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MARTIN BUBER'S I-THOU PHILOSOPHY

ALL real living is meeting," and in "meeting" we are addressed. Such is the core of Buber's thought. But what does it mean to meet and to be addressed? It is to say "Thou" and thus to say "I"; indeed, man can truly say "I," only when he says "Thou." If a man were to say no more than "It," his "I" would stand impoverished, truncated—a speaking thing in a world of things. This does not mean, however, that "It," the world of objects, of mere things, is without importance: "And in all the seriousness of truth, hear this: without 'It' man cannot live. But he who lives with 'It' alone is not a man."¹ What is significant in this affirmation of Buber's is that the objects surrounding man are, though insufficient, indispensable to him. Without "It"—without earth, air, food—man cannot live, yet did the world of things content him, he would not be fully man. Thus there are built into the world of "It" the poles of utility and reverence.² While Buber gladly concedes the necessity of the useful, he proclaims the need for the more-than-useful.

This insight frees Buber from the obstacle facing any thinker who places himself in the tradition of Kierkegaard, that is, from the belittling of the non-subjective and the consequent disregard of relations other than that between man and God. In saying that man cannot live without "It," Buber avoids this one-sidedness and seeks to root his I-Thou philosophy in the fullness of the real. Not only does

1. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1937), p. 34. This truth is stated throughout the work in various forms. See pp. 16, 31-32, 50, 63, 89-90.

2. As early as the publication of *Daniel, Gespräche von der Verwirklichung* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1919), Buber posed this fundamental polarity in terms of "orientation" and "realization." The former refers to man's use and knowledge of the universe, translating events into formulas, rules, concepts, which are useful as far as they go but otherwise sterile, whereas the latter seeks to grasp nothing but the inner meaning of every event, thereby making the event a sign of the eternal. See particularly p. 75.

he thereby safeguard his own perspectives but, historically considered, his stand also leads the subjective thinker into fruitful contact with the realm of time. To grasp, then, the full import of Buber's I-Thou philosophy, it might be well to discuss his place in the tradition of subjective thinkers.

THE SUBJECTIVE THINKER

MEN have often enjoyed philosophical insights without being aware of their full meaning. Dimly seen at first appearance, such perspectives may nevertheless be destined to play an important role in the history of ideas. The pragmatic and the phenomenological methods are examples in point, for neither can be said to have appeared first with Peirce or Husserl, but it was they who first understood the structures, powers, and limitations of these methods. So it is with the subjective thinker; with Kierkegaard he became conscious not only of his own role but also of the vast and distinguished tradition he inherited. The moment of awareness for the subjective thinker came with these astounding words of Kierkegaard: "The passion of the infinite is precisely subjectivity, and thus subjectivity becomes the truth."³ Here Kierkegaard made explicit the old insight that the subjective is a valid way into the realm of truth; he seemed even to imply that subjectivity is *the* valid way.⁴ Calling a halt to the depreciation of the subjective in the quest for truth, his dictum brought to the fore what had been operative but hidden, the historical movement between the

3. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 181.

4. It would be a complete misunderstanding of Kierkegaard's dictum if "subjectivity" were taken to mean "subjectivism" and "truth" any kind of truth. "Truth" for Kierkegaard is man's true attitude toward God. If a man goes through a routine of prayer, never giving his heart to it; if his faith is without inwardness, a mechanical thing rather than a commitment; if he says: "God was made Man" the way he says: "Here is a cup of coffee," he is not in the truth. In order to be in the truth, man must realize that God is the Holy One, the entirely Other; that man the creature and man the sinner is separated from Him by an abyss—an abyss that can be spanned only by God's grace and man's faith. "Subjectivity" in the mind of Kierkegaard speaks of man's need for continuous regeneration. One cannot simply *be* a Christian, one must ever *become* one. For the truly religious man "there is no resting place. Personal existence both 'on the way' and 'in faith' is a continual struggle, a continual risk, a continual actualization of individuality. There is no release in time. Eternity is grasped by man only as expectation." (Perry D. LeFevre, *The Prayers of Kierkegaard*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1956, p. 166.)

"objective" and the "subjective" interpretation.⁵ It is Buber who best expresses this relationship:

In the history of the human spirit I distinguish between epochs of habitation and epochs of homelessness. In the former, man lives in the world as in a house, as in a home. In the latter, man lives in the world as in an open field and at times does not even have four pegs with which to set up a tent. In the former epochs anthropological thought exists only as a part of cosmological thought. In the latter, anthropological thought gains depth and, with it, independence.⁶

Weight and counterweight, the two epochs dramatize a polarity in human existence. The "epoch of habitation" gains security for man, but at the price of objectifying him—rendering him, that is, "a thing among things," dwarfed by the universe about him. In this epoch, social relations are institutionalized, social and political life hardens into rocklike strata. In the "epoch of homelessness," however, man understands himself in his own lived context and sees himself against the wide, objective world. Man here is not in opposition to the universe; rather is he given a grasp of his own dimension, of the wholeness of his own existence. According to Buber, man alternates between these two epochs, each excessive in itself and thirsting for the other.

The subjective thinker, then, is one for whom man enters the universe through an organic relation between his own inner life and the cosmos. He is Heraclitus, who says: "Though you traverse the whole road, you could not in your going reach the limits of the soul, so deep is its meaning, its *logos*."⁷ He is St. Augustine, for whom man

5. On the integration of the subjective and the objective interpretation see Robert C. Pollock, "The Basis of a Philosophical Anthropology," *Thought*, XXV (1950), 197-220. Bernard Groethuysen, a pupil of Buber's teacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, discussed this problem in "Towards an Anthropological Philosophy," *Philosophy and History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1936), pp. 77-89.

6. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 126. See also *I and Thou*, pp. 37-38, 43-44, 118. Contemporary with and independent of Buber, a similar position has been presented by Gabriel Marcel in *Homo Viator*, trans. Emma Craufurd (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1951), p. 153, where he affirms the homeless character of man and the necessity of seeing himself as a traveler: "Perhaps a stable order can only be established if man is acutely aware of his condition as a traveller, that is to say, if he perpetually reminds himself that he is required to cut himself a dangerous path through the unsteady blocks of a universe which has collapsed and seems to be crumbling in every direction."

7. Cf. Heraclitus, "Fragments," *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, trans. Kathleen Freeman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952), frag. 45.

is *grande profundum*, "a deep mystery"; marveling at the universe and all that peoples it, "man, the marveller, is himself the great marvel."⁸ Or he is Pascal, who states: "It is not from space that I must get my dignity, but from the control of my thought. The possession of whole worlds will give me no more. By space the universe embraces me and swallows me up like an atom, by thought I embrace the universe."⁹ Coming full circle, he is Kierkegaard, for whom "subjectivity becomes the truth."

It is with Buber's critique of Kierkegaard¹⁰ that the contemporary subjective thinker gains a certain balance and a new orientation. Kierkegaard dedicated his life to becoming an "individual," a "Single One"; to becoming that category through "which, from a religious point of view, our age, our race, and its history must pass."¹¹ He castigated a conceptual interpretation of the subject for which a person is no more than "a paragraph in a system."¹² With irony he stated that "existence has the remarkable trait of compelling an existing individual to exist whether he wills it or not"—if he does not strive with all his might to become an existing individual, rather does his utmost to forget what he is and ought to become, he is but a comic figure.¹³ Only in the religious sphere, after having passed through the aesthetic and ethical "stages on life's way," does man become a "Single One." But in his direction toward the religious sphere the "Single One" is for Kierkegaard of necessity closed off from all other spheres. So exclusively does the Kierkegaardian subject become involved with God that all other involvements have become obsolete, even dangerous. Having said that "if God is to intervene in the world it must be through the individual," he went on to ask:

And how does a man become that individual? Well, unless he has to

8. St. Augustine, *Sermo CXXVI*, 3, 4 (PL 38:700); *Conf.* IV, 14, 22 (PL 32:702).

9. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. H. F. Stewart (New York: Pantheon, 1950), p. 83. There is also his famous saying: "The heart has its own reasons, which Reason does not know" (*ibid.*, p. 343).

10. See Buber, *Between Man and Man*, pp. 40-65.

11. Kierkegaard, *Journals*, trans. and ed. Alexander Dru (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 227, no. 723.

12. Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, p. III.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 109. In the context, Kierkegaard poses the problem of becoming an existing individual, in the form of a disjunction: "'Either' he can do his utmost to forget that he is an existing individual, by which he becomes a comic figure. . . . 'Or' he can concentrate his entire energy upon the fact that he is an existing individual."

do with God alone, where the highest matters are concerned, and says: now I weigh the matter as best I can, act upon it that you, O God, may be able to seize hold of me, and I therefore speak to nobody at all, I dare not do so—unless he does that he cannot become the individual. The moment I talk to another man about my highest concerns, of what God wills for me, in that very moment God has less power over me. How many are there who are able to grasp God's priority of claim on a man, so that the permission to talk to another man about one's highest concerns is an indulgence, a concession which one must pray for, because no mere man can endure being the individual absolutely.¹⁴

To this Buber answers that here the category of the "Single One," barely discovered, is already fatefully compromised, for the highest commandment is to love God *and* neighbor.¹⁵ No sooner had the subjective thinker come to full awareness in Kierkegaard than he overreached himself and cut himself free from the world where alone he can live.¹⁶ Wrong though it is to treat the subject as an object among objects, one cannot therefore conclude with Kierkegaard that the subject must be chary of all temporal involvement. Only in an organic relationship with his world, in all its historical and temporal ramifications, can the subject be authentically orientated toward the Creator and toward the whole of creation.¹⁷

14. Kierkegaard, *Journals*, p. 418, no. 1161. This attitude of being chary of other relations besides the one with God is given concrete expression in Kierkegaard's refusal to marry his fiancée Regine Olson.

15. See Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p. 51. This is not to say that Kierkegaard ignored the twofold character of the commandment of love. On the contrary, one entry in his *Journals*, a brief meditation on the words "He who . . . sees his brother in need and closes his heart" (1 Jn 3:17), expressly states that to close one's heart to one's fellow is to lock out God. "The love of God and the love of neighbor," he writes, "are like two doors that open simultaneously; impossible, then, to unlock the one without opening the other, impossible, too, to shut the one without closing the other as well." See Søren Kierkegaard, *Die Tagebücher*, trans. Theodor Haecker (Innsbruck: Brenner-Verlag, 1923), II, 224.

16. Again, in fairness to Kierkegaard, it should be said that he did not posit the exclusivity of the relationship between the subject and the Eternal without some tension and even regret. He says, for example, in the *Postscript*, p. 142: "First then the ethical, the task of becoming subjective, and afterwards the world-historical." As to regret, witness the painful entry in the *Journals*, p. 121, no. 444: "Had I had faith I should have remained with Regine."

17. See Pollock, *loc. cit.*, pp. 213-214: "To situate man in more inclusive unities in no way violates personality. Man is indeed an individual being, but that does not mean he is not also a part of a wider order. . . . Hence any form of personalism which does not view the person in terms of interrelatedness within the universe goes counter to the living process of history as well as to our own knowledge and experience, and must inevitably throw the person back upon himself, not in vital self-consciousness, but in a neurotic introversion."

Above and below are bound to one another. The word of him who wishes to speak with men without speaking with God is not fulfilled; but the word of him who wishes to speak with God without speaking with men goes astray.

There is a tale that a man inspired by God once went out from the creaturely realm into the vast waste. There he wandered till he came to the gates of the mystery. He knocked. From within came the cry: "What do you want here?" He said, "I have proclaimed your praise in the ears of mortals, but they were deaf to me. So I come to you that you yourself may hear me and reply." "Turn back," came the cry from within. "Here is no ear for you. I have sunk my hearing in the deafness of mortals."¹⁸

The presence of the eternal God in the "deafness of mortals" is a restatement of what Buber considers the central paradox of human existence. Widening the dimensions of the subject, he points out that man needs to discover the meaning hidden in the "everyday." It is this meaning which for Buber yields the richest, if not the only, relation with the Eternal. Although he is in the general tradition of the subjective thinker, directly indebted to Kierkegaard, Buber nonetheless finds it necessary to go beyond Kierkegaard's isolation, his exclusive relationship with God. For Buber, "life cannot be divided between a real relation with God and an unreal relation of 'I' and 'It' with the world."¹⁹ Rather does he seek the religious in the community of men, in the encounter of man with his fellow, in "all that is lived in its possibility of dialogue."²⁰ With Buber, then, the subjective thinker takes on a new dimension, for with him subjectivity, though primary, does not rest within itself, but reaches outward to the "other." It is on this road and on no other that, according to Buber, true subjectivity is attained.²¹

THE I-THOU RELATIONSHIP

THE notion of the I-Thou relationship and the philosophical use of these terms are not original with Buber, nor is he the only one to speak

18. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p. 15. See also pp. 13-14 for Buber's discussion of what he considers to be a false distinction between the "religious" and the "everyday."

19. Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 107.

20. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p. 14.

21. See Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 18: "In the beginning is relation." Thus to say "I" is to say "relation," for "there is no 'I' taken in itself, but only the 'I' of the primary word 'I-Thou' and the 'I' of the primary word 'I-It.'" (*Ibid.*, p. 4.)

of it.²² He himself acknowledges a debt to Feuerbach: "I myself in my youth was given a decisive impetus by Feuerbach."²³ Among contemporaries of Buber, the I-Thou relationship has been of considerable importance to the philosophies of Ferdinand Ebner, Nicolas Berdyaev, Gabriel Marcel, and many others.²⁴ But the best-known formulation is that of Buber, who so developed his original insight as to make the I-Thou relationship a key to education, social philosophy, and psychology.²⁵

Man has two basic utterances; neither is a single word, both are paired terms: "I-Thou" and "I-It."²⁶ They bespeak a twofold attitude in man: One, saying "Thou," involves the whole being, the other, saying "It," never involves the whole being. "I" is present only as spoken in the pairs "I-Thou" and "I-It." The basic utterance "I-Thou" tells of the relationship between subject and subject, whereas "I-It" tells of the polarity of subject and object. In what Buber calls "experiencing"²⁷ the world, man possesses it as an object, and this experience is *in* him rather than *between* him and the world. For the world has no share, no concern in the act of experience; it is ex-

22. For a discussion of Buber's indebtedness to others for his development of the I-Thou relation and his central philosophical position, as well as his influence on subsequent thinkers, see what is perhaps a definitive exposition of his thought in Maurice Friedman's *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1955), pp. 34-53. See also the perceptive introductory essay by Will Herberg in his *The Writings of Martin Buber* (New York: Meridian, 1956). A third exposition of Buber's thought is presented in Paul Pfoetz, *The Social Self* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1954), chap. iii.

23. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p. 148.

24. For a list of "Works other than Buber's on Dialogue and the I-Thou Relation" see Friedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 296-298.

25. Instance the influence of Buber's I-Thou relation upon psychotherapy, as has been explicated in Friedman, "Healing Through Meeting," *Cross Currents*, V (1955), 279-310.

26. See Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 3.

27. In this context Buber uses the term "experience" in a limited way. Somewhat similar to Marcel's use of "having," Buber uses "experiencing" as a transitive activity which results in one-sidedness. For him, man experiencing is man utilizing; man whittling away the constitution of things; man discovering the secret of the functioning of things. "Experience" taken in this functional sense is no doubt a severely limited use of the term; we should, therefore, avoid identifying Buber's notion of "experience" with the general philosophical view of it. Indeed, it is precisely in our times that the notions of experience and action have come in for a happy philosophical reorientation. William James, Maurice Blondel, and others have indicated the deep metaphysical implications in the raw structures of experience, utility, and action. To set Buber's specific use of "experience" against the above views is to deprive both positions of context and thus violate their true significance.

perienced. Thus the world of "It" is the world perceived, felt, used, "thought of," an object among objects, a thing among things. "But the world is not presented to man by experiences alone,"²⁸ indeed: "In the beginning is relation."²⁹

It is the basic utterance "I-Thou" which ushers in the world of relationship. In this there is no subject-object polarity, no one-sided "experiencing of," rather it is a shared event.

Relation is mutual. My "Thou" affects me, as I affect it. We are moulded by our pupils and built up by our works. . . . How we are educated by children and by animals! We live our lives inscrutably included within the streaming mutual life of the universe.³⁰

The world of relationship can exist between man and nature, between man and man, and between man and the intelligible forms. Between man and nature, the "I-Thou" relationship is expressed in silence. "There the relation sways in gloom, beneath the level of speech. Creatures live and move over against us, but cannot come to us, and when we address them as 'Thou,' our words cling to the threshold of speech."³¹ To meet nature as a "Thou" is to let her speak; it is to listen for the word, though no words are forthcoming. Indeed, frequently silence addresses us more than does speech, so often listening to itself and not addressing another, while that silence, which is not absence but abundance, contains the word.³² If man meets nature in an "I-Thou" relationship, he encounters it in a meeting of mutuality, both man and nature contributing to the relationship between them. "The tree is no impression, no play of my imagination, no value depending on my mood; but it is bodied over against me and has to do with me, as I with it—only in a different way."³³

So, too, with the second sphere of relationship, that between man and man. To say "Thou" to another man is not to experience him as

28. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 6. See pp. 7-8 for Buber's discussion of an "I-Thou" relation with the objects of nature, for example, a tree.

32. For an understanding of the depth of silence, see Max Picard's philosophical poem, *The World of Silence* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952). He sees it as one of the virgin phenomena of life, one of the realities, primally given, irreducible, indefinable, traceable to nothing but their Creator. Picard's vision is discussed in John M. Oesterreicher, *Walls Are Crumbling* (New York: Devin Adair, 1952), pp. 314-321.

33. Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 8.

an object; not to deal with him as if he were but a bundle of qualities, loosely bound and neatly labeled; not to value him for the color of his hair, the manner of his speech, no, not even for his goodness. Legitimate though these abstractions are, they fail to see the totality of a man. For he is more than the sum of his qualities, as a poem is more than the words it embodies, a melody more than the notes it marshals. If I approach the whole man, I take my stand in relation to him, a relation wherein I and he, he and I can say "Thou" and be addressed as "Thou." "Here is," for Buber, "the cradle of the Real Life."³⁴ It is in this context, then, that one grasps the import of his "All real living is meeting."³⁵

To "meet" a man is to move from "communication" to "communion," *Vereinigung*. The reverent confrontation that occurs in the true meeting of one man with another gives to the moments of "meeting" a sacredness, a sacramentality, filling them with wonder and grace.³⁶ Hence true dialogue is a "turning towards the other,"³⁷ indeed, "where two or three are truly together, they are together in the name of God."³⁸

Buber distinguishes three types of dialogue:

There is genuine dialogue—no matter whether spoken or silent—where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them. There is technical dialogue, which is prompted solely by the need of objective understanding. And there is monologue disguised as dialogue, in which two or more men, meeting in space, speak each with himself in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways and yet imagine they have escaped the torment of being thrown back on their own resources.³⁹

In establishing a continuity between "I" and "Thou," genuine dialogue evokes "communion." "I" live from within the "other," without yielding my substance and without being absorbed into the "other." Buber stresses what he calls *Umfassung*, "inclusion," as essen-

34. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

36. See Buber, *Between Man and Man*, pp. 5-6, for a description of one such encounter, and again in Buber, *Eclipse of God*, trans. M. Friedman (New York: Harper, 1952), pp. 11-18.

37. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p. 22.

38. Buber, *Eclipse of God*, p. 18.

39. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p. 19.

tial to the dialogue relationship, for it is endowed with a sterling quality: It enables one's own concreteness to remain undiminished, while the "other" is understood from the standpoint of the "other." "Inclusiveness," he writes, "is the complete realization of the submissive person, the desired person, the 'partner,' not by the fancy but by the actuality of the being."⁴⁰

The realization of the "other" by the "I," in the dialogue relationship, is expressed in one of three primary forms, each characterized by a different type of inclusivity. "The first rests on an abstract but mutual experience of inclusion,"⁴¹ a relationship so minimal that it can flow in unexpected moments of understanding even between those who disagree. It is a relationship of the spirit only, an acknowledging of the "other's" full legitimacy, wearing the insignia of necessity and of meaning."⁴² Here each opponent sees the "other's" view as a genuine creaturely reflection of eternal truth. Here he accepts paradox and all the partial truths it harbors: What had been "out of reach" is now within his scope.

What an illumination! The truth, the strength of conviction, the "standpoint," or rather the circle of movement [of each of the disputants], is in no way lessened. This is no "relativizing," unless we so term the fact that here is presented to us under the sign of limit, the very fact of mortal knowledge. To recognize means for us creatures the fulfilment by each of us, in truth and responsibility, of his own relation to Being, *zum Seienden*, through our receiving all that is manifested of it and incorporating it into our own being, *unserem Sosein*, with all our might, faithfully and open to the world and to the spirit.⁴³

The remaining two forms of the dialogue relationship are not of the spirit alone, including, as they do, the full reality of man's being and life. One is a "concrete but one-sided experience of inclusion,"⁴⁴ whereas the other is "concrete and mutual."⁴⁵ The first is typical of education, the second of friendship. In education the relationship is one-sided: Though the educator must stand at both ends of the relationship, the pupil cannot do likewise. In friendship, however, there is

40. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.* Slightly modified according to the German original.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

not merely an acknowledgment of the "other's" standpoint, rather a warm and deep inclusion of the full reality of the "other." "It is the true inclusion of one another by human souls."⁴⁶ There is in it no one-sidedness or imbalance, but full mutuality.

The relationship between man and man also knows false dialogue, that is, monologue masquerading as dialogue. The failure of monologue is not so extreme as to see the "other" as an "It"; monologue fails to address him from the standpoint of the lived actuality of his being. In a monologue the "other" is allowed to exist only as "part of myself," the standpoint taken is my own, in no way that of the "other." Even though language may disguise it as dialogue, this "reflexion,"⁴⁷ this "bending back" into the self, this refusal to turn toward the "other" is essentially monologic. Facing another and speaking to him, a man may even show concern for the "other" and speak of that man's problems, but the entire relationship remains circumscribed by his self. The "other" is not seen in the uniqueness of his own being, he is made to serve the speaker's own self. These are some of the examples Buber gives: A debate in which an orator expresses his thoughts not as he intended, but so as to wound most deeply his opponents, unabashed by their presence as persons; a conversation, devoid of any desire to communicate, to learn, to influence, or to establish a bond, but poisoned by self-assertion; a talk of lovers, in which each is dazzled by his own splendor, each lost in his own experience. "What an underworld of faceless spectres of dialogue!"⁴⁸

Nowhere is the contrast between dialogue and monologue as clear as in the realm of love.⁴⁹ Only the lover loyal to the "strong-winged Eros of dialogue" can truly know the beloved, while the monologist, receiving the beloved but on his own terms, remains closed off from

46. *Ibid.*

47. The term "reflexion" is inadequate to describe the activity of monologue, as the translator of *Between Man and Man*, p. 206, is quick to point out. The German text in Buber's *Dialogisches Leben* (Zurich: Gregor Müller, 1947), p. 162, reads: *Die monologische Grundbewegung ist nicht etwa die Abwendung als Gegensatz zur Hinwendung, sondern die Rückbiegung*. Actually, by monologue, Buber refers to the reorientating of the "other" within the province of self. This inner experience is reflective because it turns what is outward back into the self. It is not reflective in the sense of a contemplative dwelling in the "other," as in meditation.

48. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, pp. 19-20.

49. For a discussion of the "I-Thou" relationship in the realm of conjugal love, see Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Marriage* (New York: Longmans Green, 1942) pp. 1-13.

the beloved's full being. Where dialogue ends, love dies, genuine relationships shrivel. Manifold are the attempts of monologue in the presence of love; all are abortive.

There a lover stamps around and is in love only with his passion. There one is wearing his differentiated feelings like medal-ribbons. There one is enjoying the adventures of his own fascinating effect. There one is gazing enraptured at the spectacle of his own supposed surrender. There one is collecting excitement. There one is displaying his "power." . . . And so on and on—all the manifold monologists with their mirrors, in the apartment of the most intimate dialogue! . . . Only he who himself turns to the other human being and opens himself to him receives the world in him. Only the being whose otherness, accepted by my being, lives and faces me in the whole compression of existence, brings the radiance of eternity to me.⁵⁰

Turning again to the world of relationships: There is the third sphere, that of intelligible essences, *geistige Wesenheiten*. In the realm of nature (cosmos), speech is not yet present; man stands at its threshold, addressing creatures as "Thou," but the only answer he receives is movement and silence. Speech marks out the realm of man (Eros), man addressing and addressed as "Thou." But the third realm of intelligible essences (Logos) is beyond speech. Though we perceive no "Thou" in the world of forms, still we are addressed and we reply. It is our being that speaks this basic utterance, not our lips, Buber holds.⁵¹

This sphere, like the other spheres, leads to the eternal "Thou," for in each "Thou" we look forth on *his* bourn, in each we feel *his* breath, "in each 'Thou' we address the eternal 'Thou.'" ⁵²

Form's silent asking, man's loving speech, the mute proclamation of the creature, are all gates leading into the presence of the Word.

But when the full and complete meeting is to take place, the gates are united in one gateway of real life, and you no longer know through which you have entered.⁵³

Not content with expounding his I-Thou philosophy, Buber also anticipates the question as to whether his thought expresses the real

50. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, pp. 29–30.

51. See Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 6.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

or is, perhaps, but fiction. Is it really man of whom Buber speaks? Is it the man we find in the toils of "everyday"? Does the I-Thou relationship speak to each and every man, in whatever situation he may be? The opponent says No:

In all this the actuality of our present life, the conditioned nature of life as a whole, is not taken into account. All that you speak of takes place in the never-never-land, not in the social context of the world in which we spend our days, and by which if by anything our reality is defined. . . . Is the worker at the conveyor belt to "feel himself addressed in what he experiences"? Is the leader of a gigantic technical undertaking to "practise the responsibility of dialogue"? You demand that we enter into the situation which approaches us, and you neglect the enduring situation in which everyone of us, so far as we share in the life of the community, is elementally placed.⁵⁴

Buber denies that his is the way of the aristocrat, or of the dreamer; surrendering nothing, he insists that the world of dialogue is the way of all humanity. Every man must and can participate in it, every man must and can say "Thou":

You are really able. The life of dialogue is no privilege of intellectual activity like dialectic. It does not begin in the upper story of humanity. It begins no higher than where humanity begins. There are no gifted and ungifted here, only those who give themselves and those who withhold themselves.⁵⁵

No doubt, Buber's speech is far from ordinary, but we must not confuse the brilliant strangeness of his way into the world of man with the assertion that his is a world of unreality. It is true that his aphoristic, repetitive style⁵⁶ can be disconcerting to the professional philosopher as well as to the general reader. But here it is Buber who is faithful to reality, to the unpredictable and stammering character of the concrete man. It is Buber who realizes that man's greatness is in the "everyday," whether this be his meeting with nature, man, or the intelligible forms. Though Buber sings the praise of man, of each and every man, and his power to address and to be addressed, he does not unreservedly join so many of his contemporaries in de-

54. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, pp. 34–35.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

56. Buber's oracular style is most reminiscent of the "obscure and dark one," Heraclitus.

ploring the machine and decrying its dehumanization. On the contrary, in the technical sphere where man faces the machine, the "I-Thou" relationship need not be missing.

Be clear what it means when a worker can experience even his relation to the machine as one of dialogue, when, for instance, a compositor tells that he has understood the machine's humming as a "merry and grateful smile at me for helping it to set aside the difficulties and obstructions which disturbed and bruised and pained it, so that now it could run free."⁵⁷

Never does Buber ask that the world be met only as a "Thou." "This is the exalted melancholy of our fate," he writes, "that every 'Thou' in our world must become an 'It.'"⁵⁸ Melancholy it is, but an *exalted* melancholy. Indeed, this going from "Thou" to "It" yields true subjectivity, for the "I" which has tasted of the "Thou" seeks it again and again in every "It." Thus all is hallowed, all roads lead to the eternal "Thou." The movement of the "I" from the world of relationship, the world of "Thou," to the world of separation, the world of "It," is not one of opposition, but of continuity. In this movement the "I" matures and finds itself ever more in need of "unconditioned relation."⁵⁹ Thus we return to the point of departure: the "I" swinging between the two basic utterances, each in its way disclosing the meaning of the universe. "And in all the seriousness of truth, hear this: without 'It' man cannot live. But he who lives with 'It' alone is not a man."⁶⁰

EDUCATION

A STRIKING instance of Buber's sense of reality is his concern with education and the insights with which the I-Thou philosophy here provides him.⁶¹ He begins his analysis where it ought to begin, with

57. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

58. Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 16.

59. See *ibid.*, p. 63.

60. See footnote 1.

61. Buber is not a stranger to the problems of the concrete. In his preface to *Between Man and Man*, Buber stated that the purpose of the essays was to amplify and apply the thought of *I and Thou* to the needs of our time. Included in the volume is an essay on the relation of the "Single One" to the body politic, two essays on education, and an essay on the notion of man in contemporary thought. This is to say nothing of Buber's manifold writings in the direction of social and political philosophy, the destiny of Israel, and the relations of Judaism and Christianity.

the child. He does not take the child for granted, rather affirms the new beginning each child means to mankind.

In this as in every hour, what has not been invades the structure of what is, with ten thousand countenances, of which not one has been seen before, with ten thousand souls still undeveloped but ready to develop—a creative event if ever there was one, newness rising up, primal potential might. This potentiality, streaming unconquered, however much of it is squandered, is the reality *child*: this phenomenon of uniqueness, which is more than just begetting and birth, this grace of being allowed to begin again and ever again.⁶²

The child is not to be construed as simply without form, malleable to the touch of the educator,⁶³ nor should it be the educator's role merely to "develop creative powers" and lead them to their achievement. His task is to enable the child to fulfill the inborn quest for relationship. For Buber the child does not begin by seeing the world as objects, but rather as a whole to which he is related. His bent for speaking to the inanimate⁶⁴ and for regarding persons as part of a lived situation rather than as objects, reveals the organic relatedness of the child to his world.⁶⁵ "In the beginning is relation—as category of being, readiness, grasping form, mould for the soul; it is the *a priori* of relation, 'the inborn Thou.'"⁶⁶

Hence a child faces a person or a thing equally as an event to be

62. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p. 83, slightly changed according to original wording. The primal, historically creative power of the child is also affirmed by Nicolas Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, trans. R. M. French (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1944), p. 21: "When a person enters the world, a unique and unrepeatable personality, then the world process is broken into and compelled to change its course, in spite of the fact that outwardly there is no sign of this."

63. See Carl G. Jung, *The Development of Personality*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Pantheon, 1954), p. 14: "We do not usually listen to children at any stage of their careers; in all the essentials we treat them as *non compos mentis* and in all the unessentials they are drilled to the perfection of automatons."

64. See Picard, *op. cit.*, p. 120: "The child's language is poetic, for it is the language of the beginning, and therefore original and first-hand as the language of poets is original and first-hand. 'The moon has got broken,' says the child of the new moon. 'We must take it to mother to mend it.'"

65. See Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 27. For a viewpoint similar to Buber's, see among others: O. Decroly, *Comment l'Enfant Arrive à Parler* (Belgium: Cahiers de la Centrale, n.d.), I, 108, and Jean Piaget, *The Language and Thought of the Child*, trans. Marjorie Gebain (New York: Meridian, 1955), pp. 25-28.

66. Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 27.

lived and to be touched, because for him the primary theme is presence⁶⁷ rather than use. Buber speaks of

the longing for the world to become present to us as a person, which goes out to us as we to it, which chooses and recognizes us as we do it, which is confirmed in us as we in it. The child lying with half-closed eyes, waiting with tense soul for its mother to speak to it—the mystery of its will is not directed towards enjoying (or dominating) a person, or towards doing something of its own accord; but towards experiencing communion in face of the lonely night, which spreads beyond the window and threatens to invade.⁶⁸

Were the child able to speak, he would say "Thou" to all things rather than "It." For he gazes at his world, lives in and through it, not by means of it. His "I" is not yet separate from the situation in which he finds himself; indeed it marks a tumultuous moment, when he comes to say: "I want," and no longer has to say: "Johnny wants."

A child's instinct, Buber stresses, is not concerned with "having" or exploiting. On the contrary, the primal instinct of the child is to "create," to produce, to originate, and this *Urhebertrieb*, "originative instinct," is one of "doing." Though powerful, his is not an attempt to control the world he faces. True, he exercises his power in every contact: in his scribbling, playing, exploring, but it is a power of expression, of the innate relationship to each newness as it unfolds itself to him.

Here is an instinct which, no matter to what power it is raised, never becomes greed, because it is not directed to "having" but only to doing; which alone among the instincts can grow only to passion, not to lust; which alone among the instincts cannot lead its subject away to invade

67. Buber discusses the three characteristics of "presence" in *I and Thou*: "First, there is the whole fulness of real mutual action, of the being raised and bound up in relation. . . . Secondly, there is the inexpressible confirmation of meaning. Meaning is assured. Nothing can any longer be meaningless. . . . Thirdly, this meaning is not that of 'another life,' but that of this life of ours, not one of a world 'yonder' but that of this world of ours, and it desires its confirmation in this life and in relation with this world" (p. 110). Is the meaning of life simply one of this life, one of this world? Does it not rather embrace this life and the life to come, this world and the world "yonder"?

68. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p. 88.

the realm of other lives. Here is pure gesture which does not snatch the world to itself, but expresses itself to the world.⁶⁹

Buber well knows that there is more to the task of the educator than to set free the spontaneous creativity of the child. For the child is destined not to a lonely life but to a life among men; "mutuality" and "communion" must link him to his fellows.

Yes; as an originator man is solitary. He stands wholly without bonds in the echoing hall of his deeds. Nor can it help him overcome his solitariness that his achievement is received enthusiastically by the many. He does not know if it is accepted, if his sacrifice is accepted by the anonymous receiver. Only if someone grasps his hand not as a "creator" but as a fellow-creature lost in the world, to be his comrade or friend or lover beyond the arts, does he have an awareness and a share of mutuality. An education based only on the training of the instinct of origination would prepare a new human solitariness which would be the most painful of all.⁷⁰

Strong though this instinct for communion is, it cannot be compelled. Compulsion is its destruction.

At the opposite pole from compulsion there stands not freedom but communion. Compulsion is a negative reality; communion is the positive reality; freedom is a possibility, possibility regained. At the opposite pole of being compelled by destiny or nature or men there does not stand being free of destiny or nature or men but to commune and to covenant with them. To do this, it is true that one must first have become independent; but this independence is a foot-bridge, not a dwelling-place. Freedom is the vibrating needle, the fruitful zero. Compulsion in education means disunion, it means humiliation and rebelliousness. Communion in education is just communion, it means being opened up and drawn in.⁷¹

Freedom, then, is the ground of creativity, both for the child and for the educator. Therein lies the area of responsibility, because it is here that the child will come to a full relationship with the world. Hence the precise mission of the educator is to make the child, with his thirst for communion, at home in his world, the world of persons and of things, the world moving and moved. This is no simple

69. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 87, slightly changed according to original wording.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

task. To fulfill it, the educator must be in a genuine relationship with the child.⁷² What a travesty, when the educator usurps the child's being for his own aggrandizement, yet waits for the child to say "Thou"! What a travesty, when the educator tailors the universe to fit his narrow, self-centered perspective and makes himself the goal of the child's surge toward communion! Nothing but squandering of the primal instincts for creativity and communion can result from this refusal to respect the child. No, "the relation in education is one of pure dialogue."⁷³

But this dialogue, despite its mutuality, is one-sided. The educator must retain his own concreteness, even while sharing the experience and life of the child, and while, no doubt, being influenced by the child.⁷⁴ The child, however, can never really experience the world around him from the full standpoint of the educator. Hence there is mutuality, yet one-sidedness.

This mutuality—that is what constitutes the peculiar nature of the relation in education—cannot be one of inclusion, although the true relation of the educator to the pupil is based on inclusion. No other relation draws its inner life from the element of inclusion as much as this one, but no other is so completely directed to one-sidedness, so that if it loses one-sidedness it loses essence.⁷⁵

There must be an imbalance, however delicate and unpronounced, if the educator is successfully to aid the child in his own realization of that which is present to him. The educator must provide for the child's possibilities; he must see that nothing thwarts the child's propensity for relationship, and that the "inborn Thou" of the child is not distorted and repressed as a result of a false emphasis on achievement and on development of his powers. The child must be helped to face the genuineness of his inner movements; the lived relations which he naturally forms with his world must be encouraged rather than discouraged in the name of an adult world. Thus the educator must move from himself to the child in a way that can never be reciprocated by

72. See von Hildebrand, "Legitime und illegitime Formen der Beeinflussung," *Die Menschheit am Scheideweg* (Regensburg: Joseph Habbel, n.d.), pp. 355–405, for an analysis of the danger of the fraudulent types of interpersonal relations.

73. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p. 98.

74. Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 16.

75. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, pp. 98–99, slightly changed according to original wording.

the child. But this is not domination or compulsion, since the dialogue relationship has already demanded of the educator that he hold himself open to the experience of the child. Nor does the one-sidedness destroy the mutuality. The child simply needs a guide into the world he confronts, and as his guide the educator will lead him to the confrontation with his world, and show him deeper ridges, hidden aspects, and finally point to its ultimate meaning—the presence of the Creator in that world.

Among all the myriad influences which forge and form the child the educator stands out: He is aware of what he does. He wills and chooses a way; he knows what ought to be. Blind and involuntary are so many influences that bear on the child—the educator's glory is to recognize the right and to represent it.

From this the genuine educator gains two things: first, humility, the feeling of being only one element amidst the fullness of life, only one single existence in the midst of all the tremendous inrush of reality on the pupil; but secondly, self-awareness, the feeling of being therein the only existence that *wants* to affect the whole person, and thus the feeling of responsibility for the selection of reality which he represents to the pupil.⁷⁶

The true educator inspires the pupil with confidence: first in himself, then in the world of values. For the true educator is translucent, the world of values shines through him to the child. The dialogue relationship soon convinces the pupil, frightened and disappointed by this unreliable world, that "there is human truth, the truth of human existence."⁷⁷ Thus reassured, he trusts. Once he trusts, he can say "Thou," for his spirit is free. No longer suspicious of exploitation by the teacher, no longer suspecting a dialectical maneuver, he is able to join the battle of truth.⁷⁸ "He feels he may trust this man, that this man is not making a business out of him, but is taking part in his life, accepting him before desiring to influence him. And so he learns to 'ask.'"⁷⁹

Baffled and intrigued by the world, the child turns to the educator and asks his help. Thanks to the midwifery of the authentic educator,

76. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

77. *Ibid.*

78. See *ibid.*

79. *Ibid.*

the "inborn Thou" is delivered. In this way the child, sensing a Presence in his child's world, is led from that world of myth, of make-believe, where all things seem alive, into the realm of everyday, the sphere of suffering, the world of true life—the only world between birth and death. No continuity is broken. Though the world may seem to have lost some of its color, still the Presence speaks, but now in the density of everyday. Having found himself, the child has found unity and in that unity the deepest of all relationships. And what is true of the child is true of the adult:

He who can see and hear out of unity will also behold and discern again what can be beheld and discerned eternally. The educator who helps to bring man back to his own unity will help to put him again face to face with God.⁸⁰

So great is the work of the educator that he is called on to help form the image of God in man. Humbly he stands in the service of the Creator, in the *imitatio Dei absconditi sed non ignoti*, in the following of God, hidden but not unknown.

When all "directions" fail there arises in the darkness over the abyss the one true direction of man, towards the creative Spirit, towards the Spirit of God brooding on the face of the waters, towards Him of whom we know not whence He comes and whither He goes.

That is man's true autonomy which no longer betrays, but responds.

Man, the creature, who forms and transforms the creation, cannot create. But he, each man, can expose himself and others to the creative Spirit. And he can call upon the Creator to save and perfect His image.⁸¹

BALANCE

AT THE beginning of this essay I presented Buber as a balance to Kierkegaard's one-sidedness. He has known, in a way that Kierkegaard did not, that this world—humble, concrete, commonplace—is not so much an obstacle on the road to the eternal as it is the road itself. Without for a moment withdrawing this acknowledgment of Buber's role in the history of ideas, I nonetheless wonder whether he is always true to his insight and whether his insight is as complete as it ought to be.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

Indebted though we are to Buber for giving us a share of his vision of the concrete, it is difficult to avoid the impression that under his explicit attention to singular persons and things there lurks here and there a vestige of abstraction, for instance, when he speaks of *the* child. "The child," he writes, "not just the individual child, individual children, but the child, is certainly a reality."⁸² Or when, having rightly refused to ideas a throne above our heads and residence within them, he goes on to say that ideas "wander amongst us and accost us."⁸³ Taken literally, these expressions are incompatible with a philosophy of the concrete. But perhaps we should be as chary of taking literally "the child" and "ideas wandering amongst us" as we are of interpreting literally Plato's myth of the cave.⁸⁴ Perhaps they are only a poetic way of intimating the majesty of ideas worthy of our reverence; a manner of stressing the significance of the breath-taking invasion, hour by hour, of new faces, new souls, new beings, created and creative.

On the wonder and wealth of the lived moment Buber has much to say which is at once true and beautiful, yet it seems that he is in some way its prisoner. Who would not be happy to read:

I have given up the "religious" which is nothing but the exception, extraction, exaltation, ecstasy; or it has given me up. . . . I know no fullness but each mortal hour's fulness of claim and responsibility. Though far from being equal to it, yet I know that in the claim I am claimed and may respond in responsibility, and know who speaks and demands a response.⁸⁵

But there seems to be missing in this and in other sayings of Buber a full understanding of fixed time and place, of thought and hour set apart, of truth enshrined. In "What Is Man?" Buber gives this personal recollection:

Since my own thoughts over the last things reached, in the first world war, a decisive turning-point, I have occasionally described my standpoint to my friends as the "narrow ridge." I wanted by this to express that I did not rest on the broad upland of a system that includes a series of sure statements about the absolute, but on a narrow rocky ridge between the gulfs where there is no sureness of expressible knowledge but the certainty of meeting what remains, undisclosed.⁸⁶

82. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

83. Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 14.

84. *Rep.* VII, 514-520.

85. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p. 14.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

Here Buber seems to imply that the "narrow rocky ridge" alone befits the valiant, while the green meadow, high in the mountains, is too secure to be worthy of man; that when it comes to the highest things, man must be content with surmise and not press forward to the certitude of public truth. But hidden and mysterious though He is, the absolute God is not the Undisclosed. He has spoken and man must answer, not merely every man in solitude, but all men in union.

Again, that the everyday may be a prayer, not only life and heart but lips must pray, and in praying follow an order that is not the dictate of the moment. And that life may be complete, there must be not only the sudden flash of lightning, but also the still, undying fire of the diamond. "I appreciate the 'objective' compactness of dogma," Buber confesses, "but behind both there lies in wait the—profane or holy—war against the situation's power of dialogue, there lies in wait the 'once-for-all' which resists the unforeseeable moment."⁸⁷ No doubt, were we to forget that every surprise moment is a little word of God, that in it God speaks to the individual man, a person irreplaceable, unrepeatable, we would be deaf to the Voice that speaks everywhere. On the other hand, were we to deprive dogma of its sovereignty, we would limit God to the little word and condemn man to isolation. Then God would be forbidden the great word that is for all men and for all time, and man denied his social character, which no less than individuality constitutes his dignity. For as religion binds the human "I" to the divine "Thou," so it binds the "I" of each man to the "Thou" of all other men.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 18.