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Diachronics of Redemption: A Systems Theoretic View of Rosenzweig's *Star*

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Abstract

This paper explores Rosenzweig's idea of Redemption by an interpretative examination of the conceptual structures of the *Star*. These structures, in which Redemption is integrated with the other two relations, Creation and Revelation, and with the three elements of God, World, and Human, are examined from the perspective of contemporary systems theory. Moses, Pollock, and others have noted the systematic character of the *Star*. While "systematic" does not necessarily mean "systems-theoretic," the philosophical theology of the Star and its core hexad of elements and relations exemplify many ideas salient in the systems theory literature. The hexadic star itself fits the classic definition of "system," and the Yes and No of Rosenzweig's elements and their reversals illustrate the bridging, in this definition, of element and relation with the third category of "attribute." Rosenzweig's thought resonates with the opposing ontological and epistemological conceptions of "system," the constitutiveness of function as well as structure, and the diachronics of system formation which are fundamental to systems thought. In its notions of All, Nothing, One, and Many, the *Star* also offers a systems metaphysics of number.

In this paper, the systems character of the *Star* is illustrated by extensive use of diagrams. Remarkably, given its highly architectonic character, diagrams are absent in Rosenzweig's book, except for the triangle of elements, the triangle of relations, and the hexadic star that open its three parts. While conceptual structure can be explicated entirely in words, diagrams supplement words with a visual medium of communication that is deeply concordant with the *Star's* message and that supports a nonverbal dimension of understanding encompassing both intellect and experience.

1. Introduction

As Moses (1992), Samuelson (1999), Pollock (2009) and others have argued, Franz Rosenzweig was committed to systematic thought and developed in *The Star of Redemption* a highly structured philosophical theology. I argue here that Rosenzweig's thought has affinities with contemporary systems theory. While being systematic is not the same as using systems theoretic ideas, systematicity in any domain of knowledge invariably requires general ideas that are applicable to different phenomena. Such ideas are the core of systems theory, characterized by

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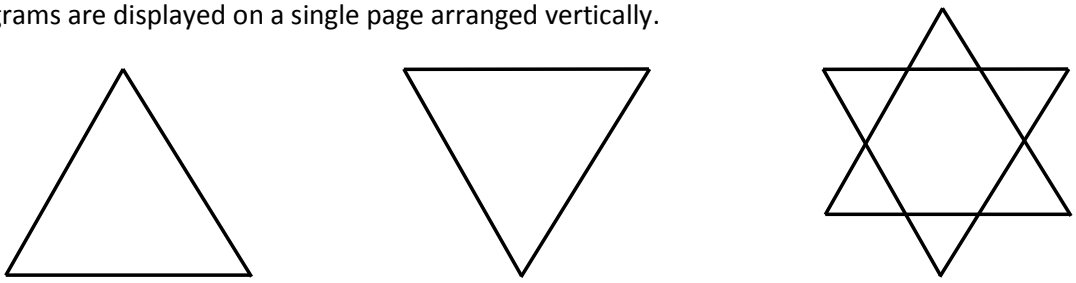
Bunge (1973) as an attempt to construct an "exact and scientific metaphysics." The *Star* makes use of many such ideas. Its intellectual affinity with systems concepts makes it contemporaneous, and also illustrates the connection between systems thought and major traditions in philosophy.

I will present the systems ideas that I find salient in the *Star* via extensive use of diagrams. Diagrams are ubiquitous in the systems literature, and using them to discuss the *Star* raises the question: what is the role of diagrams in philosophy and theology? This question has a certain timeliness in its connection to the new interest in diagrams in Kabbalah studies. The many diagrams that exist in the Kabbalistic literature, originally devalued by Scholem and his early followers, are now a focus of study. But the situation with Rosenzweig is quite the opposite. While Rosenzweig's thought is highly architectonic, he did not present in the *Star* any diagrams beyond the absolutely necessary minimum, namely a triangle of his three elements, a triangle of his three relations, and the Magen David hexad which links these triangles together, shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Diagrams in the *Star*

Each of these three diagrams introduces a part of the book; at the beginning of the book all three diagrams are displayed on a single page arranged vertically.



(a) **PART ONE**
THE ELEMENTS
or
THE EVERLASTING
PRIMORDIAL WORLD

(b) **PART TWO**
THE PATH
or
THE EVER RENEWED
WORLD

(c) **PART THREE**
THE CONFIGURATION
or
THE ETERNAL SUPRA-
WORLD

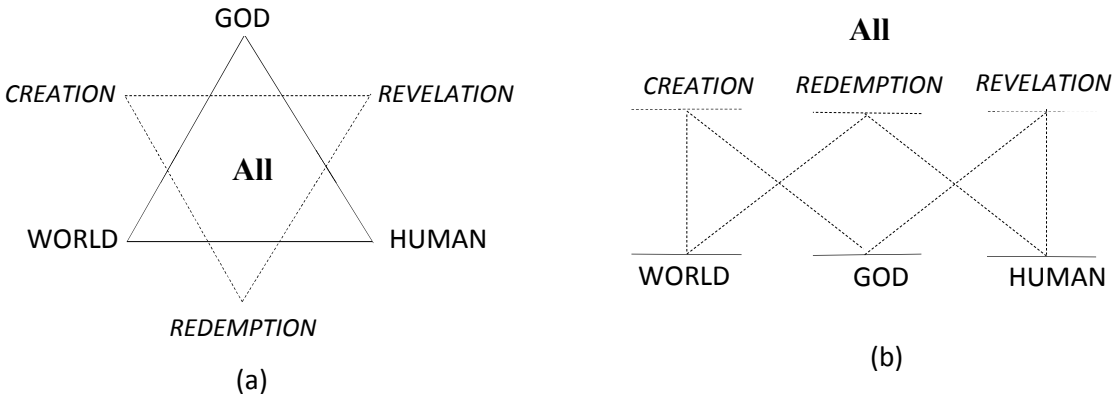
I will introduce more diagrams, and one might ask what diagrams can add to our understanding of the *Star*. My answer is that diagrams are complementary to narrative. Diagrams offer an instantaneous representation of a "whole," while narrative, like music, can convey a whole only in time. The diagrams I will introduce and the systems theoretic discourse that will explain them also suggest a slightly different view of Rosenzweig's ideas, and perhaps even a modification of them. And a systems interpretation of the *Star* is a contribution also to systems thought.

2. System

2.1 Elements and relations

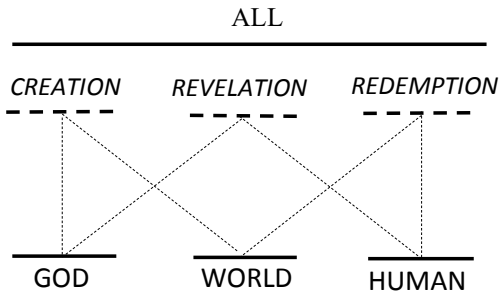
Figure 2(a) shows Rosenzweig's star. Figure 2(b) shows how a systems theorist would represent it. A "system" is defined as a set of elements and of relations that link the elements. Rosenzweig's star is obviously an example. His system is the All. But, to be clear, totalism is a feature of German Idealism, *not* of the systems theoretic perspective. Rosenzweig takes on, as Pollock (2009) has argued, the "systematic task of philosophy" which was the ambition of German Idealism. The systems perspective, however, is aimed at describing "wholes," namely systems, which typically do *not* embrace everything because they have environments. On the other hand, a common aspiration of systems thought is to achieve a "crude look at the whole" (Gell-Mann 1994), and this is certainly in the spirit of systematic philosophy.

Figure 2 Two representations of Rosenzweig's star
(a) The conventional Davidic hexad; (b) a synchronic systems-theoretic representation



In Figure 2(b) Redemption is placed in between Creation and Revelation to facilitate placing God centrally, analogous to its central position in Rosenzweig's star. This representation is synchronic. A systems representation of a diachronic view is shown in Figure 3. Reading from left to right, the temporal order of elements is God, World, and Human; the temporal order of relations is Creation, Revelation, and Redemption. All this is from the Human perspective in which God, World, and Human are at least partially taken as "equal" elements.

Figure 3 A diachronic systems representation of the star

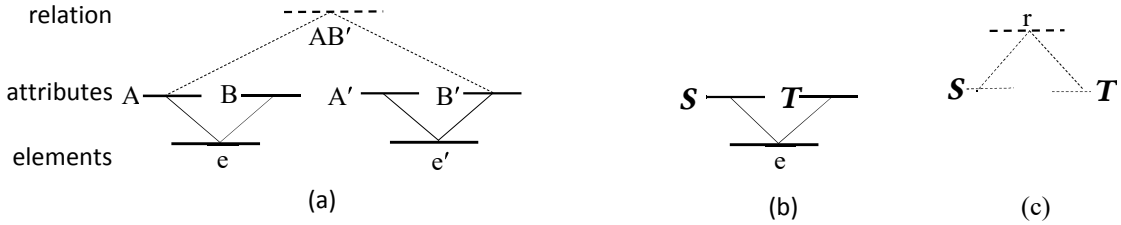


This view of diachronics depicts the *completion* of the All, but for Rosenzweig diachronics proceeds in stages and completion is only anticipated. A systems theoretic representation of these stages is shown below, but this representation requires an augmented definition of "system."

2.2 Attributes

A more complete notion of "system" reflects the idea that elements do not relate *directly* to one another. They are linked by relations via *attributes* (Hall & Fagen 1956), where attributes belong either to the elements or to the relations or, in the most general sense, to both, although most commonly attributes are viewed as belonging to elements. So a full definition of "system" is a set of elements, attributes, and relations. This is illustrated by Figure 4(a), in which relation AB′ links elements e and e′ via their attributes, A and B′ respectively.

Figure 4 Adding attributes to elements and relations
(a) Attributes mediate between elements and relations; (b) each of Rosenzweig's elements has attributes ***S*** (*Sache*, substance) and ***T*** (*Tat*, act); (c) relations can also bind together attributes

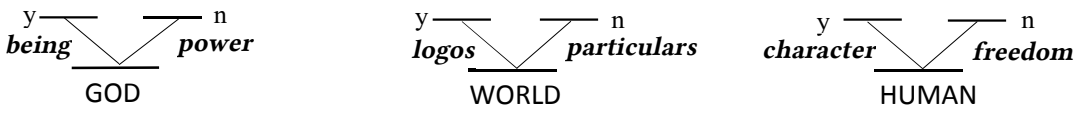


Rosenzweig's elements have attributes, namely ***Sache***, substance, and ***Tat***, act, shown in Figure 4(b), also called 'Yes' and 'No,' respectively. This pair of attributes resembles the system-theoretic duality of structure and function or being and behaving (Gerard 1958) or essence and exchange (duCoudray 2011). The element itself is an 'And' that binds the two attributes together. An element with its attributes is ***Tatsache***, fact. Since attributes can also belong to relations, as shown in Figure 4(c), a relation with its attributes is also fact.

One might consider an attribute carried by elements or relations alone as potential, becoming actual only when carried by both, when elements are linked by relations. And what is merely potential might be viewed as inherently unstable, susceptible to dissolution into Nothing. These last two ideas are Rosenzweig's, not notions found in the systems theory literature.

All three of Rosenzweig's elements have these same two generic attributes, but what constitutes substance and act for each element is different. The attributes of the elements in isolation (the primordial condition) are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5 Attributes of Rosenzweig's elements in isolation
For each element, y (yes) and n (no) are *Sache* (substance) and *Tat* (act).

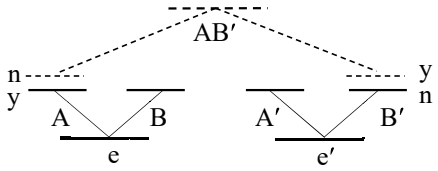


2.3 Incompleteness, inconsistency, reversal

If attributes are carried by both elements and relations, the possibility arises of elements having attributes that are not involved in any relation, or of relations having attributes that are not shared by any element. Earlier, this condition was referred to as the attribute being only potential and not actual; I will refer now to the absence of actualization as "incompleteness." There is also the possibility of mismatch between the value of the attribute called for by the relation and the value it has for the element; I refer to this as "inconsistency."

Incompleteness and inconsistency are illustrated in Figure 6. Incompleteness manifests in attributes B and A′ not being involved in any relation. Inconsistency manifests in the mismatch between the value of attribute, A, carried by element, e, and its value carried by relation, AB′ -- the differing values are Yes and No; and similarly for the two values of B′.

Figure 6 Attribute incompleteness, and inconsistency or reversal



The standard illustration of such a mismatch is "a round peg in a square hole." Mismatches like this were considered in Gestalt psychology (Angyal 1939) which contributed to the development of systems theory. Rosenzweig's idea that attribute reversals are required for elements to enter into relations can be represented *in the same way* as gestalt mismatches: the inconsistent values of attributes A and B′ in Figure 6 can be interpreted as reversals of these two attributes upon entering into the AB′ relation. If, as suggested below, reversal is supplementation rather than replacement, inconsistency is accommodated. But incompleteness can be neutralized only through diachronics. "Incompleteness in being engenders becoming" (Zwick 1984).

3. Diachronics

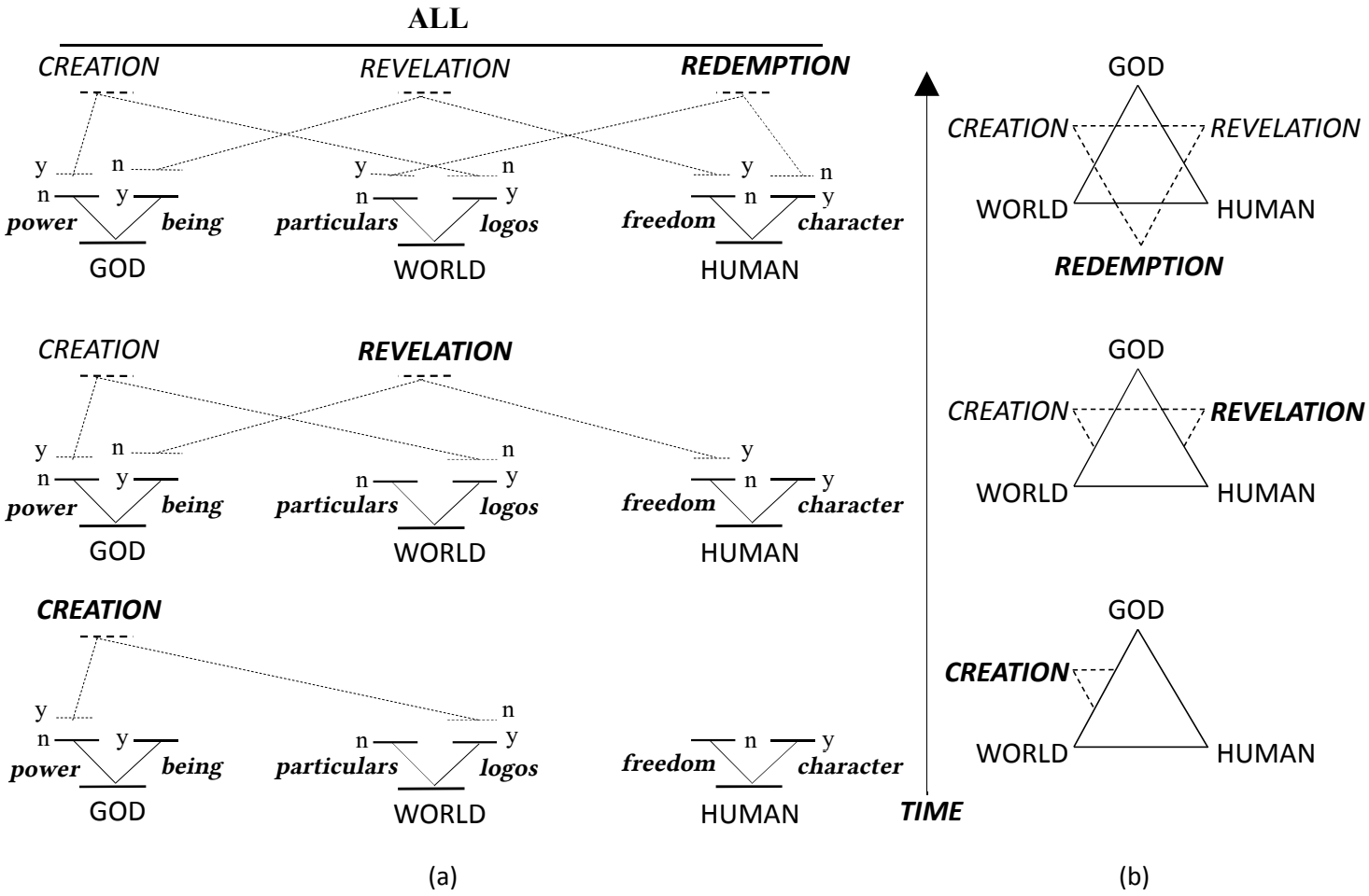
3.1 Creation, Revelation, Redemption

With this expanded triadic notion of "system" the diachronics of the *Star* can be given a systems theoretic representation. The reversals which allow elements to come into relation resolve their primordial incompleteness. This is shown in Figure 7. First the incompleteness of God's attribute of power and World's attribute of logos are resolved by reversals that relate God and World. Power, the No for God as isolated, becomes Yes for God as creator; logos, the Yes for World as isolated becomes No for World as created. This leaves the being attribute of God and the particulars attribute of World uninvolved in any relation. The non-involvement of the Human element in any relations at all is an even more extreme manifestation of incompleteness.

Creation is supplemented by Revelation, which connects God and Human. Infinite being of God reverses from Yes to No, and freedom of the Human reverses from No to Yes. After Revelation, then, both attributes of God have reversed, and their potentials are realized. But the binding of these two attributes that was previously accomplished by an 'And' internal to God is disrupted, so the gain of completeness in God's two attributes is diminished by their loss of unity.

Figure 7 Diachronics of Redemption

After Creation and Revelation, Redemption finally remedies incompleteness and achieves the All.



Moreover, World and Human are still incomplete, since each has an attribute that is not involved in any relation. The system can thus still unravel. Finally, in Redemption, character of Human reverses from Yes to No and particulars of World reverse from No to Yes, allowing Human and World to enter into relation. With the addition of this relation, the unity of God's attributes is +also regained, albeit indirectly. With Redemption, incompleteness has been fully remedied. The three elements have entered into relations with one other, the two attributes of each of these elements have become actual, the triad of elements and the triad of relations are locked together, and a stable system of the All has been generated.

If one views reversals as *replacements* of primordial polarities as opposed to *supplementations*, then for all three elements, the binding of ***Sache*** and ***Tat*** originally endogenous when the elements were isolated is now fully exogenous. This is consistent with the doctrine of holism that characterizes Idealism, in which everything is what it is by virtue of its participation in a larger whole. But from the perspective of systems theory, it is one thing to say that elements are

constituted not only internally but also externally; it is quite another thing to hold that elements are constituted *solely* by external relations.

But exogenous binding might be *in addition to* endogenous binding, with attributes of the elements bound together not only indirectly and externally by the relations that link the elements, but also directly and internally by the And of elements taken as isolated. Figure 7 adopts this perspective, showing reversals as supplementation, not replacement: dual lines for attributes indicate their binding both below by elements and above by relations. This may offer a reinterpretation or modification of Rosenzweig's system. Or, perhaps supplementation and not replacement is what Rosenzweig actually intended. Romanticism – which has been said to color Rosenzweig's thought -- often affirmed that "A given quality is potentially, then actually, its opposite, without ceasing to be what it was at first" (Rubinstein 1999).

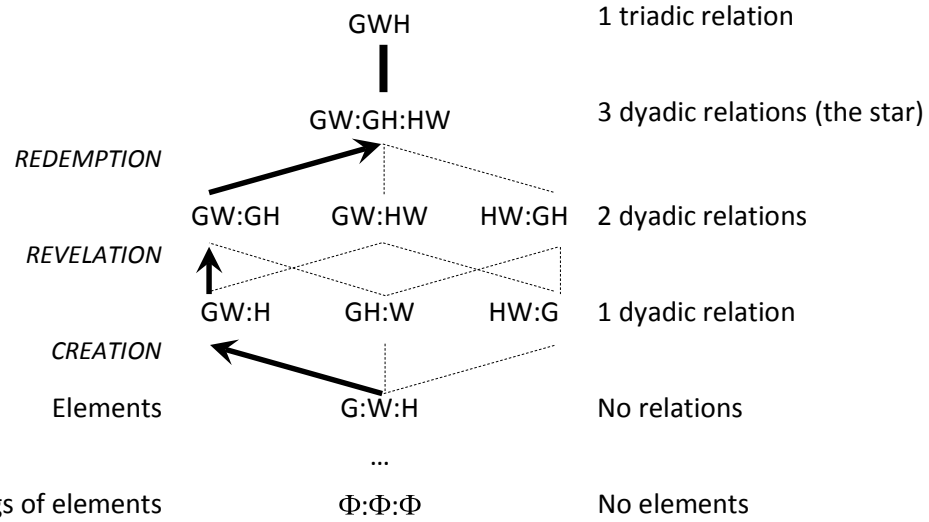
One might add: in this view, not only are elements with their attributes facts, and relations with their attributes likewise facts, but attributes with their dual values are also facts. Each attribute is an And that unites its Yes and No values, this duality not being a mismatch or an inconsistency.

3.2 Diachronic ascent

The structure of the system changes as each relation is sequentially added to the elements. Systems-theoretically, the set of possible structures for any system defines a Lattice of Structures (Krippendorff 1986), and the lattice for Rosenzweig's three elements is shown in Table 1. The lattice spans the range from unity at the top, GWH, to the multiplicity of isolated elements near the bottom, G:W:H, to the ultimate bottom consisting of the triad of Nothings, Φ:Φ:Φ, from which the elements emerge. GWH embodies the maximum unity or integration that this system of three elements can have. G:W:H embodies the maximum multiplicity or differentiation that it can have.

Table 1 Ascent towards unity

The relations of Creation, Revelation, and Redemption characterize the directed path shown with arrows. Structures in-between G:W:H and Φ:Φ:Φ, indicated by ellipsis, are not shown.



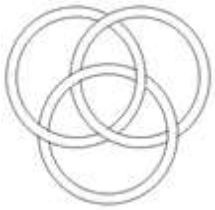
Diachronics of the star, i.e., generation of the All, is thus an ascent up the Lattice of Structures. The upward process begins with G:W:H, a structure that means that God, World, and Human, having emerged from their Nothings, are unrelated. With Creation there is a transition to GW:H, where God and World are related but Human is still isolated. Revelation adds the GH relation to give the structure GW:GH. Finally, Redemption adds HW to yield the structure GW:GH:HW, which represents Rosenzweig's One and All. Only this structure of three dyads is immune to the danger of falling back into Nothing, because all the elements are involved in two relations which actualize their attributes.

3.3 Beyond experience

GW:GH:HW, which consists of three dyads, is not, however, the top of the lattice. Above it is GWH, an inherently *triadic* relation involving God, World, and Human that encompasses but exceeds the dyadic relations of Creation, Revelation, and Redemption (Figure 8). Such a triadic relation is implicit in Rosenzweig's account. In completion of the All with the relation of Redemption, in which Human acts on World, Redemption is experienced not only by World and Human, but also – and especially – by God, so Redemption is not simply a dyadic relation between Human and World. Also, Revelation is the promise of Creation realized and of Redemption anticipated, so all three elements are here also involved. In these complexities in Rosenzweig's account, there is evidence that he conceives of the All as not merely the "sum" of three dyadic relations but rather as the triadic relation, GWH.

Figure 8 GWH as Borromean rings

GWH as a non-decomposable triad. "A triple stranded cord is not easily broken."

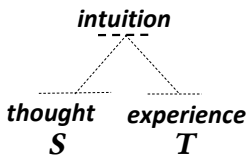


In fact, Rosenzweig recognizes that experiencing Creation, Revelation, and Redemption still does not afford a grasp of the highest unity of the whole. Such a grasp would need to be at the level of GWH. In Part III of the *Star*, Rosenzweig asserts that such knowledge is finally gained by intuition. This intuition is mystical, and is a third kind of knowledge made possible by the preceding non-mystical labor of thought and experience. The three stages in ascent to knowledge of the All are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Stages of knowledge of the All

Knowledge of the All is gained via thought, then experience, then intuition. There is a level transcending GWH beyond human knowledge (although Rosenzweig writes about it), namely the encompassing and unitary **G** (as opposed to the G that is equal, in the Human-centered view, to other elements).

G		*The Star*
GWH	intuition	Part III
GW:GH:HW	experience	Part II
G:W:H	thought	Part I
Φ:Φ:Φ		



Thought and experience take knowledge of the All up to the three interlocked dyads represented by the star. Knowledge of the deepest unity of the All, the triadic GWH, is gained only by intuition, which is the And that integrates thought and experience.

There is yet another transformation, from time to eternity: GWH becomes **G**, and the All is simply God. Rosenzweig writes, "In the redemption of the world through the human being and of the human being in the world, God redeems Himself. Human being and world disappear in redemption. God, however, completes himself."

Acknowledgement

This paper draws extensively from Pollock's *Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy* (2009), which made Rosenzweig's thought accessible to the author and inspired this study.

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