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978-0-521-51709-6 - Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy

Benjamin Pollock

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FRANZ ROSENZWEIG AND THE SYSTEMATIC TASK OF PHILOSOPHY

Benjamin Pollock argues that Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* is devoted to a singularly ambitious philosophical task: grasping "the All" – the whole of what is – in the form of a system. In asserting Rosenzweig's abiding commitment to a systematic conception of philosophy often identified with German Idealism, this book breaks rank with the assumptions about Rosenzweig's thought that have dominated the scholarship of the last decades. Indeed, the *Star's* importance is often claimed to lie precisely in the way it opposes philosophy's traditional drive for systematic knowledge and upholds instead a "new thinking" attentive to the existential concerns, the alterity, and even the revelatory dimension of concrete human life. Pollock shows that these very innovations in Rosenzweig's thought are in fact to be understood as part and parcel of the *Star's* systematic program. But this is only the case, Pollock claims, because Rosenzweig approaches philosophy's traditional task of system in a radically original manner. For the *Star* not only seeks to guide its readers on the path toward knowing "the All" of which each being is a part; it at once directs them toward realizing the redemptive unity of that very "All" through the actions, decisions, and relations of concrete human life.

Benjamin Pollock is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Michigan State University. He is author of articles in the philosophy of religion and in modern Jewish philosophy appearing in *AJS Review*, *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, and other leading journals, and he is coeditor with Michael Morgan of *The Philosopher as Witness: Fackenheim and Responses to the Holocaust*.

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BENJAMIN POLLOCK

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For Allison, Asaf, Ayelet, and Hadas



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Acknowledgments

This book began as a doctoral dissertation project at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. It evolved as it accompanied me through an immensely valuable post-doctoral stay at the University of Toronto, and it attained book form after I joined the faculty in the Department of Religious Studies and in the Jewish Studies Program at Michigan State University. I want to express my deepest thanks to colleagues and friends at each of these institutions for the intellectual, professional, and personal support they have shown me during many years of study.

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book and offered both encouragement and valuable criticism. Without his support this book would not have appeared in the form, and at the time, that it has.

From early on in this project, I imagined an ideal reader for my work: he or she would be in equal measure knowledgeable about and perplexed by the philosophical problem of systematicity, would be familiar with Rosenzweig, and would at once be so much more philosophically grounded than I that he or she would find in my book a range of weighty philosophical ideas that I did not even realize were there. Now, writers often go about their work with an ideal reader in mind. But I had the distinct good fortune of actually meeting my ideal reader in person, and precisely at the moment when I most needed his critical insight. Paul Franks read numerous drafts of this book. He encouraged me and challenged me on some of the most important questions raised in it. Conversations with him and with Hindy Najman have opened me to the philosophical possibilities inherent to academic life, possibilities that I would have otherwise never thought were there to be pursued.

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