical materialist must be aware of this most inconspicuous of all transformations.³²

The awareness of this dynamic of the past lies in the fact that it represents a radical break with the linear conception in the tradition of positivism that establishes that the past is something closed and finished. For this reason, to comprehend a different conception of the past as an evanescent presence means to situate its relevance as a moment of danger:

The true image of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again. “The truth will not run away from us”: this statement by Gottfried Keller indicates exactly that point in historicism’s image of history where the image is pierced by historical materialism. For it is an irretrievable image of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image.³³

Representing the past as providing us with images that flash by in specific moments as non-intentional, but that none the less do so in order to be recognized, is Benjamin’s way of pointing

³² Benjamin, *On the concept of history*, 390.

³³ Benjamin, *On the concept of history*, 390-391.

out the lack of critical focus that orthodox historical materialism has for being able to recognize the idea of revolution and transformation that lies in the ‘forgotten’ history of the oppressed.

At the heart of Benjamin’s *Theses on the Concept of History* is that Marx's idea of emancipation of the classless society is profoundly inspired by the concept of messianic time. Benjamin holds that, “In the idea of classless society, Marx secularized the idea of messianic time. And that was a good thing. It was only when the Social Democrats elevated this idea to an “ideal” that the trouble began.”³⁴ When the Social Democrats elevated this idea to an “ideal” Benjamin says that the trouble began because the idea of a classless society was converted by Social Democrats into an “ideal”, but this “ideal” never arrives because *as an ideal* it is always in the future and thus can never *actually* arrive to bring justice to the oppressed.

For Benjamin, the Marxist idea of the classless society finds inspiration in the messianic conception of time. This is conceived by him as a transformation of society in which the Messiah bursts into history to transform it and change its current direction of history. One of the many Jewish traditions regarding the coming of the Messiah conceives that, the Messiah will arrive at any moment to transform the world and bring a paradise of justice to the earth. However, for Benjamin, in the Marxist version of historical materialism, the idea of class struggle through Revolution is conceived as the ‘coming of the Messiah’ that is capable of transforming society and the oppressive environment in which the oppressed class is exploited. But the difference is that Marx’s class struggle is materialistic and historical, which means that it is not a celestial and heavenly presence that comes from outside of history, as in the Orthodox Jewish tradition of messianism, but from inside of a historical-materialist conception of history. The conception of

³⁴ Benjamin, *On the concept of history*, 401.

the materialistic Messiah is one of Benjamin's main contributions to a messianic political philosophy because of how it reveals the profound relationship that exists between both historical materialism and theology.

This conception is crucial to understand Benjamin's intent to try to show the deep relation involved between theological messianism, political philosophy and Law. Such a relation of theological messianism and Marxism is shown in Benjamin's Thesis One:

There was once, we know, an automaton constructed in such a way that it could respond to every move by a chess player with a countermove that would ensure the winning of the game. A puppet wearing Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent on all sides. Actually, a hunchbacked dwarf-a master at chess- sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophic counterpart to this apparatus. The puppet, called "historical materialism", is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is small and ugly and has to keep out of sight.³⁵

This quote helps us to understand Benjamin's approach to a new conception of historical materialism. The passage takes the form of a tale whereby, from the beginning to the end, "The puppet called "historical materialism" wins all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is small and ugly and has to keep out of sight". This statement is crucial to understand the new conception of historical materialism that Benjamin is suggesting, and which is a critique towards the current enlightened times in which we live and that conceives theology as something ugly and meaningless because nowadays knowledge is based on reason and science, and is considered as the most relevant knowledge possible. But as Benjamin points out, historical materialism should not ignore theology since this is 'beneath' historical materialism and inspires it profoundly.

³⁵ Benjamin, *On the concept of history*, 389.

The relevance of theology in historical materialism is such that historical materialism has not realized the importance of conceiving time differently, that is, other than the abstract idealistic conception of history that is based on an assumption that an “ideal” classless society is possible in the future. This aspect of the “ideal” future that will be better than the present and the past is, as Benjamin recognizes, the main problem in the Marxist conception of historical materialism since it places hope in an ideal future that can be interpreted as paradise on earth but that does not, and perhaps never can, actually exist. It is mere speculation.

This concept of an “ideal future” is crucial for understanding the limitations of the Marxist conception of history which is similar to how the Enlightenment ‘progress’ movement conceived the future as a better place in which the human being would reach his maturity on earth. Marx conceived of the future in much the same way, but replaced progressive ‘enlightenment’ and its goal of mature ‘full’ enlightenment with the goal of a classless society that would come about with the ‘progress’ of Communism. The Communism that is considered by Marx as a possible New Society and in which the hope of oppressed humanity has been placed is, from Benjamin’s perspective, reliant upon an empty ideal that is not able to be achieved because it is just that, an ideal that is empty in the sense that it is infinite, unreachable and incapable of being realized in the material world. The emptiness of such an ideal is what Benjamin points out in a fragment of his thesis XVIIa:

“Once the classless society had been defined as an infinite task, the empty and homogenous time was transformed into an anteroom, so to speak, in which one could wait for the emergence of the revolutionary situation with more or less equanimity.”³⁶

The empty ideal of the future that awaits humanity as a universal goal of peace and justice for the oppressed working class, results from a conception of linear time, similar to the format of the

³⁶ Benjamin, *On the concept of history*, 402.

Gregorian Calendar that I discussed above in that sense that both forms depend on an 'empty' and 'progressive' conception of time. The linear time that suggests progress in history is empty because it conceives of every historical moment of humanity as always equal, one after another, without making a distinction between their differences and their particularities and the unique experience that every human being possesses. Every moment is perceived as identical and as one at a time and therefore, it is impossible to perceive the unique particularity of any one moment. It is also impossible to define its particularity in a way that makes it possible to conceive of the change and transformation or any kind of actual 'progress' of the world.

For Benjamin it is clear that the victor's vision of history negates the vision of the oppressed, and this is the main reason for which the historical materialist that is formed in the orthodox Marxist theory is not able to conceive the vision of the oppressed of the present and the past, because all his efforts are focused on the future. That, as we said, is an empty ideal. Rather, the historical materialist in Benjamin's conception should focus his efforts, then, not on this 'empty' future, but on understanding the relation of the past to the present in a different way. To be aware of this different kind of relationship of the present to the past means to be always open to understanding in what way the material conditions of what is happening right now are related to what has happened before. This means to cultivate our historical consciousness by becoming more clearly aware of how current oppressive forces have their origins in how we 'read' or 'see' the past. What Walter Benjamin wants is to 'act' in the present in non-conforming ways, that is, not just to accept the linear progression of the Victor's time, since this has become the triumphant ideology of history that justifies historical progress, but to recognize the lost dimension of the past that has been lost and negated, and then open the possibility of revolution for a new conception of history.

Following the previous idea, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who points out the relevance of the conception of time for a new conception of history that gives place to a genuine revolution:

Every conception of history is invariably accompanied by a certain experience of time which is implicit in it, conditions it, and thereby has to be elucidated. Similarly, every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without alteration in this experience. The original task of a genuine revolution, therefore, is never merely to “change the world”, but also- and above all- to “change time”. Modern political thought has concentrated its attention on the history and has not elaborated a corresponding concept of time. Even historical materialism has until now neglected to elaborate a concept of time that compares with its concept of history. Because of this omission, it has been unwittingly compelled to have recourse to a concept of time dominant in Western culture for centuries, and so to harbor, side by side, a revolutionary concept of history and a traditional experience of time. The vulgar representation of time as a precise and homogeneous continuum has thus diluted the Marxist concept of history: it has become the hidden breach through which ideology has crept into the citadel of historical materialism. Benjamin had already warned of this danger in his "Thesis on the Philosophy of History". We now need to elucidate the concept of time implicit in the Marxist conception of history.³⁷

The peculiarity of the concept of time that we have is a key factor to understand the meaning of culture and the way we understand history. As Agamben highlights, what every culture experiences is a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without alteration in this experience. The concept of time plays a decisive role in the conception of Revolution because Revolution is not merely an attempt to change the world, but also to change time. The revolution of the current situation of things should involve a new concept of time, because if it doesn't, then it will continue with the dominant linear concept of time of the Western culture that for centuries has dominated the bourgeois conception of history. This conception of history involves a traditional experience of time. Throughout the years it has been clear how historical materialism has not been able to change the current oppressive environment of the working class; in part because the linear concept of time still plays a decisive role in our political beliefs. This is

³⁷ Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 91.

pointed out in the following lines of the quote, “The vulgar representation of time as a precise and homogeneous continuum has thus diluted the Marxist concept of history”. It is crucial to understand how for the Marxist concept of history and the bourgeois and dominant conception of linear time has crept into the framework of historical materialism. This ideological conception of time is the danger that Benjamin has warned of in his *Thesis on the Concept of History* and to avoid this danger, it is necessary for historical materialism to be in contact with theology since it suggests a different conception of time to be truly revolutionary.

This is very relevant for political philosophy because it is the recognition of the messianic aesthetics movement of history that seeks the transformation of the actual oppressed state of things, but the change of time permits one to have a different conception of the world that will be able to perceive the present as the fundamental dimension capable of interpreting the instants in which the Revolution will enable the transformation of the current state of things.

JETZT-ZEIT

In opposition to homogeneous empty time represented by linear time, Benjamin presents a different notion of time called “Jetzt-Zeit”³⁸. Jetzt-Zeit is an opposite conception to linear time that understands reality in a more diverse way, implementing the difference of every historical dimension and human experience. Opposite to the linear time that conceives every historical moment as homogeneous and equal, the Jetzt-Zeit conception of time conceives the particularity of every moment, being aware that in every instant it is possible for the Messiah or the Revolution to arrive and redeem the current oppression and injustice of the present and the

³⁸ The translation of the German term “Jetzt-Zeit” can be translated to English as “Now-Time”, and is considered as Benjamin’s main conception of time that comes from the Jewish tradition and more specifically from the philosopher Franz Rosenzweig. It is a conception of time that involves the notion of Redemption, and Redemption is crucial to understand a different concept of time that is based on the recovery of the past through the instant of the present. This is through experiencing the past in how I bring the past ‘to life’ in the time of the present, or the “Now-Time”.

past. In the conception of the Jetzt-Zeit, the Revolution can enter in every moment and every instant. And for such a task it is required the idea of a discontinuous time.

The idea of discontinuous time is conceived from what Benjamin calls a weak messianism conception of time. This idea of time is based on a weak messianism conception of time that represents the possibility of redemption of the past in any moment possible in the present. The possibility of redemption of the past consists in the possibility of interrupting the linear time to be able to look back to recognize the rights and frustrated projects of the oppressed people from the past. Simon presents this conception of redemption through the idea of messianism in the following way:

“one way to understand messianism is that the term refers to a completed state of rest, a still-stand of accomplished balance, but with-nonetheless-an outstanding task that remains before us. What ‘remains’ is not a clinging to the survival or mere finite existence; what ‘remains’ is the task yet to be completed, that task that still remains before us-the imperative to ‘love me’ and to ‘love the other’ as that which remains as an outstanding directive.³⁹

What Simon is referring to, is the presence of a weak messianism that lies in Benjamin’s conception of redemption of the past through Jetzt-Zeit, and that remains as a ‘yet to be completed’ task in the present. In opposition to a strong messianism conception of messianism in which the Messiah is a strong force that interrupts history to change its course, Benjamin’s weak messianism remains as a weak call from the past by the forgotten ones in order to be redeemed in the present and change the conception of the past. Benjamin’s weak messianism time is then a discontinuous time that interrupts the regularity and emptiness of the linear conception of time.

In discontinuous messianic time we must separate from the emptiness and homogeneous form of the historical moments that the linear time makes us believe in and negate the possibility of Revolution. The time constituted as discontinuous is contingent and therefore,

³⁹ Simon, *Rosenzweig’s Messianic Aesthetics*, 8.

open to new possibilities of change. For this reason, the Jetzt-Zeit conception of time fills the present with diversity, which means distinguishing the difference and particularity in each one of them. This conceives every moment as unique, meaningful and aware of the suffering that happened during those moments of history that are constituted by the people that suffered then and experience the oppression in every moment of their lives. This supposes an interpretation of human history from the experience of the oppressed and not only a narration of history from the victor's vision that conceives it as a chain of meaningful events only for the dominant class.

When assuming an experience of history and political dimension from Jetzt-Zeit perspective, it means to become vigilant of the current times that happen around in the present and be able to capture the meaning of the Revolution of time that opens the possibility for the Revolution of the real world. It is through this conception of the Revolution of time what makes possible the Revolution of the real world for Benjamin:

The historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time takes a stand (einsteht) and has come to a standstill. For this notion defines the very present in which he himself is writing history. Historicism offers the "eternal" image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past. The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called "Once upon a time" in historicism's bordello. He remains in control of his powers-man enough to blast open the continuum of history.⁴⁰

The key of this quote could be resumed in the phrase, the present that is not continuous because it reflects that time is an individual and unique experience of every person that experiences it and is not an abstract and general expression equal for all. On the other hand, the eternal image of the past means the past as it really was. The other image is a past that has not died but it is still alive but impatiently waiting to be updated, discovered and brought to new life in the present. How does treating the memories of the past differ in the two version, ie, the one of 'victory'

⁴⁰ Benjamin, *On the concept of history*, 396.

storytelling and the other of telling the past as it really was, that includes oppression of marginal and forgotten peoples, and also has a place for the 'joys' of past experiences.

The experience of Jetzt-zeit is an experience of the interruption of linear time, which implies the interruption of history. This experience changes the perception of time and the perception of the materialistic reality. The experience of Jetzt-Zeit results in materialistic reality and time becoming related in such a way that they are bound together, being impossible to conceive them separated without one and another. This idea can be expressed in the way in which indigenous people conceive nature. This is to say, that their idea of materialistic reality about nature is other than the way that people have experiences according to linear time. From the 'linear' perspective, we would say indigenous people were operating with an idea of time that causes them to evaluate or describe their experiences in symbolic ways, *as if that experience was a living being*. But that is not the case. For example, in some indigenous cultures the presence of a hill has a different meaning that is based on a different conception of time. A different conception of time allows them to experience the materialistic hill *as a living being*. The idea of conceiving it as a living being involves experiencing time as a narrative in which indigenous people fill their time with their narratives, stories and experiences informed by the hill. This means that indigenous people conceive the hill as a god, as a guardian or as a special being full of 'lived-world' meaning in opposition to the linear conception of time. In the linear conception of time the hill is conceived as a resource that offers economic profit. The hill is conceived then as a source of resources that will bring economic, utilitarian, etc. benefits, but that means depriving it of the meaningful and, after the lived-world experience, symbolic way that indigenous people do.

From the linear perspective of time, indigenous knowledge is considered an invalid way of knowing the world because it is ‘merely’ subjective or mythical. The “Jetzt-Zeit” perspective of time opens up the opportunity to consider indigenous knowledge as ‘metaphysical’ or ‘weak messianic’ knowledge which, from Benjamin’s perspective, this particular knowledge is full of meaningful experience and that offers meaning to those people’s lives. Moving from one perspective to the other, as I suggest that we do following Benjamin, Rosenzweig, and Simon, would then lead us to convert our way of thinking and to conceive indigenous knowledge as a valid source of knowledge.

The relevant aspect of these ideas is that the materialistic reality is experienced through a notion of time that interprets reality differently. This means to interpret it as different events that take the form of dialectical images in order to conceive the notions of ‘then’ and ‘now’. The notions of ‘then’ and ‘now’ are conceived in opposition of the conceptions of the ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’ belonging to the linear time conception, and that are perceived as ‘homogeneous’ and ‘empty’ experiences of life.

The notion of ‘Homogeneous’ for the linear conception of time is the time that is conceived as independent and external to the human being and therefore, it is objective and measurable. This supposes that the experience of time is always equal for all human beings, it is objective and mathematical; and non-relative. This is to say that the hours, days and years, are always perceived as the same for every human being and therefore, devoid of personal experience. This way of perceiving results in what Benjamin recognizes as the ‘impoverishment’ of experience that characterizes actual modern times, an impoverishment that consists in the negation of the subjective and personal experiences that give identity to our life.

Another example of the emptiness of the linear conception of time can be represented under the idea of long-term benefits that construction companies use in order to construct new buildings in cities. This is to say that under the long-term benefits criterion, construction companies intend to destroy and sacrifice the old buildings that are part of old neighborhoods to get economic long-term benefits as a result of their replacement. The idea that lies beneath this conception is that the construction of the buildings will bring big benefits, such as new buildings that substitute for the old ones, the creation of new employment and the investment of money to obtain profits. However, the dark side of this consideration of long-term benefits based on the linear time conception of time, only presents the economic benefits as a proof of success without considering the destruction of the old buildings, which represent the symbolic dimension of the culture. The symbolic dimension of the old buildings constitutes the experience of human life or what Benjamin recognizes as 'historical time'. In it, the expression of the tradition and identity is represented in the architecture of the old buildings as well as the place that they occupy in the city. Following Benjamin's perspective, the old buildings are the representation of the past and the manifestation of the meaningful experience that continues to be reflected in the present and impacts the experiences of people living in the present. The people that lived in those buildings are part of the past that give identity to the city which is the genuine expression of the culture [of those living people]. Under the linear conception of time, the present is constituted by the prioritization of the future and the rejection/marginalization of the past, which in this context represents the long-term benefit of the construction of the new buildings and economic profit for the construction company. This tendency then expresses an empty experience of time that in sum is an empty experience of human content in the sense that

in order to expect a profit in the future, the past and the present are both sacrificed for an illusory future devoid of material substance.

This empty linear conception of time prioritizes the future instead of recovering the past which would recognize the transformative character of the present. In opposition to the linear conception of time, the Jetzt-Zeit conception of time expresses an experience of life that includes the conceptions of 'then' and 'now' in order to establish a different kinds of historical conception. This different historical conception entails a dimension in which the particularity of human experiences are expressed. What this means is that human experiences are constituted by the way that people experience and recognize their singularity which breaks with the 'continuum' of progress in history. To break with the 'continuum' of the progress of history means to interrupt the empty experience of life as a successive line of undifferentiated moments of time.

It is important to point out that even when the linear conception of time is a human experience it does not mean that it is not real, in the sense, that it does not manifest on the material reality. But on the contrary, the linear conception of time is something real that appears in the constitution of the materialistic reality, in the sense that we conceive the materialistic reality in such a way that permits us to establish a relation with it. As a successive line of events:

Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to hold fast that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger.⁴¹

Benjamin's critique to Ranke about the articulation of the past as 'the way it really was' is an attempt to criticize the emptiness of the linear time that conceives all historical moments as equal and objective. Such an attempt has the main purpose of deepening in the interpretation of the

⁴¹ Benjamin, *On the concept of history*, 391.

past as a unique ‘moment of danger’ that from the Jetzt-Zeit conception of time is the unique moment in which the transformation of reality is possible. This is the beginning of Benjamin’s idea of revolution. Which consists in stopping the linear conception of time based on progress and that is aimed towards the past and not exclusively to the future. Benjamin presents his idea of revolution in the following way:

“Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps it is quite otherwise. Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on this train-namely, the human race-to activate the emergency break.⁴²

Benjamin’s conception of Jetzt-Zeit recognizes the possibility to conceive a more critical conception of Marxism through a new concept of time that opens up the possibility of the Revolution for the transformation of the world. I suppose that the relevance of thinking in a new conception of time for Marxism resides in the recognition of the limitations that the linear conception of time has had an orthodox Marxist historical materialism through the years, and how this conception has lost many of its battles against capitalism. Recognizing the limitations of such a linear conception of time is the recognition of the prevailing state of things that perpetuate the bourgeois and dominant class version of the human history and dismisses the vision of the oppressed class.

On the other hand, the presence of theology in the Marxist conception of history as Benjamin suggests is an attempt to highlight the smooth way in which dominant ideology has been latent in orthodox Marxist historical materialism. Such recognition opens up the possibility to interpret the world from different dimensions that involve the experiences of the forgotten ones, who are the oppressed people that remain in the silence of history and that no longer exists in the victor's vision of history. This supposes to break with the conception of progress that the

⁴² Benjamin, *On the concept of history*, 402.

homogeneous empty time brings to the interpretation of history and that brings more devastating consequences through capitalism.

The Jetzt-Zeit is an innovative conception of time for Marxism since it conceives the dimension of the past not as a dead time that once existed and no longer exists, but as an open dimension that can still be changed in any time in the present to bring justice to the frustrated dreams of those who were annihilated by capitalism. But that can only be possible if a new conception of the present is formulated and experienced by us and be remitted to what Benjamin said, “It is only for those without hope that hope is given”.

CHAPTER 3: FRANZ ROSENZWEIG'S CONCEPTION OF JETZT-ZEIT

In order to have a better understanding of Benjamin's conception of Jetzt-Zeit from its theological roots, it is crucial to dig deeper into Franz Rosenzweig's work *The Star of redemption*⁴³. Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) is a Jewish philosopher who in his major work *The Star of redemption*, interprets the theological categories of creation, revelation and redemption to criticize the linear conception of time and the abstract notion of the human that is developed in Hegel's Idealism. Rosenzweig's critique comes in part from his interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of history in Rosenzweig's first major work, *Hegel and the State*, where he demonstrates his understanding of Hegel's linear conception of time. In Hegel's Idealism there exists a linear conception of time, in which history is developed as a dialectical succession of moments that represent progress. The progress that remains as a historical movement of history gives shape to a progressive conception of time that is profoundly related to an Idealist way of thinking of progress. The idealist philosophy of Hegel that is centered on progress conceives the historical moments as a consecutive realization of reason, that is, the idea that conceives that human history advances from a primitive stage to a more developed one. This advancing progress is always aiming at an ideal in the future that is represented in the development of the Absolute Spirit. The conception of time involved in the progressive conception of history is a rational progression in which history conceives itself as a project of self-consciousness of freedom, making choices according to universal law, and can only understand retrospectively, with the help of the owl of Minerva, progress can only happen through dialectical self-struggle, which overcomes the other, as such. Hegel's claim is that freedom has been realized in the self-consciousness of absolute spirit.

⁴³ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*.

It is relevant to point out that in order to understand the development of the Absolute Spirit it is necessary to understand the dialectical movements that occur in history to reach the state of maturity of human history. To understand history dialectically for Hegel means to conceive the historical process as a succession of tensions that occur to achieve a better stage of development and reach the ultimate goal of history. This means, at first, to conceive that there exists a concrete moment that is conceived in Hegel's dialectical conception of history as a positive moment that is constituted as actuality. This positive moment that is conceived as an actualization which finds a way to express itself in a more complex [mature] way, that is constituted by a negation of that previously existing primitive [reality], and that can be conceived as a tension provoked by a reflection moment that allows reality to become a more rational and mature historical moment. This is what in Hegel's philosophy is conceived as the "maturity in reality":

Philosophy, as the thought of the world, does not appear until reality has completed its formative process, and made itself ready. History thus corroborates the teaching of the conception that only in the maturity of reality does the ideal appear as counterpart to the real, apprehends the real world in its substance, and shapes it into an intellectual kingdom. When philosophy paints its grey in grey, one form of life has become old, and by means of grey it cannot be rejuvenated, but only known. The owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering. ⁴⁴

In order to have a philosophical comprehension of actuality according to Hegel it is necessary to complete the formative process of actualization (Wirklichkeit), this is to become fully developed. But the state of fully developed actuality can only be completed when the ideal appears as a counterpart of the actual. This is as an understanding of concrete reality (actual instead of reality). In the first moment of historical reality, reality is conceived as a practical dimension of reality that needs to be comprehended from its substance and be able to give shape to it into the

⁴⁴ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 12.

intellectual kingdom. In order to give an intellectual shape to reality it is necessary to negate the concrete reality through the negation of the abstract though. This supposes a tension between both dimensions, concrete dimension and abstract dimension. The tensions between both practical and abstract dimensions involve a dialectical movement that perfects its formative process through the progress of historical reason.

However, in order to understand Hegel's approach to his conception of history it is necessary to understand Rosenzweig's critique of his dialectical conception of history based on the progressive historical movement that occurs as the main goal of humanity. The problem with Hegel's conception of history lies in the fact that in order to develop the Absolute Spirit through the progress of history, it is necessary to conceive the historical moments of the present as momentary moments that serve as steps to achieve a universal goal. This situates the historical moments of the present as devoid of meaning and therefore, as a lacking of experience that constitutes an empty experience of time. For Rosenzweig, Hegel's idealism is mainly focused on the projection of the future, that remains unreachable for human history because it is mainly based on an empty ideal that creates an empty experience of time. By empty experience of time, Rosenzweig means an experience of time devoid of meaning for the actual humans of history that experience life. By actual humans of history I mean concretely, material, socio-political people that experience suffering and love and hate in subjective and personal ways instead of the idealistic idea of rational and autonomous humans that are beyond the material and circumstantial moments of history. This is very important to understand Rosenzweig's approach to human history, because it places the experience of time in human history as an experience that is inside history and not beyond or outside human history. To experience time in a historical way

for humans means to experience time as *Jetzt-Zeit*, this is, to experience the present as an eternal moment “*immer währende*”, as ever and always enduring.

The experience of the present as the most profound and important experience of life is in Rosenzweig’s conception of time the rupture with the linear conception of time found in Hegel’s philosophy of history. In opposition to Rosenzweig, Hegel is unable to experience the present as the most meaningful experience of time because the present is just a step to reach the future. The future is for Hegel the most important experience of time because in it humanity will find the universal experience of the spirit. It is the culmination of the past and the present together. However, in Rosenzweig’s *Jetzt-Zeit* conception of time, the future is an empty experience of time because it is not actualized *yet*. The meaning of this idea in German is *noch nicht = future = not yet*, but it’s coming and it can be an enjoyable mealtime, like the Sabbath.

The conception of the future as an ideal devoid of actual experience of human life because it has *not yet* happened. In opposition to Hegel, for Rosenzweig, the present--as *Jetzt Zeit*--is-‘colored’ by expectations of the (good or messianic) future and a revaluation of the past, during which experience of time--the *Jetzt-Zeit* ‘present’--human life becomes transformed because the ‘present’ is the time where meaningful occurrences like dialogue that reveal the needs, desires, and motives of the other, with whom I am relating, happens. In *Jetzt-Zeit* I am open to the other and if I am already so disposed, I am able to ‘listen’ for their existential needs and desires.

This is because the present is a living experience that can change and transform reality and life in any moment, and therefore, it is a living experience that does not conceive the present moments as progressive steps to reach the future, but as eternal moments that have a unique and meaningful living experience in which present, past and future are interconnected.

The idea of eternity in Rosenzweig's *Jetzt-Zeit* conception of time is crucial to understand the deep relation with the uniqueness and unrepeatability of the particular experience of the moments we experience in every moment of our lives. Every moment and experience we have, is unique and unrepeatable because it can be the last one we experience. For this reason, the experience we have about the present is eternal since it is only one and unique. The experience of the present moment *as Jetzt-Zeit* is the experience of eternal time since it opens up a new dimension of uniqueness in the experience of time. It inaugurates the possibility to 'create' meaningful relations by enlivening the current relationship that I am experiencing -- *in Jetzt-Zeit* - by attending to (paying attention to) *just this one unique other (person)* with whom I am experiencing the relationship with.

The past for Franz Rosenzweig is 'having been created'; the present is that which engages me in the living now with the other and with things, the speaking, the dialogue with others, the love that I engage with others and with things:

Love which knows solely the present, which lives on the present, pines for the present- it challenges death. The keystone of the somber arch of creation becomes the cornerstone of the bright house of revelation. For the soul, revelation means the experience of a present which, while it rests on the presence of a past, nevertheless it does not make its home in it but walks in the light of the divine countenance.⁴⁵

The experience of *Jetzt-Zeit* involves the living of the present as an experience that is conceived as a response that defies death and, thus, for Rosenzweig signifies the existence of new kinds of vital and responsive human relations that inaugurate a new conception of time. The new human relation that *Jetzt-Zeit* inaugurates as a conception of time creates meaningful ways to be in responsive relations with others and with the world. The *Jetzt-Zeit* conception of time conceives the present as the key dimension of time from which in every instant of the present it is possible

⁴⁵ Rosenzweig, *The star of redemption*, 156-157.

to find the novelty or innovation that is co-determined by the past and future, in so far as what happens when humans relate to each other with love in the present gives life to the past, so present is changed by the past while in that moment of giving life to past, it creates a new future. In other words, it refers to the creation of a meaningful interrelation between what happens 'in' the past, present and future as living dimensions of temporality. Therefore, for someone like Rosenzweig, this new dimension of temporality inaugurated by a Jetzt-Zeit conception of time configures meaningful relations on many different levels -- interpersonal, ethical, aesthetic, living, open and dialogical.

To assume the Jetzt-Zeit conception of time opens up an experience of creating meaningful relations based on such interpersonal, ethical, aesthetic, living, openly dialogical experiences. What this means is to be open to the listening of others and to be able to have an experience of openness based on the open dialogue between the I and You. This living open dialogical approach based on the dialogue opens the possibility of sharing experiences and values between two persons. This is individual self-becoming living, speaking and listening souls. It is in the sharing of experiences between two persons where an ethical aesthetic living open and dialogical relation is experienced through or as the present. The ethical and aesthetic experience that is shared through dialogue, becomes a vital experience to create meaningful ways of feeling and experiencing life in a more diverse and different ways. That is, to be open to the differences and diversity of others. This relation with the world and with others promoted by Jetzt-Zeit allows us to create a meaning of inhabiting the world and creating meaningful worlds that are capable of making us experience life in treating things as sources of meaning and not only as physical objects devoid of meaning for our existence. The others acquire a different meaning in the conversation of the dialogue. This is, a physical experience that is related to

meaningful human relations that are based not only in a spiritual dimension but in a physical and carnal experience of the world. For this reason, the aesthetic relation we maintain with the world is embodied, sensual and lived way of being in the world, that involves a physical experience of the world as well. This physical and spiritual dimension of time is embodied through the presence of love in our human relations to become an experience of the present. The experience of the present is a constitutive part of the soul and the flesh, as Rosenzweig points out, in which the revelation has an important role in the conception of a love relationship with others that transforms the world.

REVELATION

Revelation becomes a constitutive part of the soul as an experience of the present that involves the past. So in this sense, present and past become interrelated into a meaningful experience that is open to the possibility of change in any moment of the present. Revelation involves communication. And communication becomes the main human relation of experiencing time in a dialogical dimension, this is through dialogue.

The dialogue that is created by revelation is in first place, initiated according to Rosenzweig through the dialogue that God maintains with humans, this is a dialogue that is possible because of the presence of language. The dialogue created between God and humans through language opens up a dimension of experiencing life and language that involves a community of sharing experiences and meanings that is not only centered on the I and the individual. This dimension of sharing community inaugurates a new way to understand the openness of life through dialogue between two or more personalities in order to be able to receive the differences of the others avoiding the selfishness of the I.

The sharing of experiences through dialogue, promotes and creates a different experience of time that is based on an affirmation of life, in the sense, that it is an experience of the present as an open dimension that can create in any possible moment the possibility of change.

The experience of Jetzt-Zeit becomes relevant in the moment when a dialogue between an I and You occurs. Both partners of the dialogue are changing and transforming themselves and, in this way, both are changing their relationship with the world and with others. The function of language in an experience of Jetzt-Zeit is crucial because it promotes a different kind of human relationship through the creation of meaningful dimensions.

The creation of meaningful dimensions through dialogue actualizes the experience of love and establishes future possibilities of love. The experience of love for Rosenzweig is the most important human relation because the relationship that is formed between a lover and beloved in a dialogue becomes a constituting part in the formation of a community. The dialogue allows us to share meaningful ways of experiencing time through language. The function of the language of love is to create dialogical relations that allow for experiences of Jetzt-Zeit that interrupt the linearity of time. This is, involving the experiences of two different conceptions of time that are based on each person's experiences of life, and not only based on one person's individual experience like in linear time.

In opposition to German Idealism, that conceives the individual as the basis of the linear conception of time, in the sense that the experience of time starts from the experience of the individual, there does not exist the possibility of the encounter with the other in an open dialogue, while its starting point is mainly focused on a single experience of time. So the

experience of time in this sense becomes a monological experience of time instead of a dialogical experience of time based on the dialogue of two persons.

On the other hand, the linear conception of time promotes the importance of the future as the predominant dimension to experience time through the progress of history, Rosenzweig conceives in every instant of the present, the lasting forever because it will never happen again. In this sense of living the experience of the time that involves for Rosenzweig the central conception of time as a progressive movement in constant perfection, it is necessary to occur as dialectical movements in the unfolding of the Absolute Spirit. Which involves a specific comprehension of history that situates the Absolute Spirit as the most important aspect of history. For such a conception of time it is necessary to situate Rosenzweig's attempt in conceiving the linearity of time involved in Hegel's conception of history. In Hegel's conception of philosophy of history, history is conceived as a dialectical movement in which the Absolute Spirit unfolds. The dialectical movement of history in which the Absolute spirit unfolds is the representation of linear time through the conception of progress. This means the establishment of a particular representation of history as a succession of historical stages aiming at an ideal goal of history in which humanity will reach its actuality through the use of reason.

For Hegel, there exists an intrinsic disposition in the movement of human history to develop its own perfection through reason. Hegel believes that reason governs the world and the universality of the final goal of history should be to actualize the universal expression of a rational maturity through the conception of the modern state.

On the other hand, for Franz Rosenzweig and Walter Benjamin we need time, and the material conditions of history in order to engage with the unpredictable 'other'. It is in this disposition of engaging with the unpredictable 'other' that life is embraced in a different way

that enables to be closer to others and to create community. The community is the expression of the engagement of living and loving others. For this reason, it is crucial to point out how love is a key factor in order to unite and respond to the community with ethical responsibility. As Simon points out:

“For Rosenzweig, the present moment of love constitutes the interior event that spontaneously disrupts the predictability of living our lives based merely upon narrated historical processes, since a love relationship is based upon the unforeseen and sensual desire for the other. That relationship is essentially spontaneous and unpredictable and thus is basically unfaithful to the determinations of the past and incapable of looking forward to the future. But as such, it is the source for the creation and renewability of relationships, of fusing “sinnlich” material conditions, inherently ephemeral and transitory-subject to death, with the perdurance and continuity of the “übersinnlich” or eternal.”⁴⁶

For me, Simon’s way of conceiving love in Rosenzweig, as a spontaneous and unpredictable way of embracing an ethical responsibility for others, is crucial for understanding what I mean by the disruption of the linear conception of time. This experience of living one’s life in a spontaneous and unpredictable way happens through a renewal of relationships that are based on the unpredictability of the other or others in the relationship. This unpredictability means the lover and beloved are open to attending to each other’s particular desires and needs. Such an ethical interruption of being open to others and being unpredictable creates a meaningful source of encounter that creates new human relations, in which past and future are not conceived as separate dimensions of time, just as the linear conception of time suggests, but as interdependent dimensions that are intimately related to each other and that open up an experience of openness to others. When the dimensions of time called ‘past, present, future,’ are understood in the interrelated way that happens in *Jetzt-Zeit*, then the conventional linear conception of time that conceives ‘past, present, future’ as separate entities is interrupted. This is because, for

⁴⁶ Simon, *Benjamin’s Feast of Booths*, 259.

Rosenzweig, love can only be conceived in the experience of time as Jetzt-Zeit, which is Rosenzweig's way of talking about how we experience the unpredictability of others. This aspect of being open to the needs of others is what Simon conceives as the fusion of "sinnlich" and "übersinnlich". "Sinnlich" means the sensual dimension that involves the material condition of the human expressed through the body. In this dimension Rosenzweig conceives the materiality of love in which the encounter of the lovers is experienced through the sensuality of their lived, worldly, physical bodies. While "über sinnlich" refers to the poetic love that is experienced as a meaningful embrace of spiritual love understood in its pure 'present attentiveness' (love)--on the one hand--but open to the renewal of that 'present attentiveness' (love) in the next 'unpredictable moment' on the other hand as a lasting moment of love through the expression of poetic love. In order to understand this poetic love, it is crucial to understand in Franz Rosenzweig's *The star of redemption*, the Song of songs, in which it is expressed the deep feeling of poetic love that occurs between the encounter of lovers:

The Song of Songs was an "authentic", that is, a "worldly" love lyric; precisely for this reason, not in spite of it, it was genuinely "spiritual" song of the love of God for the human. Man loves because God loves and as God loves. His human soul is the soul awakened and loved by God.⁴⁷

The experience of love that the Song of Songs reveals is an experience of genuine love between God and the human. Such an experience is based on a spiritual love lyric that represents the awakening of the soul of the human by being loved by God. The spiritual awakening of the human soul becomes a kind of analogy of the experience of genuine love just as what occurs on the experience of revelation. The experience of revelation opens up a new dimension of experiencing love as the most human and genuine human experience ever to be open to others and attend to their needs.

⁴⁷ Rosenzweig, *The star of redemption*, 199.

It is the love that God directs to humans that humans can experience love as a real and spiritual experience of love. This is a love conceived from the fusion of materiality and spirituality. Which is to say an experience of love conceived from the sensuality and poetic experiences of love in sinnlich and übersinnlich conceptions of love.

The experience of love as “übersinnlich” is conceived as an eternal experience that involves perdurance and continuity in the experience of love of who experiences it.

This experience of love that the lovers experience is the foundation to conceive the love to others that conducts to the creation of living in community. The encounter of lovers is the first step to create community and live among others.

The experience of love that the community inaugurates is then essential to conceive a different and unique experience of time in community. This leads Rosenzweig in his attempt to unite different religious communities such as Judaism and Christianity in order to provide a plural and diverse experience of time maintaining a dialogue between the community. The main conception of dialogue in the community involves Rosenzweig’s ‘Jetzt-Zeit’ attempt to involve a dialogue between Judaism and Christianity. This is because in such a dialogue it is possible to find the truth. But each religion has a unique path to access truth. The eternal truth, which for Rosenzweig is God, can only be experienced by revelation, which is constituted by the experience of Jetzt-Zeit, but the way to access it, it is through different paths. The different paths of access are represented by Judaism and Christianity, which are considered by Rosenzweig as portals to experience the truth. But it is through diversity represented by the paths of Judaism and Christianity that the truth is conceived from different dimensions of the experience of time. This is crucial to understand the relevance and importance of a different conception of time that involves not only the existence of a single and unique conception of time like the linear

conception of time, but opens up the possibility of conceiving other different conceptions of time that will have a definitive impact on the way to access truth and to experience life. What Rosenzweig is pointing out in this respect, is to offer a critique to the exclusiveness of the path that each religion assumes to have, in order to access truth. For example, insofar as Christianity was or is profoundly influenced by a linear conception of time, it developed a doctrine that included superseding Judaism and thus promoted its negation. However, in opposition to this linear conception of time of Christianity with its attempt to overcome Judaism, Rosenzweig contends that the presence of living Jewish people in the present not only negates the assumption that Christianity should overcome Judaism, but he also argues for a dialogue between both religions. In order to promote such a dialogue, we have to recognize the need for a more diverse conception of community based on the difference of conceptions of time and the difference of the others. The relevance of assuming that Christianity is profoundly influenced by the linear conception of time is to assume the need of dialogue between both religions in order to have a richer experience of time to access the truth. This is to critique the exclusiveness of the linear conception of time that Christianity promotes in order to access a different conception of truth, that is, one that involves an openness to others through dialogue with Judaism. Rosenzweig's critique aims at this or that single religion which claims to have a unique conception of truth, namely Judaism or Christianity with their claims to have the only path to access truth.

By contrast, Rosenzweig attempts to find several ways of experiencing the differences that each religion possesses in order to have a more diverse conception of truth that is based on a dialogue between them. This new approach will be capable of experiencing different conceptions of truth creating a community through dialogue. For this reason, in order to provide

a more diverse approach to truth, it is through the experience of 'Jetzt-Zeit' that we can access to different conceptions of truth in space and time.

For Rosenzweig, the space is defined by the historical context of a specific time given, for example, through the practice of religious liturgy in Judaism. It is through the practices of religious liturgy in Judaism in which the Jewish community practices religious practices in a specific and material space. Through the particular and specific practices that are a constitutive part of their Jewish tradition like eating together in family and praying inside the community and sharing a common, is how the community experiences time in the presence of others, the 'Jetzt-Zeit' experience of time is then shared and enjoyed in community:

Jews are able to also find delight in the building of their temporary shelters. The delight of the latter is made concretely present in the process whereby what is most important is prioritized, namely, a celebration of the harvest and gifts of the earth and a spiritual relationship that extends to others. Such practices are also done in accordance with textual prescriptions.⁴⁸

The spiritual relation that occurs when Jewish community gets united is crucial to understand the relevance of creating and sharing a common space through celebration, gifts, religious liturgy and dialogue. A different conception of time is then experienced and shared between each one of the members of the community, and it is through dialogue that the community experiences love and Jetzt-Zeit. For Rosenzweig, in order to maintain the dialogue between different expressions of the experiences of love and time, he provides the relevance of the dialogue between religions such as Judaism and Christianity in order to break the linear conception of time imposed by the Western tradition of philosophy and that constitutes the modern character through capitalism as a social organization.

⁴⁸ Simon, "*Benjamin's Feast of Booths*," 263.

Capitalism is then in this conception, an economic and social organization that is a product of the modern western tradition of philosophy. Such a social organization possesses an ethical spirit that is profoundly influenced by the conception of economic gain and progress. It is important to point out that the meaning of the spirit of capitalism does not mean spirit as a metaphysical conception of the term, this is, to be conceived as something abstract, but as in the sense in which Max Weber incorporates his conception of the spirit, as a set of values that influences the actions and behaviors of the humans in order to motivate hard work and progress in a capitalist society.

In Max Weber's interpretation of the spirit of capitalism, capitalism possesses a religious devotion of economic gain and economic profit that forges a capitalist mentality in which the creation of wealth becomes a moral imperative that influences moral actions. In this sense, the creation of wealth as a moral imperative is conceived as a virtue that impacts the actions of humans in order to promote a rational mentality based on a unifying principle for the social organization of the society. This rational and unifying principle of social organization has a determinant impact on the life of humans promoting a homogenous life that pursues wealth and possessions. So in this sense, the person that follows such commandments of capital and that who addresses the capitalist mentality of gaining wealth and possessions is conceived as a virtuous person. The relevance of this idea based on economic gain is profoundly influenced by the conception of progress, that originates from the perception of a limitless progress of gain in which capital is progressively developing with no end. Such a conception of progress in capitalism represents an experience of time that transforms human life into a means to progress spiritually and capitalistically.

The experience of time that capitalism takes into consideration is the experience of linear time through progress, but that according to Weber, it has a spiritual character that promotes and impacts the lives of the humans that live inside of a capitalist social organization. For this reason, Marx Weber presents in *The protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*⁴⁹, that religious devotion is usually accompanied by a rejection of worldly affairs of pleasure in the present, this is the pursuit of wealth and possessions.

In *The protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber holds that the spirit of capitalism is constituted by ideas and behaviors that favour a rational pursuit of economic gain. This rational pursuit of economic gain establishes a profound religious devotion that focuses on economic prosperity in order to be a successful Christian person:

The old Protestantism of Luther, Calvin, Knox, Voet, had precious little to do with what to-day is called progress. To whole aspects of modern life which the most extreme religionist would not wish to suppress to-day, it was directly hostile. If any inner relationship between certain expressions of the old Protestant spirit and modern capitalistic culture is to be found, we must attempt to find it, for better or worse not in its alleged more or less materialistic or at least anti-ascetic joy of living, but in its purely religious characteristics.⁵⁰

This distinction is important because it enables us to better perceive the relation between capitalism and religion. Weber emphasizes the functionality of capitalism as a set of ideas and values that impacts human life in such a way that there results an identification of the materiality of capitalism with the spirituality of Protestant Christian religion. The religious and ethical devotion that capitalism offers to humans, promotes an ethical and practical way of conceiving faith in relation with progressive and accumulative economic profit-making. The economic profit is then converted into an experience of life and time that configures the idea of continuity of human history which is based on the linear western philosophy of history. A different but related

⁴⁹ Weber, *The protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

⁵⁰ Weber, *The protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 11.

way to think about this can be found in Benjamin's comments about Weber and the 'religion' of Capitalism. According to Benjamin:

A religion may be discerned in capitalism-that is to say, capitalism serves essentially to allay the same anxieties, torments, and disturbances to which the so-called religions offered answers. The proof of the religious structure of capitalism-not merely, as Weber believes, as a formation conditioned by religion, but as an essentially religious phenomenon-would still lead even today to the folly of an endless universal polemic. We cannot draw closed the net in which we are caught. Later on, however, we shall be able to gain an overview of it. ⁵¹

Benjamin's insight about the religious structure of capitalism situates religion as the structure of capitalism, in contrast to Weber, who considers that capitalism is conditioned by religion. Benjamin recognizes that capitalism is a profoundly religious phenomenon that is characterized by three aspects of its religious structure. The first one of them is that capitalism is a purely cultic religion, this is, that all the things that happen in capitalism are intimately related to the cult. He considers that capitalism is the most extreme cultic religion that has ever existed because all the things can only have a meaningful value in relation to the cult. This aspect of the cult is then related to the second feature of capitalism distinguished by Benjamin as the permanence of the cult. The permanence of the cult in capitalism is conceived as a profound celebration of the cult, this means that in capitalism there are no "weekdays", and every day is a day feast day. In capitalism every day that is lived and experienced as a hardworking, exhausting or as an exploited day, is conceived as a feast day, this is, as a day of celebration. This is because it is justifiable that the person that does not have a work, is not being part of the celebration of the feast day that the person who does have a work. For this reason, it is justifiable to think that every day in capitalism is a day of celebration, even if that day was not intended to be celebrated for being a symbol of exploitation and injustice. The work is then celebrated and productivity is

⁵¹ Benjamin, *Capitalism as Religion*, 288.

one of the big cults of capitalism. So in this sense, every day is intimately related to the cult and therefore profoundly religious.

On the other hand, the third aspect of capitalism is the creation of guilt. For Benjamin, capitalism is the first instance of a cult that creates guilt, not atonement. This is, guilt does not find relief in the cult of capitalism and thus, make it universal. For this reason, the atonement of guilt would become the stagnation of capitalism. Even though guilt is firstly rejected it is eventually internalized and normalized. The guilt then becomes part of the conscious mind of the people living in the religious structure of capitalism and eliminates the possibility of atonement. Benjamin presents this phenomenon in the following way:

Capitalism is probably the first instance of a cult that creates guilt, not atonement. In this respect, this religious system is caught up in the headlong rush of a larger movement. A vast sense guilt that is unable to find relief seizes on the cult, not to atone for this guilt but to make it universal, to hammer it into the conscious mind, so as once and for all to include God in the system of guilt and thereby awaken in Him an interest in the process of atonement. This atonement cannot then be expected from the cult itself, or from the reformation of this religion (which would need to be able to have recourse to some stable element in it), or even from the complete renouncement of this religion. The nature of the religious movement which is capitalism entails endurance right to the end, to the point where God, too, finally takes on the entire burden of guilt, to the point where the universe has been taken over by that despair which is actually its secret *hope*.⁵²

Capitalism is then a religion that no longer offers a reform of existence but its complete destruction. This is because of the way in which capitalism expands despair in humanity and creates a religious disposition of life that becomes part of the entire human life. But as Benjamin points out, such a disposition of life becomes a religious state of the world of hope that is in pursuit of salvation.

Finally, a fourth feature of capitalism lies as a manifestation of the cult of God, but in which God remains hidden, and it can only be invoked and summoned by guilt. Guilt is

⁵² Benjamin, *Capitalism as religion*, 288-289.

then a manifestation of the cult in which God barely leans out but it appears through the presence of the guilt. Benjamin presents this phenomenon in the following way:

Its fourth feature is that its God must be hidden from it and may be addressed only when his guilt is at its zenith. The cult is celebrated before an unmatured deity; every idea, every conception of it offends against the secret of this immaturity.⁵³

As I mentioned earlier, the distinction of capitalism as a religion and the hidden presence of God lies in large part in what Bolívar Echeverría recognizes as modernity. His conception of modernity as a group of behaviors that appear since many centuries ago in social life and which one of its most important aspects is linear time. However, although this subject matter of modernity in Bolívar Echeverría is not entirely developed in this work, it will open up new pathways for a future work.

The linear conception of time is one of the manifestations of the religiosity of capitalism and modernity, and that through the presence of guilt, the God of capitalism becomes perceptible and experienced by the humans that inhabit inside the religious structure of capitalism. For this reason, through the linear conception of time is manifested a religious and bourgeois conception of history based in the victor's interpretation of history. The expression of a linear conception of history based on progress is a manifestation of the God that lies in modernity and capitalism, this last one remaining as the most developed version of exploitation and religiosity of modernity. For my thesis, and to wrap up what I want to say about Rosenzweig's version of *Jetzt-Zeit*, all three thinkers--Marx, Benjamin, and Rosenzweig--help me make the case about the difference between a linear conception of time and *Jetzt-Zeit* in order to find a better way to experience life through a different conception of time that promotes a

⁵³ Benjamin, *Capitalism as religion*, 289.

rupture with the continuity of a bourgeois exploitation and religious guilt of mankind that modernity and capitalism manifest through the conception of linear time.

The interpretation of history through the linear conception of time interpretation can only be assumed from a perspective of time that considers history as a constant actualization of human history, where certain human cultures and countries are better than others. In this sense, this is Rosenzweig's main attempt, in trying to break into this conception of the linearity conception of time that promotes individualism and competition between humans to try to maintain a dialogue between religions and humans in order to create community and break with the individualistic perspective of capitalism. Benjamin for his part, promotes the experience of *Jetzt-Zeit* as an alternative to challenge the linear conception of time inherent in capitalism and its associated experience of guilt. This can be related to Rosenzweig's attempt to come up with a way of understanding the messianic ethics of human relations through his use of *Jetzt-Zeit*. Perhaps, given such challenges, it is necessary to research once more the linear conception of time that is presented in Hegel's philosophy of history in order to better appreciate the ways in which Rosenzweig's and Benjamin's conceptions of *Jetzt-Zeit* provide us with more creative and meaningful ethical conceptions of human relations and how they are affected by temporality.

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VITA

Juan Carlos Duran was born in Nuevo Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, México. This work is the culmination of the Master of Arts in Philosophy. After High School, Juan Carlos was accepted at the Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua in Chihuahua city in 2007, and three years later, he was accepted at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in 2011 in Mexico City as an exchange student. Juan Carlos achieved his first college degree, *Mención Honorífica*, a bachelor's in Philosophy in 2013. After achieving his bachelor's in Philosophy, Juan Carlos was accepted at Shandong University in Jinan, China, to study mandarin Chinese language from 2015 to 2016. After, he was accepted at the Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua and received a scholarship from CONACYT and he achieved a Master's degree in Educational Innovation in 2018. Juan Carlos was accepted in 2018 at The University of Texas at El Paso at the Department of Philosophy. During his participation in the MA Philosophy program, Juan Carlos served as a Teaching Assistance, as of December 2020 Juan Carlos was completing this thesis for the successful completion of the Master's program.

Contact information: juancarlos051089@gmail.com