

FROM HERE TO ETERNITY

FROM HERE TO ETERNITY:
ENCOUNTERING THE DIVINE IN
MARTIN BUBER'S *I AND THOU*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of Martin Buber's famous work *I and Thou*. The primary aim of the thesis is to interpret or translate Buber's unique, impressionistic account of human existence into a coherent and revealing argument, one that is philosophically engaging and accessible to the common or everyday reader. In addition to providing a clear outline of Buber's work, this thesis also contains a short critique of Buber's basic argument, i.e., his distinction between the two spheres or modes of our being, the I-It or active mode and the I-You or passive mode. In short, it argues that what results from Buber's dualistic understanding is division or separation between ourselves and the world, between an individual human being and the beings it engages, and not the genuine or authentic unity that Buber believes his position can inspire.

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Introduction

I must say it again: I have no teaching. I point to something. I point to reality, I point to something in reality that had not or had too little been seen. I take him who listens to me by the hand and lead him to the window. I open the window and point to what is outside.

I have no teaching, but I carry on a conversation.¹

The words of Martin Buber (1878-1965); words spoken to his critics who, despite greatly admiring his work, had difficulty categorizing his thought. Buber understood their dilemma for he considered himself an “atypical”² thinker. Unlike most Western philosophers, Buber offered a poetic rather than a systematic account of existence. He was a Western philosopher with an Eastern accent: a Modern Western sage. In the words of one of Buber’s critics, Buber’s philosophy represents a form of “metaphysical impressionism.”³ For Buber, the truth of being, what is essential or eternal, is first and foremost a living reality which is best understood through our experience of what is immediately present to us. To objectify existence, to reduce its presence or immediacy to an object, is to prevent it from revealing its fundamental nature. According to Buber, all that is granted to the philosopher is to speak of the way to being, to disclose the path of passivity that leads to the experience of the divine.

But Buber as sage is only part of the story behind his philosophy. For in addition to the divine’s disclosure in presence, Buber believes, is its exile in the world, its imprisonment in the contingency of material existence and thinking. Philosophy, for Buber, is a form of prophecy. The mission of the philosopher is to enlighten humanity and by so doing to liberate the divine, to redeem a fallen world.

In 1923 Buber first published his seminal work *I and Thou*. In it we find Buber engaged in his twofold task: through his disclosure of the presence of the divine in the world Buber calls us to take responsibility for the divine's liberation.

This thesis, a critical examination of Buber's famous work, consists of four parts. The first three parts are an analysis of the three parts that make up Buber's work. Part One introduces Buber's notion of the two basic words that he believes define human existence, the basic words I-It and I-You.⁴ Part Two deals with human history and how the dominance of the I-It over the I-You leads to the exile of spirit or the divine and to our own alienation. Part Three consists of our direct relationship to God or the eternal You, what Buber calls the pure relationship, and how through this relationship we can achieve salvation. Finally, in Part Four I evaluate whether *I and Thou* succeeds in helping us reach a final unity between the eternal and the finite, between spirit and matter, between ourselves and the world. In short, I argue that because of its dualistic perspective, and despite its emphatic call for a unity, Buber's work ultimately fails to provide us with the means needed to truly free the divine and to help us overcome our alienation.

Notes - Introduction

¹ Martin Buber. "Replies to My Critics." *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*. Edited by Paul Arthur Schlipp and Maurice Friedman. The Library of Living Philosophers, Inc. (Lasalle: Open Court, 1967) 693. Hereafter cited as PMB.

² PMB, 689.

³ Nathan Rotenstreich. "The Rights and Limits of Martin Buber's Dialogical Thought." PMB, 132. In his response to Rotenstreich's description, Buber said he was willing to suffer this interpretation since he was more concerned with noting impressions than with "building a metaphysical system"; PMB, 704.

⁴ In the prologue to his translation of Buber's text Walter Kaufmann argues for his translation of the German word *Du* into the English *You* instead of the common translation *Thou*. According to Kaufmann, *Du* is used to denote intimacy and spontaneity, something that is lacking when we use the more formal word *Thou*. Martin Buber. *I and Thou*. Translated with a prologue and notes by Walter Kaufmann. (NY: Touchstone, 1996) 14-15. Quotations from Kaufmann's translation will hereafter appear as IT.

Part One: Word¹

I

For I speak only of the actual human being, of you and me, of our life and our world, not of any I-in-itself and not of any Being-in-itself.²

Buber's *I and Thou* is a work of modern existentialism.³ Like all existentialist texts, Buber's work takes as its subject matter human existence from its immediate or pre-reflective standpoint. From this position, before becoming a detached object of contemplation, our being is defined by its relational character, by our being bound up with the world through our involvement with or attachment to particular things. Any genuine investigation into our being, therefore, must begin from the standpoint of this natural association. To preserve this primary relationship or unitary phenomenon the correct method of examining human existence is not a reflective empiricism, not a reduction of our relational nature to an independent object, but rather a more passive approach in which our being is simply described as it immediately appears to us in experience. Unlike the traditional exercise in philosophy with its declarative use of language, the existentialist approach leads to a poetic style of writing in which words refer not to individual things but rather to kinds of relations.

Buber's account of the relational quality of our being is captured in his notion of basic words. To be, for Buber, is to speak. And when we speak we address the world with either one or the other of the two basic words: the basic word I-It or the basic word I-You. "The basic words," Buber tells us, "are not single words but word pairs."⁴ That is to say, they denote a necessary bond or connection between the world and us.

There is no I as such but only the I of the basic word I-You and the I of the basic word I-It.

When a man says I, he means one or the other. The I he means is present when he says I. And when he says You or It, the I of one or the other basic word is also present.

Being I and saying I are the same. Saying I and saying one of the two basic words are the same.

Whoever speaks one of the basic words enters into the word and stands in it. ⁵

II

Buber's description of each basic word consists of three main features: 1) the character of the I or subject; 2) that of the world that is addressed by the I; and 3) that of the actual relationship itself, i.e., the type of connection that exists between the I and the world.

The three features of the basic word I-It are: 1) an interested or intentional subject; 2) the world as an object or means; and 3) the conditional quality of the relationship itself, both its contingency and lack of substance.

The basic word I-It, Buber tells us, consists of "the sphere of goal-directed verbs...of activities that have something for their object." ⁶ The I of this relationship is characterized by its interest or intent, by its being concerned with something. "I perceive something. I feel something. I imagine something. I want something. I sense something. I think something...All this and its like is the basis of the realm of It."⁷ For Buber, every time we concern ourselves with satisfying certain ends or desires, be they personal or social in nature, every time we project some form of purpose onto things, we are speaking the basic word I-It.

An 'It', Buber argues, is an object or a means. Every object or thing is both 'for' a subject and 'of' a particular kind or type. An object is 'for' a subject in that it always refers back to a particular subject that is engaged with it. It is 'of' a particular kind or type in that every subject has a particular desire or intention for the object to satisfy. The type of objectivity the object or thing will take on, the type of end it will serve, depends

upon the kind of intention the I directs towards it. For instance, I address the world as an 'It' when I perceive it as a bed with which to satisfy my desire for sleep; as food to satisfy my hunger; as an entertainment to overcome my boredom; as a theory to bring order to my confusion or to satisfy my curiosity; as an idea that fits into a particular theory. Buber never explicitly distinguishes the kinds of It-sayings we speak to the world but I believe he refers to two types: 1) objects of analysis or observation; and 2) objects as instruments or tools.⁸ By objects of analysis or observation I mean both the tools of analysis, things like specific terms and concepts such as being, negation or number, as well as the objects that are themselves knowingly intended, those that are examined, measured, investigated, defined ultimately by their relation to an overall structure. Here I have in mind the objects pertaining to the disciplines of science and philosophy. By objects as instruments or tools, on the other hand, I mean those objects whose meanings are derived from their practical or instrumental value to the I, be it actual or potential, objects that are reduced to the service of a particular function.⁹ By this I am referring mainly to objects of technology, both the apparatuses of technology, say that of automobile production, and the particular objects that make them up, say a computer in a factory.

The basic word I-It provides us with an infinite variety of ways to know and use the world. Only for Buber, what this word or attitude is unable to offer us is access to what is essential or unique to the world itself. According to Buber, the I-It represents a relationship between two beings but not a real or actual relationship, not one that possesses any substance. The world possesses independence in this relationship but only of a conditional quality, only in light of a desire or purpose that has been directed towards

it, only because something is being sought from it. The world appears to me as a bed, I experience it as a bed, in light of or because of my desire or need for sleep; as an item of food, in light of my hunger; as an entertainment, because of my boredom; as a theory, in light of my confusion or curiosity; as an idea, because of a particular theory that has been devised. For Buber, the meanings we receive from the I-It relationship are lacking in depth since they are taken not from within particular beings themselves, not from their own standpoint, but rather from their relations to other things, from what lies outside of these beings: “For wherever there is something there is another something; every It borders on other Its; It is only by virtue of bordering on others.”¹⁰ For Buber, to speak the basic word I-It is to experience the world; only to experience the world ultimately means to remove ourselves from it.

We are told that man experiences his world. What does this mean?

Man goes over the surface of things and experiences them. He brings back from them some knowledge of their condition – an experience. He experiences what there is to things.

But it is not experience alone that brings the world to man.

For what they bring to him is only a world that consists of It and It and It, of He and He and She and She and It.

I experience something.

All this is not changed by adding “inner” experiences to the “external” ones, in line with the non-eternal distinction that is born of mankind’s craving to take the edge off the mystery of death. Inner things like external things, things among things!

I experience something.

And all this is not changed by adding “mysterious” experiences to “manifest” ones, self-confident in the wisdom that recognizes a secret compartment in things, reserved for the initiated, and holds the key. O mysteriousness without mystery, O piling up of information! It, it, it!

*

Those who experience the world do not participate in the world. For the experience is “in them” and not between them and the world.

The world does not participate in experience. It allows itself to be experienced, but it is not concerned, for it contributes nothing, and nothing happens to it.¹¹

Finally, the I-It relationship, Buber notes, inevitably leads us towards a state or feeling of “nothingness.”¹² In addressing the world as an ‘It’ we ask it to satisfy or meet a particular need or intention. But once the need is met - the reason for the relationship itself, what binds the two parties together – we are left with nothing, with a feeling of emptiness, with a lack or void between ourselves and the world. As with every particular need, every I-It relationship eventually comes to an end; it eventually discloses its contingent or finite basis. We can escape from the abyss of the It either by presenting the world with another desire to fulfill or by addressing it with the other basic word, the basic word I-You. According to Buber, the former choice can only lead us to despair, whereas the latter leads us towards ultimate meaning, to what is lasting or eternal.

III

The three main features of the basic word I-You are: 1) a passive or disinterested I or subject; 2) a world that is exclusive and present; and 3) the unconditional or eternal quality of the relationship itself.

According to Buber, unlike the basic word I-It in which we address the world via an intention we wish satisfied, the basic word I-You can only be spoken from the standpoint of our complete passivity or once all our intentions or desires have been silenced or set aside, once our involvement with the world has been emptied of any end or purpose.

The relation to the You is unmediated. Nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You, no prior knowledge and no imagination; and memory itself is changed as it plunges from particularity into wholeness. No purpose intervenes between I and You, no greed and no anticipation; and longing itself is changed as it plunges from the dream into appearance. Every means is an obstacle. Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur.¹³

The It is an object or a thing, a means, for it appears 'in' light of or 'for' the sake of an I-centered intention. But because the I of the I-You lacks a desire or purpose for the world to fulfill it therefore lacks an object: "Whoever says You does not have something; he has nothing."¹⁴ "Every actual relationship to another being is exclusive. Its You is freed and steps forth to confront us in its uniqueness."¹⁵ For Buber, every It appears 'for' a subject; every You appears 'for' itself.

When I confront a human being as my You and speak the basic word I-You to him, then he is no longer a thing among things nor does he consist of things.

He is no longer He or She, limited by other Hes and Shes, a dot in the world grid of space and time, not a conditional that can be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities. Neighbourless and seamless, he is You and fills the firmament. Not as if there were nothing but he; but everything else lives in *his* light.

Even as a melody is not composed of tones, nor a verse of words, nor a statue of lines – one must pull and tear to turn a unity into a multiplicity – so it is with the human being to whom I say You. I can abstract from him the color of his hair or the color of his speech or the color of his graciousness; I have to do this again and again; but immediately he is no longer You.

And even as prayer is not in time but time in prayer, the sacrifice not in space but space in the sacrifice – and whoever reverses the relation annuls the reality – I do not find the human being to whom I say You in any Sometime and Somewhere. I can place him there and have to do this again and again, but immediately he becomes a He or a She, an It, and no longer remains my You.¹⁶

According to Buber, whereas the It is characterized by its objectivity, the You is characterized by its presence or immediacy. Every You is present to us, it appears to us directly since it appears without the aid of any mediation. The It lacks presence since it possesses purpose; in every I-It relationship we are engaged with the world only indirectly, its uniqueness has passed. For Buber, the It exists in the past, the You in the present.

The present – not that which is like a point and merely designates whatever our thoughts may posit as the end of elapsed time, the fiction of the fixed lapse, but the actual and fulfilled present – exists only insofar as presentness, encounter and relation exist. Only as the You becomes present does presence come into being.

The I of the basic word I-It, the I that is not bodily confronted by a You but surrounded by a multitude of “contents,” has only a past and no present. In other words: insofar as a human being makes do with things that he experiences and uses, he lives in the past, and his moment has no presence. He has nothing but objects; but objects consist in having been.

Presence is not what is evanescent and passes but what confronts us, waiting and enduring. And the object is not duration but standing still, ceasing, breaking off, becoming rigid, standing out, the lack of relation, the lack of presence.

What is essential is lived in the present, objects in the past. ¹⁷

According to Buber, presence is an active force, a reality that is felt by us. Presence appears by addressing us directly, by acting upon us; the You, Buber notes, “appears to the soul.” ¹⁸ In a later work, Buber describes the event of relation as an inclusive experience, as what he calls our “experiencing the other side of a person.” ¹⁹ To have such an experience, Buber argues, is to be immediately aware of the inner or intentional makeup of another person, i.e., with what he or she is feeling, thinking, desiring, etc; but aware of the other in such a manner that we also recognize ourselves in the face of their uniqueness, that, as Buber notes, “it is with the other as with ourselves.” ²⁰ For Buber, an experience of otherness, a direct identification with another that lacks this inclusive element cannot be the basis for a genuine relation.

It would be wrong to identify what is meant here with the familiar but not very significant term “empathy”. Empathy means, if anything, to glide with one’s own feeling into the dynamic structure of an object, a pillar or a crystal or the branch of a tree, or even an animal or a man, and as it were to trace it from within, understanding the formation and motoriality of the object with the perception of one’s own muscles; it means to “transpose” oneself over there and in there. Thus it means the exclusion of one’s own concreteness, the extinguishing of the actual situation of life, the absorption in pure aestheticism of the reality in which one participates. Inclusion is the opposite of this. It is the extension of one’s own concreteness, the fulfilment of the actual situation of life, the complete presence of the reality in which one participates. Its elements are, first, a relation of no matter what kind, between two persons, second, an event experienced by them in common, in which at least one of them actively participates, and third, the fact that this one person, without forfeiting anything of the felt reality of his activity, at the same time lives through the common event from the standpoint of the other.

A relation between persons that is characterized in more or less degree by the element of inclusion may be termed a dialogical relation.²¹

What exactly is disclosed in the experience of inclusion, what this common reality is, Buber fails to tell us. Fortunately for us, the French thinker, Gabriel Marcel, a great admirer of Buber, is able to lead us the rest of the way, into what Marcel calls the “heart of the matter.” According to Marcel, what we share with the other is a common end or destiny, namely, one that involves the promotion of the self. I quote at length remarks made by Marcel in an essay on the originality of Buber’s witness for the I-You relation.

In my *Journal Métaphysique* I attempted to show by a concrete example how this authentic meeting manifests itself phenomenologically. It is surely correct to say that within the meeting there is created a certain community. (*Gemeinschaft*). And, on the other hand, Buber is absolutely right not to found this community upon an abstract principle, or on some generality. But I am tempted to ask myself today if the question is not above all else one of a co-belonging to [*co-appartenance à*] the same history, perhaps one could say, the same destiny, on condition that too tragic a tone is not put on this word. The stranger seated beside me in the train or in the restaurant to whom I say nothing does not belong to my history. The fact that we eat the same food for example, is not enough to create a community among us. But a minute event might be enough to give birth to a community, for example, an unexpected stop of the train which threatens to have for both of us existential consequences. This could suffice for an opening in the sort of barrier which separates us, in short, for us to make contact. And it is only from the moment that this opening is effected that we can become *Thou* for each other, even in a still limited way. It seems to me that in this perspective one would no doubt be inclined to insist more than Buber has done on the fact that this community, still embryonic but capable of growing, of becoming infinitely rich, is created between beings each engaged in a certain adventure; but this adventure itself may, of course, be undertaken at a variety of levels, according to whether or not it touches the *heart* of the matter. Here we verge, I think, on something essential, but also well protected, well guarded against the possible assaults of reflection. The *heart* of my existence is what is at the center of what we might call my vital interests; it is that by which I live, and which, moreover, is usually not an object of clear awareness for me. The community between *Thou* and *Me*, or the co-belonging, is the more real, the more essential, *the closer it is to this heart*.²²

What Marcel appears to be saying, and what, I believe Buber’s idea of relation points to, is this: that what we share in common with the other, what makes relation possible, is

an irreducible or unconditional concern for ourselves, a love of self, “amour de soi”, as Rousseau calls it. This care or love is hidden behind our everyday, conditional concerns or interests but it is the force that drives or sustains them. In the experience of co-belonging, when the consequences or ends of our private concerns manage to unite with those of the other, we become aware of this primary concern or purpose behind our interests but aware that it is equally present in the other as it is in us, that the other has an exclusive concern for itself just as we do for ourselves. In short, the other appears as a You to us because we are a You to ourselves.

For Buber, the relation that takes place between two persons involves mutual exclusiveness but it does not require mutual involvement: “The relation can obtain even if the human being to whom I say You does not hear it in his experience. For You is more than It knows. You does more, and more happens to it, than It knows.”²³ The I-You relationship is a dialogue in depth, a communication between two souls. The highpoint of relation, Buber argues, is reached in friendship where mutual involvement is a requirement, but there are need or aid-based relationships such as that between teacher and student or therapist and patient that also fall under the category of an I-You relationship.²⁴

For Buber, just as relation can happen between two persons without the direct involvement of both, it can also happen between ourselves and beings that are completely incapable of addressing us objectively, beings that altogether lack the capacity for speech or reflection. For in addition to a human sphere of relation, Buber believes, there also exists a sphere of relation that incorporates nature as well as one that incorporates what he refers to as “spiritual beings”.

Three are the spheres in which the world of relation arises.

The first: life with nature. Here the relation vibrates in the dark and remains below language. The creatures stir across from us, but they are unable to come to us, and the You we say to them sticks to the threshold of language.

The second: life with men. Here the relation is manifest and enters language. We can give and receive the You.

The third: life with spiritual beings. Here the relation is in a cloud but reveals itself, it lacks but creates language. We hear no You and yet feel addressed; we answer – creating, thinking, acting: with our being we speak the basic word, unable to say You with our mouth.²⁵

With regard to nature, Buber claims that relation is possible not simply between ourselves and animals, say, a common house cat,²⁶ but also between ourselves and non-sentient beings such as a tree²⁷ or a rock.²⁸ With reference to spiritual beings, sometimes referred to as intellectual forms or essences, I believe Buber has in mind three kinds of beings: 1) sensible forms like that found in a particular sound or colour; 2) the form of an idea or thought; and 3) the form or intention behind a specific act.²⁹

According to Buber, we can enter into relation with beings that do not share our specific form of being, such things as trees and rocks as well as intelligible forms, beings that are altogether lacking in personality or anything like consciousness,³⁰ for there is something common to all beings, every being ultimately participates in one being, what he calls the eternal You.

In every sphere, through everything that becomes present to us, we gaze toward the train of the eternal You; in each we perceive a breath of it; in every You we address the eternal You, in every sphere according to its manner.³¹

Buber's eternal You, what he will later come to refer to as God, is something like the 'One' in Plotinus or the 'Form of the Good' in Plato's *Republic* or, to use an example from Eastern philosophy, like the Tao in Taoism, that is to say, it is the ultimate being in which all particular beings are ultimately grounded or have their being, the source for the care or love behind every being.³² Because of this relation between the finite or particular

You and the eternal You, Buber believes, there is therefore no limit to where we can find the eternal You in the world, no limit to what worldly thing can become a You for us.³³

“Relation,” Buber states, “is reciprocity. My You acts on me as I act on it.”³⁴ Every encounter consists of an address by a You and a response by an I. Relation, therefore, represents a twofold event: first, our awareness of another being’s uniqueness and of our sharing with them in a common reality; and second, our active confirmation of that uniqueness, our taking on their interest as if they were our own. For Buber, what links the two events or movements together and what remains after the encounter is finished is our love for the You, a love which cannot be reduced to a mere feeling for it is in essence a commandment, a responsibility for the You.

Feelings accompany the metaphysical and metapsychical fact of love, but they do not constitute it; and the feelings that accompany it can be very different. Jesus’ feeling for the possessed man is different from his feeling for the beloved disciple; but the love is one. Feelings one “has”; love occurs. Feelings dwell in man, but man dwells in his love. This is no metaphor but actuality: love does not cling to an I, as if the You were merely its “content” or object; it is between I and You. Whoever does not know this, know this with his being, does not know love, even if he should ascribe to it the feelings that he lives through, experiences, enjoys, and expresses. Love is a cosmic force. For those who stand in it and behold in it, men emerge from their entanglement in busy-ness; and the good and the evil, the clever and the foolish, the beautiful and the ugly, one after another become actual and a You for them; that is, liberated, emerging into a unique confrontation. Exclusiveness comes into being miraculously again and again – and now one can act, help, heal, educate, raise, redeem. Love is a responsibility of an I for a You: in this consists what cannot consist in any feeling – the equality of all lovers, from the smallest to the greatest and from the blissfully secure whose life is circumscribed by the life of one beloved being to him that is nailed his life long to the cross of the world, capable of what is immense and bold enough to risk it: to love *man*.³⁵

For Buber, our responsibility for the You is what makes us unique, what makes us an individual,³⁶ it is, as he will later tell us, the basis of our freedom. Just as the address by the You is unique, so too, Buber believes, is the response by the I. The response to the

You can only be performed individually for such a response requires what Buber calls an act of “one’s whole being.”³⁷ Such an act, Buber argues, is characterized by its passive or unconditional nature, by its lacking in any purpose or means. In summing up the individual’s involvement in the I-You relationship Buber writes:

The You encounters me by grace – it cannot be found by seeking. But that I speak the basic word to it is a deed of my whole being, is my essential deed.

The You encounters me. But I enter into a direct relationship to it. Thus the relationship is election and electing, passive and active at once: An action of the whole being must approach passivity, for it does away with all partial actions and thus with any sense of action, which always depends on limited exertions.

The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one’s whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You.

All actual life is encounter.³⁸

Finally, according to Buber, “every You must become an It in our world.”³⁹ Every I-You relationship eventually runs its course or is influenced by means. What we participate in becomes something to be experienced; presence gives way to objectivity; love to use. “Every You in the world is doomed by its nature to become a thing or at least enter into thinghood again and again.”⁴⁰ The transformation of the You into the It, Buber argues, represents the source of our greatest despair or anguish in life, the true “melancholy of our lot,”⁴¹ for in the I-You relationship we find our deepest and most meaningful relationships with the world. More is lost to us with the loss of the You than in the loss that accompanies the end of the I-It relationship for in the former relationship a greater sacrifice by us is made: the loss of the You is to a large extent the loss of the I. But this melancholy or despair, Buber believes, is also “sublime”⁴² in quality. For with every relational event, with every particular and finite You we encounter, we draw closer to love, to the eternal You, to that You that by its nature can never become an It.

IV

As I previously noted, according to Buber, the relational event is not to be understood as something we experience, it is not to be reduced to a mere feeling we have for a particular being, but rather as a participation in what is irreducible or present.

Nevertheless, when describing the I-You relationship from the standpoint of the I Buber refers to the event as a bodily phenomenon, as something that acts upon or stimulates our body.⁴³ I believe the body, more specifically, the experience of feeling possesses three main characteristics that enable it to play a key role in our encounters with a You: 1) its dependent or passive nature; 2) the immediacy or directness of its awareness; and 3) its ability to apprehend a unity.

Every feeling is the product of stimulation; something first acts upon our body or emotional sense and a specific feeling results. Feeling is dependent on otherness; it is dependent upon the independent existence of the object it apprehends. Unlike thought, feeling cannot be the basis for its own awareness; it cannot create or posit objects to apprehend. In short, feeling cannot transcend what it apprehends; rather, it is essentially dependent upon the transcendence of its object.

The second main feature of feeling that is helpful in understanding its role in the I-You relationship is the immediacy of its awareness. Awareness from feeling is direct. What feeling apprehends it does so without the use of any mediation, without the aid of concepts or ideas. For instance, when I experience a certain feeling, say that of a fear of heights, I am aware of my feeling immediately or intuitively. I may be unable to correctly identify the nature of what I feel, but I do not need to reflect upon what I am feeling in order to know that I am in fact feeling something. Furthermore, feeling lacks the ability

to perceive the world indirectly, through some form of mediation, since it lacks the capacity to distinguish itself completely from what it in fact apprehends, a capacity only the reflective subject possesses. In feeling, therefore, the act of awareness and the object of that awareness are both equally present; feeling plays the role of subject and object at the same time. In other words, the world appears to us directly in feeling because our feelings are exclusive to us, they are immediately known to us.⁴⁴ Of course this mutual presence, this sense of unity, the third feature of feeling, will be present in some feelings more than others, but an awareness of unity is never more profoundly felt than in those feelings associated with the I-You relationship.

V

“In the beginning is the relation.”⁴⁵ According to Buber, before the world becomes twofold for us it is one. In the beginning, there is no world here and subject there, no absolute independence possessed by either, but only a natural partnership or association. We move in and out of relation, but the beings that were once fully present to us never completely lose their transcendence, they never become an It for us, a mere object to be experienced. In making this point, Buber asks us to consider the speech of primitive subjects, “meaning those who have remained poor in objects and whose life develops in a small sphere of acts that have a strong presence.”⁴⁶ For Buber, in its primacy, language is used to refer not to individual things but to relations.

The nuclei of this language, their sentence-words – primal pre-grammatical forms that eventually split into a multiplicity of different kinds of words – generally designate the wholeness of a relation. We say “far away”; the Zulu has a sentence-word instead that means: “where one cries, ‘mother, I am lost.’” And the Fuegian surpasses our analytical wisdom with a sentence-word of seven syllables that literally means: “they look at each other, each waiting for the other to offer to do that which both desire but neither wishes to do.” In this wholeness persons are still embedded like reliefs without achieving the fully rounded independence of

nouns and pronouns. What counts is not these products of analysis and reflection but the original unity, the lived relationship.⁴⁷

According to Buber, for the primitive subject presence determines appearance. What first appears to him is what addresses or acts upon him. The moon that is seen every night, for instance, does not stimulate much thought in him “until it approaches him bodily,”⁴⁸ until it comes to him with all the force or power of a present being. But what is first retained from such encounters, Buber argues, is not an image of an object with power, of an agent behind the action that moved him, but simply an image of the unifying force itself, and only gradually does this force become associated with a specific object. “The originally relational character of the appearance of all beings persists and remains effective for a long time.”⁴⁹ For Buber, this may help us to understand the truth behind the primitive subject’s so-called belief in magic or the supernatural.

Any assumption that the non-sensible exists must strike him as nonsense. The appearances to which he attributes a “mystical potency” are all elementary relational processes – that is, all the processes about which he thinks at all because they stimulate his body and leave an impression of such stimulation in him. The moon and the dead who haunt him at night with pain or lust have this potency; but so do the sun that burns him, the beast that howls at him, the chief whose glance compels him, and the shaman whose songs fill him with strength for the hunt. *Mana* is that which is active and effective, that which has made the moon person up there in the sky a blood-curdling You, that of which a memory trace remained when the impression of a stimulus turned into the impression of an object, although *mana* itself always appears only in an agent. It is that which we ourselves, if we possess it – say, in a miracle stone – can bring about similar effects. The primitive “world” is magical not because any human power might be at its center, but rather because any such human power is only a variant of the general power that is the source of all effective action. The causality of his world is not a continuum, it is a force that flashes, strikes and is effective ever again like lightning, a volcanic motion without continuity. *Mana* is a primitive abstraction, probably more primitive than numbers, for example, but no more supernatural.⁵⁰

The primitive subject, Buber argues, is primarily a bodily being, that is to say, a being that has not yet fully recognized itself as an independent subject, as an I existing both ‘in’

and 'for' itself.⁵¹ This is why the You for the primitive subject can never become an It. According to Buber, before the I becomes fully formed the basic word I-You can be spoken "in a natural, as it were unformed manner",⁵² only the same is not true for the basic word I-It since this word "is made possible only by this recognition, by the detachment of the I."⁵³ For Buber, a primary separation exists between the human body and the world but this separation is only implicit, expressed through the body's innate awareness of a distinction between its sensations and the outer environment. "In this particularity," Buber writes, "the body learns to know and discriminate itself, but this discrimination remains on the plane where things are next to each other, and therefore, it cannot assume the character of implicit I-likeness."⁵⁴ According to Buber, the I emerges gradually out of relation.

Man becomes an I through a You. What confronts us comes and vanishes, relational events take shape and scatter, and through these changes crystallizes, more and more each time, the consciousness of the constant partner, the I-consciousness. To be sure, for a long time it appears only woven into the relation to a You, discernible as that which reaches for but is not a You; but it comes closer and closer to the bursting point until one day the bonds are broken and the I confronts its detached self for a moment like a You – and then it takes possession of itself and henceforth enters into relations in full consciousness.⁵⁵

For Buber, once the subject recognizes its detachment from the world, once it sees itself as an independent being, it is capable of viewing the world in a similar manner. Only in this case, not as an object existing 'for' itself but as an object 'for' a subject; for after all, the world's independence from the subject is dependent upon the subject's conscious act of separation. Prior to this, the You that receded from the meeting "never became the It of an I – an object of detached perception and experience, which is what it will become henceforth – but as it were an It for itself, something previously unnoticed that was

waiting for the new relational event.”⁵⁶ But with the birth of the I, Buber notes, the basic word I-It can now be spoken.

The I that has emerged proclaims itself as the carrier of sensations and the environment as their object. Of course, this happens in a “primitive” and not in an “epistemological” manner; yet once the sentence “I see the tree” has been pronounced in such a way that it no longer relates a relation between a human I and a tree You but the perception of the tree object by the human consciousness, it has erected the crucial barrier between subject and object; the basic word I-It, the basic word of separation has been spoken.⁵⁷

VI

For Buber, the primacy of relation is not simply reflected in our initial inability to speak the basic word I-It, in the temporal precedence of the basic word I-You. After the I has emerged, relation is not merely the product of grace. Rather, both before and after the I’s emergence, encounters occur in large part due to what Buber believes is our innate desire for relation.

In the beginning is the relation – as the category of being, as readiness, as a form that reaches out to be filled, as a model of the soul; the *a priori* of relation; *the innate You*.

In the relationships through which we live, the innate You is realized in the You we encounter: that this, comprehended as a being we confront and accepted as exclusive, can finally be addressed with the basic word, has its ground in the *a priori* of relation.⁵⁸

Buber’s remarks on our innate desire for relation appear in his description of the life of the child, a life, Buber argues, that, similar to that of the primitive subject, reveals how the two basic words emerge out of human becoming.

The innateness of the longing for relation is apparent even in the earliest and dimmest stage. Before any particulars can be perceived, dull glances push into the unclear space toward the indefinite; and at times when there is obviously no desire for nourishment, soft projections of the hands reach, aimlessly to all appearances, into the empty air toward the indefinite. Let anyone call this animalic: that does not help our comprehension. For precisely these glances will eventually, after many trials, come to rest upon a red wallpaper arabesque and not

leave it until the soul of red has opened up to them. Precisely this motion will gain its sensuous form and definiteness in contact with a shaggy toy bear and eventually apprehend lovingly and unforgettably a complete body: in both cases not experience of an object but coming to grips with a living, active being that confronts us, if only in our “imagination.” (But this “imagination” is by no means a form of “panpsychism”; it is the drive to turn everything into a You, the drive to pan-relation – and where it does not find a living, active being that confronts it but only an image or symbol of that, it supplies the living activity from its own fullness.) Little inarticulate sounds still ring out senselessly and persistently into the nothing; but one day they will have turned imperceptibly into a conversation – with what? Perhaps with a bubbling tea kettle, but into a conversation. Many a motion that is called a reflex is a sturdy trowel for the person building up his world. It is not as if a child first saw an object and then entered into some relationship with that. Rather, the longing for relation is primary, the cupped hand into which the being that confronts us nestles; and the relation to that, which is a wordless anticipation of saying You, comes second.⁵⁹

Relation, Buber believes, is our deepest desire, what leads to our greatest happiness or joy. In this sense, the emptiness that characterizes the I-It relationship is simply the result of its inability to satisfy what we long for the most. Although many of our desires are lacking in depth, for Buber, desire itself is not an obstacle but a means to relation. What we need for a life lived in wholeness, for a truly joyful existence, is not less desire but rather desire that is directed in the right way, desire that has for itself the right kind of object. According to Buber, the more we say You the greater our desire for the You becomes.

VII

For Buber, the world is twofold for us in accordance with the two basic words we can speak: an It-world from the basic word I-It and a You-world from the basic word I-You. The It-world is “an ordered world.”⁶⁰ It is the world of objects and things; of time and space; of numbers and systems; of functions and tools; the world that is under our control or at our disposal; the object of our experience and use. In summing up this world and the relationship that defines it, Buber writes:

This world is somewhat reliable; it has density and duration; its articulation can be surveyed; one can get it out again and again; one recounts it with one's eyes closed and then checks with one's eyes open. There it stands – right next to your skin if you think of it that way, or nestled in your soul if you prefer that: it is your object and remains that, according to your pleasure – and remains primarily alien both outside and inside you. You perceive it and take it for your “truth”; it permits itself to be taken by you, but it does not give itself to you. It is only *about* it that you can come to an understanding with others; although it takes a somewhat different form for everybody, it is prepared to be a common object for you; but you cannot encounter others with it. Without it you cannot remain alive; its reliability preserves you; but if you were to die in it, then you would be buried in nothingness.⁶¹

The You-world, Buber argues, is not an ordered world but “the world order”;⁶² it is, as he also describes it, the “uninterpretable score the ordered world is.”⁶³ This world can neither be found nor created; it exists neither in time nor in space; it cannot be reduced to a series of facts nor to a set of propositions; it is not an object we can know but simply a presence we encounter.

The world that appears to you in this way is unreliable, for it appears always new to you, and you cannot take it by its world. It lacks density, for everything in it permeates everything else. It lacks duration, for it comes when not called and vanishes even when you cling to it. It cannot be surveyed; if you try to make it surveyable, you lose it. It comes – comes to fetch you – and if it does not reach you or encounter you it vanishes, but it comes again, transformed. It does not stand outside you, it touches your ground; and if you say “soul of my soul” you have not said too much. But beware of trying to transpose it into your soul – that way you destroy it. It is your present; you have a present insofar as you have it; and you can make it into an object for you and experience and use it – you must do that again and again – and then you have no present any more. Between you and it there is reciprocity of giving: you say You to it and give yourself to it; it says You to you and gives itself to you. You cannot come to an understanding *about* it with others; you are lonely with it; but it teaches you to encounter others and to stand your ground in such encounters; and through the grace of its advents and the melancholy of its departures it leads you to that You in which the lines of relation, though parallel, intersect. It does not help you to survive; it only helps you to have intimations of eternity.⁶⁴

According to Buber, there are two basic privileges of the It-world: firstly, that every You must eventually become an It; and secondly, that any It can become a You. These

two privileges, Buber believes, incline us to believe that it is only in the It-world that we can meaningfully dwell; that the intensity and the drama of the You-world are no match for the comfort and the “security”⁶⁵ that the It-world can provide. In concluding Part One Buber writes:

One cannot live in the pure present: it would consume us if care were not taken that it is overcome quickly and thoroughly. But in pure past one can live; in fact, only there can a life be arranged. One only has to fill every moment with experiencing and using, and it ceases to burn.

And in all the seriousness of truth, listen: without It a human being cannot live. But whoever lives only with that is not human.⁶⁶

Notes – Part One: Word.

¹ Kaufmann notes that in an outline to the final manuscript of Buber's work the three parts of *I and Thou* are respectively titled: Word, History and God; IT, 44. In recognition of this I have so titled the first three parts of my thesis.

² IT, 65.

³ Martin Heidegger is often referred to as the father of modern existentialism and although he was the first to provide a systematic examination of human existence his seminal work, *Being and Time*, first appeared in 1927, four years after *I and Thou* was first published.

⁴ IT, 53.

⁵ IT, 54.

⁶ IT, 54.

⁷ IT, 54.

⁸ As I will note later when discussing the origin of the two basic words, for Buber, the It first appears as an object of reflection, as a detached object of perception, and is then gradually transformed into a tool or an instrument for us to use and manipulate. See page 20 of this work.

⁹ From the standpoint of the I, the I-It attitude is expressed either in the form of a 'knowing' attitude or a 'practical' attitude, i.e., either in thinking or in doing. Not that the practical attitude does not express any knowledge, only that the knowing involved in this attitude is of an implicit type, knowledge not being the end or purpose of the action.

¹⁰ IT, 55.

¹¹ IT, 55-6.

¹² IT, 75.

¹³ IT, 62-3.

¹⁴ IT, 55.

¹⁵ IT, 126.

¹⁶ IT, 59.

¹⁷ IT, 63-4. Later in Part One Buber writes: "The You appears in time, but in that of a process that is fulfilled in itself – a process lived through not as a piece that is part of a constant and organized sequence but in a "duration" whose purely intensive dimension can only be determined by starting from the You" (81). Kaufmann notes that in a letter to R.G. Smith (the first English translator of *I and Thou*) in March of 1937, Buber acknowledged that what he had in mind here was Henri Bergson's notion of *durée*.

For Buber, objects lack presence because they exist in the past. But they also lack presence on account of their connection to the future, i.e., on account of their relation to our ongoing dreams and desires. Objects have been and will be; their meaning once was and has yet to happen. Under the I-It attitude we are always either too late or too early for meaning.

¹⁸ IT, 60.

¹⁹ Martin Buber. *Between Man and Man*. (London: Kegan Paul, 1947) 97. Hereafter cited as BMM.

²⁰ BMM, 99.

²¹ BMM, 97.

²² Gabriel Marcel, "I and Thou." *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*. Edited by Paul Arthur Schlipp and Maurice Friedman. The Library of Living Philosophers series. (Lasalle: Open Court Publishing Co, 1967) 46.

²³ IT, 60.

²⁴ According to Buber, although both education and therapy are relationships based on authority, on the denial of mutual You-saying, they both require that the authority figure address the other as You, as a unique person, since the needs of each person are themselves unique. IT, 178-9.

²⁵ IT, 56-7.

²⁶ IT, 145.

²⁷ IT, 58-9.

²⁸ IT, 146-7.

²⁹ Buber also distinguishes between spiritual beings that are already present in things, such as the form present in a work of art, and those that have not yet entered the world, those that are still waiting to be met, waiting to become the inspiration for a work, for knowledge or action. IT, 173-6. The first type of spiritual form could be said to be the concern of the artist; the second, the concern of the philosopher; and the third, that of the sage.

³⁰ If readers have trouble with or doubts about Buber's work it is generally with this idea. In most cases, objections are raised against Buber's first sphere of relation, specifically with the possibility for relations between ourselves and non-sentient beings. Paul Edwards expresses great difficulty with Buber's claim that we can enter into relation with such things as rocks and trees. Edwards argues that Buber is guilty here of panpsychism, of attributing higher forms of consciousness to things than would seem appropriate. Paul Edwards. *Buber and Buberism: A Critical Evaluation*. (Department of Philosophy, University of Kansas, 1970) 11-12. Similarly, Malcolm Diamond believes that Buber's commitment to these forms of relation "introduces more confusion than illumination" and that it ought to be discarded. Malcolm Diamond. *Martin Buber: Jewish Existentialist*. (NY: Oxford University Press, 1960) 31-2.

³¹ IT, 57.

³² Buber's 'Eternal You' is also similar in kind to R.W. Emerson's notion of the 'Over-soul'.

³³ Still, how it is that such a thing as a tree, for instance, can become present to me, is something altogether unclear. That both myself and the tree share in God, as it were, is one thing, but that I can have access to the tree's divine nature is something hard to comprehend. Every relational event, in addition to being grounded in God, possesses a common form of being, a common embodiment, and what this embodiment is that both humans and trees share is not clear. Buber remarks that what we find in our relations with nature is "not the deed of posture of an individual being but a reciprocity of being itself – a reciprocity that has nothing except being." (IT, 173). In defending his belief in the possibility of relations with both nature and spiritual beings, Buber argues that such a belief ultimately demands that we "step out of our habits of thought" and have the courage to trust in the undeniable "actuality that opens up before us." (IT, 177,173).

³⁴ IT, 67.

³⁵ IT, 66-7. Buber speaks of love in *I and Thou* only here when discussing the sphere of social relations. But I believe we can use love to describe what is present in the other spheres of relation as well. It is only later that Buber views love in more general terms, as a way of describing the I-You relation as a whole, as when he writes: “the “I” of the real relationship, the “I” of the partnership between I and Thou, the “I” of love.” Martin Buber. *On Judaism*. Edited by Nahum Glatzer. Foreword by Roger Kamanetz. (NY: Schocken Books, 1995) 210. Hereafter cited as OJ.

³⁶ IT, 100. Both Abraham Heschel and Emmanuel Levinas agree with Buber on this understanding of the self. For instance, as Heschel writes: “Do I exist as a human being? My answer is: *I am commanded – therefore I am.*” Abraham Heschel. *Who is Man?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965) 111. And in the case of Levinas, when he writes: “My ethical responsibility is my uniqueness, my election and my “primogeniture.”” Emmanuel Levinas. *Outside the Subject*. Translated by Michael B. Smith. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) 44.

³⁷ IT, 54, 60.

³⁸ IT, 62.

³⁹ IT, 68.

⁴⁰ IT, 69.

⁴¹ IT, 68.

⁴² IT, 68.

⁴³ On five separate occasions in Part One Buber refers to the body’s role in our encounters with a You: 1) in his first person account of an encounter with a tree: “it confronted him bodily” (58); 2) in his remarks on the work of art, how after the work is completed “the receptive beholder can be bodily confronted now and again” (61); 3) in his distinction between objectivity and presence, between the past and the present and how the I of the basic word I-It is different from the I that is “bodily confronted by a You” (63); 4) in his reference to the “bodily humanity” that distinguishes You-saying from It-saying (65); and 5) in his lengthy depiction of the life of the primitive subject and how it is primarily through its body that the subject views the world (70-1).

⁴⁴ It is not feeling alone that can directly apprehend a unity; this is possible, as Plato taught us, with thought as well. But unity through feeling is more common, it is a more accessible path to unity, than thinking. It is for this reason, I believe, and because of its intimacy with the natural world, that Buber refers to the I-You relation as a bodily phenomenon.

⁴⁵ IT, 69.

⁴⁶ IT, 69.

⁴⁷ IT, 69-70.

⁴⁸ IT, 70.

⁴⁹ IT, 71.

⁵⁰ IT, 71-2.

⁵¹ Buber states this clearly when he writes: “the original drive for “self”-preservation is no more accompanied by any I-consciousness than any other drive. What wants to propagate itself is not the I but the body that does not know of any I. Not the I but the body wants to make things, tools, toys, wants to be “inventive.” And even in the

primitive function of cognition one cannot find any *cognosco ergo sum* of even the most naïve kind, nor any conception, however childlike, of an experiencing subject.” IT, 73.

⁵² IT, 73.

⁵³ IT, 73.

⁵⁴ IT, 74.

⁵⁵ IT, 80.

⁵⁶ IT, 80.

⁵⁷ IT, 74-5.

⁵⁸ IT, 78-9.

⁵⁹ IT, 77-8.

⁶⁰ IT, 82.

⁶¹ IT, 82-3.

⁶² IT, 82.

⁶³ IT, 82.

⁶⁴ IT, 83-4.

⁶⁵ IT, 84.

⁶⁶ IT, 85.

Part Two: History

I

According to Buber, the history of the individual and that of the race may differ in many respects but they agree in at least one: “both signify a progressive increase in the It-world.”¹ With regard to the history of the race, Buber notes, this claim is often doubted. For some, all successive cultures start with a primitive stage that has the same basic structure, namely, one that consists of a small sphere of objects. Hence, it is only the history of each culture and not that of the race as a whole that corresponds to the history of the individual.² But, Buber responds, if we disregard isolated cultures and focus only on those that are under the influence of others, for instance, the Greeks under the Egyptians or Occidental Christendom under the Greeks, we find that, in general, the It-world of every culture – its knowledge of nature, social differentiation and technical achievements – is “more comprehensive than that of its predecessor, and in spite of some stoppages and apparent regressions, the progressive increase of the It-world is clearly discernible in history.”³

An increase in the It-world represents an increase in our capacity for experience and use; “experience which constitutes the world ever again, and use, which leads it towards its multifarious purpose – the preservation, alleviation and equipment of human life.”⁴ With an expanded It-world direct experience can be exchanged for indirect experience, and use of the world can become more specialized; we can acquire more and more information about the world; we can increase the capabilities of our tools or equipment. For Buber, it is true that each generation requires a continual improvement of its capacity for experience and use, but when the claim is made that such an increase represents a

progressive development of the life of the spirit then a great error has been spoken, a “real linguistic sin against the spirit”⁵ has occurred.

... for this “life of the spirit” is usually the obstacle that keeps man from living in the spirit, and at best is only the matter that has to be mastered and formed before it can be incorporated. The obstacle: for the improvement of the capacity for experience and use generally involves a decrease in man’s power to relate – that power which alone can enable man to live in the spirit.⁶

Simply put, spirit, in its human form, is our capacity for unconditional living or action.

In terms earlier used to describe the reality at the heart of relation, spirit is the love or concern for being, the unconditional responsibility for being, that lies at the core of every being. “Spirit,” Buber notes, “is word.”⁷ It represents the primary force that enables either basic word to be spoken; it is active but hidden when the basic word I-It is spoken, active and present when the basic word I-You is spoken.

Spirit is not in the I but between I and You. It is not like the blood that circulates in you but like the air in which you breathe. Man lives in the spirit when he is able to respond to his You. He is able to do that when he enters into relation with his whole being. It is solely by virtue of his power to relate that man is able to live in the spirit.⁸

II

If an increase in the It-world – in our capacity for experience and use – results in a decrease in our power to enter into relation, and if history is a progressive increase in the It-world, then the modern obstacles to relation must be the most severe of their kind. According to Buber, this fact can be clearly seen by examining how modern social life is divided into two exclusively defined districts: institutions and feelings – It-district and I-district.

Institutions are what is “out there” where for all kinds of purposes one spends time, where one works, negotiates, influences, undertakes, competes, organizes, administers, officiates, preaches; the halfway orderly and on the whole coherent

structure where, with the manifold participation of human heads and limbs, the round of affairs runs its course.

Feelings are what is “in here” where one lives and recovers from the institutions. Here the spectrum of the emotions swings before the interested eye; here one enjoys one’s inclination and one’s hatred, pleasure, and, if it is not too bad, pain. Here one is at home and relaxes in one’s rocking chair.

Institutions comprise a complicated forum; feelings a boudoir that at least provides a good deal of diversity.⁹

Institutions, according to this division, represent the organization of social life. They refer to those structures or systems, say, that of industry or commerce or the church, that are necessary for the satisfaction of a society’s material or spiritual desires. Only their size and shape tend to deny what is essential to the well-being of its members, namely, their exclusivity or uniqueness. For modern institutions are highly reductive places, places of complex objectivity, of means and ends reasoning, where what is required of us for participation or membership is simply that we carry out our allotted task, that we adhere to prescribed practices or beliefs. Feelings, on the other hand, are where we retrieve our lost independence. Feelings, after all, on account of their immediacy, are the one thing we cannot lose.¹⁰ Therefore, whenever institutional life becomes too oppressive we can always acquire a measure of freedom by turning our attention to one of the varieties of self-awareness. According to Buber, despite its wide acceptance, this separation or division of social life is always in danger of being undone; “our sportive feelings break into the most objective institutions; but with a little good will it can always be restored.”¹¹

But the severed It of institutions is a golem, and the severed I of feelings is a fluttering soul-bird. Neither knows the human being; one only the instance and the other only the “object.” Neither knows person or community. Neither knows the present: these, however modern, know only the rigid past, that which is finished, while those, however persistent, know only the fleeting moment, that which is not yet. Neither has access to actual life. Institutions yield no public life; feelings no personal life.¹²

Institutions yield no public life, no community, since they operate by denying what is necessary for genuine association, namely, the exclusivity of persons. Feelings yield no personal life since it is not feelings alone that are essential but what they on occasion help to disclose, namely, a concern for being that transcends any possible feeling. According to Buber, it is generally accepted that institutions, in their modern form, lack meaning. But that the same is true of feelings has yet to be fully appreciated; feelings still stand as “the home of what is most personal.”¹³ For even the despair over the emptiness of feelings “will not easily open one’s eyes; after all, such despair is also a feeling and quite interesting.”¹⁴ Armed with these two beliefs, Buber notes, some have attempted to form community on nothing but the free expression of feelings, on the belief that only with the freeing of feelings will people be capable of truly uniting with each other.

But this is not how things are. True community does not come into being because people have feelings for each other (though that is required, too) but rather on two accounts: all of them have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to a single living center, and they have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to one another. The second event has its source in the first but is not immediately given with it. A living reciprocal relationship includes feelings but is not derived from them. A community is built upon a living, reciprocal relationship, but the builder is the living, active center.¹⁵

According to Buber, this living center, this absolute spirit or eternal You, what in Part Three he will call God, not only provides the foundation for the institutions of public life but also that which is needed to build the key institution of personal life, namely, marriage. “Marriage,” as Buber notes, “can never be renewed except by that which is always the source of all true marriage: that the two human beings reveal the You to one another. It is of this that the You that is I for neither of them builds a marriage.”¹⁶ For Buber, only where there is a mutuality of concern between persons, when each sees the

other as participating in the uniqueness of being, in a living reality that transcends any possible feeling or institution, can true human being emerge and persist.

True public life and true personal life are two forms of association. For them to originate and endure, feelings are required as a changing content, and institutions are required as a constant form; but even the combination of both does not create a human life which is created only by a third element: the central presence of the You, rather, to speak more truthfully, the central You that is received in the present.¹⁷

As I noted in Part One when discussing Buber's notion of our innate desire for relation, we are not satisfied with simply viewing the world as an object or a thing, as an It; that what we ultimately desire is an unconditional relationship with the world, one in which the world is recognized for its uniqueness. But what we seek to grant the world is also what we wish to receive from it. Most of the time we desire and are satisfied with conditional recognition, i.e., with being recognized for what we can offer the world; be it intelligence, beauty or an ability to perform a certain task well. But eventually, either through the despair that comes with failure or, on occasion, with success, we realize the emptiness and the insecurity that such recognition provides: the value of our being is always dependent upon our objectivity, on our relation to something else; hence, if the relationship should break, then our value is lost. In becoming a self we become independent, we become a being that, although always involved with the world in some form or another, transcends its natural associations. As such, what we desire above all else is unconditional recognition, recognition of our individuality or subjectivity. I believe this understanding of the self, of our need for this type of recognition, underlies some of Buber's later remarks on the essence of social relations and can also help us to better appreciate his previous plea for both public and private life to be centered on relation.

Man wishes to be confirmed in his being by man, and wishes to have a presence in the being of the other. The human person needs confirmation because man as man needs it. An animal does not need to be confirmed, for it is what it is unquestionably. It is different with man: Sent forth from the natural domain of species into the hazard of the solitary category, surrounded by the air of chaos which came into being with him, secretly and bashfully he watches for a Yes which allows him to be and which can come to him only from one human person to another. It is from one man to another that the heavenly bread of self-being is passed.¹⁸

III

According to Buber, the source of this division of social life into institutions and feelings lies with the oppressive nature of the modern It-world. As the It-world increases, Buber argues, so does its dominance or control over us: it no longer becomes subject to us but we become subject to it; it moves from being our supporter to our opponent. What was once a tool that serviced our needs and desires becomes a being with a life of its own. Social life becomes directly defined by the demands of the It-world, by what it deems to be necessary for its successful operation. We still believe it to be under our control, for after all, the It-world is I-centered, its end is the promotion of the I, but this is clearly no longer the case. Buber's remarks on the oppressiveness of the It-world appear in the form of a response to a fictional advocate for the It-world's uncontested development.

- Speaker, you speak too late. But a moment ago you might have believed your own speech; now this is no longer possible. For an instant ago you saw no less than I that the state is no longer led: the stokers still pile up coal, but the leaders merely *seem* to rule the racing engines. And in this instant while you speak, you can hear as well as I how the machinery of the economy is beginning to hum in an unwonted manner; the overseers give you a superior smile, but death lurks in their hearts. They tell you that they have adjusted the apparatus to modern conditions; but you notice that henceforth they can only adjust themselves to the apparatus, as long as that permits it. Their spokesmen instruct you that the economy is taking over the heritage of the state; you know that there is nothing to be inherited but the despotism of the proliferating It under which the I, more and more impotent, is still dreaming that it is in command.¹⁹

Communal life with its two chambers, the economy and the state, disintegrates, Buber believes, when it comes to be defined solely by the desire for experience and use, when it is believed that it is the I of the basic word I-It that alone holds sway here. When this happens, according to Buber, the basic word I-It becomes detached and thus evil; evil, Buber argues, being what “presumes to be that which has being.”²⁰ For Buber, what is at issue with regard to the authenticity of communal life is not whether it ought to possess an It-world, for without that it could not survive, but rather, whether the spirit remains at its center.

Man’s will to profit and will to power are natural and legitimate as long as they are tied to the will to human relations and carried by it. There is no evil drive until the drive detaches itself from our being; the drive that is wedded to and determined by our being is the plasma of communal life, while the detached drive spells its disintegration. The economy as the house of the will to profit and the state as the house of the will to power participate in life as long as they participate in the spirit. If they abjure the spirit, they abjure life... The structures of communal human life derive their life from the fullness of the relational force that permeates their members, and they derive their embodied form from the saturation of this force by the spirit.²¹

Central to Buber’s thought is his belief that every It, regardless of its origin or place in the world, can become a You for us; that any being can be seen in the light of exclusivity. But for the world to be truly a home for us, Buber argues, it is not enough that we be capable on occasion of recognizing it as more than simply an It, but that our overall or governing attitude towards it be one in which the world is understood to be in essence a You, as a place in which the spirit dwells, and as such deserving of our genuine concern. In short, that the It-world is ultimately subsumed under the You-world. When this is both believed and practiced, when every action is understood as a chance to honour or serve the spirit, Buber claims, communal life becomes characterized by both “joy” and “reverence”, and the It-world becomes capable of addressing us.

The statesman or the businessman who serves the spirit is no dilettante. He knows that he cannot simply confront the people with whom he has to deal as so many carriers of the You, without undoing his own work. Nevertheless he ventures to do this, not simply but up to the limit suggested to him by the spirit; and the spirit does suggest a limit to him, and the venture that would have exploded a severed structure succeeds where the presence of the You floats above. He does not become a babbling enthusiast; he serves the truth, which, though supra-rational, does not disown reason but holds it in her lap. What he does in communal life is no different from what is done in personal life by a man who knows that he cannot actualize the You in some pure fashion but who nevertheless bears witness of it daily to the It, defining the limit every day anew, according to the right and measure of that day – discovering the limit anew. Neither work nor possession can be redeemed on their own but only by starting from the spirit. It is only from the presence of the spirit that significance and joy can flow into all work, and reverence and the strength to sacrifice into all possessions, not to the brim but *quantum satis* – and all that is worked and possessed, though it remains attached to the It-world, can nevertheless be transfigured to the point where it confronts us and represents the You.²²

According to Buber, it is essential that the spirit remain alive and active in communal life. Only this cannot be accomplished by confining it to its own private sphere of influence, one detached from the main structures of communal life. For that would mean that those areas immersed in the It-world would become subject to despotic rule, while the spirit would lose all actuality.

For the spirit in itself can never act independently upon life; that it can do only in the world – with its force which penetrates and transforms the It-world. The spirit is truly “at home with itself” when it can confront the world that is opened up to it, give itself to the world, and redeem it and, through the world, also itself.²³

IV

“In the It-world,” Buber states, “causality holds unlimited sway.”²⁴ Every event, be it physical or psychological in nature, is “considered to be of necessity caused and a cause.”²⁵ But according to Buber, the person who practices relation does not feel oppressed by causality for he knows that he is always free to step out of the It-world with

its determining stare and realize again the freedom, the wholeness of spirit, that is found in You-saying.

Here I and You confront each other freely in a reciprocity that is not involved in or tainted by any causality; here man finds guaranteed the freedom of his being and of being. Only those who know relation and who know the presence of the You have the capacity for decision. Whoever makes a decision is free because he has stepped before the countenance.²⁶

Buber's description of the relation between You-saying and our capacity for decision is essential for an understanding of ourselves and thus deserving of further articulation.

Earlier I noted our need for unconditional recognition, to have our independence recognized and thereby secured; but only by seeing the role this form of recognition plays in action can we appreciate how truly essential it is for us to receive it.

To act is to risk oneself, to forego the certainty and the security of one's present state for what is uncertain. Serious acts, acts that represent a real change in one's commitments, are generally preceded by both a fear of failure and a fear of the overall sense of uncertainty that accompanies a new relationship. To act then, is to overcome these fears. One overcomes these fears, I believe, one is provided with the freedom and the security to act, through one of two beliefs: either through the belief that one's actions, when successful, will be recognized either by the world or by reason as possessing some meaning or value; or through the belief that one is essentially more than what one decides and that even in failure one will retain a right to being. The majority of our decisions occur by means of the first belief. We are primarily finite beings who are conditioned by a concern for the consequences or results of our actions; after all, every action is intended to meet with a certain degree of success. Only it is impossible for us to always be successful, for either reason or the world to always accept us. Eventually our particular

relationships come to an end: we lose our job or a loved one, we become ill or we face the inevitability of our own death. Unless we believe that our being rests on a different ground, decisions, after such failures or losses, will become very difficult, for some, even impossible. Therefore, only through relation, through our awareness that we belong to that which is irreducible, to that which cannot fail, can we become truly free to decide.

The person who is capable of You-saying does not feel oppressed by causality, Buber argues, because he knows that his life is “by its very nature an oscillation between You and It,”²⁷ between freedom and determinism. This person, according to Buber, knows that he cannot rest in the freedom of relation, that he must return once again to his concern with objects and things, that he again become an object or a thing ‘for’ the world. But this awareness of having to leave the relational event, Buber adds, is understood as being “an intimate part of the meaning and the destiny” of human life.²⁸

Fate and freedom are promised to each other. Fate is encountered only by him that actualizes his freedom. That I discovered the deed that intends me, that, this movement of my freedom, reveals the mystery to me. But this, too, that I cannot accomplish it the way I intended it, this resistance also reveals the mystery to me. He that forgets all being caused as he decides from the depths, he that puts aside possessions and cloak and steps before the countenance – this free human being encounters fate as the counter-image of his freedom. It is not his limit but his completion; freedom and fate embrace each other to form meaning; and given meaning, fate – with its eyes, hitherto severe, suddenly full of light – looks like grace itself.²⁹

Every great culture, Buber argues, is founded upon an original act of relation, on “an essential act of the spirit.”³⁰ The living center that is discovered as the support for both public and private life is preserved and reinforced through the recognition of its authority by subsequent generations; and with that the sense of community grows and the spirit of the culture becomes more and more creative. But when a culture begins to gradually turn away from the center upon which it was first built, when its It-world is “no longer

irrigated and fertilized by the living currents of the You-world,³¹ the causality that previously supported it becomes a prison; it “grows into an oppressive and crushing doom.”³²

Wise, masterful fate which, as long as it was attached to the abundance of meaning in the cosmos, held sway over all causality, has become transformed into demonic absurdity and has collapsed into causality. The same karma that appeared to earlier generations as a beneficial dispensation – for our deeds in this life raise us into higher spheres in the next – now is seen as tyranny; for the deeds of a former life which are unconscious have imprisoned us in a dungeon from which we cannot escape in this life. Where the meaningful law of a heaven used to arch, with the spindle of necessity hanging from its bright vault, the meaningless, tyrannical power of the planets now holds sway.³³

According to Buber, the falling away or “sickness,”³⁴ of the present age is the most severe of its kind; the present belief in doom “is more obdurate and anxious than any such faith has ever been.”³⁵ This, Buber claims, is the result of an It-world that has never been more capable of subjecting us to a variety of inescapable determinations.

Whether it is the “law of life” – a universal struggle in which everybody must either join the fight or renounce life – or the “psychological law” according to which innate drives constitute the entire human soul; or the “social law” of an inevitable process that is merely accompanied by will and consciousness; or the “cultural law” of an unalterably uniform genesis and decline of historical forms; or whatever variations there may be: the point is always that man is yoked into an inescapable process that he cannot resist, though he may be deluded enough to try...It is considered foolish to imagine any freedom; one is supposed to have nothing but the choice between resolute and hopelessly rebellious slavery. Although all these laws are frequently associated with long discussions of teleological development and organic evolution, all of them are based on the obsession with some running down, which involves unlimited causality. The dogma of a gradual running down represents man’s abdication in the face of the proliferating It-world.³⁶

But the history of cultures, Buber believes, does not consist simply of a series of developments and then a decline, and ascent followed by a final descent. For in the descent into despair and loss, in the belief in doom itself, lie the seeds for a renewal, for a reawakening to the life of the spirit. The belief in doom “is a descent through the spiral of

the spiritual underworld but could also be called an ascent to the innermost, subtlest, most intricate turn that knows no Beyond and even less any Backward but only the unheard of return – the breakthrough.”³⁷ For Buber, repeating the words of the poet Holderlin: “But where there is danger what saves grows, too.”³⁸

The word ‘return’ is the English translation of the Hebrew word *Teshuvah* which literally means to turn back to God. “What the Hebrew tradition stresses,” Kaufmann notes, “is not the mere state of mind, the repentance, but the act of return.”³⁹ This act of returning, according to Buber, requires an act of our whole being, an act that is carried out without the aid of any mediator, an unconditional deed that can only be performed by ourselves. Elsewhere in his writings Buber states clearly what this act entails:

This is the intent of the teaching of return: that everyone, alone and from his own depth, must strive for divine freedom and unconditionality; no mediator can help him, nothing already accomplished by another can facilitate his own deed, for all depends on the shattering force of his own action, which can only be weakened by any kind of help from outside.⁴⁰

The act of returning is an unconditional act, but it is an act that can only occur after the self has first been silenced, after the I has diminished, and that transformation is not something that we are easily inclined to accept. Simply put, the self is only silenced when it is silenced for us. Every act of return is preceded by grace: either by the grace that comes through being addressed by a You or by the grace that can come through suffering.⁴¹

For Buber, the real possibility for return, the belief that we can at any time repent and be forgiven by God, prevents common causality from becoming an oppressive and crushing doom. That through returning we can escape from the wheel of determination

and come to possess genuine hope for our future. “In the man who returns, creation begins anew; in his renewal the substance of the world is renewed.”⁴²

V

According to Buber, we become what we speak. “The way he says I – what he means when he says I – determines where a man belongs and where he goes.”⁴³ We are an I, an independent being, on account of our ability to freely define ourselves; but the definition we are free to choose is formed by our involvement with the world, by how we address it. For Buber, in accordance with the two basic words we can speak, we can define ourselves in one of two ways: either as an ego or as a person.

The I of the basic word I-It appears as an ego and becomes conscious of itself as a subject (of experience and use).

The I of the basic word I-You appears as a person and becomes conscious of itself as subjectivity (without any dependent genitive).

Egos appear by setting themselves apart from other egos.

Persons appear by entering into relation to other persons.

One is the spiritual form of natural differentiation, the other that of natural association.

The purpose of setting oneself apart is to experience and use, and the purpose of that is “living” – which means dying one human life long.

The purpose of relation is the relation itself – touching the You. For as soon as we touch a You, we are touched by a breath of eternal life.⁴⁴

The ego sets itself apart from the world for it sees itself, as well as being as a whole, as an object; and for any object to persist in being it must be continually distinguished from other objects. The ego is concerned with its being this way and not that, with how it differs from the world and that means with how it is perceived by the world.⁴⁵ For Buber, the ego lacks actuality for: “By setting himself apart from other egos, the ego moves away from being.”⁴⁶ The person, on the other hand, enters into relation with the world for it sees itself as a free subject, one whose responsibility for the world is irreducible and unique. The person is not an object; but this does not mean that it must give up its

objectivity or particularity, what makes it different; “only this is not the decisive perspective, but merely the necessary and meaningful form of being.”⁴⁷ The person, Buber argues, is actual, it has substance, because it knows that being is not an object to be possessed but a reality that one is called to participate in.

Whoever stands in relation, participates in an actuality; that is, in a being that is neither merely a part of him nor merely outside him. All actuality is an activity in which I participate without being able to appropriate it. Where there is no participation there is no actuality. Where there is self-appropriation, there is no actuality. The more directly the You is touched, the more perfect is the participation.

The I is actual through its participation in actuality. The more perfect the participation is, the more actual the I becomes.⁴⁸

The ego does not participate in any actuality nor does he gain any. He sets himself apart from everything else and tries to possess as much as possible by means of experience and use. That is *his* dynamic: setting himself apart and taking possession – and the object is always It, that which is not actual. He knows himself as a subject, but this subject can appropriate as much as it wants to, it will never gain any substance: it remains like a point, functional, that which experiences, that which uses, nothing more. All of its extensive and multifarious being-that-way, all its eager “individuality” cannot help it to gain any substance.

There are not two kinds of human beings, but there are two poles of humanity.

No human being is pure person, and none is pure ego; none is entirely actual, none entirely lacking in actuality. Each lives in a twofold I. But some are so person-oriented that one may call them persons, while others are so ego-oriented that one may call them egos. Between these and those true history takes place.

The more a human being, the more humanity is dominated by the ego, the more does it fall prey to inactuality. In such ages the person in the human being and in humanity comes to lead a subterranean, hidden, as were invalid existence – until it is summoned.⁴⁹

Earlier I noted Buber’s use of the word ‘evil’ to describe what results when the basic word I-It becomes detached from being, when it fails to align itself with its opposite, the basic word I-You. In the case of the It-world, the evil is hidden behind what appears on the surface to be the subject’s concern for its object. But when we look at the ego, the I that lacks substance, the evil and violence that is inherent in the detached drive has

nowhere to hide. To see how this is the case with the ego, we need, I believe, to appreciate the conflictual nature that characterizes the ego's involvement with the world.

In order to preserve its objectivity the ego must continually reduce the world to an It, to something it can dominate and control. But this is only possible if the world is willing to allow itself to be continually subjected to the will of the ego. Eventually the world rebels against the ego's intentions for it. When this happens, when the world refuses to become an object for the ego, a conflict emerges; the world becomes a threat or an obstacle to the ego's self-preservation.

The conflictual nature of the ego's involvement with the world is most pronounced in the sphere of social relations. No matter how the ego approaches the other, because the other is as free as the ego, i.e., equally independent, the other, unlike nature, is always free to reject the ego's demands or requests. The more the other refuses the ego the more coercive or violent the ego's involvement with the other becomes. Unless the ego can give up its desire to reduce and possess the other, unless the frustration it experiences at the hands of the other can induce the ego to seek a more dialogical form of relationship, the ego is doomed to a life of despair. For even if the ego manages to finally subdue the other, to reduce it to an object, it cannot receive from the other what it desires the most, namely, recognition of its uniqueness, since this is possible only through relation, through the ego's recognition of the other's own uniqueness.

VI

According to Buber, when alienation strikes and if we are unable to enter into relation with the world we inevitably turn inwards in the hope that a relation with the self will provide us with a lasting peace. Only this engagement with the self can only lead to self-

contradiction since at the heart of our being is not a thing that we can encounter but rather a desire to encounter other things; not an object but an irreducible subjectivity. The self cannot become its own foundation for what is fundamental cannot be found in the self but only between the self and the world.⁵⁰ Hence, self-relation, Buber notes, can only lead us into deeper despair.

When a man does not test the *a priori* of relation in the world, working out and actualizing the innate You in what he encounters, it turns inside. Then it unfolds through the unnatural, impossible object, the I – which is to say that it unfolds where there is no room for it to unfold. Thus the confrontation within the self comes into being, and this cannot be relation, presence, the current of reciprocity, but only self-contradiction. Some men may try to interpret this as a relation, perhaps one that is religious, in order to extricate themselves from the horror of their *Doppelgänger*: they are bound to keep rediscovering the deception of any such interpretation. Here is the edge of life. What is unfulfilled has here escaped into the mad delusion of some fulfilment; now it gropes around in the labyrinth and gets lost ever more profoundly.⁵¹

If our suffering remains unable to lead us back to a life lived in the spirit, back towards “the direction of return that leads through sacrifice,”⁵² then, Buber believes, all that is left for us is to ask thought to finally free us.

And thought, ever obliging and skilful, paints with its accustomed speed a series – nay, two series of pictures on the right and the left wall. Here is (or rather: happens, for the world pictures of thought are reliable motion pictures) the universe. From the whirl of the stars emerges the small earth, from the teeming on earth emerges small man, and now history carries him forth through the ages, to persevere in rebuilding the anthills of the cultures that crumble under its steps. Beneath this series of pictures is written: “One and all.” On the other wall happens the soul. A female figure spins the orbits of all stars and the life of all creatures and the whole of history; all is spun with a single thread and it is no longer called stars and creatures and world but feelings and representations or even living experiences and states of the soul. And beneath this series of pictures is written: “One and all.”⁵³

For Buber, thought’s two pictures reveal our belief in alienation to be false and thus harmless for they deny the real existence of any association between ourselves and the world. If existence is one, be it in the form of a self-enclosed I or a self-enclosed

universe, then all feelings of separation are groundless for in the end there is nothing for us to relate to. In response to this belief and to conclude his reflections on human history,

Buber writes:

But the moment will come, and it is near, when man, overcome by horror, looks up and in a flash sees both pictures at once. And he is seized by a deeper horror.⁵⁴

Notes – Part Two: History.

¹ IT, 87.

² Kaufmann notes that Buber is here alluding to Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* which was published in 1918 and was being widely debated at the time of Buber's writing. According to Spengler, a developing culture does not borrow or integrate values or systems from past cultures, at least not in their true nature. Each culture works out its own unique being and thus what it takes from another, say, its sciences, gains independence from its original setting and meaning and should not be seen as building upon it.

³ IT, 88.

⁴ IT, 88.

⁵ IT, 88.

⁶ IT, 88-9.

⁷ IT, 89.

⁸ IT, 89.

⁹ IT, 93.

¹⁰ The last phrase of that sentence is a paraphrase of the recurring line: "There's one thing you can't lose and it's that feel" in the song co-written and performed by the artist Tom Waits entitled "That Feel." It is a song about the irreducibility of feelings, with reference to the inability of institutions to objectify them. For instance, Waits refers to the proclaimed "gospel" of feelings as being "only church." "That Feel." Written by Tom Waits and Keith Richards. Tom Waits. *Bone Machine*. NY: Island Records Inc, 1992.

¹¹ IT, 93.

¹² IT, 93-4.

¹³ IT, 94.

¹⁴ IT, 94.

¹⁵ IT, 94.

¹⁶ IT, 95.

¹⁷ IT, 95.

¹⁸ KM, 71.

¹⁹ IT, 97. In *Between Man and Man*, Buber describes the dominance of the It-world over us as the phenomenon of "man's lagging behind his works." Buber claims that this domination is found in three main areas: 1) in the realm of technique in which we are now but an extension of our tools; 2) in the economic realm in which the business of the production and utilization of goods is no longer under our complete command; and 3) in the political realm in which the two world wars have informed us that "we are the fathers of demons whose masters we cannot become." (BMM, 158) Buber also notes a second source of modern alienation, namely, the fact that the ever increasing size and sophistication of the state tends to destroy the "old organic forms of the direct life of man with man;" forms that flourish only in smaller and simpler societies. (BMM, 157) In *Paths in Utopia*, Buber refers specifically to the role capitalism, with its desire to deal

only with individuals, has played in the death of individual groups and associations.
Martin Buber. *Paths in Utopia*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996) 139-40.

²⁰ IT, 95.

²¹ IT, 97-8.

²² IT, 98-9. Elsewhere Buber writes: "Every deed, even one numbered among the most profane, is holy when it is performed in holiness, in unconditionality." OJ, 87.

²³ IT, 99-100.

²⁴ IT, 100.

²⁵ IT, 100.

²⁶ IT, 100-1.

²⁷ IT, 101. Later in Part Two (IT, 107-110) Buber distinguishes between the free and the capricious person. The free person is one who accepts the limits of what its will can accomplish but is not afraid to act since its faith is in the spirit, in what transcends the self. The capricious person, on the other hand, lacks the capacity for sacrifice and thus fails to become concrete since it believes only in what it can will, what it can accomplish through means and ends living. For Buber, unless what we are deciding for transcends us, unless the meaning we are choosing is discovered and not invented, real sacrifice is impossible. For why sacrifice yourself for what does not in truth transcend yourself? Buber makes this point again in his criticism of Jean-Paul Sartre in Buber's later work *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation Between Religion and Philosophy*; specifically in the chapter entitled "Religion and Modern Thinking."

²⁸ IT, 102.

²⁹ IT, 102.

³⁰ IT, 103.

³¹ IT, 102.

³² IT, 103.

³³ IT, 103-4.

³⁴ IT, 104.

³⁵ IT, 104.

³⁶ IT, 105-6.

³⁷ IT, 104-5.

³⁸ IT, 105. Kaufmann notes that this line comes from Holderlin's poem "Patmos", which begins: "Near is and hard to grasp the God. But where there is danger what saves grows, too."

³⁹ "I and You: A Prologue by Walter Kaufmann." Touchstone: 1996, 36.

⁴⁰ OJ, 82-3.

⁴¹ Suffering can help bring about a return to the spirit for in suffering, in moments of deep and profound despair, we see clearly what becomes of a life lived outside the spirit, what becomes of a mere material existence. We are confronted with the inevitability of our own death, with the consequences of our sin and with our dependence on others, circumstances or God. Happiness, we come to realize, is not simply the product of our will. If we are to continue on then we must acknowledge the transcendence of spirit. We have seen where the I-It leads and we can no longer afford to be defined by it. In short, suffering makes us smaller and in so doing allows what transcends us to play a larger part in our life.

⁴² OJ, 67.

⁴³ IT, 115.

⁴⁴ IT, 112-113.

⁴⁵ In *The Knowledge of Man* Buber distinguishes between two forms of human existence which are similar in kind to his distinction between the person and the ego, namely, that of being and seeming. The first form is characterized by an openness to the other; by our awareness of the other as a unique being. Whereas the second form is characterized by a closed attitude; one in which we are concerned solely with how we are perceived by the other. KM, 75-8.

⁴⁶ IT, 114.

⁴⁷ IT, 114.

⁴⁸ IT, 113.

⁴⁹ IT, 114-115.

⁵⁰ This is also true when the turn inwards is for the sake of recognizing ourselves. For self-relation as self-recognition lacks the needed objectivity and thus can only beg the question.

⁵¹ IT, 119-120. In *Between Man and Man* Buber argues that individualism, a turning inwards to the self whereby we revel in the personal quality of our despair, is the first of two responses that we have taken to alienation in modern times. The second, collectivism, which follows from the failure of individualism, consists of our renouncing our individuality for the sake of our involvement in a collective movement. Individualism denies the reality of the social for that of the individual; and collectivism denies the reality of the individual for that of society. According to Buber, neither can succeed since they deny the reality of relation. But the failure of both opens to us the door to the third way, that of return. BMM, 199-205.

⁵² IT, 120.

⁵³ IT, 121.

⁵⁴ IT, 122.

Part Three: God

I

The horror with which Buber concludes Part Two of *I and Thou* is the vision of the truth of relation in light of its previous denial, that is to say, the recognition that existence consists not of one being, be it in the form of the I alone or the world alone, but of two unique beings, both an I and a world. For Buber, if we are to overcome the alienation that results from the dominance of the basic word I-It over the I-You, if we are to confirm the reality of relation and thereby transform the feeling of horror into one of peace and joy, then our only hope is to turn to God, to enter into a relation with the You that upholds both the I and the world. The third and final part of Buber's work consists of how our relation to God, what he calls the pure relationship, provides for our salvation.

II

Extended, the lines of relationships intersect in the eternal You. Every single You is a glimpse of that. Through every single You the basic word addresses the eternal You. The mediatorship of the You of all beings accounts for the fullness of our relationships to them – and for the lack of fulfillment. The innate You is actualized each time without being perfected. It attains perfection solely in the immediate relationship to the You that in accordance with its nature cannot become an It.¹

For Buber, the eternal You has been called by many names. In the beginning these names were direct responses to the mysterious but sustaining force that first addressed us. The eternal You became an object for us but only for the sake of better directing our praise and adoration for it. “Then the names entered into the It-language; men felt impelled more and more to think of and talk about their eternal You as an It.”² Despite that, Buber argues, all names of God remain sacred for “they have been used not only to speak *of* God but also to speak *to* him”³.

For whoever pronounces the word God and really means You, addresses, no matter what his delusion, the true You of his life that cannot be restricted by any other and to whom he stands in a relationship that includes all others.

But whoever abhors the name and fancies that he is godless – when he addresses with his whole devoted being the You of his life that cannot be restricted by any other, he addresses God.⁴

God is the You that can never become an It; a presence that can never be completely reduced to an object or a thing. He can “only be addressed, not asserted.”⁵ He is disclosed through our relations with other things but is himself not a thing that can be directly disclosed. He is like light through which we see the world around us but is not itself one of the things we actually see.⁶ In short, Buber’s God is absolute subjectivity, pure spirit, the unconditional care for being that precedes being. He becomes present to us when we act unconditionally. As Buber writes elsewhere: “He who decides with all his soul decides for God; for all wholeness is God’s image, shining forth with His own light.”⁷ “In the unconditionality of the deed man experiences his communion with God.”⁸

According to Buber, God exists both inside and outside of space and time; he is both immanent and transcendent. He is not in the world in the same way that we or other finite beings are, but if we seek him outside the world we will not find him. To find him “Only the spell of separation needs to be broken.”⁹ And just as the finite You cannot be met through our following precise methods or procedures, but only by way of our “total acceptance of the present;”¹⁰ the same is true with God. “Grace concerns us insofar as we proceed towards it and await its presence; it is not our object.”¹¹ All we must do, Buber notes, is to make ourselves ready to receive him.

How foolish and hopeless must one be to leave one’s way of life to seek God: even if one gained all the wisdom of solitude and all the power of concentration, one would miss him. It is rather as if a man went his way and merely wished that it might be *the* way; his aspiration finds expression in the strength of his wish. Every encounter is a way station that grants him a view of fulfilment; in each he

thus fails to share, and yet also does share, in the one because he is ready. Ready, not seeking, he goes his way; this gives him the serenity toward all things and the touch that helps them. But once he has found, his heart does not turn away from them although he encounters everything in the one. He blesses all the cells that have sheltered him as well as all those where he will still put up. For this finding is not an end of the way but only its eternal center.

It is a finding without seeking; a discovery of what is most original and the origin. The You-sense that cannot be satiated until it finds the infinite You sensed its presence from the beginning; this presence merely had to become wholly actual for it out of the actuality of the consecrated life of the world.¹²

In every relation between ourselves and a finite You the world appears in the light of the You's exclusivity; the uniqueness of the one becomes the uniqueness of all. We sense that the unconditional concern that we have for the You can also be turned upon the other beings of the world. But once the particular relation has ended, once the You becomes an It, the exclusivity of one becomes the exclusion of all others; our concern for one requires a retreat from the others. But for Buber:

In the relation to God, unconditional exclusiveness and unconditional inclusiveness are one. For those who enter into the absolute relationship, nothing particular retains any importance – neither things nor beings, neither earth nor heaven – but everything is included in the relationship. For entering into the pure relationship does not involve ignoring everything but seeing everything in the You, not renouncing the world but placing it upon its proper ground...to have nothing besides God but to grasp everything in him, that is the perfect relationship.¹³

In his Afterword Buber explains how our exclusive relationship to God includes our relationships with the world. For Buber, God is the “absolute person, that is one that cannot be relativized.”¹⁴ God's personality is revealed to us by way of his “creative, revelatory and redemptive acts”¹⁵ in the world. He reveals himself to us, he appears in the form of a person, but his personality is merely one of his “infinitely many attributes.”¹⁶ The finite Yous of the world are included in God's personality for through the revelation

of his personhood he commands us to enter into relation with his creation. He tells us that we cannot love him without loving the world. As the Bible tells us:

... 'You shall love the Lord you God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'¹⁷

If God were not a person but only a presence then it would be impossible for us to enter into a direct relationship with him. Relation happens between two independent beings. In relation, the You is characterized by its presence, by the exclusive light in which it appears; but presence is not what we directly engage, rather, it is what makes our engagement with the You possible. Presence is not the object of relation, the other finite being is. Every You is a definite object.

Buber's God is twofold: God as presence and God as person. God as presence is found in our relation to other finite things. God as person is found through distinct historical revelations. A belief in God as presence results from our apprehension of the unlimited or irreducible. A belief in God as person results from our acceptance of the accuracy of the accounts of specific supernatural events; with the belief, for instance, that the word or will of God is documented in Holy Scripture. We cannot find the person of God by entering into relation with the world. We find him in this form only when the grace that is found in the world becomes an object.

Only by becoming a person can God satisfy our deepest desires, namely, the desires for recognition and relation. For both desires to be satisfied we need more than just an awareness that we participate in eternity. If our attachment to eternity is to be meaningful for us we need to be addressed or confirmed by eternity in our particularity as unique persons. If eternity lacks definite form then our engagement with it can only take place

when we have given up our particularity, when our unique definition has been overcome. Pure formless eternity cannot accept distinctions; there is no room in it for difference. Hence, only if the divine becomes a person can we retain our uniqueness, can our uniqueness acquire ultimate meaning. Similarly, only if God is a person, more specifically, if he has a will and desires of his own, can our desire for relation be satisfied since only then will it be possible for us to take on the needs or concerns of eternity.

Lastly, and somewhat paradoxically, it is in becoming a person that God's transcendence, his irreducibility or *Youness*, is preserved. We cannot reduce another person, we can only care for them or put our trust in them. Because a person is a subject, a free and spontaneous being, a relationship of openness with another person can only be grounded in dialogue and faith. God addresses us and we respond to him. We address him and he responds to us. As Buber notes in a later work:

And if He [God] was not a person in Himself, He, so to speak, became one in creating Man, in order to love man and be loved by him – in order to love me and be loved by me.¹⁸

III

According to Buber, just as our relationship with the finite *You* is a dialogue so too is our relationship to God. But in our desire to better understand this relationship, Buber argues, we are often guilty of distorting or even denying its essential twofoldness: God's address to us and our response to him. One such distortion is the reduction of the relationship to our feeling of dependence.¹⁹ Although the fact of our dependence deserves much attention, Buber notes, a "onesided emphasis on this factor leads to a misunderstanding of the character of the perfect relationship."²⁰ For Buber, in God's address is found our dependence, the fact of our being determined, of our need for him; but in our response to

him is found our independence, our freedom, his need for us. At the height of our engagement with God, Buber argues, our experience consists of a “fusion of opposite feelings.”²¹

Yes, in the pure relationship 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.

That you need God more than anything, you know that at all times in your heart. But don't you know also that God needs you – in the fullness of his eternity, you? How would man exist if God did not need him, and how would you exist? You need God in order to be, and God needs You – for that which is the meaning of your life. Teachings and poems try and say more, and say too much: how murky and presumptuous is the chatter of “the emerging God” – but the emergence of the living God we know unswervingly in our hearts. The world is not divine play, it is divine fate. That there are world, man, the human person, you and I, has divine meaning.

Creation – happens to us, burns into us, changes us, we tremble and swoon, we submit. Creation – we participate in it, we encounter the creator, offer ourselves to him, helpers and companions....

Wishing to understand the pure relationship as dependence means wishing to deactualize one partner of the relationship and thus the relationship itself.²²

According to Buber, the twofoldness of our relationship to God, the notion that the religious experience is in fact a relation between two independent beings, is also denied when the relationship is thought to be grounded in an act of self-immersion; be it through the loss of our own subjectivity before God or through the belief that God and the self are one.

The former view supposes that God will enter the being that has been freed of I-hood or that at that point one merges into God; the other view supposes that one stands immediately in oneself as the divine One. Thus the first holds that in a supreme moment all You-saying ends because there is no longer any duality; the second, that there is no truth in You-saying at all because in truth there is no duality. The first believes in the unification, the second in the identity of the human and the divine. Both insist on what is beyond I and You: for the first this comes to be, perhaps in ecstasy, while for the second it is there all along and reveals itself, perhaps as the thinking subject beholds its self. Both annul relationship – the first, as it were, dynamically, as the I is swallowed by the You, which now ceases to be a You and becomes the only being; the second, as it were,

statically, as the I is freed, becomes a self, and recognizes itself as the only being.
23

For Buber, the first form of self-immersion, the overcoming of the immediate duality between ourselves and God, consists of two kinds. In the first instance, the “event occurs not between man and God but in man.”²⁴ The belief here is that we can only proceed to the encounter with God after all our attachments to what is particular or contingent have been overcome. “All forces are concentrated into the core, everything that would distract them is pulled in, and the being stands alone in itself and jubilates, as Paracelsus put it, in its exaltation.”²⁵ But the attainment of such a state, Buber argues, can also prevent our making a genuine response to God for here we experience a satisfying freedom from being-attached to things that is difficult to give up. “Everything along the way is decision – intentional, dimly sensed, or altogether secret – but this one, deep down, is the primally secret decision, pregnant with the most powerful destiny.”²⁶

The second way that the duality between ourselves and God is overcome, Buber notes, is in the feeling that accompanies a brief but seemingly timeless experience of ecstasy in which it is believed that God and the self have become one. “I and You drown; humanity that but now confronted the deity is absorbed in it; glorification, deification, universal unity have appeared.”²⁷ Only, what is to be made of our natural existence, Buber asks, after the moment has finished, when we return once again to our contingent dealings with the world? Will not our finite existence and the world itself, creation or matter itself, be seen as an obstacle to our wholeness, to our participation in the real? Are we not “bound to feel that Being is split, with one part abandoned to hopelessness?”²⁸

What help is it to my soul that it can be transported again from this world into that unity, when this world itself has, of necessity, no share whatever in that unity – what does all “enjoyment of God” profit a life rent in two? If that extravagantly

rich heavenly Moment has nothing to do with my poor earthly moment – what is it to me as long as I still live on earth – must in all seriousness still live on earth? That is the way to understand those masters who renounced the raptures of the ecstasy of “unification”.²⁹

According to Buber, what is experienced in the ecstatic moment is not an actual union with God but only the place where the margins of the relationship begin and end. We believe our being is united with God’s because we have touched our own foundation which of course does not belong to us, which can only be God himself. In these types of experience, Buber claims, actuality becomes blurred. This type of immersion, Buber argues “wants to preserve only what is “pure,” essential, and enduring, while stripping away everything else;”³⁰ but the concentration into a whole human being in the presence of God cannot occur this way. What has to be given up in order to meet him is not the I or self as most mystics or practitioners of this form of immersion suppose for the I is necessary for any relationship, including that between ourselves and God, which always presupposes an I and You.

What has to be given up is not the I but that false drive for self-affirmation which impels man to flee from the unreliable, unsolid, unlasting, unpredictable, dangerous world of relation into the having of things.³¹

The second form of self-immersion, the doctrine that the self and the universe are essentially one, is, for Buber, best presented in the teachings of the Buddha. Buber greatly admires the Buddha’s offering of the *way* to being as opposed to a theory or systematic account of it. According to Buber, the Buddha refuses to divide the undivided mystery of being and to confront being this way is “the primal condition of salvation.”³² But the Buddha’s *way* is unacceptable for us if we are to retain the meaning of our natural lives, if actuality and relation is to remain something to be lived or practiced. For the path of the Buddha leads only towards self-annihilation; a complete extinction of all desires

for the sake of entering into the very core of being, the pure desire or love that has no object, which is beyond both life and death. We may follow the Buddha in his basic approach to being, Buber notes, but “going further would involve a betrayal of the actuality of our life.”³³

The goal was for the Buddha “the annulment of suffering,” which is to say, of becoming and passing away – the salvation from the wheel of rebirth. “Henceforth there is no recurrence” was to be the formula for those who had liberated themselves from the desire for existence and thus from the compulsion to become again ceaselessly. We do not know whether there is a recurrence; the line of this dimension of time in which we live we do not extend beyond this life; and we do not try to uncover what will reveal itself to us in its own time and law. But if we did know that there was recurrence, then we should not seek to escape from it: we should desire not crude existence but the chance to speak in every existence, in its appropriate manner and language, the eternal I of the destructible and the eternal You of the indestructible.³⁴

Whether the Buddha’s doctrine on being is true in this life we cannot know. But one thing we can be certain of, notes Buber, and that is that this doctrine has nothing in common with lived actuality. For the Buddha, as is also true for the Hindu, the sensory world, the world of space and time, is illusory. Overcoming our alienation comes not when we draw closer to the world, to that which is finite, but only when our attachments to it are broken. But for Buber, in truth, salvation requires the opposite.

Let us love the actual world that never wishes to be annulled, but love it in all its terror, but dare to embrace it with our spirit’s arms – and our hands encounter the hands that hold it.

I know nothing of a “world” and of “worldly life” that separates us from God. What is designated that way is life with an alienated It-world, the life of experience and use. Whoever goes forth in truth to the world, goes forth to God. Concentration and going forth, both in truth, the one-and-the-other which is the One, are what is needful.³⁵

In summing up both forms of the movement inward to the self in the hope of reaching God or being and thus salvation, Buber writes:

All doctrines of immersion are based on the gigantic delusion of a human spirit bent back into itself – the delusion that the spirit occurs in man. In truth it occurs from man – between man and what he is not. As the spirit bent back into itself renounces this sense, this sense of relation, he must draw into man that which is not man, he must psychologize world and God. This is the psychical delusion of the spirit.³⁶

IV

What is it, Buber asks, that is revealed to us in our encounter with God?

The moment of encounter is not a “living experience” that stirs in the receptive soul and blissfully rounds itself out: something happens to man. At times it is like feeling a breath and at times like a wrestling match; no matter: something happens. The man who steps out of the essential act of pure relation has something More in his being, something new has grown there of which he did not know before and for whose origin he lacks any suitable words. Wherever the scientific world orientation in its legitimate desire for a causal chain without gaps may place the origin of what is new here: for us, being concerned with the actual contemplation of the actual, no subconscious and no psychic apparatus will do. Actually, we receive what we did not have before, in such a manner that we know: it has been given to us. In the language of the Bible: “Those who wait for God will receive strength in exchange.” In the language of Nietzsche who is still faithful to actuality in his report: “One accepts, one does not ask who gives.”³⁷

What we receive in the pure relationship, Buber argues, is itself without content but filled with presence, “a presence as strength.”³⁸ According to Buber, this presence consists of three basic elements:

First, the whole abundance of actual reciprocity, of being admitted, of being associated while one is altogether unable to indicate what this is like with which one is associated, nor does association make life any easier for us – it makes life heavier but heavy with meaning. And this is second: the inexpressible confirmation of meaning. It is guaranteed. Nothing, nothing can henceforth be meaningless. The question about the meaning of life has vanished. But if it were still there, it would not require an answer. You do not know how to point to or define the meaning, you lack any formula or image for it, and yet it is more certain for you than the sensations of your senses. What could it intend with us, what does it desire from us, being revealed and surreptitious? It does not wish to be interpreted by us – for that we lack the ability – only to be done by us. This comes third: it is not the meaning of “another life” but that of this our life, not that of a “beyond” but of this our world, and it wants to be demonstrated by us in this life and this world.³⁹

I believe the three basic elements of Buber's account of revelation can be explained as metaphysical descriptions of the three parts of the I-You relationship: the first element refers to the object; the second, to what Buber later refers to as the "between", God as presence; and the third to the subject. In our relations with finite Yous the presence that lies between ourselves and the other being, that is, the exclusive light of being, is sensed by us but is not the direct object of our awareness for that is the uniqueness of the particular being itself. But in the divine revelation, a relation to God as presence and not as person, the between is directly disclosed since God is himself this presence, the You as presence. The view from the presence is twofold as it relates to the two sides of the relation, the subject-side and the object-side. As has been stated throughout, being is an unconditional concern or care for being. From the standpoint of the object this is the feeling or sense of being loved absolutely, of being recognized or confirmed in our particular being. From the standpoint of the subject this is the feeling or sense of being absolutely responsible, of being commanded to love the objects of the world. In dialogical terms, the first element of revelation consists of being addressed by God; the third element consists of being called to respond to him; and the second element is God himself, what both calls us and inspires us to respond.⁴⁰

V

By its very nature the eternal You cannot become an It; because by its very nature it cannot be placed within measure and limit, not even within the measure of the immeasurable and the limit of the unlimited; because by its very nature it cannot be grasped as a sum of qualities, not even as an infinite sum of qualities that have been raised to transcendence; because it is not to be found either in or outside the world; because it cannot be experienced; because it cannot be thought; because we transgress against it, against that which has being, if we say: "I believe that he is" – even "he" is still a metaphor, while "you" is not.⁴¹

Nevertheless, Buber notes, the eternal You is reduced again and again to an It. But such reductions, especially the initial one, the one that follows the divine revelation, are not merely human creations; God as It is not a posit or a product of our imagination; but rather a mixture of the divine and the human. We of course need God but our need for him cannot be the cause of his appearance. There is no God without revelation. Our belief in him is real because he is real.

But how does revelation become a content?

Man desires to have God; he desires to have God continually in space and time. He is loath to be satisfied with the inexpressible confirmation of the meaning; he wants to see it spread out as something that one can take out and handle again and again – a continuum unbroken in space and time that insures life for him at every point and moment.⁴²

For Buber, our desire for both spatial and temporal continuity requires that we reduce God to an object of faith. “Originally, faith fills the temporal gaps between the acts of relation; gradually, it becomes a substitute for these acts.”⁴³ In time, intimate personal prayer gives way to objective communal prayer in which prayer fills our minds but not our hearts. The absolute commandment disclosed in revelation is transformed into the holding of certain beliefs, the following of certain rules, the performance of certain practices. The unexplainable certainty and safety that accompanied the absolute sacrifice that was at the heart of the pure relation becomes objective and thus understood, it is now found outside of action and thus no longer demands or inspires it.⁴⁴

In truth, however, the pure relation can be built up into spatio-temporal continuity only by becoming embodied in the whole stuff of life. It cannot be preserved but only put to the proof in action; it can only be done, poured into life. Man can do justice to the relation to God that has been given to him only by actualizing God in the world in accordance with his ability and the measure of each day, daily. This is the only genuine guarantee of continuity. The genuine guarantee of duration is that the pure relation can be fulfilled as the beings become You, as they are elevated to the You, so that the holy basic word sounds

through all of them. Thus the time of human life is formed into an abundance of actuality; and although human life cannot and ought not to overcome the It-relation, it then becomes so permeated by relation that this gains a radiant and penetrating constancy in it. The moments of supreme encounter are no mere flashes of lightning in the dark but like a rising moon in a clear starry night. And thus the genuine guarantee of spatial constancy consists in this that men's relations to their true You, being radii that lead from all I-points to the center, create a circle. Not the periphery, not the community comes first, but the radii, the common relation to the center. That alone assures the genuine existence of a community....

The encounter with God does not come to man in order that he may henceforth attend to God but in order that he may prove its meaning in action in the world. All revelation is a calling and a mission. But again and again man shuns actualization and bends back towards the revealer: he would rather attend to God than to the world.⁴⁵

The object of our faith is a mixture of You and It. After it passes, but while it still burns, revelation takes on human form. "Although we on earth never behold God without world but only the world in God, by beholding we eternally form God's form."⁴⁶ God is present in our forms as long as we do not remove him from them. But this, Buber claims, occurs ever again; only the despair and loss that comes with the disintegration of the religious form and our world, also draws us closer to them; to new forms, new revelations, new encounters with God.

History is a mysterious approach to closeness. Every spiral of its path leads us into deeper corruption and at the same time into more fundamental return. But the God-side of the event whose world-side is called return is called redemption.⁴⁷

Notes – Part Three: God.

¹ IT, 123.

² IT, 123.

³ IT, 123.

⁴ IT, 124.

⁵ IT, 124.

⁶ Elsewhere Buber writes of God: “He is the Sun of mankind.” OJ, 109.

⁷ OJ, 66.

⁸ OJ, 86.

⁹ IT, 125.

¹⁰ IT, 126.

¹¹ IT, 124.

¹² IT, 128.

¹³ IT, 127.

¹⁴ IT, 181.

¹⁵ IT, 181.

¹⁶ IT, 181.

¹⁷ Matt. 22:37-40. *The Holy Bible*. New Revised Standard Version; Catholic Edition.

(New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 1204.

¹⁸ Martin Buber. *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation Between Religion and Philosophy*. (NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc, 1989) 60.

¹⁹ Kaufmann notes that Buber is here referring to the German theologian Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher and his belief that the essence of religion is found in our feeling of total dependence upon God. IT, 129.

²⁰ IT, 129.

²¹ IT, 130.

²² IT, 130-1.

²³ IT, 131-2.

²⁴ IT, 134.

²⁵ IT, 134.

²⁶ IT, 134.

²⁷ IT, 134.

²⁸ IT, 134.

²⁹ IT, 134-5.

³⁰ IT, 137.

³¹ IT, 126.

³² IT, 138.

³³ IT, 139.

³⁴ IT, 139.

³⁵ IT, 143.

³⁶ IT, 141. According to Buber, there is no clearer or more explicit expression of this act of psychologizing God than in the writings of the psychologist C. J. Jung. For Jung, God

is simply an autonomous psychic content. He does not exist absolutely, that is, independently from the human subject, but is found in the deepest recesses of the human soul. Religion is a relation to psychic events. For Buber's account of Jung see *Eclipse of God*; 78-92 and 133-7.

³⁷ IT, 157-8.

³⁸ IT, 158.

³⁹ IT, 158-9.

⁴⁰ God as presence is like light, He is seeing itself. He can only appear to us in this way through an intuition or feeling for only in this form of awareness, as was stated earlier in Part One, does subjectivity, seeing itself, become an object for us. Furthermore, the proof of the vision of God can only be found in action, in our commitment to or care for the world, since God is not an object but the act of seeing itself, i.e., a concern for objects. We can only love God or see Him by loving the world for a love for the world is what God in truth is.

⁴¹ IT, 160-1.

⁴² IT, 161-2.

⁴³ IT, 162.

⁴⁴ Elsewhere Buber describes the twofold nature of our religious experience as a distinction between religiosity (You-saying) and religion (It-saying). As he writes: "Religiosity is man's sense of wonder and adoration, an ever anew becoming, an ever new articulation and formulation of his feeling that, transcending his conditioned being yet bursting from its very core, there is something that is unconditioned. Religiosity is his longing to establish a living communion with the unconditioned, his will to realize the unconditioned through his action, transposing it into the world of man. Religion is the sum total of the customs and teachings articulated and formulated by the religiosity of a certain epoch in a people's life; its prescriptions and dogmas are rigidly determined and handed down as unalterably binding to all future generations, without regard for their newly developed religiosity, which seeks new forms." OJ, 80.

⁴⁵ IT, 163-4.

⁴⁶ IT, 166-7.

⁴⁷ IT, 168.

Part Four: Criticism and Conclusion

I

For all its poetry and mysticism, as well as its historical and religious analysis, Buber's *I and Thou*, I believe, is first and foremost a work of practical philosophy. For Buber, the fundamental issue of human life is not how we come to apprehend the divine - in Buber's view, a necessary and vital issue to be resolved - but rather how we manage to take on for ourselves the divine nature, in short, how the eternal is to be united with the finite, spirit with matter. According to Buber, our understanding of the divine is empty or useless unless we actualize this understanding in the world, in our own lives and in the lives of the beings that surround us. Unless we come to recognize the world's exclusivity, Buber argues, unless we actively confirm its presence over its objectivity, we are destined for a life of despair. Buber calls us back to the life of the spirit, to unconditional living or You-saying, for the sole purpose of preventing our fall into alienation. It is time now to evaluate whether or not this, the primary goal of *I and Thou* has been met. In other words, to answer the question: does Buber get the job done?

I believe that Buber's work ultimately comes up short in its task, that it fails to provide us with the means to achieve a firm or lasting unity between ourselves and the world on account of Buber's failure to recognize the role that mediation and objectivity play in the relational experience. For if spirit is to truly unite with the world, with material or conditional forms of being, then we must be prepared, I believe, for, in effect, the limiting of spirit, we must see the It-nature of the world in a much more positive light than Buber's work allows. With the exception of some words of praise for Buber's work in my

concluding remarks, the final part of my thesis will be taken up with laying out this critique.

II

For Buber, alienation exists in two forms: either in the form of matter over spirit, or that of spirit over matter.¹ In the first form, that of matter over spirit, matter is deemed to be transcendent or all that is real. This form of alienation is represented by Buber in his portrait of the ego in Part Two in which we reduce our subjectivity or spirit to an object or thing, something to defend and enhance, and as a result we come to possess both a closed and domineering attitude towards what is believed to be an inherently threatening world. Matter over spirit, the denial of spirit altogether, leads either to emptiness and violence or towards the second form of alienation. In this form of alienation, that of spirit over matter, the belief about being is completely reversed: not matter but only spirit is real. Material things, things of distinction like the world and the self, are thought to be unfit for the spirit. Contact with matter brings spirit down to the level of contingency and finitude which ultimately leads to the death of the spirit. The only way to protect the spirit, to be spiritual, is for spirit to completely separate itself from its material attachments, to deny any reality to both the I and the world, in effect, to annihilate both. This form of alienation is found in Buber's description of the two pictures at the end of Part Two and in his reference to the doctrine of self-immersion in Part Three.

The basis for alienation is the belief in the transcendence of one element, be it matter or spirit. The truth is, Buber believes, spirit seeks matter and matter needs spirit. Neither is spirit too good for matter nor is matter to possess spirit, to reduce it to an object; matter is to use spirit but not to control or dominate it. Spirit is a gift, it comes by grace, and it

must be recognized as such by us, that is, by self(material)-conscious(spiritual) agents. Matter must allow for the free movement of spirit. Spirit is only at home in the world, it can only unite with matter, when it is free to move in and out of matter and not when it is imprisoned in it.

Spirit seeks matter; it desires to take on the concerns of matter - the unconditional for the conditional, subjectivity for objectivity. But how can spirit achieve this goal, how can spirit be united with matter, with what is itself caused and determined, under Buber's absolute distinction between presence and object, between It and You, when all mediation or definition is seen as an obstacle to the spirit or You-saying? In short, how can spirit respond to matter or care for it, how can it satisfy its own desire, without taking on the nature of matter, without itself becoming in some sense determined? For Buber, objectivity and mediation deny the uniqueness or otherness of beings, they prevent our acting unconditionally. But his obsession with presence and passivity, with the unconditional act, prevents him from recognizing what a genuine response entails, what matter demands of spirit, as well as how mediation both discloses and grounds relation. Buber has succeeded in calling us back to the reality of spirit, to being as presence, only the cost of his success is a dualistic account of being. Once matter and spirit are separated, and if the separation is absolute as it is under Buber, then it is impossible, no matter how strongly the call is made for unity, to bring the two elements back together.² What is required for a real unity between the two is a more positive account of the It. We need to see what Buber fails to see, namely, the role mediation plays in the event of relation, that objectivity is not simply an obstacle to the spirit. I will now examine four ways in which mediation or objectivity plays such a role: firstly, how the presence of the

world's material needs, its misery and suffering, enable us to apprehend its exclusivity; secondly, that a genuine response requires not only that we see the world as an It, that we concern ourselves with its needs, but that we in fact become an It for it, that the spirit be limited or take on definite form; thirdly, that relations are not unguided but rather possess a universal content and that relation itself ought to be understood not as a reciprocal relationship but as one based on our obedience to authority, to something that we are not equal to; and fourthly, how spiritual objectivity, such things as ethical rules and religious practices or beliefs, can both express and enhance our participation in the spirit.

III

According to Emmanuel Levinas, a great admirer of Buber's writings and a like-minded believer in the primacy of relation, despite Buber's pioneer achievement of calling us back to a reality outside the self, Buber fails to adequately describe the true nature of relation due to his failure to recognize both the manner in which the other primarily appears to us, that is, by way of their pain or suffering, and the fact that a genuine response to the other demands that we concern ourselves with their specific material needs, in Buber's terms, that we concern ourselves with their It-nature.

Levinas' critique of Buber's account of relation is centered in his critique of Buber's remarks on the nature of solicitude.³ According to Buber, solicitude is not a genuine relation because in it "man remains essentially with himself...the barriers of his own being are not thereby breached; he makes his assistance, not his self, accessible to the other..."⁴ For Buber, as was noted earlier in my examination of the reciprocity of relation, only when we participate fully and equally in the reality of the other that is present to us, when we recognize that we are similarly situated in being, can relation be

said to take place. “Such a relation,” [one of solicitude] Buber states, “can share in essential life only when it derives its significance from being the effect of a relation which is essential in itself.”⁵

Levinas’ critique of Buber’s position on solicitude is threefold. Firstly, that solicitude provides us with access to the otherness or exclusivity of another person. Secondly, that solicitude, on account of its height distinction, is closer to the reality of the “dissymmetry” and not the reciprocity, as Buber argues, that defines relation.

Reciprocity, Levinas argues, is the view of the relation from the outside, from a third person perspective, and not how the I actually experiences it. Levinas asks: “Does not the ethical begin only at the point where the I becomes conscious of the Thou as beyond itself?”⁶ And thirdly, that solicitude, with its concern for the needs of the other, with the other’s conditional being, represents what is required in a genuine response to another person. Levinas writes:

Buber rises in violent opposition to the Heideggerian notion of *Fürsorge* [solicitude] which, to the German philosopher, would be access to Others. It is certainly not from Heidegger that one should take lessons on the love of man or social justice. But *Fürsorge* as a response to an essential destitution accedes to the alterity of the Other. It takes into account that dimension of height and misery through which the very epiphany of others takes place. Misery and poverty are not properties of the Other, but the modes of his or her appearing to me, way of concerning me, and mode of proximity. One may wonder whether clothing the naked and feeding the hungry do not bring us closer to the neighbour than the rarefied atmosphere in which Buber’s meeting sometimes takes place. Saying ‘Thou’ thus passes through my body to the hands that give, beyond the speech organs – which is in a good Biranian tradition and in keeping with the biblical truths. Before the face of God one must not go with empty hands. It is also consistent with the talmudic texts that proclaim that “to give food” is a very great thing, and to love God with all one’s heart and with all one’s life is yet surpassed when one loves Him with all one’s money. Ah! Jewish materialism!⁷

Buber and Levinas are clearly offering different accounts of the relational experience.

Whereas Buber argues for the reciprocity of relation, for an equality between the I and

the You, Levinas argues against such a structure and in favour of a basic inequality between the two beings, the You for Levinas being over against the I or more important in the eyes of the I. The question that Levinas' critique of Buber's depiction of relation raises is: which of the two accounts better describes the reality of relation? The answer, I believe, lies with Levinas' description. For with his belief in the primacy of human need, Levinas offers an account of relation that is more concrete, more affirming of conditionality, than Buber's, one that better captures the fundamental unity between spirit and matter.⁸

By focusing solely on the experience of inclusion, the experience of reciprocity or equality, Buber severely restricts our awareness or access to otherness. Solicitous feelings, feelings of compassion or sympathy, and even those of pity on occasion, are the primary means by which we are alerted to the exclusivity or otherness of the other, the primary means by which we are prevented from reducing them to an object 'for' us. Solitude, in fact, possesses two key characteristics of relation, namely, a passive subject and an object with presence. There is no guarantee that the other of solitude will become a Buberian You, that a relation of reciprocity will emerge, but as long as we are capable and willing to reflect upon the source of our solicitous feelings then out of it a new understanding, one based on the equality of all persons, can come. For does solitude not take place on account of a shared disposition, on an implicit acceptance on our part that we are equally vulnerable as to the fate that has befallen the other? Solitude is based upon an identification with the other's subjectivity and thus has the potential to turn into a genuine relation. Furthermore, it is precisely the other's suffering that stimulates our response or sense of responsibility for it. We concern ourselves with

the other on account of the presence of its needs, because the other needs us, and not, as it were, out of a sense of its equality with us. For why would we feel compelled to recognize the other's exclusivity if they are in fact enjoying it, if we see the other only in the light of its exclusivity? What is there to liberate if the other's spirit is already free?

The experience of the equality of all persons or beings, the experience of reciprocity, is without doubt a profound experience, in truth, a much deeper experience than that of solicitude. But one cannot remain in such an experience for too long. Reciprocity, the experience of inclusion, inspires us to act. A genuine response or concern for the other, an actual confirmation of its equality with us, requires that we move beyond reciprocity, that we move back, as it were, to the I-It. To say 'You' demands that we become an It for the other, that we become a means through which the other is raised to actual exclusivity. All You-saying represents the limiting of the spirit; it consists of the unconditional becoming conditional. The artist that is confronted by a form responds to the call by handing himself over to the dynamics and needs of the form; he puts himself at the mercy of it. His being becomes the place in which the form becomes a work. Similarly, in becoming a person, in providing us with an object to enter into relation with, God gives up his being as pure spirit and takes on the objective form of personhood. In short, He limits his being for our sake. Without an appreciation for the role that the needs of the You plays in relation it is difficult to see not only how relation is made possible, how the You manages to appear, but what in fact responding to the You means from us.

In order to acknowledge the role that both mediation and presence play in relation, I believe a distinction needs to be made between being 'in' the presence of a You as opposed to being 'under' its presence. To be 'in' the presence of a You means to

encounter another being directly, to experience its exclusivity in an unmediated manner. To be 'under' the presence of a You means to see another being through some form of mediation, as an object or It, but as ultimately living under the reality of its Youness or uniqueness. We then, I believe, must accept a further distinction between Its or things, between those things that originate in You-saying and those that do not; the difference say, between a poem and a household appliance. With this distinction between 'in' and 'under' in place we can summon both thought and purpose to the service of relation and thus allow them to appear in a more favourable light.⁹

IV

Buber's notion of relation as reciprocity denies the basic inequality that characterizes our relationship with the other in the genuine response. It denies the fact that, in the response, the other's being has precedence over our own. But relation as reciprocity ignores another unequal relationship behind relation, namely, the absolute authority presence or God has over us. For Buber, God is primarily immanent in the world rather than transcendent, that is to say, He is essentially beside us rather than above us. Our failure to recognize this fact, Buber believes, is one of the main sources of our alienation. But the truth about God, I believe, is the other way around: He is immanent because He is above all else transcendent.

Presence overwhelms us. It has no equal. To encounter presence is akin to the experience of the sublime, an experience initially characterized by feelings of both awe and fear but later by those of love and reverence. Presence commands our respect. It demands that we acknowledge its superiority over any and every person or being. In the face of presence, all persons are equal for all fall short of its glory, all things are beneath

it. The genuine response to the other is an act of obedience to what is present, to what lies between ourselves and the world, but also to what precedes and transcends any relational event. Relation is ultimately characterized not by reciprocity or mutuality but by the absolute authority of God. It reveals not our absolute freedom but our enslavement to Him and His call to righteousness.

The notion of our unconditional responsibility for the other is a central notion in Buber's philosophy. Only Buber fails to put this universal commandment in its proper place, that is, above the actual experience of relation, since he fails to grant it the authority it deserves. Buber refuses to reduce relation to our obedience to authority because he believes that such an understanding, by reducing the other to an idea, denies the other's uniqueness, and, by substituting a rule or ideal for personal commitment, prevents our acting unconditionally.¹⁰ But such a refusal not only fails to respect God's transcendence or authority,¹¹ but fails to provide us with the means necessary for self-sacrifice and in so doing restricts the possibility for God's greater immanence, for a real and lasting unity between ourselves and the world, between spirit and matter. Worldly existence requires that we continually become a means, that we grant some form of mediation authority over us. But without the knowledge of the ultimate end of our actions, without the belief that every act, no matter how instrumental or profane, is an act of obedience to God, is an expression of our love for God, we will lack the purpose required for our engagement with the world. Without the belief in God's authority we cannot consistently respond to Buber's call to hallow the everyday.

Proof that Buber's account of relation is not unguided, that Buber makes use of things that are themselves outside the scope of the relational experience, can be seen in his critique in Part Three of the ecstatic experience. For I believe that Buber's argument against the mystic's belief in an actual unity or merger between the self and God is based not upon any real proof that such an event is impossible but merely upon Buber's belief that God demands that we engage Him through His creation.

Buber refers to the ecstatic experience as taking place on the margins of the pure relationship. But to speak of margins here is to introduce a division or distinction that requires a reflective distance or prior assumption which the experience itself cannot provide. We are of course not God, we do not share the same form of being as Him: He is the creator and we are the created and this basic distinction will never change. But we do possess being or what is essential, there is, to use Meister Eckhart's words, a "divine spark" in us. We enter into relation with another being and through that event sense the presence of God; but only because being has been stimulated or aroused in us, has been freed from its concern with our matter. The mystic's claim is that in a moment of ecstasy the spirit is completely released from the bonds of the self and or body and is thus free to appear in its pure form. The issue of the possibility of a merger is ultimately based upon whether or not the spirit can at any time be completely released from its attachment to us; in other words, a physiological and not a metaphysical question. And if it can be then what does it become other than God? What can it disclose other than God? "Know that no soul," Eckhart says, "can enter into God unless it first becomes God just as it was before it was created."¹² As Plotinus once noted:

Whoever has seen it knows what I say: that the soul receives another life when it approaches and has already approached and has already received it; that is,

when the soul experiences and comes to know this: He who leads forth the chorus of the other life is present, and now no other thing is needful, nay, all other things must be put aside, and in this One shall I stand and this One shall I become when I have cast off all veils of the extraneous... Then we may gaze on him here, and on ourselves too, in the manner of gazing that does good: ourselves in glory, full of spiritual light, nay, ourselves *as* pure light, unencumbered, weightless, having become God, nay, *being* God.¹³

Such a feeling complicates the religious life. An obsession or preoccupation with it may even be a sin. But to claim as Buber does that a unity between ourselves and the world is impossible appears to be an impossible claim to make. To truly object to such experiences as the end towards which we are to strive requires that we accept certain truths of existence that cannot be found in experience, such things as the Biblical belief in the inherent goodness or value of the world or the biblical understanding that one cannot love God without loving the world. But more than that, I believe, instead of forcing us to abandon the belief in a unity, Buber's account of relation and the spirit, the belief that we can experience God directly provides us with the means of explaining it. As Buber writes:

Of course, God is "the wholly other"; but he is also the wholly same: the wholly present. Of course, he is the *mysterium tremendum* that appears and overwhelms; but he is also the mystery of the obvious that is closer to me than my own I.¹⁴

V

A return to God or the spirit can be born simply out of an immediate change in our intentions, through a particular instance of passivity or self-sacrifice. But a return will be short lived if it is based solely on the strength of our sincerity or passion, on our will alone. "If what we are learning is to love a person unselfishly," Iris Murdoch writes in her critical essay on Buber's philosophy, "we have the privilege of dialogue, and need also the presence of good ideals and desires."¹⁵ Unless we possess the right beliefs and habits

to help ground our commitment to relation, unless our environment is friendly to relation, we will eventually fall back into the worship of false or foreign gods. As was true for the Jewish people under the kingships of Hezekiah and Josiah, our turning back to God must ultimately consist of our faith in and obedience to certain forms of spiritual objectivity.¹⁶

For Buber, spiritual objectivity, such things as ethical norms or religious practices or beliefs, simply represents various ways in which the spirit is reduced by us to an object. We turn spirit into matter, Buber believes, out of our need to capture the essence of the relational experience, to understand it but also to tame or control the spirit. Spirit becomes an object and for some time this objectivity serves the spirit well. But eventually, by putting a means before the meeting, the objectification or materialization of spirit prevents our contact with the spirit, it builds a barrier between ourselves and God.

Buber's dualistic account of spiritual life, his distinction, as it were, between our actions or intentions and our beliefs or objective ends we seek, is, I believe, misguided for two reasons. Firstly, and as was noted earlier in my critique of Buber's account of the genuine response, in order to realize its concern for matter, spirit must take on the form of matter, it must limit itself or become an It. God becomes a person and reduces our relationship to Him to our obedience to a series of commandments for our sake, out of His love for us. Furthermore, both ethics and religion, the two forms of the objectification of the spirit, are not merely the reduction of spirit to matter or an object but an expression or embodiment of the unity between spirit and matter that Buber so desires. For instance, in religious tradition or sacred objectivity, the transcendence of both spirit and matter are simultaneously confirmed. In being sacred or Holy, in being free of the relativity and

contingency that characterizes matter itself, the matter of religious experience enable us to recognize spirit, what lies outside of matter. Similarly, because spirit is objectified, because it is not free of matter, matter itself is recognized.

The second reason why Buber's account of spiritual life is incorrect or misguided has to do with the ability spiritual objectivity has in allowing us to recognize God's or spirit's authority over us. In putting certain rules or laws above us, in taking an attitude not of doubt but of faith towards certain objects, as is required when following religious traditions, we not only promote God's transcendence but we practice obedience.

"Tradition," as George Grant notes, "means literally a handing over; or, as it were, a surrender."¹⁷ For how can we love God, how can we practice our faith, without putting some form of objectivity over us? In becoming an object God limits Himself for our sake. And in following the forms in which He has limited Himself, in treating His matter as if it were spirit, we limit ourselves for His sake.¹⁸

VI

When confronted with the criticism that his work was too harsh towards the It, Buber acknowledged this fact but defended his position by claiming that the need for a return to the spirit was far too great to allow for a more sympathetic or fairer account of the It. As Buber writes in response to this criticism by his close friends Ernst Simon and Franz Rosenzweig:

Indeed, it [*I and Thou*] does not do justice to it [the It]: because I am born in the midst of this situation of man and see what I see and must point out what I have seen. In another hour it would perhaps have been granted to me to sound the praises of the It; today, not: because without a turning of man to his Thou no turn in his destiny can come.¹⁹

In *I and Thou*, Buber dismisses or downplays the It in an effort to better confirm the You. This decision prevents him from philosophically reaching the unity between spirit and matter that he so desired. But it was also Buber's desire to lead us back to the spirit, back to a love for life that is the end of our deepest desire; and this goal of Buber's, I believe, has been met. "If you wish to learn to believe, love!"²⁰ To have failed to describe the true nature of existence, to have failed in one's philosophy, Buber must have believed, is of little consequence if one believes in love and is willing to speak for it. Without love we have nothing. With it, Buber certainly believed, anything is possible. Works that call us back to love are the most enlightening, the most useful of their kind. Despite its shortcomings, a sincere reading of Buber's *I and Thou* can only lead to one conclusion:

Exiled in us we arouse the soft,
Unclenched, armless, silk and rough love that breaks all rocks.²¹

Notes – Part Four: Criticism and Conclusion.

¹ By matter I simply mean determined or definite being, in short, being as objectivity, as It.

² Buber's later notion of the realm of the "between", the idea that being or what is essential resides neither in the I itself nor in the world itself but rather between the two, provides little aid in bringing about a unity between spirit and matter for it is simply another word to describe what Buber believes altogether lacks any content.

³ Buber's remarks on solicitude are found in *Between Man and Man* in his criticism of what Buber argues is Martin Heidegger's "monological" account of human existence. According to Buber, because Heidegger views our relation to being primarily through our awareness of our death and not as Buber does through our relations with other, our involvement with being requires that we be concerned solely with ourselves. As Buber notes, "For him [Heidegger] the individual has the essence of man in himself and brings it to existence by becoming a "resolved" self. Heidegger's is a *closed system*." BMM, 171.

⁴ BMM, 170.

⁵ BMM, 169.

⁶ Emmanuel Levinas. "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge." PMB, 147.

⁷ Emmanuel Levinas. *Outside the Subject*. Translated with an introduction by Michael B. Smith. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) 18-19. Levinas made similar remarks to these in an article first published two years before Buber's death in 1965 ("Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge"). Buber responded to that article, but merely by restating his position with an emphasis on the truth, as he saw it, that even if all the material needs of the other were satisfied "the real problem would become wholly visible for the first time." PMB, 723. In other words, Levinas' critique had no effect on Buber's understanding of relation.

⁸ In a letter written to Buber dated September 19, 1922, Florens Christian Rang, a friend of Buber's, criticizes *I and Thou* for its surprising lack of concreteness. Rang writes: "Your language veers too much towards the scientific. In so doing, it becomes abstract, the very opposite of the message it means to bring, which is as concrete as it could possibly be. And, along with the language, the train of thought likewise becomes abstract." *The Letters of Martin Buber: A Life of Dialogue*. Edited by Nahum Glatzer and Paul Mendes-Flohr. Translated by Richard and Clara Winston and Harry Zohn. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996) 284.

⁹ In one of his later works, Buber grants objectivity and reflection an essential role in You-saying. Relation, Buber later argues, is the product of a twofold movement: first, an act of distancing whereby the You is recognized as an independent object; and second, an act of entering into relation with this objective independence. See *The Knowledge of Man*; chapter 2: "Distance and Relation" and Chapter 7: "Man and His Image Work". Nathan Rotenstreich argues that in this later position Buber has, in effect, moved "beyond the former rigid distinction of It and You." PMB, 111.

¹⁰ Buber's allegiance to sincerity is, I believe, a bias that all existentialist thinkers are guilty of. Existentialism's obsession with the actual decision itself, the act of will that is involved, prevents the existentialist from recognizing the role impersonal things, things like ideas or rules or principles, reason itself, play in guiding or determining our decisions.

¹¹ Buber's preference for the immanence of God over His transcendence is the basis for his belief, as stated in Part Three, that what our unconditional responsibility ultimately means is that God in fact needs us. This sense of God needing us is what becomes of our understanding of God when we view Him solely from the standpoint of His immanence, by way of a particular relation between ourselves and the world. But such a belief is misinformed. The origin of our responsibility is found in God's grace and mercy. God created us for a purpose but He cannot be understood as needing us, that we are somehow necessary to His existence. It is foolishness to think otherwise.

¹² A statement made by Eckhart and noted by Buber in a collection of mystical writings Buber assembled. *Ecstatic Confessions: The Heart of Mysticism*. Collected and introduced by Martin Buber. Edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr; translated by Esther Cameron. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966) 156. Florens Christian Rang criticizes Buber for not recognizing the unity that results from our encounter with God when he writes: "In truth there is no I-You, but only Thou, from which the I then echoes." *The Letters of Martin Buber*; 284; letter from Rang to Buber dated September 19, 1922.

¹³ *Ecstatic Confessions*; selections from the writings of Plotinus, 32.

¹⁴ IT, 127.

¹⁵ Iris Murdoch. *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1993) 479.

¹⁶ In the biblical account of the reigns of the kings Hezekiah and Josiah, the return to God that each king commanded was defined by a return to a life lived in accordance with ancient practices and beliefs, to a covenantal relationship. See 2 Kings: 18-23 and 2 Chronicles 29-36.

¹⁷ George Grant. *Time as History*. Edited with an Introduction by William Christian. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) 65.

¹⁸ The discipline of philosophy, I believe, ought to be understood as being similarly grounded. Ideas or concepts, contrary to Buber's belief, are forms by which we recognize the authority of what transcends us, be it God or the truth. Ideas do not take the place of God or the spirit but rather they picture our relationship to what is higher. Distinctions, like Plato's between forms and particulars, ultimately promote and enhance our connection to the spirit. Furthermore, although it is impossible to grasp God in thought, it is, I believe, possible, as many philosophers have done in practice, to be lead towards God, towards the unthinkable, towards what can only be intuitively known, by thought; for instance, by dialectical reasoning whereby thought gradually separates itself from contingencies. For Buber's critique of philosophy, his belief that philosophy has its basis in the basic word I-It, see *Eclipse of God*, specifically Chapter Three entitled "Religion and Philosophy."

¹⁹ PMB, 708. In a letter written by Rosenzweig to Buber not long before *I and Thou* was first published, and after Rosenzweig was sent a copy of the printer's proof of Buber's work, Rosenzweig remarks that "in the I-It, you [Buber] give the I-Thou a cripple for an

antagonist.” Rosenzweig goes on to say: “Intoxicated by the joy of the discovery, like Ebner [German philosopher, Fernand Ebner], you cast everything else (quite literally) to the dead. But *It* is not dead, although death belongs to it. It is created. But because you have equated It with the indubitably dead “It” – “for” – “the” – I, you *must* consign everything that out of sheer vitality resists falling into this valley of death to the realm of the basic word I-Thou, which as a consequence *must* be vastly expanded.” *The Letters of Martin Buber*; 278-9; letter undated but apparently written just prior to September 14, 1922.

²⁰ OJ, 213.

²¹ These are the final two lines of Dylan Thomas’ poem entitled “There was a Saviour”. *Selected Poems of Dylan Thomas*. Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Walford Davies. (London: Orion Publishing Group, 1998) 43.

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