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Abstract:

**Dialogical Education and the Importance of Time (of the Moment) in Franz Rosenzweig's Writings: "The Star of Redemption" and "Of *Bildung* there is no End".**

In the 21 century, we are permanently confronted with the unforeseen and unexpected; the current pandemic, the effects of climate change, the barbarism of war and terrorism, waves of refugees, and with the suffering of people.

This raises the question whether accomplishment or adjustment to terms through a systematic and knowledge-oriented mode of thinking is sufficient to cope with these challenges. Keeping this question in mind, I would like to present a few reflections on modes of thinking about the importance of time and the living moment in a dialogical and educational context. My particular focus will be on the time (events) in Judaism and Jewish dialogical education (as explained in Rosenzweig's essay "Of *Bildung* there is no End" (transl. by Michael Zank<sup>1</sup>). My presentation will focus on a basic category in Rosenzweig's educational thoughts:

To Franz Rosenzweig, an openness or a state of being ready for the unexpected, for that which is alive, is of great importance. Above all, being ready also means holding back on plans and planning.

In his essay "Of *Bildung* there is no End" Rosenzweig makes his case for the openness that each moment/instant of learning entails and for the place of the living (speaking) word in Jewish education. He tried to escape the scientific approach and above all the university practice of "churning out books", because the written word represents a closed mental process and is therefore merely an object of consideration. According to Rosenzweig, such a mental process is not oriented towards questions, but only towards finding answers.

Rosenzweig's pedagogical thought can be used to briefly summarize the main ideas encompassing his pedagogical concept of studying Biblical texts. He mainly focused on the study of Biblical texts in the context of both dialogical and individual learning, thinking, and acquiring knowledge:

Jewish scholarship (*Wissenschaft*). This concept already indicates the relevance of non-dogmatic and individual learning and its significance for grounding this implicit contrast between academic cultures and lived (informal) learning experience. To ensure this method was applied, lecturers – the group of teachers coming from a variety of religious traditions and predominantly chosen because they possessed particular personal qualities - were expected to have little expert knowledge about a topic.

Like Franz Rosenzweig, the Jewish-French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas challenged the primacy of the epistemological approach and analytical conceptual thinking in the Western European tradition. In his writings (after Shoah) Levinas opposed the purely cognitive thinking which allowed people to be viewed as objects of knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> In: Michael Zank, Franz Rosenzweig, the 1920s and the <email> moment of textual reasoning, in: Petr Ochs and Nancy Levene (Ed.). Textual reasoning's", SCM Press, London 2002.

Levinas therefore attempted to supplement Western European philosophical concepts and their a priori philosophical thinking with wisdom, namely that of the Talmudic teaching tradition by contrasting Othering relationships (the face-to-face relation) that always elude the philosophical concept, the idea of the penetrating scientific approach to the world, to the interpretation.

“It may be possible, however, to oppose to knowledge preceding engagement something other than innocent doing, childlike and beautiful like generosity itself, something other than in the sense of pure *praxis*. For the latter cuts through Gordian knots (nots) instead of untying them and is contemptuous of the information with which the European tempted by temptation, simultaneously an adventurer and man living in supreme security, wants to surround himself. This European is certain at least of his retreat (Reflection) as subject into his extraterritorial subjectivity, certain of his separation with respect to any other, and thus assured of kind of irresponsibility toward the All.”<sup>2</sup>

The dialogical learning process and the process of teaching (in the sense of “relation to the Other”) hold a special importance in Judaism and could serve to complete the education of both Jewish and non-Jewish youth in Western Europe.

In this dialogical relationship, humans are obligated to listen and to respond. There is no time to plan or to contemplate this, it happens - here and now. Such an obligation has an ethical dimension, which according to Levinas takes on special significance in the light of the Shoah (the Holocaust): it is about the human obligation to respond to the Other and to strangers; about human responsibility in relation to the Other<sup>3</sup>.

Levinas tells us that the relationship with the Other requires us to open and renew our perception because the Other is absolutely different and cannot be comprehended.

Such an interpretation is never interested in the purpose, the perception, the meaning of a response; on the contrary, you can say that it exemplifies a thinking geared towards the question, an attitude of questioning reflection. This open “questioning”, which is not oriented towards a certain response, is an activity that is not interested in the object but primarily in the human being who is asking and speaking.

The questioning attitude does not aim at a specific state of knowledge, but at the concept that refuses conceptuality. To that extent, basic educational mindsets are an opening, in “egression from oneself” (Lévinas), to disengage from egoism, from selfish interest. The principal concern is to refrain of harming other humans.

For Levinas, the relationship with the “Other” is first and foremost one’s connection with a face, with another human being. We gain access to the Other in an ethical relationship via its face that is secret, not through analytically conceptual perception.

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2 Emmanuel Levinas. *Nine Talmudic Readings*. Indiana University Press. 2019. P.36.

3 Cp. Emmanuel Levinas: *Vom Sein zum Seienden*, Freiburg 1997

## Trans-difference

Ephraim Meir describes another concept for a dialogical attitude of openness in his philosophical writings<sup>4</sup>: His approach is that of "trans-difference" in the context of interreligious dialogue (dialogue between world religions).

Meir argued that “with all our similarities, we are different and the differences between us are the condition itself for interreligious encounters and cooperation. If we were all the same, dialogue would be meaningless. There are major differences, which make a “trans-different” attitude possible. With respect for differences, cooperating and bridging between worlds become possible.”

Meir suggested that<sup>5</sup>: “I maintain before any identity, before I am I, before I construct my own self, before any self-assertion, I am called to a life with others. Before shaping identity, identity is shaped. Consequently, the lesser his ego precludes the possibilities of the other, the greater the uniqueness of a person. The closeness to the other, the solidarity with him in an active life, makes up my uniqueness.”

Meir thus focuses on the interpretation of the subject “as being visited by otherness” and states, “or better: approach the self as elected to relate and care.”

According to Meir, attention to the specificity of the Other and living the otherness of the other in the self is the kernel of one's subjectivity or higher identity.

“One is not simply equal or identical to himself. Along the same lines, I reinterpret collective /religious identity as hospitality through a dialogically oriented hermeneutics.”

Moreover, Meir shares the views of Rosenzweig and Levinas on dialogical teaching and learning.

In his book "The Rosenzweig Lehrhaus"<sup>6</sup> Meir expresses a polemical position on analytical and knowledge-oriented teaching and learning: “Jewish teaching is lived and experienced; it is not a matter of cognitive contents. The message of the *Star*<sup>7</sup> That truth has to be made true. Experience of revelation as love takes priority over knowledge. Objective knowledge is on a lesser plan than subjective acknowledging, in which knowledge finds its proper context”<sup>8</sup> Thus, my comments and statements, too, are guided by the basic ideas which are presented by Rosenzweig in his essay “Of Bildung there is no End”<sup>9</sup> and “The Star of Redemption”<sup>10</sup>.

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4 Ephraim Meir: Identity, Self-Transcendence and Trans-Difference. Lecture University of Hamburg, 2011.

5 Ephraim Meir: Dialogical Thought and Identity. Trans-Different Religiosity in Present Day Societies. Publishing House De Gruyter. 2014.

6 Ephraim Meir, The Rosenzweig Lehrhaus: Proposal for a Jewish House of Study in Kassel inspired by Franz Rosenzweig's Frankfurt Lehrhaus. Bar Ilan University, Faculty of Jewish Studies. The Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research and Strengthening Jewish Vitality. 2005, P.37.

7 Franz Rosenzweig. Star of Redemption"

8 Ibd. Ephraim Meir.

9 Michael Zank explains in his comment to his English translation of Rosenzweig's text this title in a following way: “Rosenzweig wrote “Bildung und kein Ende” (the title is a pun on Ecclesiastes 12, 12, “Of making many books there is no end”.

10 Franz Rosenzweig “The star of redemption “(trans. By Barbara E. Galli), the university of Wisconsin Press, 2005.

However, I would also like to outline Rosenzweig's thoughts and very briefly discuss the ideas that another post-Shoah Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, develops in his book "Totality and Infinity"<sup>11</sup> and his essay "The Pact"<sup>12</sup>.

Finally, I would like to outline a contemporary conception of open dialogue by the Jewish philosopher Ephraim Meir with the concept of trans-difference as a complement to Rosenzweig's and Levinas' dialogical philosophy in his writings: "Interreligious Theology"<sup>13</sup> and his lecture "Redeeming Religious"<sup>14</sup>.

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11 Emmanuel Levinas, "Totality and Infinity" Springer Netherlands, 1991.

12 In: Emmanuel Levinas "Beyond the verse. Talmudic readings and lectures" (trans.by Gary D. Mole). *Continuum* London, 2007.

13 Dialogical Thought and Identity. Trans-Different Religiosity in Present Day Societies. Publishing House De Gruyter. 2014.

14 Publishing: in the Rosenzweig Yearbook 12.