

Editorial

Editorial: Ethical and Epistemological Aspects of ‘Dialogue’: Exploring the Potential of the Second-Person Perspective §

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§ A *Festschrift* in honor of Paul Mendes-Flohr on the occasion of his eightieth birthday.

This Special Issue of *Religions* is devoted to ‘dialogue’—a trans-disciplinary key concept par excellence that is not to be used as a strategy to produce some ultimate synthesis, but rather to foster a conversation (Mendes-Flohr 2015a). ‘Dialogue’ is crucial for any inter-religious, intercultural and interhuman endeavor because it includes the art of listening and the chance for self-correction; it promotes mutual enrichment and provides a novel way of approaching questions related to the world we are familiar with throughout life, to foreign cultures and not least to the human relationship with God.

Despite its inflationary use in different disciplines and contexts, the notion of ‘dialogue’ remains far from clear. The purpose of this Special Issue is to investigate ‘dialogue’ in a multi-approach analysis by combining an array of traditions: Jewish studies and Christian theology, history, literary theory, ethics, philosophy of religion, existential philosophy, hermeneutics, phenomenology, deconstruction, political theory, and pedagogics.

Philosophers of dialogue are often accused of focusing primarily on the ethical–existential significance of the encounter with another person—one’s being transformed by the embodied co-presence, voice and testimony of another—while neglecting the cognitive content of the truth claims being put forward. Yet, if we ignore that which is unique to dialogue, namely the performative, unforeseeable and surprising character of address and response in a shared space of reflection (Buber 1923/1996; Rosenzweig 1925/2000; Meir 2018), we also miss the insights we can gain from this interactive process—for instance, a productive *allosensus*, which, unlike consensus and dissensus, “allows one to recognize the difference of and from the other” (Nikulin 2010, p. 79). In this way, one can become enabled to build bridges between cultures and develop an intercultural and interreligious epistemology: Indeed, in order to understand the other, one needs to be cognizant of the prism of one’s own interpretative lens (Mendes-Flohr 2007b).

Second-person encounters and dialogical relations exceed what one person alone or what a neutral observer can see and compare. The second-person perspective differs fundamentally from both the insider perspective of the first person and the outsider perspective of the third person. Self-expression and the impression of otherness come together in the mutually binding sphere ‘in-between’ the interlocutors of the dialogue. The interplay of opposed orientations in which one’s own beliefs are challenged by alternatives may result in scientific virtues such as “intellectual pluri-perspectivity” and “epistemic humility” (Fisch 2016), which can help us avoid one-sidedness and oversimplification.

That is why the potential of the second-person perspective is worth being explored further in regard to methodological innovation (cf. Tracy 1990; Darwall 2006; Schmidt-Leukel 2020). Investigating not only the ethical but also the neglected epistemological aspects of dialogue by concentrating on that through (*dia*) which it takes place—the event of an interrelation and intersection of different perspectives in an encounter that combines subjectivity and objectivity in a special way—promises that we reach a better understanding of the quality and status that can be attributed to the ‘in-between’ (Welz 2015), which mediates the dialogical relation between the self and the other.



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This Special Issue of *Religions* is, at the same time, a *Festschrift* we have been editing in honor of Paul Mendes-Flohr on the occasion of his eightieth birthday on 17 April 2021. He is Professor emeritus of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Dorothy Grant Maclear Professor emeritus of Modern Jewish History and Thought at the University of Chicago. Moreover, he is the former director of the Franz Rosenzweig Minerva Research Center for German-Jewish Literature and Cultural History at the Hebrew University, and he is the editor-in-chief of the German edition of the collected works of Martin Buber. His single-authored books on Buber are classics (see [Mendes-Flohr 1978, 2019](#)). He is also a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a senior research fellow at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem. He is a leading scholar of modern Jewish philosophy with a special focus on German-Jewish intellectuals of the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly Buber and Rosenzweig, Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin, Gustav Landauer, the Frankfurt School and Leo Strauss.

That the jubilarian is a most prolific writer can be seen from the enclosed list of publications (see Supplementary Materials), which has been supplemented with many additional titles since he received his previous two *Festschriften* on the occasion of his seventieth birthday (see [Wiese and Urban 2012](#) with a detailed biography and bibliography; [Matveev and Noor 2011](#), pp. 11–32). He has, by now, authored a dozen books that have been translated into many languages, edited another forty volumes, and written more than 300 articles, book chapters, and blogs in English, Hebrew, and German (see <https://huji.academia.edu/PaulMendesFlohr>, accessed on 1 March 2023). The genre of the blog is a relatively new one, which he has used since the pandemic when he, in 2020, became the President of *The Global Lehrhaus* (see <https://thelehrhaus.org>, accessed on 1 March 2023), an international and interreligious online platform for continuing education and reflections on issues of common concern. The establishment of *The Global Lehrhaus* was inspired by the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* (Free House of Jewish Learning) that Rosenzweig founded in Frankfurt am Main a century ago, in 1920, and that was later directed by Buber.

We dedicate this Special Issue to a superb scholar and exemplary human being, a genuine *Mensch* who excels not only in academia, but also in his everyday life as a citizen, father of a family, and a wonderful friend who inspires his environment with his wisdom, warm-heartedness and deep humanity. For more than two years, we have had the privilege of regularly meeting with him for a digital Buber *havruta* in which we have slowly read and discussed Buber's *I and Thou* ([Buber 1923/1996](#)). Even though the jubilarian modestly and unboastfully insists on being merely a co-learner, he has also been an amazing teacher who has generously and humbly shared his vast scholarly knowledge and dear-bought existential insights with us, coming down to a level at which he can make himself understood while elegantly and relaxedly comparing different philosophical and religious traditions. He has given us a matchless example of gentle and careful intellectual and spiritual guidance through trustful listening and personal trustworthiness.

We are grateful for all encounters with the scholar, mentor, and human being Paul Mendes-Flohr, who has shaped “an entire field with his brilliant oeuvre” ([Wiese and Urban 2012](#), p. 1); indeed, this oeuvre is impressive both in terms of its interdisciplinarity, range of topics, and thoroughness, without him ever intending to establish a school of thought; rather, he is “a bridge builder and cultural mediator in the Buberian sense” (*ibid.*, p. 7). This is all the more important in the current socio-political context in which we see an escalation of violence between Israelis and Palestinians. Paul Mendes-Flohr has not only edited Buber's texts on this problem and collected them in the volume *A Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs* ([Buber 1983](#)), but he is also actively participating in the peace movement and writing a book on *Truth and Reconciliation in Palestine/Israel* together with a Palestinian friend who gave Paul the Arabic name Abu-Amal, the Father of Hope (email by Paul Mendes-Flohr to Claudia Welz on 25 September 2022).

This is not the only context in which he, despite all odds, engages in difficult, precarious, or even ambivalent dialogues between representatives of different groups that he tries to befriend, thus supporting peace, understanding, and a better future. He does

so also in German-Jewish and German-Israeli post-Shoah contexts, in Jewish–Christian, Jewish–Muslim, and Jewish–Christian–Muslim encounters, and in correlating religious and secular, age-old biblical and modern post-traditional traditions of thought in his life and his research. This kind of bridge-building across the abyss of otherwise separate worlds can be seen as ‘the red thread’ in his work (see, for instance, [Mendes-Flohr 1987, 1999, 2010, 2017, 2021](#)). Last but not least, he has illuminated the fruitful tension between religion, politics, and culture in a broader sense of the term (see, for instance, [Mendes-Flohr 1985, 1986, 1988, 1991, 1994a, 1994b, 2008, 2014b, 2015b](#)). This Special Issue of *Religions*, presented in the form of a *Festschrift*, celebrates his tireless efforts to connect different worlds, and it pays tribute to the abiding significance of his scholarship.

The online collection and the printed volume at hand comprise twenty contributions from former students, colleagues, as well as old and new friends from all over the world. All contributions testify to the breadth and depth of Paul Mendes-Flohr’s lifework, which is quoted and discussed in all texts, spanning over a wide gamut of themes and research trajectories. In what follows, a thematic overview of all contributions is provided. The essay collection is structured into seven parts that elucidate ‘dialogue’ from different angles:

The first part, “**Dialogue in Interreligious Contexts,**” is opened by Katharina Heyden’s account of the rhetoric of interreligious dialogue, as seen from different religious perspectives. In her article “**Dialogue as a Means of Religious Co-Production: Historical Perspectives,**” she examines three historical examples: (1) Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* from 2nd-century Rome; (2) the *Kuzari* by Judah Halevi, the Jew alongside the *Dialogus* of Petrus Alfonsi, and a Christian convert from Judaism (both discuss Islam) from 12th-century Spain; and (3) Moses Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem* and Johann Caspar Lavater’s *Nathanael* from 18th-century Berlin. Each contextualized case study reveals the commitment to hearing the religious Other, the utility of the Other for demarcating one’s own religious identity, and the epistemological contradictions of religious systems. Borrowing Martin Buber’s insight that the *Ich* (the “I”) needs a *Du* (a “You”) to form itself, but that it must transform that *Du* into a third person *Es* (an “it”), Heyden shows how complicated the process of religious co-production through dialogue is. Following [Mendes-Flohr \(2017\)](#), who champions a strong multiculturalism that takes religious convictions seriously and considers them relevant for the crafting of pluralistic societies, Heyden, too, recommends a “solicitous, dialogical tolerance” ([Mendes-Flohr 2017](#), p. 315) in which religious particularities are accepted as part of human creatureliness. Given the history of the conflictual coexistence of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, Heyden regards them as co-builders not only of a common world, but also of their respective religious identities.

Another contribution from the University of Berne and the local collective project “Religious Conflicts and Coping Strategies” is Luca Di Blasi’s article “**The Negative Aha-Moment, or: Anticipating the Need for Dialogical Tolerance.**” Di Blasi promotes a *Kippbild* hermeneutics, as developed on the basis of Wittgenstein’s model of reversible figures such as the duck–rabbit, which he interprets as a postmodern method of coping with religious conflicts by relativizing differences as various ways of *seeing as*. He shows how a relativistic understanding of religious differences can be avoided, while calling attention to the moment in which both parties come to conform to the image they have of the respective ‘other’; in this moment, the hidden assumption of one’s own ‘tolerant’ superiority towards the other groups one only ‘tolerates,’ yet does not appreciate, is unmasked. This uncanny insight is called a negative “aha-moment.” Di Blasi claims that one’s self-realization in this moment demonstrates the need for “dialogical tolerance” as highlighted in the work of [Mendes-Flohr \(2017\)](#).

The second part of the essay collection ‘zooms in’ on Judaism. It is headlined “**The Role of Dialogue in Post-Traditional Jewishness**” and focuses on the potential of the second-person perspective within ‘post-traditional’ Jewishness, which is a distinctively modern condition wherein past sources of theological authority and religious normativity are no longer self-evident. This condition has been one of the most abiding themes in Mendes-Flohr’s work for over four decades.

In his essay **“From Secular Religiosity to Cultural Disjunctions: Visions of Post-Traditional Jewishness in the Thought of Paul Mendes-Flohr,”** Sam S.B. Shonkoff reviews a number of Mendes-Flohr’s publications between 1978 and 1987, in which ‘secular religiosity’ is described as a manifestation of post-traditional Jewishness, exemplified by figures such as Buber and Rosenzweig. According to Shonkoff, these early writings intimate the possibility of a critical and nonetheless integrated Jewish religious subject, grounded hermeneutically in Jewish sources and sociologically in the Jewish community of destiny (*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*). Shonkoff discovers that starting in the late 1980s, Mendes-Flohr’s representations of post-traditional Jewishness begin to emphasize greater degrees of complexity and, indeed, fragmentation. These later writings gesture less to visions of secular religiosity than toward postures of ‘undogmatic, pluralistic, and open’ self-reflectivity before the ever-changing faces of reality. Throughout this rich trajectory in Mendes-Flohr’s thought, we see that he returns continually—and ever more trenchantly—to dialogical life as a grounding principle.

Yemima Hadad takes her point of departure in Mendes-Flohr’s much-appraised intellectual biography of the just-mentioned Jewish philosopher, *Martin Buber: A Life of Faith and Dissent* (Mendes-Flohr 2019). In her article **“Femininity, Motherhood, and Feminism: Reflections on Paul Mendes-Flohr’s Biography *Martin Buber: A Life of Faith and Dissent*,”** Hadad argues that Mendes-Flohr offers us an intimate view of Buber’s life and thought without neglecting the story of the women in his life and their contributions to shaping his thought. In her short reflection essay, she highlights Buber’s relation to women, femininity, motherhood, and feminism—a perspective that emerges in almost every chapter of Mendes-Flohr’s important Buber biography. This angle not only illuminates the personal–psychological dimension of Buber’s inner life, but also the deep currents of his intellectual life and thought.

In his paper **“Thinking Proleptically: Paul Mendes-Flohr on Intellectual History as Second-Person Dialogue,”** Orr Scharf argues that Mendes-Flohr addresses the contemporary challenges faced by Jews by illuminating these challenges with a view to the intellectual history of modern German-Jewish thought, where he ‘excavates’ an anticipation of the current intellectual, spiritual and moral reality of Judaism. Based on a reading of Mendes-Flohr’s most recent single-authored book, *Cultural Disjunctions: Post-Traditional Jewish Identities* (Mendes-Flohr 2021), Scharf shows how Mendes-Flohr’s adaptation of Buber’s call to aspire to I–Thou relations supports proleptic historiography, both in methodological and ethical terms.

The third part of the essay collection takes a closer look at **“Ethical Aspects of Dialogue: Neighborly Love and Fraternity.”** Moving chronologically from the 19th to the 20th century, Part III is opened by Cass Fisher, who compares Friedrich Schleiermacher’s main doctrinal work, *The Christian Faith*, to Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption* and asks: **“Did Schleiermacher Go Overboard? Reading *The Star of Redemption* and *The Christian Faith* Together.”** A close reading of the *Star* alongside *The Christian Faith* reveals surprising points of similarity in a wide range of topics, while the points of contradiction between the two works illuminate Rosenzweig’s contributions to modern theology. The adversarial stance Rosenzweig adopts toward Schleiermacher in the introduction to Part 2 of the *Star* lends the impression that Rosenzweig is leaving Schleiermacher behind. Yet, Fisher shows that many of Rosenzweig’s theological ideas resonate deeply with Christian formulations of those topics, although he is cautious about claims of direct influence that are difficult to prove and are often reductive. Fisher instead unearths the ethics of dialogue that informs Rosenzweig’s thought and so thoroughly shapes Mendes-Flohr’s life and work.

Ori Werdiger introduces the booklet *Love: Accusative and Dative* (Mendes-Flohr 2007a), which explores ancient and modern Jewish engagements with the commandment to love the neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). Drawing on Rosenzweig’s phenomenology of divine–human love, Mendes-Flohr seeks to delineate the possibility of a humanist ethics of compassion that is not dependent, as it is for Rosenzweig, on hearing the divine voice. Based on

these reflections, Werdiger explores the concept of fraternity (*fraternité*) as it figures in the thought of Yehuda Léon Askenazi (1922–1996), a North African kabbalist thinker and an important spiritual leader of Francophone Jewry in the twentieth century. In his paper “**From Dialogue to Revelation: Alterity and the Concept of Fraternity (Fraternité) in Léon Askenazi’s Biblical Hermeneutics,**” Werdiger points out that, for Askenazi, the challenge of fraternity, as figuring repeatedly in the Genesis narrative, is the preferred model through which to think about second-person relationships. Furthermore, he suggests that, in contrast to Rosenzweig’s top-down account of revelation and human love, Askenazi’s approach represents a bottom-up model of the love of one’s neighbor, which, when achieved, engenders divine revelation.

Ephraim Meir establishes “**A Virtual Dialogue between Gandhi and Levinas.**” Both Mahatma Gandhi and Emmanuel Levinas interpret religion ethically. Yet, in Meir’s view, Gandhi’s ethico-politics work with radical interrelatedness, whereas Levinas differentiates more between the self and the other. Gandhi’s emphasis on love of the enemy and his attempt to soften the opponent’s heart are absent in Levinas’s metaphysics. Meir compares Levinas’s ethical metaphysics to Gandhi’s notions of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*. Both thinkers criticized an understanding of peace as based on rational contracts, and instead equated peace with universal brother and sisterhood. Without underestimating the similarities between Levinas and Gandhi, Meir argues that precisely the differences between both thinkers allow for a ‘trans-different’ dialogue that respects specificities and promotes communication in a movement of hospitality and mutual learning.

The fourth part of the essay collection attends to “**Epistemological Aspects of Dialogue: Listening, Responding, and Knowing.**” Elizabeth X. Li engages with the Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard in order to explore “**Epistemological Aspects of Dialogue: Some Kierkegaardian Perspectives.**” Examining Kierkegaard’s criticism of non-dialogical approaches to knowing, she concludes that Kierkegaard operates with a contact theory of knowledge, analogizing knowing and breathing to underline the importance of receptivity and relationality in the epistemic process. By placing Kierkegaard in conversation with his pseudonym Johannes Climacus, dialogue can be seen to play a crucial role in two ways: Firstly, Kierkegaard and Climacus creatively re-appropriate and reconstruct dialogical aporia textually; secondly, Kierkegaard and Climacus’s invocations of dialogue center the second-person perspective. Li relates the just-mentioned aporia to Mendes-Flohr’s characterization of the other as being “irreducible to categorical perceptions and conceptions” and thus, in some sense, “beyond translation” (Mendes-Flohr 2007b, p. 119). Yet, authentic dialogue not only demands us to be “open to the possibility of being challenged” by the voice of the other, but also “entails a risk”: “by truly listening to the other” one might “be changed, transformed cognitively and existentially” (Mendes-Flohr 2015a, p. 3).

The transformative potential of dialogue occupies the center stage also in Valeria Dessy’s article “**Building Religion through Dialogue: David Hume in Conversation with Twentieth-Century Philosophy of Dialogue.**” In this article, Dessy explores the dialogical dynamic of David Hume’s *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* by comparing Hume’s work with twentieth-century philosophers of dialogue. She first focuses on Michael Bakhtin’s analysis of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s books and demonstrates that neither Hume nor Bakhtin orient the plurality of voices engaged in a dialogue based on a pre-made understanding of reality. She then compares Hume’s and Buber’s respective epistemological standpoints. The aim of her article is to show the relevance of Hume’s thought in the contemporary philosophy of dialogue. The final part of Hume’s *Dialogues* has often left Hume’s readers perplexed. After a long and articulate debate between Philo, the skeptic, and Cleanthes, the theistic philosopher, the readers would expect the victory of Philo, whom many considered to be Hume’s spokesperson. Surprisingly, the book ends with the victory of Cleanthes. Keith Yandell suggested that none of these personages represented Hume, and that Philo’s change of mind was a change in perspective. Dessy follows Yandell and demonstrates how dialogue promotes changes in perspective and thus also enables a change of mind.

Self-transformation due to reversals in one's perspective is also accentuated in the next paper, which is entitled **"Learning through Listening and Responding: Probing the Potential and Limits of Dialogue in Local and Online Environments,"** authored by Claudia Welz, Essi Ikonen and Aslaug Kristiansen. This article explores an age-old form of dialogical learning, *havruta*, which has been employed by Jews throughout the centuries to study the Torah and the Talmud; as such, it evaluates an experiment that entailed extending *havruta* from a couple of fellow students (*haverim*) to an international, multi-religious group reading philosophical texts together, and transferring the learning process from the Jewish house of study (in Hebrew: *beit ha-Midrash*, in German: *Lehrhaus*) to an online environment. Methodologically, the experiences from the online *havruta* are brought into a theory–practice feedback loop and are discussed from various theoretical angles: (1) The first section introduces how *havruta* was conducted traditionally and how Rosenzweig, who in 1920 founded the Frankfurt *Lehrhaus* and invited Buber to offer lecture courses, advanced *havruta*. (2) The second section explains how Rosenzweig's pedagogical principles, as distilled from his writings on education, are modified in the above-mentioned contemporary online reading group. (3) The third section draws on Buber's philosophy of dialogue, Juhani Pallasmaa's architectural theory and Michel Chion's film theory in order to investigate the epistemological and pedagogical significance of different modes of listening, asking, and responding, and the role of trust for dialogical learning and self-transformation in local and online learning communities.

The fifth part of the essay collection is captioned **"Personal and Impersonal Aspects of Dialogue."** In **"Humanizing the It: Martin Buber on Technology and the Ethics of Things,"** Asher D. Biemann investigates Buber's writings on technology, which are scarce and seemingly subordinated to what he described in *I and Thou* as 'the tyranny of the It.' However, a closer look at his writings reveals, in fact, a life-long reflection on the dialogical potentiality of things—whether artworks, buildings, or machines—that echoed broader discourses on technology at the time. Beginning with Julius Goldstein's *Die Technik* (1912), which Buber edited for his series *Die Gesellschaft*, and concluding with Buber's reception and critique of Martin Heidegger, especially during the 1950s, we can see that Buber critically engaged with the question of technology with respect to labor and community, art and artisanship, and the ethics of thinghood. Biemann's essay contextualizes Buber's repeated call to humanize technology in early 20th-century debates on technology and in the post-1945 crisis of humanism. Biemann argues that Buber framed technology not only through its aesthetic potential, as *Werk*, but also as another form of solidarity and care, without which community and respect for our environment would not be possible.

Ilya Dvorkin reconsiders Buber's philosophy of dialogue, which is often presented as an attitude towards the world within the framework of the relationship between *I and Thou*. In his article **"Hidden Person Makes Dialogue Present: The Place of It in the System of Dialogue According to Cohen, Buber and Rosenzweig,"** Dvorkin also calls attention to Hermann Cohen and Rosenzweig, for whom dialogue is unthinkable outside of a more complete system of interpersonal relations, which also includes *He* and *She*, *We* and *They*. A sharp controversy unfolded between Rosenzweig and Buber regarding the place of *It* in the dialogical process. Rosenzweig criticized Buber's belittling of *It* and his ignoring of the deep connection that exists in the *I–Thou* and *I–It* relations. Dvorkin indicates that the third person is an important element of Rosenzweig's philosophical system as a whole. In particular, Rosenzweig showed the extraordinary role of the *It* in the construction of language. Rosenzweig's concept of *It* not only challenges Buber's *It*, but also echoes Freud's *Id*. In this context, Dvorkin regards Rosenzweig's philosophy as an attempt to harmonize the relationship between *I* and *It*, i.e., between the selfhood of a separated person and the closeness of the world completed in itself.

Kasper Lysemose's article **"In the Middle of Love: At the Fringes of Personhood. An Explorative Essay on the Dialogue of I and Thou and the Poetics of the Impersonal"** turns to Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, where the Dane introduces the idea that God's love is 'the middle term' in interhuman relations. As such, divine–human love is not just one

relation among others, but is rather the being-in-relation as such. This implies that the middle is as inconspicuous as it is ubiquitous. According to Buber, however, there is a privileged relation to the middle in the *I–Thou* relation. For Buber, this is so on the strength of two traits of this dyadic relation: that it is dialogical and personal. It is in dialogue that *I* and *You* are responsive to the word of God, and it is in personal co-presence that the theophany of God, understood as an ‘absolute person,’ may occur. Lysemose examines the tenets of the philosophy of dialogue at their margins in terms of expounding how (1) according to Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Simone Weil, and Jean-Luc Nancy, the impersonal in the person is disclosed in love and anxiety, and (2) how the monologic in dialogue is expressed in Friedrich Hölderlin, Novalis, Giorgio Agamben, and Clarice Lispector’s poetics of the impersonal.

In discussing Mendes-Flohr’s paper, “Martin Buber and Martin Heidegger in Dialogue” (Mendes-Flohr 2014a, p. 23), Lysemose takes up Heidegger’s question of whether we address God, ‘our eternal Thou,’ through saying *Thou* to one another, whether it is God who relates us to one another in the first place, or whether there is something primordial preceding this alternative and thus suspending the line of demarcation between monologue and dialogue. This question is also key to the sixth part of the essay collection, which is entitled “Dialogue and Relationality.”

In her essay “*Ich werdend spreche Ich Du’: Creative Dialogue in the Relational Anthropologies of Martin Luther and Martin Buber*,” Sasja Emilie Mathiasen Stopa compares Martin Luther’s relational ontology to Buber’s dialogical anthropology. She suggests that the anthropologies of both Buber and Luther presuppose a notion of creative dialogue, which rests on the Biblical conception of the world as created by God’s Word and hence, of reality as spoken. Stopa argues that this common grounding leads to similar anthropologies in which creative dialogue is the kernel of sound interpersonal relations that, in turn, articulate the human relationship with God. Moreover, she argues that this understanding of reality made Luther and Buber question the prevailing philosophical ontology of their time: in Luther’s case, Aristotelean substance ontology, and in Buber’s case, Kantian subject–object dualism.

In their paper “*Extending the Dialogical Array*,” Tami Yaguri and Edward F. Mooney propose that the *I–You* dialogue of mutually reciprocal engagement creates a difference of heaven and hell. Yaguri and Mooney distinguish between four types of dialogue that differ epistemologically by the qualities of the *I* who engages in dialogue: According to the first type of *I–You* dialogue, the subjects involved in the primary word *I–Thou* own a dialogical perspective, while the other three types of dialogue concentrate on an *I* who has an experience of creating and engaging in a dialogue that shortly achieves some kind of mutuality with its conversational partner. The second possible stance toward the *You* is described as an *I–You* dialogue of sympathy, a third possibility is described as an *I–You* dialogue of empathy, and a fourth possibility is a dialogue that transcends *human* mutuality by compassion and reaches a *heavenly dialogue*. By nuancing possible dialogical relations in these ways, Yaguri and Mooney aim to extend the dialogical array.

Niels Wilde, too, explores the quality of dialogical relations in his essay “*Buoyant Ontologies: The Roots and Ramifications of Dialogue in Buber and Heidegger*.” Wilde defends the assumption that both Buber and Heidegger develop a notion of responsivity. While Buber does so in terms of dialogue, the latter does so in terms of correspondence. Wilde claims that they not merely develop different types of discourse, but also describe transcendental structures in the context of a *relational* or *fundamental* ontology. However, and this is Wilde’s second claim, the responsive register is also transmitted on a different frequency: this is one that begins from elsewhere, not in a transcendental a priori, but rather in a transcendent address. Through a focused reading of Buber and Heidegger, Wilde reaches the conclusion that responsivity takes place across the transcendental–transcendent divide. In addition, responsivity *shapes* the ontological makeup of such a divide because the ontological conditions of dialogue are negotiated *through* dialogue.

The seventh part of the essay collection addresses “**Dialogue and Messianic Politics.**” Libera Pisano investigates “**‘The Tragedy of Messianic Politics’: Gustav Landauer’s Hidden Legacy in Franz Rosenzweig and Walter Benjamin.**” Landauer (1870–1919), a German-Jewish anarchist and radical thinker, was brutally murdered in the Munich Soviet Republic. Mendes-Flohr has contributed enormously to the rediscovery of this long-neglected figure, who nonetheless played a crucial role in the intellectual debates of his time. Mendes-Flohr emphasizes the impact that Landauer’s death had on Buber’s conception of politics at a time when Jewish revolutionaries were attempting to combine messianism and activism. As a complementary supplement to Mendes-Flohr’s insightful work, Pisano attempts to show how Landauer’s legacy can be traced in two other German-Jewish thinkers, namely Rosenzweig and Benjamin, albeit with important differences. In particular, she exposes how Landauer’s idea of an anarchic diaspora and his idea of revolution as interruption, which are both based on a unique conception of time, can be seen as two powerful theo-political devices that he used in order to dismantle a too narrow and too technical idea of politics. In addition, Pisano traces the echo of the anarchic diaspora in Rosenzweig’s thought, and she explains how Landauer’s idea of interruption and inversion re-emerges in Benjamin’s conception of revolution.

In his essay “**United Passions: Jewish Modernity and the Quest for Integrity in Paul Mendes-Flohr,**” Samuel Hayim Brody gives an overview of Paul Mendes-Flohr’s long and distinguished career as a historian of modern Jewish thought and the ways in which he has followed Martin Buber in striving for unity among the many subjects and spheres of Jewish life in modernity: politics, religion, economics, etc. Brody argues that Mendes-Flohr, like Buber himself, has done so both descriptively and normatively, by holding divisions together in productive and pluralistic tension. Brody discusses the notions of ‘theo-politics’ and of a ‘cosmopolitan Zionism.’

The last essay in the collection is authored by Bjarke Mørkøre Stigel Hansen and Hermann Schmid. It is entitled “**Tragic Dialogue: On the Ruins of Language.**” Hansen and Schmidt perceive dialogue as a persistent but elusive presence in many of Benjamin’s writings, and they are well aware of the fact that Benjamin’s relationship to dialogue is both significant and difficult to grasp. In “*The Role of Language in Trauerspiel and Tragedy*” (1916), Benjamin engages more explicitly and directly with dialogue. Accordingly, Hansen and Schmidt start by outlining Benjamin’s understanding of language after the Fall. Then, they consider how his reflections on language are intimated in his writings on tragedy and tragic dialogue. Finally, the authors take a closer look at Benjamin’s notion of thought images (*Denkbilder*), which was conceived in 1924 and can be viewed as a response to the call of language after the Fall. Thus, Hansen and Schmid tentatively illuminate a line of development in Benjamin’s understanding of dialogical language, which lies at the crossroads of literature and politics.

In conclusion, it is our hope that this Special Issue of *Religions* has accomplished its threefold aim: firstly, to clarify the notion of ‘dialogue’ in terms of an interdisciplinary cross-fertilization; secondly, to attain a more comprehensive understanding of the quality and status of the space ‘in-between’ the self and the other; and, thirdly, to shed light on the potential and the limits of the second-person perspective. If this collection of articles as a whole inspires others to further explore the dialogical relationship with respect to methodological innovation, it has achieved its objective.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/rel14040543/s1>, Paul Mendes-Flohr’s Bibliography.

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