



Dossier “Filosofía Judía: Problemas y Tendencias”

Dialogical Principles of Martin Buber

Samuel Ballou

sballou@antioch.edu

Antioch University Santa Barbara

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Abstract

The goal of this study is simply to look into the life, the philosophy and the relevance of Martin Buber today. In each of these aspects the objective is to give the reader a clear and concise outline of the important characteristics of the themes in each of the forth mentioned areas. Buber lays a foundation to a dialogical philosophy within the context of his philosophical anthropology. Besides the monumental work, “*I and Thou*”, Buber has two other works that are of great importance in his development of a dialogical philosophy: “*The Knowledge of Man*”, and “*Between Man and Man*”, which will be used as a sort of introduction to the inquiry into Buber’s *I and Thou*.

Keywords:

Dialogue; Community of Otherness; Mutuality; Authenticness

Principios dialógicos en Martin Buber

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es el de brindar una mirada a la vida, filosofía y relevancia de Martin Buber. En cada uno de estos aspectos, el objetivo es dar al lector un esquema claro y conciso de las características importantes de los temas, en cada una de las cuatro áreas mencionadas. Buber funda la filosofía dialógica dentro del contexto de su antropología filosófica. Además de la obra monumental, Yo y Tú, Buber tiene otras dos obras de gran importancia en su desarrollo de una filosofía dialógica: “El Conocimiento del Hombre” y “Entre el Hombre y el Hombre”, que se utilizará como una especie de introducción a la investigación de “Yo y Tú”.

Palabras clave:

Dialogo; Comunidad de los otros; Mutualidad; Autenticidad



Historical Context

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“Human life and humanity come into being in genuine meetings” (Buber 2002).

Looking at each day as an empty pallet to be painted upon, or blank manuscript to be composed upon we can find singular opportunities that pass our way only once... to participate in these precious moments is our essence, to *become* demands both a certain co-creation on our part and a certain participation in relation in and with these opportunities that pass along our life's narrow ridged way. The encounter of the between, the mystery of my person and the other that stands before me and eternity, this is our essence, to be, to become, human that is to enter into true relation. What is the unifying, underlying point that holds the between together? What are the principles of a dialogue that is not only genuine but also authentic? What are the limits of a dialogue? Is dialogue restrained by language? What is monologue? How does reflection play into the monological sphere? These are but a few questions that arise with the study of the philosophy of Martin Buber. Dialogue is much more than what we normally tend to assign the word today in our common vocabulary. There is a much deeper and more profound implication that seems to have been all but lost. It is of utmost importance in the re-discovering of what true genuine dialogue is, for it is in this encounter that the human person not only discovers and encounters the other, but it is precisely where we encounter ourselves in actuality.

Genuine Dialogue

For Martin Buber, dialogue is an exceptional and often rare type of interaction between two *beings*. Each open to change and affected by the exceptionality and uniqueness of the other for the brief moment in which the two paths cross, each with a desirous notion of turning toward the *other*, both “with the intention of establishing a living mutual



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relation between himself and them” (2002). This dialectical change is a coming and going from communication to communion through a series of turning to the other with the fullness of oneself and being turned toward by the *other*. Each of the participants fully open to the unknown of what may come, but nonetheless fully disposed, readily awaiting the breath of creativity innovating the *now*. For Buber, when two beings participate in a genuine dialogue that is, a living mutual relation that has been established, a *dialogic relationship* has taken place.

The basic movement of a dialogue is precisely this “turning towards” the other. In this “turning towards” there is a specific requisite that one turn with the entirety of the self. Not only with the body, as if with gestures and speech, but also with the soul. In this way, the other becomes a presence. In this insistence, the world of many rapidly passing perceptions of things that all but seems irrelevant ceases to be irrelevant and for this moment we touch upon the limitless sea of a dialogical encounter. This turning to the other accordingly is not a turning to the other in a purely sentimental way, but incorporates the entirety of the person to the other.

Genuine dialogue takes place in the turning of the being in all truth. Buber uses the verb “to mean” in a way to further the understanding of dialogue. To “mean” someone implies not only a turning toward but delicately practicing a degree of “making present” in the moment. Both the experiencing senses and the imagining of the real work together in an intricate way to make present the other, not only as the unique being that they are, but in their wholeness and entirety. There is an elaborated dialectic from perceiving and receiving that leads to a confirmation not in a sense of approval rather of acceptance (Buber, 1965). This dialectical action is necessary for a genuine relation to occur. When in sincerity a man turns toward the other he invites and brings about a reply.

Genuine dialogue is not limited to the realm of inclusive speech; it may also be silent. In the distinguishing of true dialogue, there are no demands of the *I* nor does the *I* command the *other* to respond to him. On the contrary, the core of the dialogic relation is found in that the *other* as a being has attained an ability to respond to or answer the *I*.



The essence of dialogue is “not that you are to answer but that you are able” (Buber, 2002) Inanimate objects too, are seen, as “able” to sensibly affect the awareness of humans. Once encountered as a being, an object becomes capable of response and a dialogic relationship is established, with no word ever needing to be spoken. The importance here is that one must insist on the openness to the enigma of the being, but one cannot hope for a response as one can hope for with a person. In this way, a dialogue with inanimate objects is limited.

Buber writes:

“...genuine dialogue – no matter whether spoken or silent – occurs where each of the participants really has in mind the other of others in their present or particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them” (2002).

This “living mutual relation” in the briefest and slightest moment of encounters can be established if at least there is recognition and acknowledgement of the other’s uniqueness as a being.

These dialogic relationships are not based on the sentimental nor based on love. This is not to say that love cannot be dialogic, on the contrary Buber says “...love without a dialogic relation, without real outgoing to the other, reaching to the other, and accompanying with the other is false” (2002). But it is to say that it is possible for a genuine dialogic relation to occur without the presence of love, while love without the presence of a genuine dialogic relation is a love in appearance only.

In the latter case man sees the beloved as an object for his own gain. This would give way to a *mismeeting*. On the contrary a pure dialogic relation is as Buber writes:

“...you felt altogether dependent, as you could never possibly feel in any other – and yet also altogether free as never and nowhere else; created – and creative. You no longer felt the one, limited by the other; you felt both without bounds, both at once” (Buber, 1970).



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A dialogic relation is not a certain state of being that only a few can perhaps attain, rather anyone and everyone is capable of dialogue. Buber says “Dialogue does not begin in the upper story of humanity. It begins no higher than where humanity begins... only those who give themselves and those who withhold themselves” (Buber, 1965). One cannot organize or plan dialogue; this would indicate a lack of turning toward or opening of the *I.*, in this case it would almost always indicate a mismeeting whether or not the individuals ever become aware of it and no matter how deep their conversation grew or how much they felt they had accomplished.

Technical Dialogue

There is a second type or variety of dialogue that Buber identifies, that is the technical dialogue. This dialogue is impelled, he claims, “solely by the need of objective understanding” (1965). The purpose of such a dialogue then is communication of specific technical details necessary to achieve working agreement and/or compromise. For example, a contractor goes over the specifics of a certain blueprint with a carpenter for arriving at an agreement and understanding about the building that is being constructed. In this case a technical dialogue occurs. There seems to be some similarities in the structure of genuine dialogue and technical dialogue, however, the purpose and intention of the technical dialogue is focused upon the exchange of information rather than upon the establishing of the “living mutual relation.”

Monologue

On the other hand, a monologue, according to Buber, is a conversation and/or communication that is superficially directed by man toward some other being. However, there is no encounter between them and the results have the effect of talking only to



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oneself. Nevertheless, this does not indicate that the basic movement of a monologue is a turning away, rather it indicates “reflexion” or a turning inward.

Buber defines reflexion as:

“...when a man withdraws from accepting with his essential being another person in his particularity – a particularity which is by no means to be circumscribed by the circle of his soul is in no way immanent in it – and lets the other only exist only as his own experience, only as a ‘part of myself’” (Buber, 2002).

Buber says that reflexion occurs when man either denies the uniqueness of the other or tries to limit or define the boundaries of that uniqueness to suit his own ends. In doing this, man forbids the other to confront him and or declines to be confronted by it. This does not however indicate that reflexion is merely a matter of ego. We consider what Buber writes:

“Reflexion is something different from egoism and even from ‘egotism’ it is not that a man is concerned with himself – in considering himself, enjoys himself, idolizes himself – this is not integral to reflexion ...” (2002).

This *turning inward* is an action directed toward one’s own self, while *turning away* is an action associated with the other. Not determined by man is the intrinsic uniqueness of the other. Rather this intrinsic uniqueness of the other is recognized and acknowledged by man.

Along A Narrow Pathway

Encountering the other in genuine dialogue is not only rare but is as well an event that can be called extraordinary. Such encounters are exceptional moments in life. One may conclude that it would be preferable to remain in a certain perpetual state of dialogue once one has truly experienced this kind of encounter. However, this is not



possible. Buber, however, does not place in opposition a life of dialogue and a life of monologue. Rather there is a delicate interwoven dialectic in our daily lives that is a coming and going, a moving from dialogue to monologue and from monologue to dialogue. That each Thou must become an It, for Buber is melancholy, but one must always retain hope that every It may become a Thou.

Today encountering the other in a genuine dialogue seems to be almost a lost cause for various reasons. Perhaps one of these reasons is the vulnerability that the person enters in dialogue. If dialogue requires a complete openness of the person, the person stands in a vulnerable and/or fragile state in front of the other. This giving of oneself in a complete way the person stands without any masks, the person genuinely is who he is and nothing more or less. The key here is being authentic. The *seeming person* (Buber, 1965) is one who appears to be in front of the other. This appearing is a necessary means in which we present ourselves to the world, and therefore we are present to the world; however, the problem is found in, to what degree do we become preoccupied with how we are seen, rather than *being*.

This seeming cannot be eliminated, but the key here is in authentically being who we really are. We appear before the other as who we want to appear, but how much of this is reflecting a true authenticity of our being? When we are truly ourselves we are in a vulnerable position. How so? In being open and giving of ourselves we are placing ourselves in the position of being either accepted or rejected by the other. Rejection or objectifying the other is an obvious pain that we all have suffered at one time or another. These experiences of being interpreted as an object are a limiting of becoming. We then in turn become more of a *seeming person* in order not to be hurt and this cycle continues.

If we are to rediscover the “dialogical principle” there is then a certain risk that we must take. This risk implies a giving of ourselves in our wholeness rather than a placing of who we want to be to the other. The risk then is we will either encounter acceptance or rejection. With fear of rejection many have developed barriers that do not allow for



others to come into an encounter with others, and this leads to the *seeming person* that Buber speaks of (Buber, 2002).

A life of dialogue is founded upon the awareness that man has of his potential to relate. It is grounded upon man's recognition and acceptance of the uniqueness of the other and of himself. And finally, it is based on man's ability to act on these qualities. But even with the greatest intentions man cannot preserve a perpetual state of dialogue, or rather a perpetual state of I-Thou relation, but one must take the risk when these precious moments pass our way. This is to be human, to relate and to enter into this mystery that is the genuine dialogue.

The coming and going from a dialogical state and *monological* state is part of the overall state of human life, but it requires of us a certain openness to the infinite possibilities that are before us. Just beyond the horizon of the unknown there lies an immense sea of potentialities that will only come our way once in the now of our lives, are we prepared to be opened to these possibilities, to be changed by them? Man's world is inherently two-fold, the coming and going from these two realms of possibility is our privilege as human beings to take and actualize in our lives.

Human beings are in the utmost unique place of all creatures precisely for this reason: because of the two-fold nature of man's world, and the two-fold attitude of man. No other creature has this possibility.

Philosophical Ideas and Themes in *I and Thou*

„Die Welt als Erfahrung gehört dem Grundwort Ich-Es zu
Das Grundwort Ich-Du stiftet die Welt der Beziehung“¹ (Buber, 1958).

Buber perhaps is best known for his work entitled *Ich und Du*, which has roots dating back to the fall of 1919, was first published in German in 1923, and in 1927 it was first

¹ The world as experience belongs to the primary word I-It, the primary word I-Thou establishes the world of relation. Trans. by Samuel Ballou



translated into English (Buber, 1970). In it Buber lays the foundation for his dialogical philosophy. *I and Thou* is written in a very different literary style in comparison to any other philosophical work. Buber does not write *I and Thou* using a concise systematic method; rather Buber uses a succession of long and shorter aphorisms. He divides the book into three parts. The aphorisms within each section tend to be arranged without any specific linear progression. This is because they are not intended to be read as a logical argument that has specific steps in building a case, but rather Buber intends that they be read as related reflections.

Looking at the larger picture, however, each of the three sections comprises a stage in Buber's larger argument. The first part of the book Buber establishes a very fundamental premise. Buber is the first to show that Man's world is inherently twofold. Everything, depending on how we look at it, can be seen as an *It*, or as a *Thou*. This is based upon two primary word pairs that all Man utters when he speaks; either I-It, or I-Thou.

The fundamental concept that underlies the entire book is the distinction made in the first section between the two modes of engaging the world. The more common of these two modes is what Buber calls "experience". This makes up the world of the word pair I-It. This mode is by far the most familiar to anyone, because it is the mode that Man almost exclusively utilizes and fundamentally goes about constructing his world. In the world of I-It Man gains experience through collecting data, analyzing it, classifying it, theorizing about it. The object of experience, or the *It*, is viewed as a thing among things to be utilized, or to be served for some purpose. In experience, we see our object as a collection of qualities and quantities.

In addition to this mode, Man as Man has something that no other creature has, this is the ability to speak the basic word pair I-Thou and by thus speaking it entering into a dialogical relation (1970). This is what Buber calls "encounter" or "encounter". When we enter into a dialogical relationship with an object we have an encounter with that object and both the *I* and the *Thou* are transformed by the relation that has occurred.



The *Thou* that we encounter is to be met in its entirety, not as a mere sum of its qualities and quantities.

Buber shows us that we can enter into dialogue with any of the objects that we experience; with inanimate objects, with animals, with people, and with God, each obviously in a varying degree and different manner. When speaking of how we can enter into a dialogue with inanimate objects, we find a limitation as the inanimate object is most limited. With animals, too, there is a large limitation to the dialogue that we can enter into. With Man the phenomena of encounter can perhaps be best described as love, but is not limited to love. We can also enter into dialogical relation with a being that cannot be the object of experience: the eternal Thou, God.

The second part of the book, Buber looks at human life lived in society. This is done by his investigating both society in itself and how Man exists within society. Buber explains that modern society leaves man alienated and isolated because it lacks to acknowledge both modes that we have for engaging the world. Sadly, the paradigm for modern society is lived almost exclusively in the I-It mode. Buber also looks at how modern society is built and based upon the mode of I-It in the realms of: politics, economics, public institutions, and even much of personal life. Each are all fundamentally based in the fact that we view every other being as an *It* rather than a *Thou*. This has led to modern Man feeling alienated, isolated and alone; existential anguish, worries of meaninglessness, depression, are all results of our strict reliance on the mode of I-It to dominate how we engage our world.

Finally, in the third part, Buber touches on the subject of our relation with the eternal Thou. This done by building on the conclusions made in the two previous parts. Buber tells of how to go about building a fulfilling and meaningful society, a true community. This is to be done by way of making proper use of the neglected mode of engaging the world, that is the mode of I-Thou. In this final section, Buber offers to us his solution to modern Man's woes. This solution involves an opening of ourselves to dialogue, to encounter, and thus help to build a society that is based on the relational *Thou* rather



than one the experiential *It*. As we know all encounters are fleeting, a *Thou* will soon enough become an *It*, and again the *It* can become a *Thou* (Buber, 1958).

In humanity, there is a deep longing for something to fulfill a void. To this dilemma, Buber offers his solution, an encounter with the absolute relation, the eternal Thou. We cannot seek out this encounter; rather we must prepare ourselves for it. If we ready ourselves for this encounter it most definitely will occur, and the proof that it has taken place is to be found in the transformation that we undergo.

After a relation with the eternal Thou, we can then speak the word pair I-Thou, for every Thou has its root in the eternal *Thou*. This transformation Buber tells us is divine grace as a holy-insecurity. Thus, filled with a loving responsibility, we are given the ability to say “Thou” to the world. Man, then is no longer alienated, and does not worry about the meaninglessness of life, man is fulfilled and completed, and will help others to reach this goal as well, man will help to build an ideal society, a real community, which is made up of people who have also have undergone this transformation.

The Two Modes of Engaging the World

The basic principle underlying all of Buber’s philosophy is in the premise that man has two modes in which engaging the world is possible. However, these two modes are not set in conflict rather reflect the two-fold world in which man lives and man’s two-fold attitude (1958). These two modes are very different in contrast, but nonetheless make up man’s ability to interpret and engage the world. There is neither an easy definition nor an explication that can be offered to completely sum up the complexity that surrounds the intricate and delicate thread that holds these two modes together and gives way to transformation from one to the other.

In the context of space and time the world of *It* finds its home, and outside of both space and time, the *Thou* takes place, but is bound to return to an *It* once it has ran its course. This is because the *It* is a memory that has taken place in time, and remembered as such. How easy it is to live in the past. Entering into a dialogue with a Thou is what



12 makes present the present. How difficult to live in the present. However, Buber reminds us that it is not possible to live in the bare present, but rather offers this word of caution:

„Und in allem Ernst der Wahrheit, du: ohne Es kann der Mensch nicht leben. Aber wer mit ihm allein lebt, ist nicht der Mensch.“² (Buber, 1958).

This illustrates to some extent how both modes of engaging the world are interwoven and connected and above all necessary, because Man without a *Thou* is no Man. It is Buber's desire to help us to recognize that the mode of encounter is available to us and to help us open ourselves up to it. Buber, however, by no means is suggesting that we ignore the mode of experience altogether, rather to come to a deeper understanding of the two and how they relate and how we can as Mankind live a two-fold life based upon the two-fold attitude of the two basic word pairs that we utter.

The mode of experience is necessary to our survival and it cannot be ignored. But it must not exclusively be the paradigm for life. It is through experience that we come to see an order in the world which we then use to obtain the necessary elements of survival. The mode of experience is not, however, sufficient for our existence as human beings.

Meaninglessness and Alienation in the It-World

It is in the second part of the book in which Buber turns from the individual to the society. Buber summarizes the source of the current problems of our society in one of the sentences at the end of the first aphorism. Buber writes:

“for the development of the ability to experience and use comes about mostly through the decrease of man's power to

² And in all the seriousness of truth, hear this you: without *It* Man cannot live. But he who lives only with *It*, is not Man. trans. by Samuel Ballou



enter into relation – the power in virtue of which alone man can live the life of the spirit” (Buber, 1958).

It is here that we find that human culture is in a steady progression toward better and better experiencing. From the onset of the late nineteenth century with the industrial revolution and with Comte and the scientific revolutions the human being is ever anew perfecting and fine-tuning the ability to experience. Buber sees much good in scientific progress, but he is also very aware and warns us of its unhappy effects. Our so called, advances have managed to place the human person almost exclusively within the lonely and alienated world of the I-It. The world has become a world in which it has become more and more difficult to say “Thou” to anyone or anything. The irony to our advances is that by trapping us within the I-It world, the advances that we have made and continue to strive for have left us feeling alienated, burdened, estranged, and hopeless rather than happy.

What about our institutions? How have they left us alienated and failed to fulfill us? According to Buber, our institutions have failed in that the solution that they offer is a solution based upon introducing more feelings into the same institutions. This however is fundamentally wrong because our feelings are just as lifeless as our institutions because they are merely tied to experience and not to relation. These feelings are not between an I and Thou, rather, they are obtained by an I toward an It. For Buber, love between human beings is the only encounter that can save the structures of our society. This by allowing us to build and fortify a community based on shared loving responsibility. The next question then asked by Buber is whether such a society is even feasible.

Would the economic structure and politics be able to realistically endure a drastic transformation from seeing others as It's – as the service they can offer- to seeing others in the whole uniqueness of their existence? One may ask how such a society could function rationally and precisely. However, Buber tells us that it is not as if the modern economy and government is working well as things currently stand. Both are



heading down a long and treacherous road to disaster specifically because of the lack of relation. There is nothing wrong or wicked, Buber tells us, about the desire to make money or to obtain power, but these motivations need to be fundamentally connected to the will toward relation if they are to result in true community (1958).

Towards Building True Community

How then is a true community brought about? What are the preambles in the building up of this community? For Buber, the key resides in first and foremost relation and relation with the eternal Thou. In each of all of our encounters that fleetingly pass our way we glimpse at the possibility of encountering the eternal Thou. Buber writes:

“The extended lines of relations meet in the eternal Thou. Every particular Thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou; by means of every particular Thou the primary word addresses the eternal Thou” (1958).

In order to encounter the eternal-Thou, one must ready one’s soul. Once the soul is ready for this encounter, it will unsurprisingly occur. This process of readying one’s soul is not passive, rather requires an active decision. One must decide that it is wanted to encounter the eternal Thou and actively one must take steps in preparing one’s soul. This active decision making Buber calls the decisive moment in Man. A decision to enter into relation with the eternal Thou is not an easy one. This indicates leaving behind the world of experience which is predictable, comprehensible, and easily manipulated. The world of encounter is none of these things.

Rather the world of encounter can be startling because it is not predictable rather is open to spontaneity, it is not comprehensible rather is mysterious, and is not manipulated rather is exposed. In preparing oneself for encounter it is impeccable to



reduce one's drive toward self-affirmation, the drive toward self-protection and the need to feel that one is in complete control of not only oneself but of the world.

But how can it be known that an encounter with the eternal Thou has taken place? Perhaps it can be known by the results of this encounter. The encounter is transforming by its nature. Man comes out of an encounter with the eternal Thou with a sense of loving responsibility. People who are in relation with the eternal Thou are those who form the ideal society and community. It is these people who can say "Thou" to the entire world. This community then is based on the common relationship they all hold to the eternal Thou. This relationship has transformed them into people who now live their life encountering. In such a community, every day, every moment of life is holy (1958).

Toward a Solution to Modern Society's Woes?

Buber's analysis of the problems of modern society is at the same time both intriguing and forewarning. Keeping in mind that *I and Thou* was written in 1923, we can see Buber as a prophet of the beginning of the century. The rapid scientific advances that have been made since Buber's time make his diagnoses even truer today than they were back then. Many of modern day thinkers have written on the correlations between the isolation tendencies that began to show up in the late 20th century and the drastic rise in the rates of depression.³ Accordingly, in our time and age what we see happening is an ever-increasing focus on relying upon experience and in thus relying solely upon experience excluding encounter from our lives. This has led to us seeing everything and everyone as an object to be understood intellectually and practically used to further extend our own contentment and success. The chilling rise in rates of depression and suicide might be an indication of the deep seated human need for the

³ Take for example the use of the internet to conduct close to all transactions be it with the bank, school, or other functions, and the increasing levels of ambition that have led us to place less emphasis on personal relationships.



other mode of relating to the world, a mode which is reciprocal and participatory, that is the mode of I-Thou.

However, in Buber's sociological enquiry we find a criticism in that Buber fails to explain how a newly restricted society might work on a practical level. How is a society based on loving responsibility to be run? How can one tie together the will to profit and power to the will to relate? In modern society, it is necessary to cooperate and interact with many people with whom we have no close ties. Take for example a politician. A politician has never encountered most of his or her constituents. This would be next to impossible given the sheer numbers of people and the limit of time. Likewise, with the businessman, his or her decisions may affect hundreds of thousands of people, or with people such as Donald Trump, affect the entire world, but how is it possible to encounter each and every one? How does the ability of these people to encounter really effect society?

Or take for example a problem of a different sort. Take for example that we all developed the ability to encounter those around us and developed a certain loving responsibility for those people. This could lead to a certain type of biasedness towards the interests of those closest to us. Perhaps even this would lead to unjust behavior towards those to whom we did not yet know. We can think of instances of groups among whom the sense of a responsibility was particularly strong. Take for example the case of Nazi Germany in which there was a strong belief in national ties and a sense of responsibility for the fatherland. This shows us that an overwhelming sense of love and/or responsibility focused toward certain persons is not necessarily a good basis on which to build national and international governance. But needless to say, the Nazi's were experts in operating and creating an I-It world.

Buber does however offer a solution to these worries. The community in which Buber envisions human beings do not have simply a loving responsibility toward members of the group, but rather toward all human beings. This even includes human beings that we have never met and will likely never meet. This becomes possible only after one encounters the eternal Thou. If in such a society human beings love everyone, the two



forth mentioned worries disappear. However, the vagueness of the account is still a bit troubling. It is hard to imagine how this community would work. Buber affirms that the will to profit could still exist, but would such a desire continue to exist in a world that loving responsibility toward all other people is the moving force? Would this world based on loving responsibility be capitalist or communist? Would it be some kind of median between the two, or neither, or something else, perhaps communal socialist? In this world, how would the distributions of goods go about? Who would regulate who? This is not to say that the proposal that Buber offers is not a feasible one. However, it is difficult to determine whether it is possible or not without more specifics about how it would operate.

Concluding Reflections

One of the most important things to keep in mind about the points mentioned above is that Buber is not drawing a picture of two separate and parallel worlds, one world in which one experiences and one world in which one encounters. Instead what Buber does is something that no other philosopher had done before. Buber presents to us two ways or modes of viewing and engaging the same world. This is the basic principle to Buber's philosophy. These two modes are not placed into conflict rather the human person is unique in that we are the only creature to have these two modes of engaging our world. Both modes are important.

To fully realize what it means to be human it is important to be able to engage the world in either of the modes given on the circumstances of the situation. In Buber's *Ich und Du* we find the base for his philosophy of personal dialogue. Buber's major theme is that through personal dialogue the nature of reality can be defined. Human existence can be defined by the way in which we enter into and engage in dialogue with the world, with each other and with the Eternal Thou, or God.

Human beings have two attitudes in which they may engage the world: that of I-Thou and that of I-It. The I-Thou attitude is a relation that is subject to subject, while the



attitude of I-It that is subject to object based. In the I-Thou relationship human beings are aware of each other as having a unique unity of being. The other, the Thou is not perceived as consisting of specific, isolated qualities. Dialogue is engaged with each other's whole being. The I-Thou relationship is based on mutuality and reciprocity. In the I-It mode of engaging the world we find that human beings perceive the other as consisting of specific, isolated qualities and view themselves as part of a world which consists of things. The I-It mode is based on separateness and detachment.

For Buber, the I-Thou relation is a direct interpersonal relation which is not mediated by any superseding system of ideas. The I-Thou relation is a direct relation of subject to subject, which is not arbitrated by any other relation. This shows that the I-Thou relation is not a means to some object or goal, rather it is an ultimate relation involving the whole being of each subject, the interhuman. Love, as a relation, is also a subject to subject relation, not subject to object. Love is an I-Thou relation in which the subjects share in each other's unity of being. This is because the subjects do not perceive each other as objects, rather recognize in the other the other in their wholeness through a relationship based on reciprocity and mutuality. Love is also a relation in which the I and Thou share a sense of respect, commitment, caring and responsibility.

God, for Buber, is the eternal Thou. It is the eternal Thou that sustains the I-Thou relation infinitely. The eternal Thou is not an object of experience, nor is the eternal Thou an object of thought. The eternal Thou is not something which can be investigated or examined. In other words, the eternal Thou can never be an It.

The I-Thou relation is an universal relation which is the foundation and base for all other relations. If the individual has a real I-Thou relation with the eternal Thou, then the individual must have a real I-Thou relation with his fellow man and the world. If the individual has a real I-Thou relation with the eternal Thou, then the actions of the individual must be guided by the I-Thou relation. It is here that we find in Buber's philosophy of dialogue an instructive method of ethical inquiry and of defining the nature of personal responsibility.



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