

**Franz Rosenzweig's**  
***Star of Redemption***  
**As a System of Philosophy**

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Flush with undefined and unreferenced recondite terms, phrases and quotations, some apparently drawn from conversations with his interlocutors, yet often tweaked from their original meaning if just a little, Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* notoriously occludes ready understanding even by the initiated. Be it an unmarked quotation from Goethe or an allusion to a Kantian notion, Rosenzweig's *Star* requires a North Star of its own for successful navigation.<sup>1</sup> As a result, and in large part due to simple humility in the face of such a daunting and difficult task, we leave the exposition and clarification of those details for someone better suited to it. Our task here, rather, is to delve into a more abstract question regarding Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* when one considers his claim that the work constitutes a system of philosophy. Our task here then is to investigate the grounding of Rosenzweig's *Star* as a system of philosophy.

## **I. Introduction**

### **I.A. Defining the Universe of Discourse**

The question regarding the grounding of the *Star* as a system of philosophy involves, on the face of it, two questions: A) Is the *Star* in fact what it claims to be – a system of philosophy?<sup>2</sup> And B) is the *Star qua* system of philosophy, which, due to the complexity and difficulty of the text, we are assuming as having met the criteria for a system of philosophy and thus meeting the requirements for (A),<sup>3</sup> well-grounded and thus convincing? By (B) well-grounded and thus convincing, however, I intend the following distinction from (A): Taking (A) to entail any questions concerning the system's internal or logical coherence and

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<sup>1</sup> I'd like to take this opportunity to say thank you to my own personal North Star for all things Rosenzweig, Prof. Mendes-Flohr, for the many talks we've had on this and many other issues.

<sup>2</sup> On the nature of a system of philosophy as conceived by Rosenzweig and the *Star* as just such a system of philosophy see the nuanced scholarly disquisition by Pollock in: Benjamin Pollock, *Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Though I do not concur with everything contained in Pollock's volume, I do agree with his presentation of the many questions and issues regarding the *Star's* status as a philosophical system as well as most of his conclusions. Accordingly, the following discussions are greatly informed and influenced by Pollock's work.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. fn. 2 above.

consistency as well as its "external" discursive consistency and coherence, i.e., the system's accurate representation and modeling of existence, I take (B) to entail its appeal to the individual subject (referred to by Rosenzweig as "the self"), the system's (ultimately contingent) ontological point of departure. To say it differently, (A) encompasses the objective or logical requirements Rosenzweig posits as constituting a system of philosophy, and (B) encompasses the individual subject (the self) as the system's conceptual fulcrum and thus the subjective *ground* demanded by Rosenzweig's New-Thinking for a philosophical system. Therefore, whether or not the *Star* as a system of philosophy is successfully grounded in a convincing appeal to the individual subject-self, understood to be the system's ontological ground, is the question with which we will be occupied immediately below.

#### I.B. Qualifications

*Prima facie*, it seems that a positive answer to (A) would necessarily produce a positive answer to (B), and thereby render the *Star's* affirmation of the contingent subjective-self as the ontological ground of the system to be philosophically cogent. For if a system is taken to be both internally coherent and consistent as well as *presentative* of a systemic view of reality, what would be further required for a successful grounding of a system? To answer this question, it should be noted from the outset that Rosenzweig's distinctive conception of a philosophical system, defined as over and against the regnant (the "Old-Thinking") conception of a philosophical system, precludes by its very presuppositions the attainment of absolute truth, that is, if truth be defined by purely objective rational criteria. Yet, as pointed out by Leo Strauss in discussing the "Napoleonic strategy" of the modern Liberal Enlightenment project, vis-à-vis orthodox theology,<sup>4</sup> a philosophical system's rationality or

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<sup>4</sup> Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law: Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and his Predecessors*, trans. Eve Adler (NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), p xx, ff. The "Napoleonic strategy" discussed therein by Leo Strauss is that of leaving the final killing stroke for one's enemy to be meted out naturally in the course

objectivity in and of itself is insufficient proof of its being the only true system.<sup>5</sup> A successfully grounded philosophical system, as conceived by Rosenzweig, must now, under the auspices of the New-Thinking, entail not just (A) logical and conceptual rigor – consistency, coherence, soundness and the like –, but (B) subjective grounding as well – a successful appeal to the ontological significance of the individual subject-self; an appeal that is not only philosophically consistent with the system’s rational presuppositions but that rules out the possibility of other competing systems as well. Having defined then just what is meant by “grounding,” and thus what is at stake here, let us turn to the *Star* itself.

## **II. Rosenzweig’s *Star* as a System of Philosophy**

### **II.A. A Hypothetical System of Philosophy**

To begin, let us turn to the definition of a system of philosophy as understood by Rosenzweig. STAR / NEW THINKING QUOTES AND FTS. Pollock deftly brings forth Rosenzweig’s definition of a system of philosophy as that “which seeks to grasp the ultimate truth of Being together with the ‘whole’ of actuality, and this whole of actuality is itself not something singular; rather it is a complete collection of particular beings,” or “nothing less than knowledge of the ‘One and All’ as such and in their interconnectedness; it is the philosophical unification of the conceptual identity which is common to all that is together

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of future events. The purpose of such a strategy is to avoid expending valuable resources in finishing off one’s opponent and to not realize one’s inability to achieve the final terminal blow. Such a strategy leaves the opponent wounded, so to speak, but not technically defeated, in the strict sense of the word, or disproven as this case will require. This qualified and thus not true victory is achieved by means of mockery and the rewriting of history to forget or marginalize the opponent to a nonetheless very much alive obscurity. With regards to the modern Liberal Enlightenment project, then, its victory over religion in the modern era is precisely one of mockery and a rewriting of history insofar as the sole basic premise of theistic religion – that there is an omnipotent and omniscient God – remains entirely intact.

<sup>5</sup> In discussing how the Moderns seem to have been victorious over the Ancients and other theistically inclined world views as a result of mockery and not actual refutation, Strauss mentions the impossibility of such a refutation from the position of the modern Liberal Enlightenment project and its coinciding admission of the limits of human reason regarding the refutation of competing systems. This, explains Leo Strauss, is greatly informative as to the actual requirements for the true success of a system. In other words, a system’s ability to stand alone is ultimately insufficient. It must, in the end, prove that it is either the only system able to stand alone, prove that it stands alone the best or otherwise preclude other competing systems. ADD PAGE REFERENCES IF NOT MORE SOURCES

with the unique difference of each actual particular: system is the unity of the One and All, of identity and difference.”<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the concept of a system of philosophy as developed by Rosenzweig, in accord with the epistemological premises of the New Thinking and as explicated by Pollock, does not, in and of itself, necessitate “a way in” for the subject-self – a grounding appeal to the subject-self. Rather, it simply assumes the subject-self as the starting and delimiting point of the system and is thus entirely hypothetical.

To expand particularly on the hypothetical nature of Rosenzweig’s system, one need not go very far. At the very beginning of the *Star*, Rosenzweig stipulates that systematic knowledge of the One and All requires a conscious and freely given “Yea” on behalf of the subject-self to allow forth the Aught/Non-Naught<sup>7</sup> from the Naught<sup>8</sup> and thereby everything particular offered by Rosenzweig in the *Star qua* system of philosophy.<sup>9</sup> But, as Rosenzweig is sure to point out, there is no justifying case to be made for the utterance of the “Yea”.<sup>10</sup> “Yea is the beginning... it is really only the point of departure, and therefore simply incapable of being itself *affirmed*.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, Rosenzweig’s system of philosophy, along with any other New-Thinking, “existentialist” or subject-centered system of philosophy,<sup>12</sup> is ultimately a hypothetical or conditional system entirely dependent on each and every individual subject-self for their utterance of the archetypal word “Yea,” for the inclusion of the subject-self by the subject-self as that upon which the system depends and is formed around. “We found the three points [the connecting, constitutive elements of

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<sup>6</sup> Pollock, p 23.

<sup>7</sup> That is, the particular, the contingent, the self qua contingent.

<sup>8</sup> That is, the noumenon beyond empirical knowledge

<sup>9</sup> *Star*, p 24ff. Cf. “Yea is the beginning... it is really only the point of departure...,” *Star*, p 26.

<sup>10</sup> This is, of course, aside from the appeal of the system itself garnered as a result of the “Yea.” This extensive significance of the “Yea”, of an affirmation of noumenal particularity, will be discussed in greater detail below.

<sup>11</sup> *Star*, p 26 (emphasis mine).

<sup>12</sup> In the concluding section of this paper, ‘Further Concluding Discussions,’ I return to what I contend to be the limitations of Rosenzweig’s system and, with reference to other subject-centered philosophies, what may be conscripted to overcome these limitations.

reality, i.e. Man, World, and God]<sup>13</sup> to be individual, mutually unconnected, and could bring them together only arbitrarily, only subject to change, only under the sign of the *Perhaps*.”<sup>14</sup>

A philosophical system based on the New Thinking, then, is thus to be understood as an all-encompassing philosophical system in its seeking the One and the All and by its subsuming within its scope any and all individual subjective standpoints – by allowing each individual *qua* a contingent self to enter into a free relation to God and the world (which includes other contingent beings) – upon which the system is built and delimited. Moreover, let it be noted that while there may be a place for any and all subject-selves within the system, it must ultimately be the individual subject-self’s own decision, their own choice, to see themselves as the contingent and finite yet defining part of the system, to adopt the system as their own, to have the truth of the system be true *for* them, to utter that initial “Yea” and thereby to turn the system from merely hypothetical to actual, that is, to a lived reality – a lived reality as opposed to a purely rational construct.

For now, the above discussion regarding the hypothetical nature of a New-Thinking’s system of philosophy will have to suffice for, before proceeding, and in considering its central importance, the very notion of a subject-self must first be defined so as to more adequately understand its relationship to a system of philosophy so defined and the dependence of a system of philosophy so defined on the individual subject-self.

## II.B. The Individual Subject-Self

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<sup>13</sup> “These three pieces [or points] are God, World and man,” *Star*, p 19.

<sup>14</sup> *Star*, p 235 (emphasis mine). Though it is the subject-self’s resisting by its very nature being absorbed into the rational All that is being discussed in the passage from which the quotation is taken, the hypothetical nature of the system nevertheless constructed, which is due, in part, precisely because of the resistance of the subject-self, is certainly of issue, and is present in the discussion, as illustrated by the necessity (the final use of “only” in the quotation) of the conditional ( the “sign of the Perhaps.”). Cf. “It [the subject-self] is only the *virtual* locus for the beginning of our knowledge” *Star*, p 26 (emphasis mine).

Rosenzweig's affirmation of the individual subject-self *qua* a contingent, finite self determines his conception of a system of philosophy. Though including the self, which is marginalized to obscurity if not entirely excluded from the classical One and All of traditional philosophical systems "from Ionia to Jena" – from the pre-Socratics to Hegel, within his system, Rosenzweig's system is but a hypothetical construct, and not yet a realized actuality. If and when an individual subject-self assents to the presuppositions of the proposed philosophical system – namely, the ontological status of the self's contingency and finitude – by uttering the archetypal "Yea," the previously lone, existentially destitute position is overcome and included under the scope of the all-encompassing philosophical system. The subject-self thus becomes internal to and in fact a constitutive factor of the entire system. Thereby the goal of the system, which, as already noted, is to contain and maintain the unity and difference of existence, i.e., including, *inter alia*, each and every subject-self. "I myself, I the world-viewer, am the limiting ether for the content of the world which I view. Limited and turned toward the interior, toward the content, toward the world, the philosopher is the form of his philosophy."<sup>15</sup>

### **III. Grounding Rosenzweig's System**

#### **III.A. The Goal**

In "a conception of system in which the realization of the One and All was grasped as dependent upon the decisions and actions of [individual, particular] human beings,"<sup>16</sup> the question of motivating and affecting just such a decision and action in the individual subject-self to assent to and adopt and thereby finally form and delimit the system is of paramount importance. In more technical Rosenzweig-ian terms: prompting the subject-self to utter

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<sup>15</sup> Reiner Wiehl, "Experience in Rosenzweig's New Thinking" in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (University Press of New England: Hanover and London, 1988), p 43.

<sup>16</sup> Pollock, 183.

that initial "Yea" in the face of the Naught, and thus to affirm the ontological significance of the contingent, finite self, is of paramount importance. Thus, the central question that this paper has been driving at is to pose the following: What grounds the system in a convincing appeal to the subject-self to adopt the system as their own? What convinces the subject to utter the archetypal "Yea"?

Rosenzweig's answer to this question is succinct: "Unlike the truth of the philosophers... this truth must be truth *for* someone."<sup>17</sup> Nothing short of an argument that appeals to and convinces the subject-self of the truth of the system – and not just in terms of its internal logic, but also from, so to speak, outside the system, in competition with other systems, and most decisively, in terms of the subject-self's existential, indeed, *subjective* "point of view" (*Standpunkt*) – will suffice. That this is so is precisely due to the central position of the individual subject-self in the formation of a system of philosophy as conceived by Rosenzweig in the New-Thinking. To whatever extent the system of philosophy satisfies condition (A), as coherent and sound as it may be, a philosophical system, conceived as it is by Rosenzweig, is not in and of itself maximally convincing. This can be seen as due to its relinquishment of the absolute objective standpoint – a standpoint deemed under the Old-Thinking to be the only position that is epistemologically valid and thus capable of (soundly) convincing one and all. However, the New-Thinking's philosophical system must nevertheless be maximally convincing to the individual subject-self in order to have any grounding for that individual subject-self. A successful system must therefore ground itself in an appeal to the subject-self *qua* subject-self – a subject-self outside and independent of the system and thus faced with other competing systems. The grounding and thus cogency

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<sup>17</sup> Wiehl, p 45. "The New Thinking" in *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, presented by Nahum N. Glatzer, pp. 205-6. That passage continues with: "...why "the" truth must be converted into "our" truth. Thus truth ceases to be what "is" true and becomes a verity that wants to be verified, realized in active life."



of Rosenzweig's system hence rests not only on its internal, rational coherence, but pivotally on its realization by the individual subject-self, as well. In some ultimate sense, the validity of its grounding is principally conative, not cognitive. It is at this junction that reason and faith, philosophy and theology, meet in Rosenzweig's system.

Expanding on the image of "a way in" used earlier, what is being sought here is a way for a subject-self to relate to, understand, assent to and thereby adopt and delimit the system from one's own individual position, which is by definition outside of the system, even if only temporarily or originally so. Or, again, to put it in more Rosenzweig-ian terms, how and on what grounds is one to relinquish the absolute objective standpoint and become the limit of the system by imposing one's contingent and finite form on the system? If this grounding or "way in" were to be not only explained but be convincing, it, in turn, would provide *a* "if not" *the* "reason" for the subject-self to assent to and adopt the system at first from outside and then later from within, as a system of which one is a part of, as one's own system. However, as will be shown below, the appeal of Rosenzweig's *Star* as a system of philosophy to the nigh infinite number of individual subject-selves may not be as successful as Rosenzweig requires as a result of his conception of a system of philosophy. Therefore, his system may not be as all-encompassing as it must be by definition to be successful.

### III.B. The Obstacle

The grounding appeal of Rosenzweig's system can be found, to a large degree,<sup>18</sup> in two places: 1) His critique and refutation of the Old-Thinking's concept of a system of philosophy and (2) the content of the *Star* as a system of philosophy once assented to. Let us proceed in order.

#### III.B.1. Contra Old-Thinking

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<sup>18</sup> This is merely to qualify that the following is not an exhaustive list. This lack of exhaustiveness should not, I trust, effect or undermine my basic argument.

Rosenzweig's critique of the Old-Thinking is aimed at undermining some of the fundamental presuppositions of the whole philosophical tradition of the Old Thinking. From Jena to Iona, no philosopher, philosophy or system of philosophy fully escapes his critique.<sup>19</sup> Rosenzweig's critique of the Old-Thinking's concept of a system of philosophy has two prongs: I) that the absolute objective standpoint advocated by the regnant philosophical tradition is ultimately both unattainable and not as all-encompassing as it claims, and thus its pride of place as the sole determining factor of truth and the meaning of human existence is in fact overly idealized and thus unfounded; II) the complete marginalization of the particular individual subject-self under the Old-Thinking is ultimately unjustified and a massive lacuna in its striving to be all-encompassing. As a result of both these prongs, systems of philosophy that maintain the absolute objective standpoint as the only rational, plausible, and valid principle in the determination of philosophical truth, marginalize, if not utterly nullify the individual subject-self and hence fail to address the existential reality of the individual self – in Kantian terms: the noumenal reality of human existence, the reality that is beyond the grasp of universal reason – and are deemed scandalously inadequate for philosophy's supreme task of providing a systematic integration of all that exists into a unified whole. In short, the systems devised by the Old Thinking – from the pre-Socratics to Hegel and his epigoni – have failed precisely because they eliminated from reason's purview the reality of human existence as lived and experienced by contingent, finite beings.

Consonant with Rosenzweig's existential demand that philosophy embrace the individual *Standpunkt*, his critique of the Old-Thinking's concept of a system of philosophy is indeed compelling. Rosenzweig's *Star* is thus on its way to a successful grounding, the

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<sup>19</sup> It should be said that a great number of these prior and critiqued systems of philosophy certainly contribute to Rosenzweig's critique and his forming of the New-Thinking concept of a system of philosophy.

criteria for which was delineated in section I.B. above. However, in limiting his critique to the Old-Thinking concept of a system of philosophy, and by not including other alternative systems of philosophy, and specifically other existentialist or subject-centered systems, Rosenzweig weakens the grounding appeal of his system and leaves plenty of room for other expressions of a New-Thinking, existentialist or subject-centered system of philosophy to compete against his.<sup>20</sup> Considering that our requirements for a successfully grounded system of philosophy include definitive proof precluding all other systems or at least asserting this system over all other systems, this incomplete critique of philosophical systems is a major shortcoming for the *Star*'s grounding appeal.

### III.B.2. Pro-*Star*

The grounding appeal of the content of Rosenzweig's *Star* can be found, in large part,<sup>21</sup> in the following five areas: (1) in his revitalized conception of the role of liturgical prayer, (2) his revitalization of Jewish community and tradition, (3) his maintaining (though subsuming it to the subject-self's existential *Standpunkt*) the absolute objective standpoint within the system, (4) his giving the individual subject-self its due as the basis and delimiting factor of the system, and (5) his achieving a (hypothetical) system that assigns to the subject-self a relational ontology that is in fact the constitutive grammar of the system encompassing of the One and the All. These propositional claims are at the heart of the *Star* as a system of philosophy.

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<sup>20</sup> E.g.: Soloveitchik's system as presented in *Halakhic Man* or Arthur A. Cohen's "Natural and Supernatural Jew" are but two examples of the modern Jewish existentialist (bordering on schizophrenic, if I may) attempts to maintain the subjective *Standpunkt*. Leibowitz's fundamental and sole commitment to the Halakha and the concomitant self-extraction from worldly affairs may be seen as another one. However, for existentialist systems existent at the time of Rosenzweig's writing, Buber's *I and Thou*, i.e. his dialogical philosophy of presence, may be seen as another example. ???

<sup>21</sup> This is merely to qualify that the list is not exhaustive. This lack of exhaustiveness should not affect the point being made.

The *Star* is without doubt a masterful work that manages to bring the whole gamut of being or ontology into dialogue with itself, with one another, with existent, contingent existence, all while maintaining a relational-axiology within which every existent is to be found. However, as is to be recalled from our earlier discussions, a successfully grounded New-Thinking system of philosophy must appeal to the individual subject-self on their own terms. Thus, due to the specifically religious nature of the system of philosophy put forth by Rosenzweig,<sup>22</sup> the content of Rosenzweig's system can be seen as appealing only to individuals of a theistic faith who appreciate and value the revitalization of concepts of divine revelation, creation and redemption. To make the point even stronger, and free of any religious obscurities or qualifications: Due to the subjective basis for a successful grounding of the system of philosophy as constructed according to the epistemological premises of the New-Thinking, the value and appeal of the content of Rosenzweig's system will necessarily appeal on the basis of its own premises to only a finite number of individual subjects thereby vitiating the force of his thesis to have presented a *universal* concept of truth which finds its full expression in the conative moment of individual subjects. If some individuals are in potential excluded by dint of culturally and religiously inflected rhetoric, then Rosenzweig's system perforce fails to truly be a system of philosophy, that is, a philosophy of the One and All. Moreover, while Rosenzweig certainly spent a significant amount of time, space and energy devoted to refuting the Old-Thinking's concept of a system of philosophy and thus refuting systems based on an absolute objective standpoint (and the corresponding marginalization of the subject-self) he does not even attempt to

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<sup>22</sup> In arguing that the *Star* was a distinctive system of philosophy, Rosenzweig denied it was a *Jewish* book. Nevertheless, he conceded its method is Jewish, especially insofar as its method draws upon Jewish sources, thereby lending the volume a Jewish texture, if not content. This, of course, is especially true of parts two and three of the *Star*, as part one addresses purely philosophical questions and *eo ipso* claims to assume a universal voice.

refute other existentialist or subject-centered systems of philosophy. Therefore, the grounding appeal of Rosenzweig's *Star* as a system of philosophy is ultimately incomplete due to his use of the "Napoleonic strategy,"<sup>23</sup> by which he never delivers the final blow that would preclude the success of *all* other systems, period. In the end, despite Rosenzweig's best attempt to include the subject-self in his system by giving it its due,<sup>24</sup> the *Star* may prove to be an ungrounded system. This is especially so insofar as Rosenzweig, in departing from his philosophical predecessors, relinquishes the need for the absolute objective position which any and all subject-selves had previously sought to attain and from which they would, by definition, have been able to judge the system as convincing or not, as grounded or not. Put differently, Rosenzweig's system so successfully absorbs and internalizes what was previously the grounding for a system philosophy – a subject's reasoned search for the absolute objective position – that the system itself is left floating in an abyss of sorts with little to no reference to anything outside of itself, most especially the yet to be included subject-self.<sup>25</sup> The *Star* as a system of philosophy stands as a completely self-contained system, containing everything (at least potentially), but inaccessible to the as-of-yet unconvinced and thus as-of-yet un-included rational individual subject-self, and this is despite there being a place for the rational individual subject-self as that around which and from which the system is built and delimited.

#### **IV. Concluding Discussions**

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<sup>23</sup> Mentioned earlier; Cf. fn 4 and 5 above.

<sup>24</sup> This is done by recognizing that existence, or better yet, life, is lived, experienced and cognized by particular contingent finite subjects, and not from some abstracted, infinite, and objective *Standpunkt*. ???

<sup>25</sup> This brings up the question of who these as-of-yet unconvinced individuals are as well as why and whether or not they should be included in the first place. For the first question, I can offer myself as an example. For the second question, I understand Rosenzweig's claim of universality for his New-Thinking conception of a system of philosophy to entail just such universal inclusion.

It would seem, then, that while Rosenzweig's system is a great leap forward, philosophically speaking, by its relinquishing the pride-of-place given to the Old-Thinking's striving for the absolute objective standpoint, as well as its being based on and around the heretofore marginalized and ignored individual subject-self, the basis for the system, the subject-self, in reality, has little to no *objectively* motivating reason to assent to, adopt and thereby define and fully realize the system. By virtue of its existential *Standpunkt*, its absolute objectivity is compromised. Thus, to answer the very question with which we have been occupied with, the question as to whether or not Rosenzweig's *Star* as a system of philosophy is successfully grounded must be in the negative. To clarify, that Rosenzweig's system is ultimately not universally grounded is actually a claim that Rosenzweig's system is ungrounded for the nigh infinite number of subject-selves, not that it is not absolutely or objectively, but subjectively ungrounded. Unfortunately, this last qualification does not blunt the attack much at all as the whole development and success of the New-Thinking's concept of a system of philosophy over the Old-Thinking's concept was precisely its universal inclusion, central-focus and dependence on the subject-self, the subject-self who is now the lynch-pin of the system's own undoing.

## **V. Further Concluding Discussions**

This critique of the *Star* as a system of philosophy equally applies to any and all existentialist or subject-centered systems of philosophy that share the presuppositions of Rosenzweig's New Thinking. Subjectively grounded philosophical systems court the danger of losing the universal grounding that would render them a system. The Old-Thinking's systems claimed universal grounding as intrinsic to their claim to an un-subjective absolute objectivity. If the latter principle is a *sine qua non* for universal truth, then the New Thinking's inclusion of the individual *Standpunkt* into its philosophical system and the

concomitant exclusion of the absolute objective *Standpunkt* as the basis of its universal grounding, is bound to fail. But is the Old Thinking, grounded as it is in objective Absolutes any more universally grounded than the New Thinking as the conceptual foundation of a system of philosophy? Refutations of philosophical systems generated by the Old Thinking certainly exist, e.g. Rosenzweig's critique of the Old-Thinking. Moreover, not only do such critiques exist, they are also extremely effective in undermining most any claim to absolute objectivity and thus universal grounding.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, and in conclusion, the very attempt to propound a system of philosophy proves to be an inherently dubious project. Moreover, I venture to suggest that Rosenzweig's *Star* and its proclaimed objective of developing a system of philosophy is ironically but a vestige of the Old-Thinking and its hubristic conception of universal objective truths. Unfortunately, then, the anti-philosophical conclusion that a universal grounding and appeal for both Old-Thinking and New-Thinking systems is untenable if probity is to be maintained must be put forth and the desire for a third option, ideally incorporating the objective purview of the Old-Thinking and the subjective *Standpunkt* of the New-Thinking must be sought.<sup>27</sup> Hence, despite the seemingly insurmountable difficulties of such a "third way," looking forward, there is something positive to be gained more immediately from the above discussion. The epistemic limitations of the concept of universal reason are not uniquely specific to any one form of system but are inherent in the diverse heterogeneity of human nature and in the notion of system itself. It is an established scientific principle that any system of sufficient complexity and thus actually worthy of the name 'system' can never fully explain its own axioms and

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<sup>26</sup> That the absolute objective standpoint ignores if not fully dismisses the subject-self, something finally, in the modern era, recognized as not just worthy of attention in a system of philosophy but as something essential to it, is, to my mind, the best example of an absolutely objective critique of the Old-Thinking concept of system and thus a critique of the system on its own grounds precluding universal grounding.

<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note that this is much the same conclusion arrived at in (some readings of) Leo Strauss's works and his engagement with the theological-political problem.

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first principles without reference to something outside itself. It very much seems to be the case that this scientific principle applies to philosophic systems as well. What this extra-systemic referent may be if the project of a system of philosophy, even if pursued according to a dialectic of the objective and the subjective as proposed by our vision of a "third way," I leave to another paper.



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