

crime, where Jews could be victims or victimizers. Chapter 6 analyzes daily life through entertainment and social and family events, such as dances, banquets, or picnics. These activities provide a very eloquent image of some of the forces that organized Jewish social life: gender, generation, and class. Halfway between public and private spheres, these activities were the places where women found a more public role, different generations showed their conflicting interests, and social classes contrasted sharply. Finally, the last chapter studies the trajectories of eight different public individuals of the period, including journalists, writers, political activists, an artist, and a powerful cultural entrepreneur. Some of them were well known inside and outside Jewish circles, while others only within Jewish life. Without pretending to be representative of the whole, this selection provides an entrée to understanding the conditions of integration and personal and professional development, which, at least potentially, immigrants and first-generation Jews encountered.

The interest that Mollie Lewis Nowen's book has for the field of Jewish studies in general, and Latin American Jewish studies in particular, lies both in its theoretical approach and the empirical material used for the analysis. The book presents actors, spaces, and practices not assessed by previous works, and in so doing, it shows us a fundamental and unknown facet of Jewish life not only in Argentina, but also in the wider global Jewish Diaspora.

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Benjamin Pollock. *Franz Rosenzweig's Conversions: World Denial and World Redemption*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014. 265 pp.  
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Benjamin Pollock's *Franz Rosenzweig's Conversions* revisits and revises our understanding of a legend central to modern Jewish thought: the all-night conversation in Leipzig (*Leipziger Nachtgespräch*) among Franz Rosenzweig, Eugen Rosenstock, and Rudolf Ehrenberg. On July 7, 1913, so we have believed for decades, Rosenstock and Ehrenberg convinced Rosenzweig of the groundlessness of his academic agnosticism and relativism, persuading him to convert to Christianity and setting the stage for his return to Judaism later in October 1913. According to Pollock, however, archival evidence suggests that the conversion that occurred during the *Leipziger Nachtgespräch* in reality led Rosenzweig from a world-denying theology (a position, in other words, based on faith, not reason) to a theology in which the world assumes a central role in redemption. At stake in works like *Star of Redemption* (1921) is not a choice between reason and faith, but rather the "moral and spiritual status of the world" (216). Pollock's main contention is thus that we can understand Rosenzweig's thought as "the most compelling metaphysical alternative to Gnostic dualism," as a system that

resolves the tension between self and world through “dialectical development rather than static opposition” (11).

The book’s significance for Rosenzweig studies and Jewish thought is multifaceted and undeniable. Its first major contribution lies in the new picture Pollock paints of the intellectual and biographical framework in which the *Leipziger Nachtgespräch* took place, which he achieves by reconstructing the mindset that Rosenzweig brought to the 1913 conversation: one not of philosophical relativism, but rather one akin to the early Christian Gnostic Marcion (c. 85–160). Marcion distinguished between the inferior Hebrew God, creator and ruler of our world, and the true God of “love, mercy, and goodness” revealed by Christ, who shows “the way to a new, blessed kingdom not of this world” (18, 19). A set of unpublished texts (including Ehrenberg’s play *Halbhunderttag*, Rosenzweig’s cycle of sonnets “Shechina,” and his 1910 letter on “Young Hegel”) suggest that by 1913 Rosenzweig too believed in an equally radical theology, according to which the self can achieve a pure relationship with the true God only through death as the negation of her existence in our fallen world. Contextualizing the *Leipziger Nachtgespräch* with the book that sparked it (Selma Lagerlöf’s *Antikris mirakler* [1897]), Pollock demonstrates that the conversation revealed to Rosenzweig the unity of God (“God created the world and [is] not just the God of revelation”), how the world can serve as the stage of redemption, on which the soul’s love for God is actualized through “the forging of a loving community with others in the world,” and, hence, that it is on earth that Christians can achieve the Kingdom of God (19, 79). The story that *Franz Rosenzweig’s Conversions* tells is not just novel and compelling, but also a welcome indication that there is still much primary material related to Rosenzweig to be fruitfully explored by scholars.

The second contribution of *Franz Rosenzweig’s Conversion* resides in its reframing of Rosenzweig’s return to Judaism in the aftermath of the *Leipziger Nachtgespräch*. Despite the intensity of the existential (even suicidal) abyss into which the initial conversation plunged Rosenzweig, it seems unlikely, given the evidence, that Rosenzweig underwent a life-changing faith experience in Berlin during Yom Kippur in October 1913. Instead, Rosenzweig’s conversion back to Judaism was much more “a conclusion reached through thought,” a radical, contemplative consequence of a struggle with Marcionism that continued even after the *Leipziger Nachtgespräch* (99). Pollock thus presents the logic of Rosenzweig’s return to Judaism as an experience less of faith and more of hope, oriented toward a redemption that Christians and Jews collectively work to realize within history. To remain a Jew, Rosenzweig realized in the aftermath of Leipzig, is necessary because it reminds Christians of the difference between having faith and actually achieving the Kingdom of God on earth, and thus warns them of the ever-present “risk of falling back into Marcionism” (110). While interpreters have often drawn piecemeal on Rosenzweig’s early work to illuminate his mature thought, Pollock renders legible the essentiality of the former for the latter, by charting not just the ruptures, but also the continuities of Rosenzweig’s intellectual biography.

The final major contribution of *Franz Rosenzweig’s Conversions* resides in reinterpreting the *Star* as the culmination of a debate catalyzed by the *Leipziger Nachtgespräch*. Alongside clearing up a number of exegetical impasses in the

work, the book's final chapter shows how the threat of forgetting the world underpins the redemptive roles Rosenzweig ascribes to Christianity and Judaism: Christianity advancing toward the Kingdom of God, Judaism orienting Christianity, by admonishing that redemption still lies in the future. Hence, that the *Star* invokes Marcionism is not its philosophical shortcoming, but rather, as Pollock's final chapter shows, a sign that Rosenzweig presents us with a system, which, on the one hand, makes the soul and world dialectically interdependent until redemption and, on the other hand, in which the "created truth" depends on "human affirmation" and in which "the path to redemption is the path along which we actualize our creatureliness" (214). Rosenzweig's harmonious reconciliation of world and self in his life and thought thus makes, as the epilogue contends, for "good thinking" and, potentially, "good life" (219). Given Pollock's rearrangement of Rosenzweig's intellectual biography, it seems all the more incumbent on Rosenzweig scholars to find an answer to the question of whether and how Rosenzweig's life and thought can orient us ethically and morally in the present.

Indeed, Pollock's revised narrative raises a handful of salient questions for future scholarship. What, for instance, is the effect of literature on Rosenzweig beyond just plot structure in works such as *Antikristis mirakler*, *Halbhunderttag*, and "Shechina," not to mention the works of Goethe and Schiller to which the *Star* often refers? How do the aesthetics of expression play into Rosenzweig's thinking, itself already so concerned with the structure of language and its effect in the world? If Rosenstock was in fact oblivious to "the impression he was making on Rosenzweig" in 1913, what then are we to make in practice of redemptive love as a theoretically dialogic and reciprocal phenomenon (76)? Such questions are prompted by Pollock's argument and are fertile ground for further conversation.

Perhaps the most pressing implications of *Franz Rosenzweig's Conversions* can thus be found not just in the novel story it tells of Rosenzweig's intellectual development, but in the myriad questions that such novelty allows us to ask of a larger historiography of modern Jewish thought in Germany. Pollock provides, as he writes in the epilogue, "a coherent story" of how Rosenzweig worked through metaphysical questions in both his life and thought (219). Not despite, but because of such coherence, we may ask ourselves what function the *Leipziger Nachtgespräch* legend plays in accounts of renaissance and renewal, of returns from reason to faith in a modern and, supposedly, secular age. What identities, histories, and legacies of Jewish thought in Germany did the legend initially enable postwar intellectuals to construct and continue? And what story of modern German Jewish intellectual history are we now able to tell? In the end, *Franz Rosenzweig's Conversions* shows us that there is still much work to be done in this world on Rosenzweig and modern Jewish thought—a sentiment that certainly would have pleased Rosenzweig himself.

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