

Identity Dialogically Constructed

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Preface

In this collection of articles, I have brought together various texts that articulate my point of view on a range of subjects that all deal with identity and communication, mostly in religious existence. Several of the articles were published previously and have been reworked and enlarged in view of the present edition. Two of the chapters were originally written in Hebrew and appear here for the first time in English. Two chapters contain original contributions for this volume.

The first chapter, written especially for this publication, contains my view on the problem of religion and the necessity of a “trans-different,” dialogical attitude that celebrates both specificity and plurality, yet, at the same time, also urges cooperation between differing religious ways of life. The second article was originally written for a Festschrift in honor of Hamburg theologian Professor Wolfgang Grünberg on the occasion of his seventieth birthday.¹ It deals with the life-long task of constructing religious identity, a task that I consider to be necessarily dialogical.

The third chapter analyses the essay “Love and Wisdom” of the Christian dialogical thinker Franz Fischer. I compare his thoughts with those of Jewish dialogical philosophers, indicating that Jews and Christians participate in the same dialogical mode of thought. The chapter appeared previously under the title “Fischer’s Essay ‘Love and Wisdom’ in Light of Jewish Dialogical Thought,” in *Die Bildung von Gewissen und Verantwortung – Zur Philosophie und Pädagogik Franz Fischers* (Franz Fischer Jahrbücher).² Chapter 4 “Towards ‘Profligative’ Philosophy and ‘Proligion’ with Fischer and Buber” continues the

¹ Ephraim Meir, “I – You. Constructing Religious Identity,” in *Theologie der Stadt* (Kirche in der Stadt. Band 17), eds. C. Bingel e.a. (Berlin: EBVerlag, 2010), 140-144.

² Meir, “Fischer’s Essay ‘Love and Wisdom’ in Light of Jewish Dialogical Thought,” in *Die Bildung von Gewissen und Verantwortung – Zur Philosophie und Pädagogik Franz Fischers* (Franz Fischer Jahrbücher) (Norderstedt and Leipzig: Anne Fischer Verlag and Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2010), 226-245.

comparison between Fischer and Jewish thought, more specifically that of Buber. In this text, published here for the first time, I propose a radical dialogical philosophy and a new way of looking at religion, in the footsteps of Franz Fischer and Martin Buber.

Chapter 5 “Janusz Korczak’s Care for the Little Ones in Light of Jewish Tradition” was originally a foreword for Monika Kaminska’s doctoral dissertation, published under the title *Dialogische Pädagogik und die Beziehung zum Anderen. Martin Buber und Janusz Korczak im Lichte der Philosophie von Emmanuel Levinas*.³ This essay presents Kaminska’s approach, which situates the Polish-Jewish pedagogue in a longstanding Jewish tradition and brings Korczak’s thoughts in the proximity of Levinas’s ethical metaphysics. Care for the other and respect for the mystery of the child and for the children’s otherness characterized Korczak’s life.

The next chapter, “On Hasidism as Dialogical Existence that Hallows Daily Life,” appeared previously in the re-edited Hebrew translation of Buber’s “For the Sake of Heaven,” published by Yediot Aharonot and Sifre Hemed.⁴ It situates the Hasidic chronicle “Gog und Magog” within Buber’s dialogical thought that was eminently expressed in his “I and Thou.” It shows the extraordinary ability of Buber to present Hasidism as a source of inspiration for Jews and non-Jews alike.

Chapter 7, entitled “On a New Age in Democracy as Part of the Holocaust Memory,” appeared first as a review of Shmuel Trigano’s *The Democratic Ideal and the Shoah* in the Website *Scholars for Peace in the Middle East* (SPME).⁵ It discusses the book of this French-Jewish

³ Meir, foreword to *Dialogische Pädagogik und die Beziehung zum Anderen. Martin Buber und Janusz Korczak im Lichte der Philosophie von Emmanuel Levinas* (Jüdische Bildungsgeschichte in Deutschland 9), by Monika Kaminska (Münster: Waxmann, 2010), 9-16.

⁴ Meir, “On Hasidism as Dialogical Existence that Hallows Daily Life,” (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Sifre Hemed, 2007), 287-303.

⁵ Meir, “On a New Age in Democracy as Part of the Holocaust Memory,” review of *The Democratic Ideal and the Shoah*, by Shmuel Trigano, September 14, 2010, *Scholars*

scholar, for whom the formation of what I call an “active memory” of the Shoa implies a critical reflection on democracy as well as the necessity of thinking the concrete and the particular.

Chapter 8 appeared in the second volume of the Rosenzweig *Jahrbücher*.⁶ It is a memorial that I include here because Professor Rivka Horwitz was an eminent Jewish scholar and a warm personality, to whom I was closely connected and with whom I frequently studied. I had the privilege of discussing with her, in her Jerusalem home, a variety of Jewish thinkers as well as many themes that are crucial in modern Jewish thought. She loved Judaism and situated Jewish thinkers in the larger context of the *Zeitgeist*.

The last chapter “How to Think Death from Time and not Time from Death” appeared as a foreword in the Hebrew translation of Emmanuel Levinas’s *Death and Time*.⁷ It presents Levinas’s original thoughts on time in a nutshell; these philosophical thoughts are universal yet bear the traces of a particular, Jewish thinking.

It is my hope that the essays assembled here will stimulate the reader to reflect upon his/her own religious existence and identity, and to put him or herself in permanent dialogue with those who belong to other religious traditions. All the essays highlight one fundamental idea: that the same and the other, identity and communicative, inclusive thinking, specificity and universality, belong inseparably together.

for Peace in the Middle East (SPME), <http://www.spme.net/cgi-bin/articles.cgi?ID=7168>.

⁶ Meir, “Rivka Horwitz of Blessed Memory,” in *Rosenzweig Jahrbücher* (Freiburg-Munich: Karl Alber, 2007), 263-267.

⁷ Meir, “How to Think Death from Time and not Time from Death,” foreword to *Death and Time*, by Emmanuel Levinas (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2007), 7-13.