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Heir to Landauer's Legacy

A chastened Buber radically revised his views—about the still-raging war that was ravaging Europe, but also about political nationalism. In a letter of February 4, 1917, requesting revisions to an article submitted to *Der Jude*, Buber, the journal's editor, urged the author, Moritz Goldstein, to reconsider his claim that though nationalism is a mistaken path to community, patriotic loyalty to the state engenders positive, genuine, and enduring communal bonds. Clearly annoyed by what he found to be a specious argument, Buber chides him, "Yes, I too have 'overcome nationalism,' but certainly not in favor of the idea of the state." In response to Goldstein's myopic celebration of patriotism per se, born of a disaffection with the experience of war, Buber responds that it is not consistent with his experience. "What I and some of the best among my friends in the field and at the home-front have experienced" is that both a nation and a state are at best relative ideals, legitimate only to

the extent that they foster the birth of a new humanity. These "cursory words," he concludes, should suffice "to indicate . . . that there exists a different experience of these years, a different lesson derived from them, a different 'conquest of nationalism' inspired by them," and, moreover, "a different conception, generated by [this experience], of our task as Jews"—a task he identifies with Zionism.[1]

Exactly a year later, in a letter of February 4, 1918, Buber assured the novelist and playwright Stefan Zweig that Zionism did not aspire to establish yet another political state. Zweig, the author of a recently published pacifist play, *Jeremiah*, had asked Buber whether, in the wake of the sobering lessons of the war, Zionism was still beholden to "the dangerous dream of a Jewish state with cannons, flags, [and] military decorations."[2] Zweig viewed *Jeremiah*—published in the midst of the war, and soon to have its premier performance in neutral Switzerland—as a "hymn to the Jewish people," who, suffering eternal defeat, had transformed their fate. That fate would the source of a new Jerusalem: a life beyond political nationhood, embodying the vision of transnational human solidarity, and a "permanent rebellion" against the very notion of a nation-state and its pernicious claims. As a Jew, he explained to Buber, he had "resolved to love the painful idea of the Diaspora, to cherish the Jewish fate more than Jewish well-being." What will remain of the Jews spiritually, he asked Buber, if they deny their destiny to dwell among the nations of the world as a people that has transcended the folly of nationalism? The establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, Zweig held, would be a betrayal of the people's prophetic vocation and thus a "tragic disappointment."

In response to Zweig's impassioned affirmation of the Diaspora, Buber registered his own distrust of nationalism and the nation-state and clarified the nature of his abiding Zionist commitment. Acknowledging the troubling ambiguities of

Zionist aspirations, he tells Zweig that they must be embraced as a creative challenge if Judaism is to cease being an ethereal, disembodied entity, devoid of concrete expression:

> I do not know anything of a "Jewish state with cannons, flags, and military decorations," not even as a dream. What will become [of the Zionist project] depends on those who create it. And precisely for that reason individuals like me, who are of a human and humane disposition, must take a resolute part *here*, where human beings are once again granted the opportunity of building a community (*Gemeinschaft*). . . . I for my part prefer to participate in the extraordinary venture of something new, in which I do not see much "well-being" but quite a good deal of great sacrifices. I prefer this, rather than to go on enduring the Diaspora, which for all its beautiful and painful fertility, passes on the nourishing substance of that [purely spiritual] movement piece by piece to inner decay. I even would prefer a tragic disappointment to a not-at-all tragic but continual and hopeless degeneration.[3]

Yet only a day before sending his letter to Zweig, Buber had confided in a letter to Hugo Bergmann, a member of the Bar Kochba circle who would become one of his closest lifelong friends, that he too harbored the fear that Zionism might very well degenerate into unalloyed political nationalism:

> We must not deceive ourselves that most of today's leading Zionists (and probably also most of those who are led) are thoroughly unrestrained nationalists (following the European example), imperialists, even unconscious mercantilists and worshipers of [material] success. They speak about rebirth and mean enterprise. If we do not succeed to construct an authoritative counterforce, the soul of the movement will be corrupted, possibly forever.[4]

Manifestly alarmed by "the misguided spirit" that he feared had overtaken Zionism, Buber wrote to Bergmann, "I am at any

rate determined to throw myself into the struggle [against this lamentable development] with everything I have."[5]

Buber's fears had been especially aroused by the publication in November 1917 of the Balfour Declaration, which aligned the Zionist project with British colonialism. With bitter sarcasm, he warned that Britain would introduce into Palestine *Fußballgeist*, the spirit of soccer, and worse, "the demon of mercantilism." Buber's opposition to the Balfour Declaration placed him at odds with most Zionists, even those who like him gave priority to cultural renewal. In this regard, the Hebrew novelist Shai Agnon recounted an exchange between Buber and Ahad Ha'am, the *spiritus rector* of cultural Zionism. Sometime after Lord Balfour issued his letter proclaiming Great Britain's commitment to the "establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people," Agnon, then living in Germany, invited Buber, Ahad Ha'am, and the Hebrew poet Chaim Nachman Bialik to his home in a suburb of Frankfurt am Main. Sitting on the balcony of Agnon's apartment overlooking a garden of pine trees, they discussed (presumably in Yiddish, their common language) the most pressing issues facing the Jewish nation.

The conversation eventually touched upon the Balfour Declaration, at which point Ahad Ha'am argued that, should the Zionist movement fail to seize the opportunity presented by the declaration to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine, it would be a grievous error—indeed, it would be the forfeiture of the last opportunity to bring about the nation's "redemption." Visibly taken aback, Buber protested that he envisioned the people's redemption to come about in a fundamentally different manner. With a gentle smile at what he undoubtedly regarded as Buber's incorrigible romanticism, Ahad Ha'am, the rationalist, bowed his head in silence.[6] Agnon, too, saw Buber's position as endearingly idealistic, as well as anachronistic. Buber, he would write decades later, was "among the remaining few who still upheld a belief, inherited from the cosmo-

politan spirit of the Enlightenment, that in the first instance, we are to regard ourselves as citizens of the world dedicated to *tikkun olam* [repair of the world]. . . . He nurtured this view with a cherubic innocence, a purity of heart, but at times with extreme naiveté."[7] What Ahad Ha'am and Agnon regarded as naiveté, however, Buber held to be a "greater realism," viewing the prevailing political pragmatism of the Zionist movement as short-sighted. Although his voice would be increasingly marginalized, in the initial years of the British Mandate of Palestine he continued to argue that the diversity of Zionist ideological discourse, especially with regard to the movement's ultimate political objective, merited resisting the pull toward political nationalism and realpolitik.

In the decades before the establishment of the State of Israel, the *Endziel*, the ultimate goal of Zionism, was indeed officially left undefined, if only to avoid antagonizing the British Mandatory government and the Arabs of Palestine.[8] Placing in brackets the Endziel of Zionism had the effect of encouraging open debate on the objectives of the movement. Rejecting the goal of Jewish political sovereignty in Palestine, Buber was reluctant to define the Jews as a "nation," preferring to call them a "people" (Volk). The significance of this semantic distinction is highlighted in an exchange he had during the summer of 1916 with Hermann Cohen, the doyen of German neo-Kantian philosophers. Cohen, who was prominently associated with liberal Judaism, assailed Zionism for undermining the integration of Jewry into German culture and civil society, and believed that Zionism betrayed the religious vocation of Jewry, which should instead be to act as "suffering servants," dispersed among the nations, heralding the future messianic era of universal fraternity, justice, and peace. The Jews, he argued, are not a nation, but merely a "nationality"—hence the necessary loss of its ancient statehood—since a nation is a political entity, which requires a state for its full expression, whereas a "nationality" is

a "fact of nature," an ethnic group. (A nation-state may contain many nationalities; Cohen believed that in Germany, the Jews should be integrated into the German nation-state as members of one of its diverse nationalities, much like the Saxons, Bavarians, and Prussians.)

In response, Buber accused Cohen of terminological (and thus conceptual) obfuscation, arguing that the Jews are neither a nation nor a nationality, but rather a people (Volk):

> The Jewish people are not a fact of nature but a historical reality that can be compared to no other; not a concept but a towering [reality], living and dying before my and your eyes; not a means for the transmission of religion, but the bearer of this religion and with it all the Jewish ideologies, all [expressions of] the Jewish ethos, all [forms of Jewish] social life—a people debased as it has been [in the Diaspora] to dust.[9]

For Buber, the Jews as a people are characterized by their spiritual vocation, defined not solely by the Law of Moses but also by an ongoing quest to exemplify (rather than merely point to, as for Cohen) the ideal human community, and as such to be a "light unto the nations." Accordingly, Zionism does not, as Cohen contended, betray Judaism's "messianic ideal," for the realization of that ideal does not require "the dispersion, debasement, and homelessness" of the Jews. "The Jewish people must persevere in the midst of today's human order—not as a fixed, brittle fact of nature appended to an ever more diluted confessional religion, but as a people pursuing its ideal . . . *for the sake of the human order.*" Although for Buber, as for Cohen, a struggle for a "homeland" is by definition a national struggle, he saw Zionism as sui generis, because "the struggle for a Jewish communal existence in Palestine [is] a supranational one (*übernationales*)." That is, "we do not want Palestine for the Jews, we want it for humankind, for we want it for the *realization* of

Judaism."[10] Still, Buber would surely have been hard-pressed to elaborate what would in practice distinguish a "Jewish communal existence" (*jüdisches Gemeinwesen*) from a national "homeland" (*Heimstätte*) in Palestine. As we shall see, this ill-defined distinction would mostly function as a way of trying to steer the Zionist project away from unbridled political nationalism.

Before his exchange with Cohen went to press, Buber sent Landauer a copy of his statement, requesting comments. Landauer gave a qualified approval to Buber's attribution of universal significance to Zionism: "What you say about . . . the task of *a* people [the Jewish people] for humanity," he writes, "is of such a nature that I ought to say: for me too." Yet, he continues, the task of collective self-actualization, of benefit to the entire world, is incumbent on each people. He notes that he had in fact recently signed a proclamation calling upon the Germans to dedicate themselves to serving all of humanity. He did so, he tells Buber, "as a German who feels responsible for what other Germans do to themselves and other peoples." His allegiance to the German people, he assures Buber, "coexists with my Judaism without the slightest conflict." He noted that he had previously elaborated this position, writing of the "intimate unity" of his dual identity as a Jew and German, which he would not deny by distinguishing "one element of this relationship within myself as primary, and the other, as secondary. I have never felt the need to simplify myself or to create an artificial unity by way of denial; I accept my complexity and hope to be an even more multifarious unity than I am now aware of." He pointedly expressed his dismay that, in contrast, in Buber's rebuttal of Cohen's affirmation of a German-Jewish identity, he spoke "*wholly* as a Jew."[11]

Buber conceded that he regarded his dual identity as a German and a Jew differently than Landauer did, but insisted that his position was not the same as that of the "official Jewish nationalists. I do not reject dualism as they do; rather I acknowl-

edge it like you, but unlike you I feel it to be a dynamic and tragic problem, a spiritual *agon* [struggle], which like any agon, can become creative."[12] By framing settlement of the Land of Israel as a propitious context in which to pursue this struggle, he held, Zionism challenges the Jews to live with their dual identity at its deepest and spiritually most authentic level—that is, both as Jews and as citizens of the world, beholden to the prophetic voice of universal fraternity. Thus, in an essay written a few weeks after the Russian Revolution of March 1917, he called on his fellow Jews to celebrate the liberation of the masses of Russia from Tsarist tyranny. "We do not separate our human and Jewish feelings, human and Jewish responses from one another. We celebrate the freedom of human beings, the freedom of peoples, whoever they may be. . . . We believe that the emancipation of the Jews and that of humanity go hand in hand, for we believe that humanity's soul is beginning to come of age. Our Zionism has its roots in this belief."[13]

Buber's political vision developed and shifted during his tenure as the editor of *Der Jude* beginning in the spring of 1916. Over a decade earlier, in the fall of 1903, Buber (together with Chaim Weizmann) had proposed the founding of a journal to be called *Der Jude* (The Jew), but the pair failed to marshal the necessary financial support for the project. The envisioned monthly, as Buber stated in the original prospectus, would address a younger generation of Jews "for whom Judaism is not something that is bygone and closed, not something banned to rigid formulas, but is the living spirit of the people in all its depth and breadth in all its variety, in all its forms and articulations."[14] With the outbreak of World War I, the idea of the journal was broached once again by the Jewish National Committee, which had been cofounded by Buber in October 1915. As Germany's troops pushed into Tsarist Russia, the committee sought to mobilize German public opinion in support of a comprehensive program to improve the lives of eastern Euro-

pean Jewry. Toward this end, the committee, which enjoyed the support of the World Zionist Organization, allocated funds to establish a journal and asked Buber to serve as its editor. Buber agreed—on the condition that the journal not be formally affiliated with the Zionist movement. This, he hoped, would let him include Zionists and non-Zionists (as well as non-Jews) as both writers and readers of a literary and political monthly of the highest quality.

Buber devoted himself fully to organizing and editing *Der Jude*, putting on the back burner all of his own major projects. For the next seven years, he did not take a vacation, often working from 8:00 a.m. to midnight. Moreover, he did not receive a salary (his financial support came from his father and dividends from properties bequeathed to him by his grandparents), though he did eventually receive a very modest monthly stipend to help defray incidental expenses.[15] He successfully recruited many leading minds of his day to contribute to the journal, assuring them that doing so would draw serious attention to what he regarded as the exigent political and cultural issues facing contemporary Jewry.

Buber did not limit his pursuit of contributors to established authors. Similar to when he had edited Herzl's *Die Welt* some fifteen years earlier, he sought to engage the voices of the younger generation, even those like Gershom Scholem who were critical of his views and literary style. Rafael Buber recalled the then nineteen-year-old Scholem paying an unannounced early morning visit to his father. Hearing the young man shouting at his father, Rafael ran to his father's study and waited outside, ready to pounce on the impudent intruder, but Scholem said his piece and quickly left. With his fists still clenched, the sixteen-year-old Rafael asked his father, "How did you let that rascal shout at you?" Buber softly replied, "My son, some day that young man will attain intellectual renown."[16]

Shortly after Scholem's outburst, Buber invited him to

contribute a critique of the Zionist youth movement to *Der Jude*.[17] At Scholem's behest, Buber also solicited an article from Scholem's friend Walter Benjamin, even though Buber had been deeply offended by a particularly vitriolic letter Benjamin had written to him, castigating the jingoism in *Der Jude*'s inaugural issue.[18] (What had actually troubled Buber, who since the publication of that first issue of the journal had recanted his own position toward the war, was Benjamin's thinly veiled but damning critique of Buber's expository voice: "To me, . . . every action that originates from the . . . heaping up of word upon word seems frightful . . . I continue to think that by striving for crystalline clarity and eliminating the unutterable in language, we will arrive at an acceptable and logical form for achieving effectiveness in language.")[19] Benjamin ultimately declined Buber's invitation to contribute to his journal. He was more successful, however, in soliciting an article from Franz Kafka. At first the little-known, diffident writer from Prague hesitated, explaining to Buber that he was "far too burdened and insecure to think of speaking up in such a company [of established authors], even in the most minor way."[20] But Buber persisted, and Kafka finally yielded. Learning that two of his short stories had been accepted for publication, Kafka humbly wrote: "So I will be published in *Der Jude* after all, and always thought that impossible."[21]

The numerous essays that Buber himself authored in the journal signal a shift in his conception of the axis of community (Gemeinschaft), away from subjective experience (Erlebnis) and toward interpersonal relations. He no longer conceived of Jewish renewal as principally an aesthetic-spiritual process. "Cultural work," he declared in an essay of March 1917, "is a misleading term," for "the word 'culture' is too great and too limited for what we want. What we want is not 'culture,' but life. *What we want is Jewish life.*" In a radical reversal of his previous teachings, Buber now contended that "what we want

cannot be attained by spirit and creativity; it certainly does not come from 'culture.'" The renewal of Judaism cannot be realized through individual experience, he believed, but only in "living with, helping and serving one another."[22]

Buber's vision of community as the basis of Jewish renewal would henceforth be distinctively utopian, requiring nothing less than a radical transformation of the structure of human relations. His emerging ethical socialism bore the unmistakable imprint of Landauer, to whom he became particularly close after their reconciliation. While previously Buber had been primarily drawn to Landauer's writings on mysticism and literature, in a 1904 article with a palpably autobiographical echo he summarized Landauer's teachings as "self-liberation": "We must break all bonds in order to find ourselves. The prohibitions of laws and traditions are nothing but impoverished, miserable words for one who deprives oneself of happiness."[23] In an earlier time, as the editor of *Die Gesellschaft*, Buber had little practical interest in Landauer's anarcho-socialism, even though he had commissioned Landauer to write a volume on revolution. But in the wake of Landauer's trenchant critique of his glorification of the war experience as engendering community, his friend's utopian socialism would now decisively inform Buber's vision of Jewish renewal.

Landauer was most pleased with this turn in Buber's thought. Upon reading Buber's polemical exchange with Hermann Cohen, in which his friend explained that the goal of Zionism was not the founding of a state but true human community, Landauer wrote Buber: "With what heartfelt joy, I once again read your Cohen booklet. Also in the notes there are much of those elements that bind us."[24] For Landauer, true socialism could not be realized only through institutional change, either of the power structures of the state or of the economic order: it required as well a fundamental spiritual regeneration of the individual and of the moral quality of interpersonal re-

lations. Genuine social change would proceed from the individual, in a personal decision to awaken the love that slumbers within one's self and within others. Yet we should not be satisfied with the creation of an inner, personal socialism; we must call upon our "ethical will" and work toward a socialist society in the here and now.

Revolution, for Landauer, should take place to whatever degree possible under prevailing conditions, through the construction of alternative communitarian modes of social and economic conduct, including the nascent kibbutz movement in Palestine. His socialism was an endless historical process in which each generation would work to realize social and economic justice as much as possible—paradoxically inspired by the ideal that can never be fully realized. His seminal lecture "Aufruf zum Sozialismus" (Call to socialism) greatly informed what Buber would later call "Hebrew humanism" and, indeed, his philosophy of dialogue. At the funeral of Landauer's daughter Charlotte (who passed away in 1927 at the age of thirty-three), Buber would take the opportunity to summarize her father's political legacy in consonance with his own developing approach: the "new community of humankind for which we hope cannot coalesce out of [isolated] individuals . . . but rather there must exist cells, small communal cells out of which alone the great human community can be built."[25]

But the bond between Buber and Landauer, forged through their occasionally fraught dialogue on political and ethical issues, was not only ideological; it was primarily grounded in an existential bond of an enduring and earnest friendship. Indeed, Buber was one of Landauer's few genuine friends. As the theater critic Julius Bab noted, despite Landauer's prominence as a writer, translator, editor, and political activist, he "had very few friends in the true sense of this difficult word and also no lasting comrades. The demon in Landauer that sacrificed all the forces of his inner life to a passionate goal also sacrificed

friendships and comradeships in great number. . . . Thus this prophet of genuine, deeply felt community was in his personal life almost a solitary man."[26] His friendship with Buber was a rare exception.

When the two first met at the Hart brothers' Neue Gemeinschaft in 1900, they were each at a critical juncture in their lives. The twenty-two-year-old Buber was trying to find a footing outside of Jewish circles, to define himself in ways beyond the claims of traditional Jewish law and loyalties. Landauer's Nietzsche-inflected anarchism—with its unique blend of individual self-determination, mystical epistemology, and communitarian socialism—exercised a powerful pull on the young Buber. Landauer, for his part, was at the time in the midst of an intense extramarital affair with Hedwig Lachmann, whom he would eventually marry, and whose warm, unambiguous Jewish identity prompted him to clarify his own ties to Judaism, toward which he had been, until then, utterly indifferent. Buber, the Polish Jew, offered Landauer personal knowledge of Judaism as a way of life and, as refracted through his writings on the Jewish Renaissance, a culturally and spiritually engaging worldview. It was Buber's early writings on Hasidism in particular that inspired Landauer to affirm with manifest pride his Jewish spiritual patrimony. In a review of Buber's *The Legend of the Baal-Shem*, he wrote that "Judaism is not an external accident [of birth], but a lasting inner quality, and identification with it unites a number of individuals within a community," observing obliquely about their then-embryonic friendship that, "in this way, a common ground is established between the person writing this article and the author of the book" under review.[27] Ultimately, Landauer and Buber were bonded by the ineffable element of personal compatibility, which evolved over the years into a relationship of mutual trust.

Their friendship took on an added significance for the "lonely revolutionary"—as Bab aptly called Landauer—

following Lachmann's sudden death after a bout of pneumonia in February 1918. Unable to reconcile himself to his beloved Hedwig's untimely passing, Landauer fell into a period of extended bereavement. Perhaps in an effort to extricate his friend from prolonged mourning, Buber sought to engage him in various projects. His efforts were not successful, and Landauer apologized to Buber, explaining that he hoped his inability to participate "doesn't affect our harmony and community, which has grown much deeper in the course of these years and which, as far as the future goes, has much to do with my desire and willingness to preserve life and strength."[28]

Other than preparing an anthology of his late wife's poetry, Landauer had little resolve to do anything else.[29] In a letter of August 1918 to the dramaturge Hans Franck, he apologized for not writing. "I am not a whole person, and I don't know whether I will ever be again. If you knew how much my work is affected thereby—wanting to work but not able—you would understand how difficult and nigh-impossible it is for me to take on something that would be but a diversion and not genuine work."[30] A month before declining Franck's request for his collaboration on a project for the municipal theater of Düsseldorf, Landauer received a visit from Buber, who stayed with his bereaved friend for three to four days.[31] In October of that year, Landauer, in turn, visited Buber and his wife in their home in Heppenheim.[32]

Less than a month later, in November 1918, the Jewish journalist and theater critic Kurt Eisner led a socialist revolution to overthrow the monarchy of Bavaria, proclaiming Bavaria a free state and republic and serving as its provisional premier. Landauer was apparently drawn out of his prolonged mourning by the promise of Eisner's government to effect a "spiritual revolution," believing that "Marionettes [would] turn into human beings; rusty philistines [would] become capable of emotion; every fixed thing, even convictions and denials, [would] begin

to totter; the intellect, usually concentrated on one's own well-being, [would turn] into reasonable thinking . . . for the common weal; everything [would be open] to the good; the unbelievable, the miracle [would become] feasible; the reality otherwise hidden in our souls, in our religious beliefs, in dream and in love, in the dance of the limbs and in sparkling glances, is pressing to become reality." Eisner, who had met Landauer a few years earlier through their mutual involvement in the pacifist organization Bund Neues Vaterland, wrote Landauer on November 14, beseeching him to join in the Bavarian revolution "as soon as your health allows." Alluding to Landauer's reputation as an inspiring orator, Eisner continued, "What I would like from you is to contribute to the transformation of souls by means of [public] speaking."[33] Despite a lingering flu on top of his ongoing depression, Landauer eagerly accepted Eisner's invitation. On the day after he received Eisner's letter, he wrote Buber, informing him that he would accept Eisner's invitation. "You ought to come too; there is plenty of work. I'll write you as soon as I know of anything definite of concern to you."[34] Less than a week later, he again wrote Buber, requesting that he send Landauer his "ideas on adult education, organization of publications, etc.," and added, "or better still come with them to Munich soon."[35]

Buber would join Landauer in Munich only three months later. The delay was apparently due to his efforts to organize a conference of German socialist Zionists, to take place in Munich in February 1919, in solidarity with the revolution and Eisner's government. The conference had to be cancelled because of the increasing instability of the situation in the Bavarian capital. Nonetheless Buber went alone to Munich in mid-February, where with Landauer he attended a session of the parliament of the Bavarian republic and participated in the parliamentary debate on "political terror." Although Landauer had proposed the topic, as Buber recalled, "he himself

hardly joined in the debate; he appeared dispirited and nearly exhausted—a year before his wife had succumbed to a fatal illness, and now he re-lived her death in his heart." The discussion was largely between Buber and a leader of the Spartacus League (the predecessor of the German Communist Party): "I declined to do what many apparently had expected of me—to talk of the moral problem," he proudly noted, "but I set forth what I thought about the relation between end and means. I documented my view from contemporary historical experience." The Spartacus representative responded with documentation of his own to justify political terror. He noted that the head of the Cheka, the secret police established by Lenin in December 1917 to secure the revolution against enemies of the Bolshevik regime, "could sign a hundred death sentences a day, but with an entirely clean soul"—to which Buber retorted, "This is, in fact, worst of all. . . . This 'clean' soul you do not allow any splashes of blood to fall on!" Buber's Spartacus opponent said nothing, but simply looked at him with "unperturbed superiority." Landauer who sat next to Buber, "laid his hand" on Buber's, and "his whole arm trembled."[36]

On February 21, a despondent Buber left Landauer and Munich. Upon reaching his home in Heppenheim that evening, he learned that earlier that day Eisner had been assassinated, shot in the back by a right-wing nationalist. His fear that the revolution would be met with violence—a fear that he shared with Landauer—had been suddenly and tragically realized. In a letter he wrote the following morning to the poet Ludwig Strauss, he reflected on the "profoundly stirring week" he had spent "in constant association with the revolutionary leaders, a week whose grimly natural conclusion was the news of Eisner's assassination." As he explained to his future son in-law—Strauss would marry Buber's daughter Eva in 1925—during that turbulent week "the deepest human problems of the revolution were discussed with utmost candor . . . I threw out questions and

offered replies; and there occurred nocturnal hours of apocalyptic gravity." Sadly, all but a few of his interlocutors were prepared to acknowledge the tragedy that he believed awaited them and the revolution. "Face to face with them I sometimes felt like a Cassandra."[37]

For Buber, the tragedy of the revolution, in which Jews played a prominent role, was captured in Eisner's fate: "To be with him was to peer into the tormented passions of his divined Jewish soul: nemesis shone from his glittering surface; he was a marked man. Landauer, by dint of the greatest spiritual effort, was keeping his faith in him, and protected him—a shield-bearer terribly moving in his selflessness. The whole thing is an unspeakable Jewish tragedy." In this lament, he parenthetically remarked that for "Landauer himself, who witnessed the assassination of Eisner and who refused to take the opportunities to escape that were offered him, it was more the road into the future that could come only through self-sacrifice."[38] This passing comment may have expressed a premonition that Eisner's fate also awaited Landauer—as indeed, it did.

At the state funeral for Eisner, Landauer delivered a eulogy that theater critic Julius Bab described as "burning with indignation and love."[39] Perhaps to honor the legacy of his martyred comrade, he stayed in Munich despite the violent turn in the revolution. On April 7—Landauer's forty-ninth birthday—a parliamentary opposition to the government that had replaced Eisner's declared the Bavarian Council Republic. Landauer was appointed "the People's Delegate for Education," but within a week the Council Republic was overthrown by the communists, whose regime was also short-lived. At the end of April, counterrevolutionary troops entered Munich to suppress the revolution. They did so with unbridled vengeance, killing over a thousand "revolutionaries." On May 1, Landauer was captured; on the following day—less than three months after Eisner's assassination—he was savagely bludgeoned to death as a crowd

gathered, cheering and chanting: "Bump him off, that dog, that Jew, that rogue."[40]

Buber was deeply shaken by the tragic death of his friend; he viewed Landauer as a martyred idealist, a gentle anarchist who had sacrificed his life in a doomed effort to herald an era of politics without violence. Buber would devote himself to honoring the memory and vision of Landauer—a man he would unabashedly eulogize as a "crucified" prophet:

> Gustav Landauer had lived as a prophet of the coming human community and fell as its blood-witness. . . . In a church at Brescia [Italy] I saw a mural whose entire surface was covered with crucified individuals. The field of crosses stretched until the horizon, hanging from each, men of varied physiques and faces. Then it struck me that this was the true image of Jesus Christ. On one of the crosses I saw Gustav Landauer hanging.[41]

Poignantly, Buber would later recall in the twilight of his years, "I experienced [Landauer's] death as my own."[42]

A year before his brutal assassination, shortly after his wife's unanticipated death, Landauer had written a last will and testament (including instructions for handling his intellectual legacy) in which he expressed fear that his own end would come soon. Addressed to his cousin, Siegfried Landauer, the document read: "Dear Siegfried! I never believed that I would outlive my wife. Since I have now experienced what one only in such circumstances realizes[h]ow quickly one can die, I would like, as far as it is possible, in the case of my death to express my wishes for my daughters."[43]

After delineating how his modest material and financial resources should be distributed, Landauer stipulated that "in all matters pertaining to my publishing contracts, I request the help of my friend Dr. Martin Buber." He further requested that Buber administer his and his late wife's literary estate, and

that "all their unpublished writings should be given to him" to arrange for their publication. Indeed, "in all literary matters Buber's voice takes precedence." Upon collecting Landauer's correspondence, the will stated, Buber should have it published, but not include anything that might "hurt anyone living and their heirs."[44] Buber would faithfully fulfill his role as executor of Landauer's literary estate. With fastidious care, he edited several volumes of Landauer's writings and two volumes of his correspondence.[45] Buber also published several stirring essays about Landauer's work and introduced Landauer's ideas to the postwar generation, especially to Zionist youth whom he hoped would be inspired by Landauer's conception of communitarian socialism.[46]

Landauer, as noted earlier, had a formative influence on Buber's own thinking, especially regarding the salience of interpersonal relations in shaping spiritual and communal life. In 1918, a year before the Bavarian revolution and Landauer's assassination, Buber gave a lecture in Vienna in May, Berlin in October, and Munich in December on "Judaism and Authentic Community" (alternatively entitled "The Principle of Community in Judaism"). In 1919 he published this lecture as a short book, under the title *The Holy Way: A Word to the Jew and to the Nations*, with the dedication "In Memory of My Friend Gustav Landauer."[47] The subtitle of this book alludes to Fichte's famous *Addresses to the German Nation* of 1808, in which he called upon the German nation to regard itself as an instrument fulfilling universal ideals, and to view patriotism as the path toward realizing the ultimate, cosmopolitan goals of humanity. Buber's call for Jewry to embark on the "Holy Way"—which would be free of Fichte's contemptuous views of lesser nations (especially, it should be noted, the Jews)—reverberated with Landauer's anarchist, communitarian teachings in which the realization of socialism is an ongoing process centered on interhuman relations in the here and now.

Buber declared that "the world of true Judaism" is the work of being "God's 'partner in the work of creation,' to finish the work begun on the sixth day . . . in the all-embracing and all-determining sphere of community."[48] Israel was thus to be a "holy people" by demonstrating to the world that "the realization of the Divine on earth is fulfilled not within man but between man and man, and that, though this does indeed have its beginning in the life of individual man, it is consummated only in the life of true community."[49] The neglect of the divinely appointed vocation of Israel was, he believed, what marked the tragedy of modern Jewry, not what is conventionally called "assimilation." For Buber, the fact that Jews had allowed "another people's landscape, language and culture [to permeate] our soul and life" was not, in the end, what had drained Judaism of its vitality and spiritual significance, for

> even if our own landscape, our own language, our own culture were given back to us, we could not regain the innermost Judaism to which we have become unfaithful. Not because many of us have renounced the norms of Jewish tradition and the system of rules imposed by this tradition; those of us who kept these norms and rules inviolate in their yea and nay have not preserved [the] innermost Judaism any more than those who renounced them. . . . All that is customarily referred to as assimilation is harmlessly superficial compared to what I have in mind: the assimilation to the Occidental dualism that sanctions the splitting of man's being into two realms, each existing in its own right and independent of the other—the truth of spirit and the reality of life. . . . All renunciation of the treasures of national culture or religious life is trifling compared to the fateful renunciation of the most precious heritage of classical Judaism: the disposition toward realization [of unity of spirit and life].[50]

Although Buber would eventually drop the term "realization" (*Verwirklichung*), the underlying idea would remain cen-

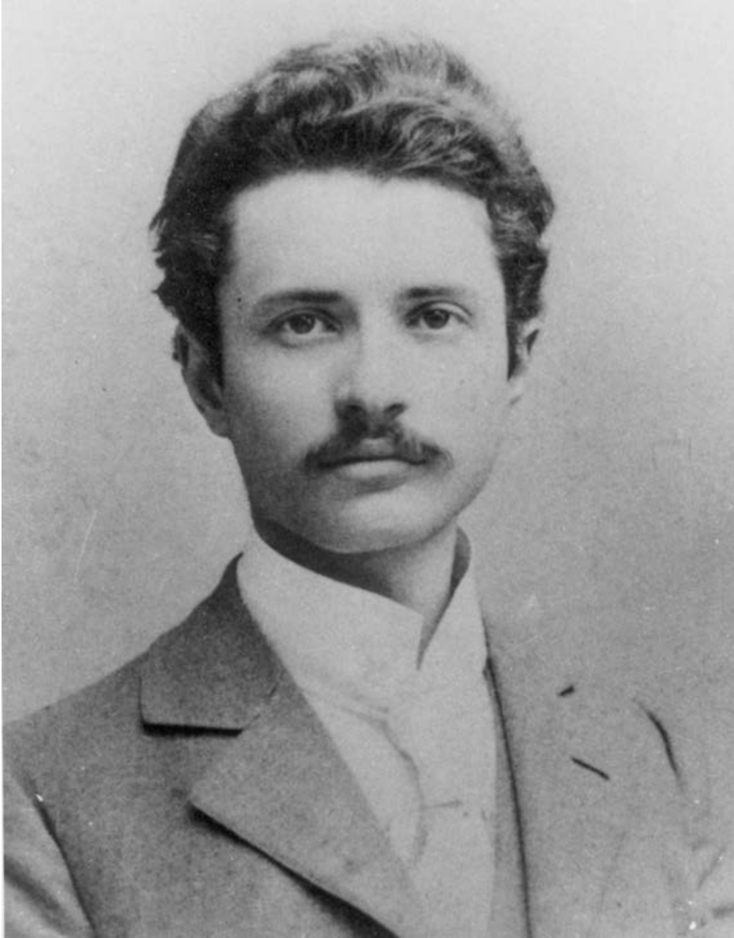
tral to his later philosophy of dialogue: the disposition to realization "means that true human life is conceived to be a life lived in the presence of God." God's presence is realized—"encountered" will be the term Buber would later prefer—in the realm of the "Between": the Divine "attains its earthly fullness only where . . . individual beings open themselves to one another, disclose themselves to one another and help one another; where immediacy is established between one human being and another; where the sublime stronghold of the individual is unbolted, and man breaks free to meet another man. Where this takes place, where the Eternal rises in the Between, what is a seemingly empty space is [in fact the] true space for realization of community, and true community is that relationship in which the Divine comes to its realization between man and man."[51] Accordingly, "the innermost Judaism" is marked by a resolve "to create the true community on earth."[52]

Buber concluded this call to reaffirm that "Holy Way" with a swipe at the "dogmatizers of nationalism"—his fellow Zionists—who were gathered under the banner of "Let us be like all the nations, O House of Israel." He accused them of hypocritical denunciation of the assimilationists of the Diaspora, claiming that "you who would readily approve of idol-worship in our homeland if only the idols bear Jewish names" actually subscribed to the most egregious form of assimilation: "You are assimilated to the dominant dogma of the century, the 'unholy dogma of the sovereignty of nations,' which assumes that one's nation is 'answerable only to itself.'"[53] Buber was quick to add that his fulminations against nationalism were not to be construed as denying that the existence of nations is "a fundamental reality in the life of mankind," one that "can no longer be eradicated from man's consciousness, nor should it be. But this recognition must, and will, be augmented by another: that no people on earth is sovereign; only the Spirit is."[54] And should the Zionist project aspire to establish in Palestine just another

state "devoid of spiritual substance," it will find itself "in the war of all against all," inexorably bound to be "crushed in the machinery of its own intrigues."[55]

In voicing these concerns, Buber was well aware that he was swimming against the current, and that his jeremiad against political nationalism would be dismissed as hopelessly detached from the brutal realities faced by the Jewish people. In a letter to one of his friends from the Prague circle, he lamented that "there are but very few Zionists who share or even understand the pain that [the movement's] 'external' [political] success causes me."[56] His ongoing anguish would lead him not only to be deeply ambivalent toward the Zionist project, but also to question his own fundamental intellectual and spiritual commitments.

Upon returning in June 1920 from a conference in Prague of Hapoel Hatzair, a non-Marxist socialist Zionist movement whose name means "the young worker," Buber shared these doubts with a conference organizer. With disarming candor, he revealed: "Truth be told, my dear friend, I can no longer make sense out of Hapoel Hatzair, or Zionism, or even Judaism, and, least of all, 'myself,' that is, of all I have hitherto spoken and written."[57] These festering existential doubts had already prompted him to begin work more than a year earlier on a manuscript that would lay "the general foundations of a philosophical (communal and religio-philosophical) system to which I intend to devote the next several years." Since engaging in the writing of this manuscript—which after four years would appear under the title *Ich und Du* (I and Thou)—he had experienced "a strange dejection, a feeling of standing between two worlds, the sense of having reached a frontier that grows ever stronger within me."[58]

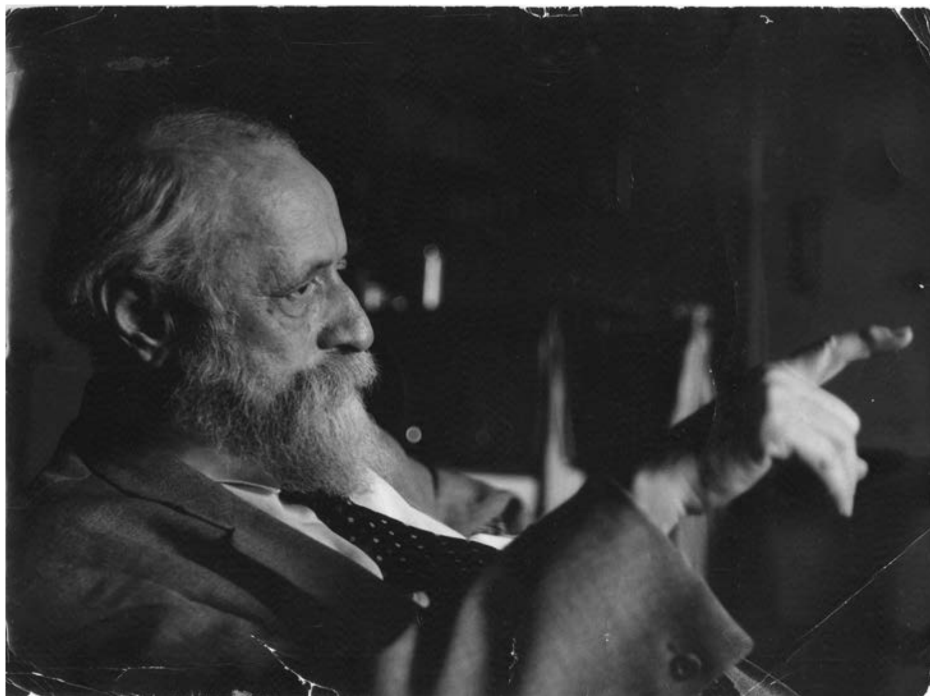


Martin Buber as a student in Vienna (1896–1897). Martin Buber Archive, The National Library of Israel, Jerusalem. Courtesy of the Martin Buber Literary Estate.

Paula Buber in her twenties. Courtesy of the Martin Buber Literary Estate.

Martin Buber in the company of Martin Heidegger (*second from right*), 1957. Courtesy of the Martin Buber Literary Estate.

Martin Buber, when he was about eighty years old, with
his grandchildren and great-grandchildren in Jerusalem.
Courtesy of the Martin Buber Literary Estate.



Martin Buber in 1949. Courtesy of the Martin Buber Literary Estate.

Left to right: Ernst Simon, Hugo Bergmann, and Martin Buber at Buber's Jerusalem home, 1963. Courtesy of the Martin Buber Literary Estate.

Students of Hebrew University celebrating Buber's eighty-fifth birthday. Courtesy of the Martin Buber Literary Estate.

Buber at age eighty-five. Photographer: David Rubinger.
Courtesy of the Martin Buber Literary Estate.