

Martin Kavka Annulling Theocentrism

Those of us who are scholars of modern Jewish philosophy and theology have precious little to consult when we think about gender. Think about it we must, because the vast majority of the canonical works of modern Jewish philosophy and theology not only assume that their reader is male – this is a banal point – but that he is masculinized in accordance with a particular construction. How this construction works differs from text to text. As Susan Shapiro has shown, in Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, feminized matter is made virtuous (within limits) through her disciplining by masculine reason and the law. In Emmanuel Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, the unthinking and life-loving male is made virtuous through his imitation of feminine hospitality.¹ But construction there is. The power of the canon of modern Jewish philosophy and theology depends on these ungrounded essentialisms, which start in one iteration of a rhetorical trope, and through repetition carve out a world that over time comes to appear natural. The essays on gender in Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption*, originally published in 1921, that appear in this issue of *Bamidbar* continue this vein of tropological analysis. Zachary Braiterman deepens his previous analysis of the homosocial context of the male Jewish believer in the *Star* by showing how the men in that homosocial world are camping up revelation, performing drag shows for one another as they put on the mask of the Shulamite in the Song of Songs.² Gesine Palmer and Mara Benjamin read the *Star*'s treatment of revelation within the realm of family dynamics to opposite effect. Palmer's interpretation figures God as mother; Benjamin's interpretation figures God as a violent being, and it is our everyday account of mothering that should lead us to develop new and better theologies than Rosenzweig himself offered.

These three essays do not cohere with each other. Palmer's and Benjamin's contradict each other, and neither of those tolerates Braiterman's choice to refuse to supplement the erotic dimension of the *Star* with an account of family dynamics (whether in the *Star*, or in the structures of family life). It is tempting to say that such a divergent group of papers suggests that the *Star* is a book that contains multitudes or even infinities.

But this does not seem to me to be an option here. One cannot affirm all three of these papers, since that would entail a claim that one affirms both a paper that claims that we should *not* value the *Star* (Benjamin) as well as two papers (Palmer and Braiterman) that claim that we still should. A response to these papers must take on this issue of their authors' acts of valuing. Reading a text for gender does not necessarily keep that text at arm's length, but can be itself an intervention in a relationship between reader and text, or a negotiation of a text that has formed a scholar and therefore is analogous to a parent. And so in the following pages, I would like to turn the focus of analysis from the object being read, Rosenzweig's *Star*, to the reading subject. What is implicit in giving oneself the right to read for gender? In answering this question, I hope to show that any and all reading for gender in Jewish philosophy involves not only reading for the work that tropes do, as Shapiro has shown; it also requires from the outset a reader who (perhaps without explicitly knowing it) occupies a theological territory that rejects an important strand of twentieth-century Jewish philosophical theology, namely the theocentric one that affirms the rightness of divine will and command simply because it is divine.

In the course of her argument that Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* is not a book about love or eros in any meaningful sense, but rather one about human persons being dominated by God, Mara Benjamin quotes the famous sugya from the Talmud that imagines God coercing the Israelites to accept the Torah by threatening to drop Mt. Sinai on the Israelites' heads if they do not consent. The sugya does not end here. The Talmud reports R. Aḥa b. Jacob as claiming that such an image of the giving of the Torah "furnishes a strong protest against the Torah." As David Novak has remarked,³ the Hebrew word for "protest" here, *moda 'a'*, is a technical term that appears elsewhere in the Talmud (B. Baba Bathra 40a) to denote a writ in which a person declares that she or he is under duress to serve as a party to a contract about to be finalized; this writ gives permission to annul the contract later. In other words, where the sugya ends is not with a portrait of God who holds all the power in the covenantal relationship, but with a portrait of members of a community who hold the right, under certain conditions, to declare that the covenant is not worth endorsing. All three of these papers – in their deep attention to the ways in which gendered language operates in the *Star* – are wrestling with the decision whether or not they should file a *moda 'a'* against Rosenzweig. Did they affirm their fealty to the *Star* under duress, because that book was proclaimed to

be canonical? If so, should they annul that fealty at this present moment? Nevertheless, the issue of whether one wants to file a *moda 'a'* against Rosenzweig cannot be tidily separated from the issue of whether one wants to file one against the God of Sinai. For if one had affirmed one's fealty to the *Star* under duress, was it because its portrait of God is as violent as one of a God who blithely threatens to drop a mountain on a people?

Such questions were not apparently available to Rosenzweig's first Anglophone readers. The reception history of Rosenzweig in America has long been bound up with the sense that Rosenzweig was just like post-WWII American Jews, who were trying to figure out how to balance their desire to commit to traditional Judaism with their desire to commit to America. As Will Herberg wrote in the first major Anglophone article on Rosenzweig, which appeared in *Commentary* in December 1950, "out of his [Rosenzweig's] own life he was able to forge a new way of Jewish religious thinking, a new conception of the ancient faith that never fails to strike fire in the heart of those who seek God out of the necessities of their existence."⁴ While Rosenzweig was hagiographically constructed to be exemplary for the American Jews in the immediate aftermath of World War II, for the authors of the essays on Rosenzweig in this issue of *Bamidbar*, his holiness is now in question. This is most obviously the case in Benjamin's paper, which argues that the *Star* is a text that, in its account of revelation, upholds "violent heteronormative domination"⁵ because the human soul (figured as female) is unable to refuse the command of God (figured as male). For her, Rosenzweig's *Star* should be rejected as an authoritative text in the canon of modern Jewish philosophy, for there are Talmudic texts that cohere better with elements of human experience than the *Star* and other philosophical theologies either ignore or repress.

But this questioning of Rosenzweig's authority is also implicit in the other two papers. For Braiterman, if there is a new way of forging Jewish religious thinking in the *Star*, it is not in any way because Rosenzweig showed that "human existence is intrinsically religious existence," as Herberg thought.⁶ Rather, it is because he showed that religious existence was really human existence, with all the messy constructions and fantasies that are typical of human existence. The methodological lead appears to be merely a matter of taste, since Braiterman finds Rosenzweig's rhetoric about revelation to be "over the top and dramatic."⁷ (From Braiterman, this is an expression of praise.) However, Braiterman's essay is not simply a register of an aesthetic response; it is an argument. His claim that the *Star*

is a stage, best suited for the theater, lies in the fact that its characters are always engaged in role-playing. In responding to revelation by voicing the claim “I am yours” (a slight alteration to the Shulamite’s claim in Song of Songs 2:16 that “I am his”), the Shulamite is a figure for every Jew.⁸ Yet in the description later in the *Star* of the Days of Awe (in German, *gewaltige Tage*, a phrase that is not devoid of overtones of violence), Rosenzweig’s portrait of the Jewish believer is clearly a married man, wearing a *kittel*.⁹ No single biological sex, no single mode of gender performance, is apropos to Jewish life. Masks are donned and doffed as one makes one’s way through a liturgical year or a theological lexicon. Synagogue life, therefore, is formally no different than the life of the habitué of the gay bar, who experiences drag shows at least weekly. Braiterman clearly has affection for what he sees as the *Star*’s “hot campy eros,”¹⁰ and may even think it shot through with holiness (he is silent on the matter), but this holiness has *nothing* to do with Rosenzweig’s notion of holiness, which was characterized by having no place in the world. Rosenzweig asserts that Hebrew, for example, is holy because of its difference from everyday language; it is this difference that “prevents the eternal people from ever being quite in harmony [*einig*] with the times.”¹¹ But for Braiterman, if the *Star* is a site of holiness, it is not uniquely so; every theater stage and every mode of performance becomes similarly redescribed as holy, without being transformed into something supernatural as a result of that redescription. The *Star*’s hot campy eros, unlike Hebrew, is quite in harmony with the times. For Braiterman, the *Star* is fundamentally different than the work that Rosenzweig said it was; indeed, what Rosenzweig says is belied by the operations of the *Star*’s varying figurations of Jews and the Jewish people.

Palmer shows the instability of fixing the *Star*’s subject matter. She reads the central section of the *Star* through the prism of Rosenzweig’s romance with the wife of his very close friend Eugen Rosenstock, Margrit. Palmer can read the *Star* this way because Rosenzweig, in his letter to her of 2 November 1918, tells us that this is the correct reading: the section on revelation “is not ‘for’ you but – yours. Yours – like I am.” But in that case, who can decide whether Rosenzweig’s quotation from Song of Songs 2:16, “I am yours,” is about his relationship to God or his relationship to Margrit Rosenstock? It is this indecision that motors Palmer’s argument. The *Star* is not *only* to be psychoanalytically reduced to an interhuman romance; neither is it *only* to be read theologically. Her reason for insisting on this point has to do with the very dynamic of revelation itself in

the *Star*, one in which God transforms from mother to lover. In the text of the *Star*, this move is very quick, occurring in only about three or four sentences near the beginning of the central section of the *Star* that treats revelation.¹² Rosenzweig's narrative of revelation is one of God's coming into relationship with human persons, of momentarily entering human history; this is described as a transformation of the divine as impersonal fate into a momentary divine event of personal love. Palmer reads this not only as a transformation of the divine's nature, but also as a manifestation of what the divine had been before it communicated with any human person. For her, that which emerges in revelation is not other than the fates that are "the original law ... it is not by accident that they are mostly women, for the maternal is always that which is there already." If revelation is the revelation of a mother, as Palmer suggests, then the asymmetry of the love relationship – which is so problematic for Benjamin – is to be expected, given the infant's dependence on a mother for perduring existence. Theology is always the theology of a family drama, and it is refreshingly one in which the child is not engaged in differentiating itself from its mother, as in many psychoanalytic narratives, but instead continually comes into a linguistic relation with the mother, in which nothing is left unconscious.¹³ However, note the strange twists and turns in Palmer's argument. A theological book is demythologized not as a romance, but as family drama. But this decision serves to explain the nature of the romance, because Palmer reads the end of Rosenzweig's treatment of revelation, in which God disappears from human history, as a psychic accomplishment in which the beloved "learns to speak for itself,"¹⁴ and not as an expression of painful frustration at being unable to maintain revelation over an extended period of time. This point then gets re-theologized as a claim that God/Mother is the necessary ground of love, and all this is verified by what she argues is the correctness of Rosenzweig's fumbling through the various rhetorical registers of the love-analysis. In other words, she finds Rosenzweig to be worth affirming as a thinker because of his "pleading, crying, stammering, and stumbling for the mere purpose to be loved by his beloved"¹⁵ and for no other reason. Nonetheless, because the theological meaning of the *Star* is derived from its portrait of a human need, Palmer's reading of the *Star*, like Braiterman's, is a decidedly naturalizing one. It is not God who dominates the *Star*; it is the human person.

What I find so fascinating about these essays is the fact that these authors ascribe to themselves the right to set the terms on which reading Rosen-

zweig is, or would be, worthwhile. In a previous generation, the worth of Rosenzweig was dictated to his readers (beginning with Herberg, as well as with Nahum Glatzer). Almost sixty years after Herberg's essay, we now have evidence his judgment is false. Rosenzweig's *Star* does indeed fail to strike fire for Benjamin. It only strikes fire campily for Braiterman (if not necessarily comically), and for Palmer the necessities of existence lead one to seek not God but Mama, even if we identify (or misidentify) her as God. Scoring points against Herberg is perhaps not difficult. Yet what lies underneath these readings is not the death of Herberg, or even the death of God, but the death of theocentrism. For in announcing their right to withhold endorsement of Rosenzweig's *Star* as a work of theology – by saying that it is about love (Palmer), or violence (Benjamin), or a campy mix of the two (Braiterman) – these three are also withholding endorsement of the description of revelation that has long given the *Star* its reputation as a classic. Rosenzweig had argued, after all, that the self is nothing before it hears the command to love God. In Rosenzweig's commentary on the *Aqedah* narrative of Genesis 22, he claims that unlike Adam in Genesis 3 (who hides when God asks "Where are you?" and thus does not enter into relationship with God), Abraham becomes a subject when God calls his name twice (Genesis 22:11). But in Abraham's response of *hineni* ("here I am"), what appears, in Rosenzweig's view, is only "the singular human I, as yet wholly receptive, as yet only opened up, as yet empty, without content, without essence, pure readiness, pure obedience, all ears."¹⁶

On the other hand, for these authors, the issue of whether a person will receive God or not is based on the content that already makes up a person's character and informs her decision to obey or not. For Palmer, if Rosenzweig's account of revelation is worth endorsing, it is because Rosenzweig has said something *psychologically* important about an ego's need for love and affirmation. For Braiterman, if revelation is worth endorsing, it is because Rosenzweig has said something *psychologically* important about the way in which the artifice of culture is a path to self-knowledge akin to a gay queen's range of pop-culture cathexes upon coming out of the closet. For Benjamin, Rosenzweig's account of revelation is not worth endorsing because Benjamin herself is already filled with a sense of what love means (on the basis of her own motherhood, and her reading of theoretical accounts of maternal love).

Benjamin would seem to be the odd one out here, but I do think that she has put her finger on something that Braiterman and Palmer have missed. If

Rosenzweig's account of revelation in the *Star* involves revelation coming to an empty self, who accepts the divine command because she or he is otherwise empty, then the various maneuvers that Palmer and Braiterman make in order to affirm Rosenzweig are, in the final analysis, just as un-Rosenzweigian as Benjamin herself is. If we use worldly knowledge as a criterion to assess the validity of Rosenzweig, then we are no longer being empty selves, and we have therefore *already* decisively moved outside the ambit of Rosenzweig's analysis. Therefore, it seems to me that all three of these articles, because of the agency that their authors perform in reading for gender, announce the death of theocentrism. If theocentrism means once and for all being unable to file a writ of *moda'a* against God – if divine command is right and good simply because it is divine command, if there is no judging divine command because God *qua* God is radically transcendent and other than humans – then theocentrism is not worthwhile, no matter how one phrases one's endorsement of a theocentrist such as Rosenzweig (for example, by reading him as an astute scholar of psychology, as Palmer does, or as a proto-queer theorist, as Braiterman does¹⁷).

For various reasons, I endorse the death of theocentrism.¹⁸ Yet such endorsement comes with its own conceptual problems. What comes after the death of theocentrism? To what extent can modern Jewish philosophy then make *any* assertions about revelation (or other theological categories)? For who would reveal after the death of theocentrism? If theocentrism is dead, then it is not God who reveals from on high. Yet if we are the revealers, then to what extent is revelation anything different than ordinary learning about the natural world? If the death of theocentrism is equivalent to the death of revelation, can the field of modern Jewish philosophy or theology do anything more than re-read canonical figures in the light of our arbitrary contemporary human and communal concerns? But what would be the point of returning to anyone at all in the canon, if it is *our* context that determines our conclusions about the theological concepts invoked in the canon of modern Jewish philosophy or theology?

Some years ago, I attempted to answer the last of these questions in an article that, on the basis of Levinas's confused reports on the work of Maimonides and Halevi, argued that a canon served as a screen by which scholars could present themselves as authoritatively as possible.¹⁹ A canon of modern Jewish philosophy would give rise to thought in and through the analysis of its works; its works are taken by the scholar to be not themselves claims for knowledge, but to be pretexts for the scholar's

own claims to knowledge. In other words, the canonical works of the past are agents of “revelation,” producing novelty for an individual and/or a community. To describe this process, one might turn to another description of a family drama in the canon of modern Jewish philosophy, one that does not come from Rosenzweig. In June of 1782, Moses Mendelssohn wrote his friend August Hennings a letter in which he expanded upon his opposition to the account of progress found in Lessing’s *The Education of the Human Race*, in which progress is something that happens to humanity as a whole. Mendelssohn, on the other hand, claimed that progress only exists at the individual level; what persists over the course of history is a series of individuals “who follow upon one another like water in a stream.” If this were not the case, or “if the human race were always to go further towards perfection, then the newcomers would find no opportunity to train their abilities [*Kräfte*] or to develop their natural inclinations.”²⁰ Yet such an increase in an individual’s power is only possible – as good classical mechanics tells us – if it pushes against a counter-force that originates from outside it. Mendelssohn continued in this letter with an aside on child-rearing. Children

have the same tendencies and the same capabilities [as we adults do]; therefore they must find the same inducement [to develop those capabilities] that we found, or their abilities will remain untrained. They cannot continue where we left off, because they do not begin where we have begun; they are endowed with an elastic force [*Federkraft*] that meets with no resistance and therefore cannot operate effectively [*wirken*]. How are they supposed to train their powers of understanding if all their needs have been satisfied without effort? How are they supposed to train their love of freedom if no tyranny presses on them? How are they supposed to train their love of truth if it is spoon-fed to them?²¹

In the course of these general claims about parents’ or society’s responsibility to children, Mendelssohn claimed that there is no such thing as good child-rearing without heteronomy. Like Benjamin, he affirmed the necessity of a power differential between parent and child. (Unlike Benjamin, he did not specifically mention mothers.) Like Benjamin, through the metaphor of the child as a spring with a tensile power (another way to translate *Federkraft*) that increases when another force presses down upon it, Mendelssohn affirms the parallel transformations that parent and child undergo in the dynamic of parenting. The child’s autonomy is produced in and through the power differential between child and parent. Furthermore, this is a training, a regimen that knows no end but can always be improved.

To read these papers in the context of this letter would be to say that the power to articulate the *necessity* of turning away from Rosenzweig's own theocentrism is a result of, and gains its authority from, the encounter of reading Rosenzweig or commentaries on Rosenzweig. For Benjamin, the articulation of a more naturalist theory of revelation that coheres with experiences of child-rearing results from the first moments in which she was annoyed and disturbed by the book. For Braiterman, the articulation of an aestheticist account of revelation comes from his distaste for the high moral seriousness that suffuses so much scholarship on the *Star*. For Palmer, Rosenzweig's psychological perceptiveness is a way of saving the *Star* from being simply an artifact of his relationship with Margrit Rosenstock. Would these conclusions have arisen without the *Star* pressing upon these scholars' own tensile power? Perhaps. Yet I doubt that they would have arisen in the same way, with the acuity that these papers give to those conclusions, without the fight with a concrete text that grounds these authors' fundamental negation of the *Star*'s core theocentric value. We read the canon not for the sake of falling in love with the authors and works that comprise it, but for the sake of determining ourselves and our own views more precisely. We advance in inquiry by rejecting the authorities of the past, or by accepting them on new terms or on more expansive terms, and persuading others that we have not responded willy-nilly. We give reasons for doing so, and those reasons become authoritative until the next generation of students rejects us for not having given as accurate a picture of the situation as we ought to have. Mendelssohn's account of parenting might therefore be transferred to the realm of scholarship. As a parent establishes heteronomy in order to produce the child's later autonomy, so the canon threatens to smother the scholar in order to produce compelling interpretations. In this way, *The Star of Redemption* is the agent that brings these authors' anthropocentrism to light, even if such anthropocentrism does not quite overlap with naturalism in any of these essays. This, and this alone, is enough to justify the field's continuing to read Rosenzweig's *Star*, or any work in the canon that we or others might want to reject (or endorse for different reasons) at a later point in time.

To read Rosenzweig's *Star* anthropocentrically is to assign oneself the power to decide its meaning(s). Nevertheless, claiming that a canon reveals in and through the act of interpreting is not the same as claiming that God reveals in and through the act of interpreting that canon. Or is it? After all, to read the *Star* anthropocentrically is to reserve the right to

make a claim of *moda 'a'* at any point in the analysis; that right extends through all three of these papers, even if it is only Benjamin's paper that ends up filing the claim against Rosenzweig's violent God. As a result, the anthropocentric reading can be re-theologized by linking it to a classical Jewish text. However, I am not necessarily convinced that making such a link is tantamount to a comfortable return to theology. The category of *moda 'a'* – which states that the decision as to whether a command is good is our decision, and therefore departs fundamentally from Rosenzweig's account of revelation as based in our emptiness or our being all ears – simply may not leave room for any category of revelation.

This naturalist-atheist possibility goes against the argument that Palmer is trying to make in her paper, in which the broad register of gendered language in the *Star* signifies that the difference between the interhuman and the revelatory is hardly a difference at all. In the course of her analysis of the account of revelation in the *Star*, Palmer turns away from the section of the chapter on revelation in the *Star* entitled "Grammar of Eros" and Rosenzweig's stylized conversation between God and the human soul and jumps to the end of that chapter, in its fuller treatment of the Song of Songs, which claims that the expression of interhuman love is itself divine: God is "the *third* who is always present when the two are together."²² Rosenzweig's claim, as Palmer points out, uses biblical criticism for theological ends. Early *wissenschaftlich* scholarship had been puzzled by the figuration of the male lover in the opening chapter of Song of Songs as both king (1:4) and shepherd (1:7); this raised the possibility that there might be two lovers, and confusion as to which man the Shulamite truly loves. Rosenzweig resolved this puzzle by turning to the analysis of wedding poems (*wasf*) among Syrian peasants in Johann Gottfried Wetzstein's 1873 article "The Syrian Threshing-Table [*Die syrische Dreschtafel*]" – Wetzstein was the Prussian consul in Damascus during the 1850s – and Franz Delitzsch's 1875 commentary on the Song of Songs.²³ In the form of the *wasf*, the peasant is styled as a king; in this surplus over naturalist identity, Rosenzweig inferred that "by speaking, love already becomes superhuman [...] like speech itself, love is sensual-supersensual."²⁴ In other words, something divine manifests itself when the lover acknowledges that he is directed towards someone exterior to him.²⁵ Nevertheless, such a reading is not free from problems. If this revelation is not simply to be an account of how selves are grounded in an attribute-free exterior that transcends the realm of sensuousness, but an account of how selves are

grounded in the particular God of the Jewish tradition, then the uniqueness of the lover who mediates the divine presence disappears. If one is to emphasize the uniqueness of the human lover who is exterior to me, then it is an ungrounded leap to move from this person right here before me to an account of a manifestation of the transcendent God. One cannot have both the sensual and the supersensual at once. One of the poles must give way, as the sensual dissolves into the supersensual, or the supersensual becomes a rhetorical technique for speaking about the awesomeness of the sensual.

Braiterman denies this point; for him, revelation is about figure and image – not about content – and it is about the self-knowledge that results from attending to those figures and images. But here too, one might ask “whence the figuration?” If the ground of the figure is the human imagination, then “revelation” becomes simply a term of art by which one pragmatically talks about a system of religious belief that concretizes self-knowledge for the believer. We are in the territory of Durkheim here, not of Rosenzweig. If the ground of the figure is a revealer, an exterior agent who commands “Love me!”, one must develop an account of how the imagination receives impressions from the outside in order for these figures to truly count as revelation. Benjamin is in similar territory as Braiterman on this point, when she insists at the end of her paper that the revelatory command “must contain within it the memory and anticipation of the nurture through which the beloved soul and the beloved people can come to hear this call.”²⁶ If a system of nurturing is the cause of hearing the call, how does one differentiate the divine caller from the path of life by which one comes to hear the call? How could one know, or have confidence, that the caller is something other than the human, or even other than another human?

All that we can say, after turning away from theocentrism, is that the canon brings questions to our attention, and creates responses by engaging with contemporary scholars’ *Federkraft*. It is *Rosenzweig* who reveals, and who continues to reveal as we find new things (whether troubling, astute, or campy) in his writing. The possibility of going further, and answering the question of whether it is possible to give an account that defends the possibility that God has revealed from Sinai, or might still reveal, remains at this point closed off. The authors may not care about answering such questions; they may not think such questions matter. But the canon tells us they do, and it is up to scholars to articulate why they might not matter, as opposed to assuming that they do not or are best left to the private sphere,

safe from the threats of scholarship. The necessity of grappling with these issues is not something that I have introduced into the canon of modern Jewish philosophy. It is implicit in the very structure of the *moda 'a'*. When scholars ascribe themselves the right to decide on what revelation might contain – in the case of these three papers, the right to show how the tropes of gender work against the theocentrism that motivates the *Star's* analyses – the possibility of filing a *moda 'a'* against God is always around the corner. This opens the possibility of annulling not just theocentrism, but divine revelation altogether.

Notes

- 1 See Susan Shapiro, "A Matter of Discipline: Reading for Gender in Jewish Philosophy," in: *Judaism Since Gender*, eds. Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt (New York: Routledge, 1997), 158-73; Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini: essai sur l'extériorité* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 145; Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 170-71.
- 2 For the previous reading, see Zachary Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation: Aesthetics and Modern Jewish Thought* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 229-36.
- 3 David Novak, "Natural Law, Halakhah, and The Covenant," in *Jewish Social Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 28.
- 4 Will Herberg, "Rosenzweig's 'Judaism of Personal Existence': A Third Way Between Orthodoxy and Modernism," in *From Marxism to Judaism: Collected Essays of Will Herberg*, ed. David Dalin (New York: Markus Wiener, 1989), 73. For more on the reception of Rosenzweig in America, see Peter Eli Gordon, "Rosenzweig Redux: The Reception of German-Jewish Thought," *Jewish Social Studies* 8.1 (2001): 1-57.
- 5 Mara H. Benjamin, "Love in the *Star*? A feminist challenge," *Bamidbar* 8 (2014): 23.
- 6 Herberg, 80.
- 7 Zachary Braiterman, "Revelation Camp: Gender, Franz Rosenzweig, and the Con-fusion of Concepts," *Bamidbar* 8 (2014): 59.
- 8 Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), 203-04; Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William W. Hallo (New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1970), 182-83; Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara Galli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 196-97.
- 9 Rosenzweig, *Stern*, 363; *Star*, trans. Hallo, 326; *Star*, trans. Galli, 346.
- 10 Braiterman, "Revelation Camp," 68.
- 11 Rosenzweig, *Stern*, 335; *Star*, trans. Hallo, 302; *Star*, trans. Galli, 321.
- 12 Rosenzweig, *Stern*, 177; *Star*, trans. Hallo, 159; *Star*, trans. Galli, 172.
- 13 Compare to Nicolas Abraham, "L'écorce et le noyau," in: Abraham and Maria Török, *L'écorce et le noyau* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), 203-26; Abraham, "The Shell and the Kernel: The Scope and Originality of Freudian Psychoanalysis," trans. Nicholas

- T. Rand, in: Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 79-98; Esther Rashkin, *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 16-21.
- 14 Gesine Palmer, “‘Dying for Love’ – Making Sense of an (Unwitting?) Inversion in Franz Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*,” *Bamidbar* 8 (2019): 36.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, 46.
 - 16 Rosenzweig, *Stern*, 196; *Star*, trans. Hallo, 176; *Star*, trans. Galli, 190.
 - 17 As an aside, while I defer to Braiterman on issues of queer theory, it seems to me that his reading Rosenzweig as a camp figure may mis-classify him. In Sontag’s “Notes on ‘Camp’”, she delineates three types of creative energies: the seriousness of high culture, the “extreme states of feeling” characteristic of avant-garde art (which is marked by an increase in violent imagery), and the aestheticism of camp. Especially in the context of Benjamin’s essay in this volume, Rosenzweig seems to fit better with the second of these taxa than with the third. Sontag goes on to note that this avant-garde creativity is marked by a “tension between moral and aesthetic passion,” and certainly by reading for the aesthetic moments in the *Star*, Braiterman succeeds in showing this tension. But the “hot campy eros” of the divine-human relation would belong more to Braiterman, in his resolution of this tension in favor of the aesthetic, than it would to Rosenzweig himself. See Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1966), 287.
 - 18 See Martin Kavka, “The Meaning of That Hour: Prophecy, Phenomenology and the Public Sphere in the Early Heschel,” in *Religion and Violence in a Secular World: Toward a New Political Theology*, ed. Clayton Crockett (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 108-36; Kavka, “The Perils of Covenant Theology: The Case of Eugene Borowitz,” *Journal of Jewish Ethics* 1.1 (2015), 92-113; Kavka, “The Perils of Covenant Theology: The Cases of David Hartman and David Novak,” in *Imagining the Jewish God*, eds. Leonard Kaplan and Ken Koltun-Fromm (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 227-53. For a brief account of what theology can be after theocentrism, see Kavka, “Profane Theology,” *Method & Theory In The Study of Religion* 27.2 (2015), 104-15.
 - 19 Martin Kavka, “Screening the Canon: Levinas and Medieval Jewish Philosophy,” in *New Directions in Jewish Philosophy*, eds. Aaron W. Hughes and Elliot R. Wolfson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 17-51. I should note that this essay was the first I drafted after I became a widower in late 2007; it therefore marks the beginning of a turn away from my earlier writings, which were more comfortable with theology as a set of objective truths that a scholar could receive in an uncomplicated fashion.
 - 20 Mendelssohn, Letter to August Hennings 25.6.1782, in *Gesammelte Schriften: Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Alexander Altmann et al. (Stuttgart: F. Fromann, 1971–), 13:65.
 - 21 *Ibid.*, 13:66.
 - 22 Palmer, “‘Dying for Love,’” 41.
 - 23 See Rosenzweig, *Stern*, 223-24; *Star*, trans. Hallo, 200-01; *Star*, trans. Galli, 214-16. For biographical information on Wetzstein, see Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 87. For Rosenzweig’s use of Wetzstein and the Orientalist Karl

- Budde, see Inken Rühle, “Das Hohelied – ein weltliches Liebeslied als Kernbuch der Offenbarung?”, in *Rosenzweig als Leser*, ed. Martin Brassler (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2004), 453-79, esp. 475. For the influence of Wetzstein, see Wetzstein, “Remarks on the Song,” in: Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, trans. M.G. Easton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1877), 162-76; Karl Budde, “The Song of Solomon,” *The New World* 3 (1894), 56-77.
- 24 Rosenzweig, *Stern*, 224; *Star*, trans. Hallo, 201; *Star*, trans. Galli, 216.
- 25 This is the interpretation of the passage found in Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 99.
- 26 Benjamin, “Love in the *Star*?”, 23.