ROSENZWEIG, Franz (1886-1929)

Born in Kassel, Franz Rosenzweig was a German philosopher of self-conscious Jewish affiliation and a charismatic leader in a circle of existentially minded contemporaries. His major work, *The Star of Redemption* (1921), presents a sui generis iteration of systematic hermeneutics, a way of proceeding in the world centered on “experiential philosophy” *[erfahrende Philosophie]* and an ecumenical project of “speech-thinking,” or “thinking with others” that influenced Emmanuel Levinas and Walter Benjamin, among others. Rosenzweig produced an innovative translation of the Hebrew Bible into German with Martin Buber, and founded an institute of adult Jewish education in Frankfurt, the *Freies Jüdische Lehrhaus*, which became a center of Weimar Jewish intellectual life, attracting participants such as Buber, Leo Strauss, S.Y. Agnon, A.J. Heschel, Gershom Scholem, and Erich Fromm. Rosenzweig took a doctorate (under Friedrich Meinecke) from the University of Freiberg in 1913 with a dissertation entitled *Hegel and the State*, a project that included the discovery of a significant Hegelian article of manuscript. His subsequent work critiqued philosophy (including Hegel’s) for culminating in narrative closure (“the unity of the logos founds the unity of the world as a totality”) and because (“from Ionia to Jena”) “all philosophy has asked about essence,” a philosophical chimera. Other idealistic projects, including Zionism, came under a like scrutiny. Instead, Rosenzweig proposed a new philosophical grammar that generated a better expression of the historical predicament of existence: “speech-thinking,” the difference lying “in the need of an other,” allowing each moment to become “a springboard to eternity.” In 1922, he was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, but continued to produce writings up until his death in 1929, far outliving medical predictions.

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