

Chapter 7

Idealism and Realism Based on the Jewish Political Tradition

ABSTRACT

This chapter will present an overview of several thinkers, connected to the Jewish political tradition, whose approaches have guided this author in the endeavor of dialogue and peacebuilding. Dialogue is essentially supported by social psychological theories which are at least implicitly reflective of idealist worldviews. From my experience though, as a political scientist actively engaged in the endeavor of interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding efforts at dialogue however noble must be tempered by a realist understanding of power dynamics. The focus will be mainly on the theories of Hans J. Morgenthau the seminal theoretician of the school of realism in the discipline of international relations, and the philosophy and approach of the renowned philosopher of dialogue Martin Buber. The political philosophy of John Herz will also be outlined with its balance between realism and idealism. Finally aspects of the thought of the international Judaic spokesman and rabbinical figure Jonathan Sacks will also be presented with his emphasis on the “dignity of difference”.

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INTRODUCTION

“When a man’s ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.”

Proverbs 16:7

At first thought an overview of a number of important theorists connected to international relations (Hans J. Morgenthau and John Herz), social philosophy (Martin Buber) and Jewish philosophy and thought (Jonathan Sacks) might seem somewhat disconnected from the main themes of this book. However, this author particularly as practitioner in the field of Jewish-Arab dialogue and peacebuilding has found these theories to be extremely useful in the effort to navigate these endeavors. Indeed, **as the eminent social psychologist Kurt Lewin stated, “there is nothing more practical than a good theory”** (Marrow, 1977).

And from the standpoint of the field of conflict management two important researchers have asserted that the field of “intercultural relations have to do with survival, raw politics and power” ...and that a lack of dealing with “the interaction between culture and power has been a major weakness in the field” (Landis and Wasilenski, 1999, p. 538).

Thus, this researcher as a political scientist believes that efforts at inter-religious dialogue and peacebuilding must call upon both realist and idealist philosophical perspectives. Furthermore, in framing this approach it is extremely important to recall an important dynamic in the development of the Jewish-Arab/Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as emphasized in chapter 3. This refers to conditions necessary for both stability and peacebuilding which involve the application of power along with efforts at dialogue between these two groups in the various phases of the conflict.

This was particularly illustrated in chapter 3 regarding the two schools of Jewish Zionist thought as articulated in the mid-1920’s; on the one hand by **the revisionist or “Iron Wall” position of Zev Jabotinsky and on the other by Brit Shalom and its efforts at Jewish-Arab dialogue and cooperation.** To be sure, formal peace treaties between Israel and its Arab neighbors and particularly between Israel and Egypt, **required a “hurting stalemate” to have occurred particularly following the 1973 Yom Kippur War.** However, from the Egyptian standpoint the knowledge that Israel could not be defeated by military means was only one motivation for Egypt to pursue a policy of rapprochement with Israel. The other was the achievement by Egypt of a limited victory over Israel in the initial stages of the war which allowed Egypt to assuage its honor after the defeat in the 1967 Six Day War and psychologically meet Israel as an equal (Dinitz, 1999). This culminated in the dramatic initiative of President Anwar Sadat and his visit to Israel in 1977, which eventually led to the Egyptian Israeli Peace Treaty.

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