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Modes of Educational Translation – Introduction

Jonathan Cohen

We are proud to present our readers with Volume 13 of our series: *Studies in Jewish Education*. This volume is concerned with the possibility of “translating” insights derived from areas of knowledge sometimes thought to be outside the purview of education – to issues and problems on the agenda of educational thinkers, researchers and practitioners. As we have learned from our teachers, Prof. Seymour Fox, of blessed memory, and Prof. Michael Rosenak (may he be granted many more years of fruitful creativity) – “translating” from philosophical systems or lead concepts, from principles deriving from the tradition of Jewish thought, or from cultural visions – to educational thought and practice, is a most complex matter. Some prefer to work in the “normative” mode, wherein normative world views are “translated” from fundamental philosophical “principles” to educational “ideals,” “goals” and “means.” In the transition from one category to the next, however, certain terms must necessarily be modified or reinterpreted. This process is both enriching and impoverishing – as certain understandings are inevitably “lost” in translation even as other insights are gained. Others prefer to work in the “deliberative” mode, beginning from symptoms of malaise emanating from the field of educational practice, accessing world-views and disciplines of knowledge in order to arrive at an informed formulation of the “problem,” then generating alternative solutions to the “problem” – alternatives from among which some will be chosen for implementation and others, perhaps just as promising, will have to be discarded or shelved. For those who feel more at home in this mode – world-views, concepts, disciplines and cultural visions do not function as overarching norms, but rather as “resources,” drawn upon to the degree that they are seen to address problems as experienced by those affected by them. As if this were not complex enough, Prof. Rosenak has reminded us that neither mode – normative or deliberative – is, or should be sufficient unto itself. On the one hand, normative discourse that does not also have its “ears to

the ground,” picking up on current educational problems and addressing them in terms intelligible to those who suffer from them, will end up being sterile and hortatory. Deliberative discourse, on the other hand, is always anchored in normative assumptions, without which one could not articulate what it is about the “problem” that is “problematic,” or in need of amelioration. According to Rosenak, there must be a constant, dialectical interaction between the normative and deliberative modes if educational issues are to be addressed both honestly and intelligently.

It is in full view of the complexities and opportunities attendant upon the derivation of educational insights from philosophy, Jewish thought, academic Jewish disciplines or cultural-social visions – that we present the essays collected in this volume. They signify a direction, rather than a destination. They are “essays” in the original sense of the word, namely rich and productive excursions into areas that have not yet been mapped or definitively summarized.

The volume before you represents the fruit of a joint project, generously supported by both the Melton Centre for Jewish Education of the Hebrew University and the Mandel Leadership Institute. For a period of over two years, a group of highly accomplished scholars, thinkers and educators from the Melton Centre and the Mandel Institute met regularly to explore the issue of educational “translation” *from* various “external” sources *to* various kinds of educational contexts, as well the possibility of moving in the opposite direction: *from* a discussion of known educational projects or practices *to* the philosophical principles underlying them. During that period, individual members of the group made presentations on issues relating to the theme of the seminar, presentations that were then frankly discussed and critiqued by other group members. Having both convened and led the seminar sessions, I can testify that they were conducted on a level that clearly indicates the “arrival” of the philosophy of Jewish education as both an academic discipline and an indispensable resource for Jewish educational practice. At some point during the discussions, an internal “mini-conference” was held (the “Acco” conference) wherein close-to-final papers were presented by the participants, generating reactions by fellow-participants that were then incorporated into more refined versions of those papers. As a culmination of the process, a conference of larger scope was held at the Mandel Institute. At this conference, a number of scholars, thinkers and educators from outside the circle of seminar participants, from a number of Israeli universities, were invited to present response-essays to the

final papers offered by the seminar “regulars.” On numerous occasions, participants expressed their appreciation at having been called upon to take part in this extended journey, a process they felt helped to deepen and refine their work.

At this point, I would like to express my profound thanks and appreciation to Dr. Haim Rechnitzer, now of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, for all of his valuable assistance in organizing seminar sessions, and for putting together the mini-conference at Acco as well as the summary conference at Mandel. Without Haim at my side, the process above could never have gotten off the ground or gained momentum. He also was an indispensable aide during the early stages of the editing process.

I would also like to thank my fellow-editor and collaborator, Dr. Elie Holzer of Bar-Ilan University. Elie was not only an active participant in the seminar sessions and conferences. He also agreed to share the arduous work of editing the various contributions, conceiving of the thematic sequence of the volume and maintaining open communications with all concerned. It was he who provided both the impetus and the sense of partnership needed to “translate” this project from a disjointed set of essays into an integrated volume.

I would also like to express my thanks to the leaders of the Melton Centre and the Mandel Institute, Dr. Howard Deitcher and Annette Hochstein, for their steady support for this ambitious project. I was very much encouraged throughout the process by the unflagging vote of confidence I received from them both. Their commitment to sharing the knowledge and insight gained from our work has now materialized in this volume, a published collection they have long awaited.

I reserve a special note of gratitude for Prof. Seymour Fox, my teacher and mentor, for the irrepressible enthusiasm he showed for our efforts. From his contagious excitement about the initial conception in its early, most formative stages, to his participation in virtually every session of the culminating conference – he took a personal, intellectual and educational interest in the topics on which we were talking and writing. We are all still mourning his untimely passing, and are still grieved that he did not live to derive pleasure from yet another of the initiatives he both founded and supported.

Before the articles and responses are allowed to speak for themselves, some brief comments on the different sections comprising the volume. The essays appearing in the first section of the book represent attempts at

“translation” from elements of the thought-systems of specific philosophers and theologians, to educational conceptions and guidelines. My own article, for example, represents a kind of “double translation” of the educational thought of the great medieval Jewish thinker Maimonides. The essay articulates three constructions of Maimonides’ educational philosophy by modern Jewish thinkers (Hartman, Schweid and Rosenak). The three constructions, however, are themselves “constructed” – such that each is shown to emphasize one of Joseph Schwab’s well-known “commonplaces” of education (Hartman – the student, Schweid – the teacher, and Rosenak – the subject matter of the philosophy of education itself). Yehuda Ben-Dor, in an extraordinarily penetrating analysis, shows how an understanding of what Ludwig Wittgenstein means by “languages” and “life-forms” can aid contemporary religious educators in understanding the difficulties their students have in negotiating between the Jewish religious tradition and the Western liberal tradition. Dr. Haim Rechnitzer also has recourse to Schwab’s four “commonplaces” in deriving implications for education from Ernst Simon’s compelling notion of “second innocence.” He then carries Simon’s “modernist” ideas beyond their context into a dialogue with certain features of what has come to be known as “post-modernity.” Dr. Ari Ackerman claims that in the case of David Hartman, the structure of “translation” from some supposedly “general” philosophy or theology to more “specific” educational issues does not do justice to the character of Hartman’s work. In his view, Hartman’s theology as a whole is conceived as a response to an educational diagnosis of the contemporary Jewish scene. Ackerman also presents us with some interesting reflections on the respective “price” that the religious and non-religious sectors are called upon by Hartman to pay in order to facilitate “openness” between the two groups. Dr. Ari Bursztein analyzes the thought of the well-known theologian Emil Fackenheim from the perspective of the concept known as “education for resistance.” He concludes that Fackenheim’s thought invites a reformulation of this concept – from resistance to repressive regimes or classes, to resistance to the relativization of morality – this, in the wake of the absolute evil represented by the Holocaust. In her analysis of the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, Prof. Annette Aronowicz takes note, among many other things, of Levinas’ tendency to “translate” theological language into the language of ethical action, and his refusal to allow conceptual language to hide or obscure the particularity of the obligation we have to the “other” in concrete situations. Towards

the end of her essay, she attempts to derive implications from Levinas' vision of Jewish education for the conduct of Jewish studies in academic settings. Each of the essays in this section is then reviewed and critiqued by experts in philosophy and Jewish thought from a range of Israeli universities – Profs. Zev Harvey, Samuel Scolnicov and myself of the Hebrew University, Prof. Yehoyada Amir of the Hebrew Union College, and Drs. Elie Holzer and Hanoch Ben-Pazi of Bar-Ilan University.

The writers in the next section, while remaining close to the disciplines of philosophy and Jewish thought, proceed in a somewhat different manner. Rather than base their essays on the views of particular philosophers or theologians, they begin their analysis from a root-concept – one that has featured prominently in the writings of many thinkers, and has taken on different meanings within the framework of different thought-systems. Dr. Moshe Meir examines the concept of the ideal Jew as one who is called upon to “imitate God” in some way. He traces the changes that this idea has undergone over the course of the history of Jewish thought – from the Bible, to the Talmud, to Maimonides and then on to the modern Jewish thinkers: Hermann Cohen and Rav Kook. Dr. Jen Glaser undertakes a thoroughgoing clarification of the concepts of “authenticity” and “integrity” in the best of the analytic tradition. She then inquires as to the implications of these two notions for issues of Jewish self-understanding and practice within the context of contemporary liberal Judaism. The two essays in this section are responded to respectively by Dr. Avinoam Rosenak of the Hebrew University and Yisrael Sorek of the Mandel Institute.

In the following section, the point of departure for educational “translation” changes once again. This time, it is some kind of traditional Jewish or contemporary academic discipline that serves as the source to be “translated.” For Dr. Elie Holzer, it is the discipline of Bible interpretation that is placed in the foreground, seen through the prism of contemporary Bible scholarship (Alter and Sternberg) and hermeneutic theory (Ricoeur). Holzer then goes on to draw pedagogic implications from his discussion of these disciplinary perspectives – namely that the experience of the interpretive process itself, rather than the retention of any particular conclusions yielded by this process, must figure more prominently in Bible education. Dr. Michael Gillis focuses on the traditional discipline of Midrash, viewing it through the lenses of contemporary academic disciplines and multiple scholarly perspectives. He then proceeds to draw implications from this inquiry for the place of

Midrash in Bible education, for the issue of the relative appropriateness of Midrashic discourse for certain stages of cognitive development (the work of Kieran Egan becomes important here) and for Bruner's distinction between "paradigmatic" and "narrative" modes of holding knowledge. The essays in this section are engaged by Profs. Michael Rosenak and Marc Hirshman – both of the Melton Centre.

The last section of the collection returns to Jewish thinkers as a point of departure. This time, however, what is considered is not this or that thinker's overarching philosophy or theology, but his vision of a thriving Jewish culture. Elisheva Moatti and Dr. Marc Silverman clearly articulate Brenner's view that a vital Jewish culture will be the natural result of what a "healthy" Jewish people will create in the present and the future, unencumbered by a priori, normative "ideas" concerning the "essence" of Judaism coming from the past. A passion for Jewish education, a la Brenner, should no longer be derived from the fear of assimilation or loss of Jewish cultural specificity, but should derive from a positive concern for the overall ethical and aesthetic quality of contemporary Jewish life. The last article in the collection is by Dr. Daniel Marom. In a comprehensive and penetrating essay, Marom makes the claim that the condition of contemporary Zionism and post-Zionism warrants a revisiting of Horace Kallen's vision of cultural pluralism. After setting forth Kallen's cultural vision in clear contours, comparing it (favorably) to certain more contemporary diagnoses of the "Jewish condition," Marom dwells on the unique conception of Jewish education that flows from Kallen's brand of multiculturalism – a conception that "emphasizes a vibrant Jewish cultural enclave that lives among other cultural enclaves, each of which inducts its members into its own vibrant traditions and encourages them to enter into active dialogue with the members of other enclaves." The respondents to the essays in this last section of the volume are, respectively, Avi Katzman of the Mandel Institute and Prof. Daniel Pekarsky of the University of Wisconsin – a longtime colleague and participant in many Mandel projects and enterprises.

In concluding this introduction, I would like to offer a special vote of thanks to Vivienne Burstein, our managing editor and publications coordinator, for the huge part she has played in bringing this volume to fruition. Her editorial skills, her fine attention to detail, and her "people skills" (so necessary in the production of a book of this kind), have proved an invaluable aid to us all. In the words of Rabbi Akiva - "*shelanu ve'shelachem – shela*" (what is ours and what is yours – is hers).

We would also like to thank Helen Gottstein for her excellent language editing of the English articles in this volume, as well as the editors and production staff of the Magnes Press for their signal contribution to both the form and content of the book. It is our hope that the essays here enclosed will stimulate much discussion and inquiry, and engender further research into the complex issue of “educational translation.”