Summary

‘Jichud’, Unity in the work of Martin Buber

The question of the unity of his work from the perspective of his quest for the unity of reality (‘Wirklichkeit’, actuality)

The work of Martin Buber spans a great number of scholarly disciplines: philosophy (philosophy of religion, social philosophy, political philosophy), sociology, phenomenology and history of religion, theology (exegesis, hermeneutics, translation), psychotherapy and pedagogy. In the edition of his ‘works’, edited by himself, he made a classification into four sections: works on philosophy, Chassidism, bible and ‘the Jew and his Judaism’.

This study examines the unity of this work. The classification into four sections is named four ‘genres de discours’. The study is oriented towards the connection and interaction between these discourses and focuses especially on the description and analysis of the theme of ‘unity’ in the work, where the term ‘unity’ (and related terms such as duality (twofold being) and polarity, duality and dualism) - forms an important guiding principle.

This unity of the work does not manifest itself easily. This is due to the fact that Buber’s work is deliberately not systematic, as he describes in his own words towards the end of his life: ‘I have no teaching. I only point to something. I point to reality. I point to something in reality that had not or had too little been seen. I take him who listens to me by the hand and lead him to the window. I open the window and point to what is outside’. People sometimes perceive, through the four windows he opens by means of the classification of his work into four sections, widely differing landscapes and imagine themselves in different worlds. Some people are even of the opinion that Buber’s books and essays are so diverse, that it is hard to imagine that they are the work of one author. From a postmodern idea of fragmentisation, this need not take away from the significance of Buber’s work. Furthermore, the biblical and Chassidic discourses have a particularly narrative approach to reality. In spite of this relationship with a number of characteristics of postmodernism, it is characteristic of Buber that he remains in search of unity, with full recognition of multiplicity and fragmentisation. He considers this fundamental to his work, because he interprets reality as a religious reality. Religious reality, being total reality, unifies all partial existence. This search for and naming of unity by Buber throughout his life and work is connected in this study with the study of unity and relationship of the four discourses within his work. In some chapters the biographical element and the development of his thinking are the central focus, in some rather the research into the relationship and interaction of the discourses. The title of the study is ‘Jichud’, the Hebrew word for unification. The motto for the study, derived from Buber’s book ‘Daniel’ is: ‘Unity is that which is eternally becoming’. The choice of ‘Jichud’ in the title of this study is based on one of the results of the study. This term, linked to the Kabbala and Chassidism, indicates that for Buber ‘unity’ is a becoming unity, in a historical, messianic and eschatological
perspective. His ‘dialogical life’ should be viewed from this perspective and against this horizon.

Chapter 1, ‘Unity in life and work’ gives an orientation of work and person. It is an exploration of what Buber himself considers his ‘work’, in its unity and coherence. It initially describes the scholarly, political and cultural context. This is exemplified by the relationship Buber had with three Jews who were very influential in twentieth century life: Marx, Freud and Einstein. Buber knew Freud and Einstein from personal encounters. In his thinking he approaches them critically from the question how, from their scholarly ways of approach, they reduce the totality of reality to a subsector, which in its turn becomes determining for the totality of reality. Thus they lose sight of the totality and unity of reality.

For a closer analysis of how Buber himself saw his work and the unity of his work, the forewords of his books are analyzed to see which keys he provides himself. He emphasizes the essayistic character of his work. They are incomplete drafts, complementing and completing one another. It is an open work, stimulating and challenging to a continuing dialogue. We can conclude from his descriptions that he would like to initiate the discussion between the four discourses, in order to reach a more complete understanding of reality.

The question of unity of the work is closely connected with the question whether, and how clearly, we can distinguish various periods in his life and work. Usually a distinction is made into a pre-dialogical, or mystical period, and a dialogical period, starting with ‘I and You’ (1923). To gain insight into how Buber sees this distinction himself, detailed attention will be given to the ‘Foreword’ to his collected ‘Speeches on Judaism’ (1923). This text is a key text to understanding the unity of the totality of his work in the various periods. With the help of the terms mysticism, revelation, immanence and transcendence, it becomes clear how Buber himself sees the continuity and discontinuity of his work. In doing so, he emphasizes continuity more than most of his commentators. In the course of this study there are frequent references to the text of the ‘Foreword’, also to verify to what extent Buber’s idea of the continuity of his work is based on his texts.

The paragraphs following try to find an answer to the question how Buber viewed himself and what his relationship was to the scholarly disciplines philosophy, theology, sociology and pedagogy. The unity and relationship in his affinity to these disciplines is to be found in the term experience, which he sees as a religious experience. That experience can only be expressed in philosophical language, where he recognizes, but at the same time relativizes, the indispensability and necessity of the use of concepts. When having to make a choice to determine Buber’s thinking, this can be best characterized as ‘religious thinking’ within the realm of philosophy of religion. (He considered ‘I and You’ prolegomena for a greater work of philosophy of religion). In addition to the scholarly orientation we find a number of more general indications supplementing the image of his life and work: man of letters, poet, artist, thinker, teacher, wise man, prophet, religious socialist, Chassid. In the survey of this Buber research special attention has been given to studies by others who describe the unity of the work from one central theme, such as: ‘alienation and the quest for meaning’, the ‘hidden dialogue’ in the work through ‘leading words’ (‘Leitworte’), ‘polar dualities’, the ‘secrecy of God’ (the ‘Eclipse of God’), the ‘concept of faith’, ‘good and evil’, the ‘relationship man-world’.
The chapter ends with arguments why for the further set-up a choice has been made for the four discourses and a division into a pre-dialogical and dialogical period.

Chapter 2, ‘Unity from chaos’, describes the origin and development of the theme and concept in the philosophical/general discourse, as distinct from the Jewish discourse, in the pre-dialogical period. The longing for unity covers the pre-dialogical period from Buber’s first publications around 1900, up to and including the publication of ‘Daniel’ (1913), which he considered his most important work till then. He described his life after his early childhood as a period of chaos, confusion and fragmentisation. This was especially due to the influence of Nietzsche. He broke away from this by joining Zionism, which he experienced in terms of cultural renewal. He looked for experiencing unity in mysticism. In his attention for German mysticism he tried to attain an experience of unity, without sacrificing the importance of the unity of the person in the individuation, and an experience of all in one. This mysticism of Buber has been described by some as an ‘atheistic mysticism’, related to an ‘atheistic theology’, whose limits are hard to define in comparison with a pantheistic experience. Sometimes Buber sees the unity of God as emerging from a projecting need for unity of man, without it becoming clear whether, in doing so, he denies God as the unconditional, or as the foundation of being. In ‘Ecstatic Confessions’ we find a motive that resonates in all his later work: what is experienced in the mystical experience cannot, yet must, from an inner urge, be expressed in language.

Unity also has a central role in his interest for Oriental thinking. In ‘The road/way of Tao’ the experience of unity is no longer the central issue, but rather following the road leading to unity. It is the unity of realization, which is given a central place in ‘Daniel’. In ‘Daniel’ the relation of unity to polarity is the central theme. In the five conversations the themes of unity and polarity are developed. In this way the formal frameworks are defined, from which his dialogical philosophy is to develop. As a result, these frameworks of unity and polarity do acquire a different content and direction, from the encounter with an independent otherness. The development from ‘Daniel’ gains a content and practical elaboration at the outbreak of the First World War, when Buber, together with others in the ‘Forte Kreis’ tries to make a contribution towards preventing the war. The categories of his thinking, such as realization and the movement from potentiality to actuality (‘kinesis’) are, in their abstraction, not resistant to the outbreak of chaos.

Within this philosophical/general discourse he refers to a wide range of religious traditions, such as classical antiquity, Christianity, German mysticism, oriental religions and Taoism. There are remarkably rare references to Jewish tradition, as compared with references to Christianity, especially to the New Testament and to Jesus. In developing the concept of unity he distances himself more and more from a metaphysical-philosophical definition of the concept of unity, as dominant in western philosophy. Unity is not primarily thought, but done in realization, as realization of the unity of the self in the world, but still without the defining relation with the ‘you’ as opposite in a polar duality.

Chapter 3, ‘Unity through chaos’, describes the development of the theme of unity in the pre-dialogical Jewish discourse. Within this discourse unity is also the central theme, which is not only evident from the appearance of the concept of unity, but also from the rhetorical composition of speeches and essays. Within this discourse
the emergence can be seen of what he sees as one great religious experience that he became aware of between 1912 and 1919. From here he manages to arrive at a new experiencing and formulation of unity from the chaos of war, a duality, in which the duality of ‘I’ and ‘You’ remains essential throughout the quest for unity in this reality.

In the search for a ‘Jewish Renaissance’, in the emphasis on concepts such as creativity, self-expression and strength, the influence of Nietzsche can be seen. In his elaboration of the ‘Jewish Renaissance’ various unity-motives are present: the unity of national and international culture, the unity between Eastern European and Western European Jewry, the unity of political and cultural Zionism, the unity of higher and lower culture, the unity of culture and religion.

In an early theoretical paper on Chassidism, the section ‘The Life of the Hasidim’ in ‘The Legend of the Baal-Shem’, he describes Chassidism with the help of four concepts, in which ‘unity’ comes up again and again. Hithlahawuth: the ardor of ecstasy, as a climbing to the unity of God. Awoda: service in the world in order to reunite God with his Schechina resident in the world. Kawwana: the intention of a soul, directed towards one goal: the redemption, as the ultimate unification in God of all and everything in creation. Schifluth: humility, through which the unified man wants to share his unity with the other, by experiencing his life as his own life. The theme and concept of unity in this discourse are elaborated further by means of the description of aspects of unity that can be described as an ascending series of ordered entities: ecstasy and unity, man as a unity, unity as a deed, unity and sin, unity and language, community and people as a unity, unity with earth, nature and land, Jewry and the unity of the peoples, the unity of God and the unity of reality. This can be seen as one of the clearest examples of the anchoring of Buber in Jewish tradition, in which unity is an essential theme and concept. The same holds true for his thinking in polarities, as polar dualities that can enclose contrasting attributes. It is not a matter of either-or, but rather both-and.

In the Jewish pre-dialogical discourse the influence of Nietzsche is still visible in the way in which Buber describes the ‘Jewish Renaissance’, but Spinoza replaces Nietzsche as most important philosopher. He initially describes him as pantheistic, later panentheistic, in accordance with the way in which his own thinking develops. Besides, the influence of German mysticism is constantly pushed back by Chassidic mysticism. This can be illustrated in the distance he takes from mysticism as an ecstatic experience, in which man is alone, in favour of a religious experience, with mystical connotations, in the everyday life. He follows this pattern in the structure and composition of his books ‘Daniel’ and ‘Events and Meetings’, as a description of this journey in more secular and philosophical terms.

The biblical discourse does not play an important part in this period yet, but does play a part in his changing thinking: from God as a projection, to God as an independent and transcendent presence. He sees the narrative books of the bible as ‘the history of the encounters of JHWH with his people’. Words such as ‘revelation’ and the ‘voice’, which addresses man in what happens, appear especially in the speeches shortly after the First World War. These references to the use of language of his dialogical period are also to be found in the words he uses. His use of the terms ‘I’ and ‘You’ appears at an early stage, so that there is insufficient reason for arguing that Buber did not start using this terminology until late, when completing his book ‘I and You’ (1923). It is this development within the Jewish discourse that helps him through the crisis of war, in a transition to the dialogical period.
Chapter 4, ‘Unity unfolded to duality. Unity in the dialogical period’, describes the place and function of the theme of unity especially from ‘I and You’, which is mostly considered to be Buber's most important work. Against the prevailing opinion that Buber wrote this book based on the elaboration of a series of lectures on ‘Religion as Presence’ in 1922, it is asserted that Buber’s statement that there was already a first concept in 1916, is not implausible. It evolved from a long process of growth and maturing between 1912-1919.

The theme of unity in ‘I and You’ is explored through six subthemes:

- Unity unfolded as duality: The world is a unity which manifests itself to man and unfolds as a duality, in an ‘I-You’ relationship and an ‘I-It’ relationship, related to one another as a polar duality.
- I as a unity and you as a unity: man who seeks to meet the other as you must first be a unity in himself before the twofoldness of I and You originates, in which ‘man becomes an I through a You’.
- I and You as a twofoldness: here he sees a distinction with most forms of mysticism, in which a unity without duality is experienced. In the encounter of I and You the singularity and the otherness of the other cannot be left out.
- The ‘between’, the ‘word’ and the ‘spirit’ creating as a unity: in the bipolar relationship of I and You, the ‘between’ creates unity, which he can also refer to as ‘word’ and ‘spirit’, with an implicit reference to Schechina, as the immanent presence of God in the world.
- ‘I-You’ and ‘I-It’ as dual polarity: this relationship is often seen as a dualism, or as an either-or, and not as a sliding scale from the highest form of I-You to the lowest form of an I-It. They are not circumstances that alternate purely all the time, but they are mutually interwoven. The term ‘Gestalt’ (form), which has a prominent place in our further research, is named by Buber ‘a mixture of You and It’.
- ‘The eternal You’ as creating unity: since the world of I-You, contrary to ‘I-It’, does not show cohesion in space and time, the question arises how this fragmentary experience can still lead to an experience of unity. Although God as the ‘Eternal You’ cannot be described, it can be encountered in the experience as a safeguard and guarantee for the unity of reality.

In the pre-dialogical and the dialogical period the theme of ‘unity’ forms a continual line, where unity is seen more and more as unity of a polar duality. The novelty of this development becomes visible in the changing vision of mysticism and in the importance of concepts like ‘between’ and ‘Gestalt’ (form), which are now no longer formed primarily in one’s own spirit, but from the encounter with a You. In the pre-dialogical period one of the most frequent statements, based on the gospel, was that ‘one thing is essential’. In the dialogical period ‘the one-and-the other’ is essential; the unification of the individual cannot take place without going into the world, and thus to God.

The unity of the philosophical, Jewish and Chassidic discourse is illustrated by comparing unity in four books and essays: ‘I and You’, in the ‘Foreword’ to the collected ‘Speeches on Judaism’ with the distinction between the transcendence and the immanence of the word, in ‘The Great Maggid and his Followers’, with explana-
tions about ‘Jichud’, and the essay ‘Religion and the Reign of God’. All these publications date from around 1923 and together give an idea of Buber's thinking in those years. It also becomes evident how ‘I and You’ is rooted in Jewish tradition and that it should especially be seen as a religious-philosophical work. In all current exploration of ‘I and You’ in the fields of pedagogy, psychology and communication science this central aspect of Buber's thinking is often ignored. He emphasizes the unity of reality along these various ways and concludes that the religious is the reality which unites all that is partial. In further publications he especially explores the immanency of the word in the philosophical (‘I and You’) and Chassidic discourse, and the transcendency of the word in the biblical discourse.

The way in which the theme of unity influences the entire dialogical period is examined through ‘What is man?’, the pedagogical essays, and the four ‘Speeches on Judaism’ dating from after the second world war. The starting-point in ‘What is man?’ is to what extent philosophical anthropology does justice to the wholeness of man in the totality of life. With the philosophers discussed he observes that they reduce the reality of man to a part and see that as the total. In ‘Speeches on Education’ he emphasizes that the educator, who is whole through his wholeness, accomplishes that the person he educates also gains wholeness. In the educational dialogue and process, educating and being educated are one. But there is no equality in mutuality. The educator ‘includes’ the other, but it does not work the other way round, due to the different roles in the process. In the four ‘Speeches on Judaism’ which he published under the title ‘At the Turning’, the theme of unity is just as central as in the speeches from the pre-dialogical period, both in content and in rhetorical composition. In the last speech ‘The Dialogue between Heaven and Earth’, he describes the fundamental rule of the bible from two statements: ‘Man is addressed in his life by God’, and ‘Man’s life has been intended as a unity by God’. In this way the dialogue is inextricably connected with the unity of life and the unity of God.

Chapter 5, ‘The Scripture and unity’ explores the theme of unity in and from the biblical discourse. One of the most important questions here is how his biblical dialogical hermeneutics relates to his dialogical philosophy as developed since his ‘I and You’.

For Buber and Rosenzweig the Scripture is a missionary book, which does missionary work in and through itself. Through their bible translation they direct that missionary work directly towards the German context, colored by Christianity. In that context Neo-Marcionism is active, which, following the early Christian heretic Marcion, makes a distinction between the God of the Old Testament, the creator, who knows only justice, and the loving God of the New Testament. The unity of the Scripture, as a Jewish book, is determined in form and content by its orientation towards the unity of reality, on a life encompassing reality, on a life in unity of spirit and life. The theme Scripture as unity is explored in five aspects:

- The unity of the message: The Scripture is message in all its parts. A message based on unity of form and content. The message is based on a dialogue between God and man and shows the possibility of this dialogue. Revelation is a dialogue between God and man in history. Man can participate in this dialogue through the Scripture. The message is the foundation of the unity of the Scripture, but it is not an unchanging message, because the dialogue is a dynamic process in history.
Unity of message and what happens: Buber recognizes the importance of a historical-critical approach, but also limits it. He remains in search of the historical core of the dialogue between God and man, although it can only be indicated roughly. If there is no relationship with a real historical process, the gospel would become fiction.

Unity of language and structure: in emphasizing breath as the smallest unit of a sentence, and the connecting function of the ‘leading words’, he sees the ‘awareness of unity’ of the Scripture revealed. The search for unity is already inherently present in the structure of the Scripture.

Unity of canon and tradition: Buber already sees the form in which the Jewish tradition is expressed as Midrasch at work in the Scripture itself. It is more evident in the role of Rosenzweig than it is in Buber, that they wanted to take the post-biblical tradition into account in their translation. The bible translation can also be considered from this Midrasch tradition.

Unity of text and historical context: the message of the Scripture is not only determined historically from the past, but also related to current hearing. This characteristic of Buber’s biblical writings becomes especially apparent in the thirties. In titles, composition and use of words, a number of these publications can be seen as resistance literature, hard to recognize as such for the Nazis.

In the three more extensive studies on the bible, ‘Kingship of God’, ‘Moses’ and ‘The Prophetic Faith’, the theme of ‘unity of reality’ has a prominent place. This is elaborated in his discussion of the kingship of God and of monotheism. The kingship of God is directed towards salvation, towards ‘the completion of creation through the foundation of unity realized in the multiplicity of the world, one with the fulfilled kingship of God’. Moses embodies the kingship of God in his idea and task of realizing the unity of religious and social life in the community of Israel. The prophets asserted ‘the totality and unity of culture, which can only be whole and one as one made holy by God’. The unity of life in the relationship with God is founded in the covenant. This relationship is not only described in theo-political terms, but also in more intimate terms, summarized by Buber under ‘imitation of God’. Here he makes a connection between the unity and unicity of God and the unity of man, as ‘becoming one’ and unicity.

In the dialogical period the discussion of the unity of God shifts its focus from the unity of God to the unicity of the God of Israel. The question whether other gods exist is less important than the question whether what they express and mean for man, can be secured by the God of Israel. Thus in Amos the deity that was to lead other peoples is identified with the God of Israel. He also led other peoples to their countries. Buber used this text throughout his life in his plea for the Palestinian case.

In order to determine the relationship between the biblical and the philosophical discourse three themes are discussed: dialogical hermeneutics, revelation and history, and the relationship between immanence and transcendence. Dialogical hermeneutics is described as hermeneutics layered in four categories, which can be connected with categories from ‘I and You’. The first category is the Scripture as a book. Here especially the ‘It’ category is in danger of becoming dominant. The book becomes a religious institution. The second category is the ‘word’, which can open up as ‘Form’ (‘Gestalt’) to the ‘You’ of the voice, but also
may disappear into the ‘It’. The third category relates to the ‘Gesprochenheit’ (spokenness, being spoken), as the way along which the word opens up towards the ‘You’ of the voice. The fourth category is the voice, in which man meets God as the ‘eternal You’.

In the discussion of the relationship between revelation and history the concept of revelation is first described from ‘I and You’ and the broader philosophical discourse in the dialogical period. Revelation can take place any time man meets the ‘eternal You’ in the ‘finite you’. But that does not explain how those momentary encounters merge into a history. That happens especially in the biblical discourse. Revelation is history which manifests itself in the dialogue between God and man, because man, in encountering the many moments, gets to know and recognizes the One. History can be experienced directly from these encounters. That does not apply to creation and redemption. These are ideas that man experiences from his self and then relates to revealed history.

We conclude that there is no essential break here between the philosophical and the biblical discourse. In ‘I and You’ he translated the pre-dialogical discourse into a philosophical discourse, in which some specifically Jewish elements receded into the background. When he takes up the biblical discourse again after ‘I and You’, the Jewish concepts and ways of thinking reappear, though with different accents under the influence of ‘I and You’.

In the biblical discourse, revelation takes place in extraordinary events in nature and history, but these are not supernatural or super historical. The secular events can open up for the transcendental. The references to the immanence of the Schechina in a panentheistic sense, as links to the Chassidic and biblical discourse, are missing in the biblical discourse.

Chapter 6, ‘Unity in themes’, describes four themes that are of great importance in the totality of Buber's work. In this chapter they are especially discussed from the perspective of the dialogical period: History, religions and unity, nature, good and evil. With each theme we examined how the four discourses play a role and how they interact. In doing so, a conclusion from the previous chapter is confirmed: that the biblical discourse becomes the dominant discourse during the dialogical period. Although the main focus of this chapter is the unity of the work, as unity and interaction of the discourses, also attention has been given to the role of the theme and concept of unity.

Buber makes a distinction between a view of history ‘from above’ and ‘from below’. There is ‘a history of successes’ and ‘a history of disappointments and failures’. In a messianic perspective the ‘history from below’ is eventually decisive, and thus history becomes unified again. In setting his prophetic vision against an apocalyptic vision of history, the dilemma of determinism and indeterminism appears. In this antithesis the distinction ‘I-You’ and ‘I-It’ resounds. The relationship between freedom and grace in the dialogue between God and man in history can only be described paradoxically: the contribution of God and of man cannot be named or measured in separate parts. The paradoxical unity can only be discovered, experienced and accepted in action.

In Buber’s discussion of and his thinking about Jewish messianism, all four discourses are involved. Sometimes they merge into a more or less clear concept, sometimes they divert in and from their singularity. The most characteristic thing about Buber's view is ‘the messianism of continuity’. He arrives at this idea from his
reinterpretation of Chassidic tradition. He thus transcends the prophetic vision of the future. In the ‘messianism of continuity’, every act that takes place in sanctifying existing reality, is related to messianic fulfillment and contributes to it.

Finally, within the scope of the theme of history, three subthemes are discussed: gnosis and magic, as deterministic attitudes toward history; the unity of means, goals and ends in history, especially in Zionism and socialism; ‘Ichud’ as the pursuit of the unity of peoples, in which Buber was actively involved by participating in the ‘Ichud’ movement which sought a union of Jews and Palestinians.

The conclusion of this part on history is that Buber’s view of history should especially be seen from the primacy of a biblical theology of history.

The theme ‘Religions and unity’ pays attention to Buber’s discussion of the ‘heathen’, which is linked with his dialogical philosophy. The heathen is he who does not recognize God in his appearances in dialogue and who resorts to magic, as an I-It relationship to the divine. In his approach of religions, Buber’s criterion is always whether there is an I-You relationship to the absolute. The religion of Israel is also seen from this point of view. There is some tension here: revelation and a dialogical relationship are possible in every religion, yet Israel leads the way in history, in the way in which it knows and recognizes God, and can thus direct other peoples the way to ‘Sion’.

With the theme ‘nature’ the four discourses all receive ample attention. In ‘I and You’ the relationship to nature is one of the possibilities of an I-You relationship. In his later works he distinguishes degrees of mutuality: the relationship man-man has a different mutuality as compared with the relationship man-nature. In his biblical discourse little is to be found concerning a relationship to nature in terms of I-You or in pantheistic terms. The relationship is determined here in terms of solidarity and partnership. In the biblical and Jewish/Zionistic discourse we find a priority for the experience of God in history above the experience of God in nature. The experience of ‘God after Auschwitz’ contributed to this perception.

The relationship with nature from panentheistic ideas is, also in the modern discussion about the foundation of a Jewish eco-theology, especially connected with Chassidism. In this respect Buber’s personal relationship to Chassidism is examined. A comparison is made between the use of the terms ‘covenant’, ‘holy action’ and ‘sacramental’ within the biblical and Chassidic discourse. Buber’s lack of systematism appears from his use of the words ‘sparks’ and ‘Schechina’. In his description of ‘what Chassidism is eventually about’ he is also prepared to give up pantheistic and panentheistic ideas, for an eventual sense, from the confrontation with nature, that God is involved and present there. But this takes place in a way that is hard to express in words, not even in terms derived from Chassidism. It remains to be seen whether Buber, in spite of all rejection and criticism of gnosis and magic, can still be inspired by Chassidic models of thinking, which, from their Kabbalistic background, are drenched with influences of gnosis and magic. Can he escape this background by ‘de-esoterisizing’?

In the theme ‘good and evil’ the question of unity of reality is also involved. Buber recognizes a duality of good and evil, but opposes every dualism. For him evil is especially indecisiveness, a lack of direction in which the ‘evil urge’ has not yet directed itself towards the good, in which man has not yet been able to unify subjectively experienced duality. In ‘Images of Good and Evil’ Buber describes, with the help of Genesis 1-6, stages in the origin of evil. This essay also gives an example of

413
the interaction between the philosophical, anthropological and the biblical discourse. Under the influence of the Second World War the power of evil now receives more emphasis. It is no longer only an event that happens to man, but man can also make a conscious choice for evil. But eventually Buber’s relationship with the theme of ‘good and evil’ is under the sign of redemption: man, who becomes one in himself and finds direction in his encounter with who and what is different, contributes to the unification of reality, the ‘jichud’, in the messianic future.

Chapter 7 contains ‘Conclusions and perspectives’. The most important conclusions are that the search for unity is a, or rather, the central issue that has its effect throughout Buber’s life and work. Also, the distinction between ‘I’ and ‘You’ in the dialogue can be seen as duality in the perspective of a becoming unity in the messianic redemption. The central place taken by unity as a theme, also apparent from the way in which the concept of unity is used throughout the work, does not imply that the work also forms a unity in the four discourses. The conclusion is that there is interaction, though not without frictions, as appears in the relationship between the philosophical and the biblical and between the Chasidic and the biblical discourse. These frictions have to do with the essayistic character of the work, but this very character invites the reader to look for interaction and unity himself. Though he often uses paradoxes, we were unable to find insoluble contradictions.

In the development of the four discourses, also in their interference, the biblical discourse appears to become dominant in the dialogical period. In his handling of biblical tradition, with emphasis on revelation, creation and redemption, he remains connected with the individual experience, also as a criterion for the acceptance and processing of that tradition. The question is relevant whether that experience should not carry too much. In his interpretation of the Chassidic tradition, as Kabbala turned ethical, the question is asked whether he can escape from the gnostic ways of thinking of this tradition and whether the esoteric and gnostic thoughts can also reflect an original ‘I-You’ encounter.

Buber’s thinking is Jewish and universal. His renewal of Jewish tradition was strongly determined by the German and Protestant context. The guiding principle in his relationship to that context was a ‘missionary awareness’ of the necessity to make heard the message of the unity of reality. In his relationships to other religions he has a twofold approach: on the one hand a great openness for authentic expressions of encounters with the ‘eternal You’, on the other hand an assessment of those experiences from the ‘dialogue with God in and as history’, an insight giving Jewish religion a pilot position.

Chapter 8 is a short ‘meditative postscript’ with reference to Buber’s translations and interpretations of Psalm 73. There eternity is a category transcending all our thinking trapped in space and time. Eternity is not infinity in time. We may state that this eternity also sets limits to everything that can be said about unity with the motto of this study ‘Unity is that which is eternally becoming’.