



Bar-Ilan University
אוניברסיטת בר-אילן

UNIVERSITÄT LEIPZIG



Multiple Identities

A Cross-Disciplinary, Jewish-Christian Conversation

Wednesday, January 15, 2014

Begin: 1 pm

End: 7 pm

Coffee Break: around 4 pm

Professor Dr. Meni Koslowski, Bar Ilan-University
Department of Psychology
Creating Group Identity

Professor Dr. Ephraim Meir, Bar Ilan-University
Department of Jewish Philosophy
Dialogical Thought and Identity

Rabbi Shabtai A. Rappoport, Bar Ilan-University
Jesselson Institute for Advanced Torah Studies
The DNA of Identity

Professor Dr. Rochus Leonhardt, Universität Leipzig
Differentiating Religious Identities: A Response to F. D. E. Schleiermacher

Professor Dr. Alexander Deeg, Universität Leipzig
Liminality and Christian/Religious Identity

Professor Dr. Dr. Andreas Schuele, Universität Leipzig
Identity Under Discussion: The Case of Early Judaism

Dr. Timotheus Arndt, Universität Leipzig
Between Forsaken and Gathered

Bibliotheca Albertina, Beethovenstraße 6, 04107 Leipzig

Mail: k.backhaus@uni-leipzig.de

Phone: +49 341 9735410

Professor Dr. Meni Koslowski, Bar Ilan-University

Department of Psychology

Creating Group Identity

Ever since Tajfel's major research on social identity pointed out how in-group biases are developed, researchers have focused on antecedents that increase the likelihood of this phenomenon. Although seen as a possible explanation of prejudicial thoughts and behavior and something to be avoided if done for purely subjective reasons such as racial discrimination, there are times when a group or organization wants to create stronger bonds among its members. This may include a military unit, a classroom setting, or an organization that is simply interested in enhancing esprit de corps. What have researchers found to be effective in creating some of the ties that motivate people to want to identify with others who are like them or have similar goals? Investigators have looked at so-called community features that help build identification through focusing members' attention on various group characteristics. In recent research by Ren et al. (2011), the authors reported that fostering communication between group members, especially about group activities and even intergroup competition, created greater group identification. Also, an increase in bond-based attachment, which focuses more on information about activities of individual members, as well as pointing out interpersonal similarity, also was found to have positive effects. These techniques can be applied in different settings and thus providing outsiders an opportunity to become part of the group and letting the insiders feel more pride and identification.

Professor Dr. Ephraim Meir, Bar Ilan-University

Department of Jewish Philosophy

Dialogical Thought and Identity

In my lecture, I discuss the problem of identity as it is treated by Jewish dialogical thinkers, and offer a new view on identity with the help of the terms *self-transcendence*, *self-difference* and *trans-difference*. My position is that dialogue is an integral element of identity itself and that the loftiness of the subject lies in transcending himself and becoming other to himself in the concrete encounter with others.

In discussion with Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Emmanuel Levinas, I outline a novel conception of a selfhood that is grounded in dialogical thought. The self is conceptualized as socially and ethically embedded and engaged in the world. The higher identity of the subject is thus a kind of non-identity, a self that receives and hosts "alterity" and refuses to return to itself. The process of the self which confirms the other is called "self-transcendence". The subject is also other to the other, unique and non-definable. The self is therefore two-sided: it shapes itself and it is shaped by the other. Between the self and the other, "trans-difference" becomes possible. The sublime reality of self-transcendence is possible because of the appeal of the other: before any identity, before the I's self-construction and self-assertion, it is called to a social and ethical life. I interpret the subject as being visited by otherness. "Self-difference" is the crown upon the I; it is the result of a dialogical life, a life of passing to the other. At the same time, a person is always in a concrete culture and tradition, which he both inherits and builds from within himself. The philosophy of identity advanced in my lecture brings the particularity or difference of the self and the difference *in* the self, caused by the other, together.

Higher identity is therefore shaped through recognition of differences and the realization of trans-difference. The notion of "trans-difference" is used in order to come to a new understanding of individual and collective identity and a newly conceived religious identity. I impart my interpretation of other-oriented religiosity as the possibility of developing an inclusive lifestyle, in which "passing" to the other, hospitality and the activity of "translating" are core elements. Differences between religions remain valid, but individual houses do not constitute the whole town. In trans-religious religiosity, one may discover what unites people, what forms the universal dimension in particular religions, and how religious humanism may contribute to other forms of humanism in modern society.

Rabbi Shabtai A. Rappoport, Bar Ilan-University

The Jesselson Advanced Torah Institute, Bar Ilan University, Israel

The DNA of Identity

“And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech” (Gen. XI, 1). Language consists of a limited amount of elements – letters and syllables – that can be combined to express an incredible number of ideas. As long as the whole earth is of “one language and of one speech” all these ideas could be discussed, understood and assimilated by all. The genetic information of all life, stored in the form of DNA, is in fact such “one language”. The oneness of this language of information is critically important when discussing Identity, once it is realized that the differences among Human groups, nations and races are—as quantified as bytes of information—indeed insignificant: “Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, profaning the covenant of our fathers?” (Malachi II, 10).

However, the study of Identity is affected by the evolutionary idea of Kin Recognition. This idea, that living creatures are naturally selected to being altruistic towards their relatives, was quantified mathematically around 1930 by R. A. Fisher and J. B. S. Haldane, and was developed in the 1960s by W. D. Hamilton, John Maynard Smith and others. This concept of evolutionary psychology is still subject to an ongoing research, regarding human families, tribes and nations. It is possible that Kin Recognition is the underlying reason for the need to “belong”, and is the primary source of the perception of Identity.

An alternative concept of Identity, that could be derived from the Network Theory, is consistent with the idea of “one language” DNA. M. H. Luzatto (1707-1746) suggests that all creatures are interconnected by what could be described in modern terms as a multi-dimensional complex network. Identity is the self-perception of a specific network imbedded in the Grand Network of the Creation. The sense of Identity focuses the minds of people in the direction their specific individual and collective duties lies, regarding the Grand Network as well as the imbedded networks that are its components.

Professor Dr. Rochus Leonhardt, Universität Leipzig
Institut für Systematische Theologie

Differentiating Religious Identities: A Response to F. D. E. Schleiermacher

In his theological main work "The Christian faith", the protestant scholar Friedrich Schleiermacher presents a definition of Christianity based on a twofold differentiation of the various shapes of religious communions. The paper will describe and examine Schleiermacher's perception of the diversities of religious communions. It is the main argument of the paper that, with respect to the *present* situation of Religion, Schleiermacher's twofold differentiation is not sufficient and that a third difference has to be added.

Professor Dr. Alexander Deeg, Universität Leipzig
Institut für Praktische Theologie/Liturgiewissenschaftliches Institut

Liminality and Christian/Religious Identity

Identity is a key-word in theological discussions and in Christian congregations. And at the same time, it is an ambivalent term.

On the one hand, churches are seeking their "identity" and engaging in "identity-formation"-processes, theologians reflecting on pastoral care use the term frequently to describe the aim of a successful pastoral counseling, and there are plenty of books describing how Christians can find their "identity" in faith in the years of midlife-crisis, in times of sorrow etc. On the other hand the concept of "identity" is severely questioned by others who hold the opinion that "identity" can even be described as a counter-concept to biblical faith.

One of the most prominent critics of "identity"-formation as the aim of ecclesial work and of "identity"-concepts as the basis of theological reflection is Henning Luther (1947-1991, in the last years of his life practical theologian in Marburg, Germany).

The paper presented will examine his critique, nourished by Jewish thinkers like Emmanuel Lévinas, and will describe the tension of "identity" and "liminality" as the core tension of religious thinking in a Jewish and Christian context. "Living at the frontier" – this term will prove to be a challenging description of "Christian" (and Jewish?, and religious?) "identity" in late modern times.

Professor Dr. Dr. Andreas Schuele, Universität Leipzig
Institut für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft/Forschungsstelle Judentum
Identity Under Discussion: The Case of Early Judaism

While it is a matter of debate when Judaism 'began,' most scholars today agree that the exilic and early post-exilic periods played an instrumental role in the formation of Jewish religion. This can be seen from the fact that texts from these periods discuss criteria for membership in Jewish communities of the time. Examining what these texts establish as 'identity markers' makes it immediately clear that there is no single set of criteria of who or what a 'Jew' is or ought be. Geography, historical memory, ethics, ritual practice, and even what we would call genetics figure largely in this debate. What creates a sense of identity is not so much consensus about any single one of these identity markers but rather the emotional disposition and intellectual ability to engage in a meaningful conversation about them. The paper will examine this discourse about Jewish identity in the early Persian period, paying special attention to the books of Isaiah and Ezra/Nehemiah.

Dr. Timotheus Arndt, Universität Leipzig
Institut für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft/Forschungsstelle Judentum
Between Forsaken and Gathered

between forsaken and gathered

The continuous change in life makes Heraclitus question identity: "We both step and do not step into the same river twice" is one of the famous expressions of the perception that "everything flows". A biblical expression of the same phenomenon can be found in Psalm 27:10 "my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD gathers me in." This vers mentions two turning points in life, on which human identity hinges in a religious way: staying the same person in the changes of life.