

## Aus: Philosophical Interrogations

### I. The Philosophy of Dialogue

#### A. Philosophy in General

*Walter Kaufmann:* My questions are concerned with the relation of your thought to traditional philosophy as we know it from the works of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, and Kant, to give a few examples. Most people would surely agree that it makes sense to ask about Kierkegaard's relation to philosophy of this sort – perhaps also about Nietzsche's relation to it, or Heidegger's. The answer, of course, will be different in each case. I am assuming that this question makes sense when asked about you; and to facilitate an answer, I shall suggest a few specific subquestions.

1. A large part of traditional philosophy was concerned with the analysis of concepts, though this was not the only concern of any great philosopher. Do you attach less value to such analysis than the traditional philosophers named above?

2. Do you feel that your central intentions are closer to those of Amos than to those of Aristotle? Closer to Lao-tzu's than to Hume's? Closer to Hermann Hesse's than to G. E. Moore's?

3. Is it more important to you to bear witness of an experience and to exhort men than to clarify concepts or to develop speculative theories? If so, of what traditional philosophers would you say the same?

4. Are you at all apprehensive that your main concerns might be buried under the weight of appreciations that are too academic and, in one sense of that word, too philosophical?

*Buber:* The nature, strictly speaking, of the relationship of my thought to »traditional philosophy« seems to me more a theme for my critics than for me. But through answering your subquestions, I believe I can, at any rate, give a few hints.

1. An ever-renewed analysis of basic concepts appears to me, too, a central task of thought because it is the presupposition for an ever-renewed confrontation with reality. Concepts, the grandiose instrument of human orientation, must repeatedly be »clarified«; a final validity can never be accorded them, although each of the great explanations claims for itself the character of final validity, and clearly must claim it. In all genuine philosophy, analysis is only a gateway, nothing more. To be sure,

the great philosophers who have conducted these analyses have held them to be more important than I do, doubtless because they held philosophizing to be more important. I *must* philosophize; there is no other way to my goal, but my goal itself cannot be grasped philosophically.

5     2. Certainly my »central intentions« are closer to those of Amos than to those of Aristotle, much closer. But for Amos a concept such as »righteousness« is, in fact, nothing at all other than the condensation into words of a command that is to be fulfilled in a given situation; as a concept it does not concern him, And when I have to philosophize (and I  
10 must, indeed, do so, as I said), I must learn from Aristotle and not from Amos. It is otherwise with the distinction between Lao-tzu and Hume. Lao-tzu ushers me, far more deeply than Hume, into the problematics of conceptuality; he discloses to me, as Hume does not, the abyss beneath the concepts; he helps me do what Hume will not and cannot do – see  
15 through the indispensable logicizing of reality. Note well, I am no disciple of Lao-tzu; I see the reality of being entirely otherwise than he. Indeed, it is at times much easier for me to »accord the right« to Hume than to him. But his speaking and his silence are instructive to me even today for the rational intercourse with that which is beyond concepts.

20     3. To bear witness to an experience is my basic intention, but I am not primarily concerned with exhorting men; rather, with showing that experience to be one accessible to all in some measure, in some form. In this I do not feel myself far either from the Platonic dialogues or from Descartes' *Discours de la Méthode*.

25     4. My main concerns could just as easily be buried under the weight of appreciations that are too philosophical as under those that are too historical (in the sense of the history of religions) and even too literary. There are many methods of evading the vision and practice of the life of dialogue through theoretical discussions of the dialogical principle.

30 *Rollo May*: To what extent is Buber an existentialist? He is often referred to under that appellation, and his thought has obvious similarities with the philosophy of modern crisis called existentialism, but he frowns on the title. Specifically, what is his relation to Kierkegaard and Heidegger, as well as to the broader cultural movement of existentialism?

35 *Buber*: I cannot, of course, be particularly pleased when, instead of paying attention to what I directly have to say, a questioner furnishes me with the label of an »ism« and then wants to know concerning it. But if those be called existentialists who transpose human existence itself into the center of rational contemplation, then one could call me that. Only

one thing must not remain unnoticed: everything else may be discussed purely speculatively, but not our own existence, the genuine existentialist must himself »exist.« An existentialism that contents itself with theory is a contradiction; existence is not one philosophical theme among others. Here witness is made.

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## B. Ontology

*Helmut Kuhn:* 1. Should we not try to broaden the concept of community as based upon the I-Thou relationship into the idea of an all-embracing ontological community?

2. Is it not true that the meeting (Begegnung) – that meeting of minds which unseals the depths of personality – takes place within a fixed order and under an unbending law which we know, however imperfectly, as the law of love? 10

3. A question about the antithesis which opposes the fellow man (the Thou) of whom we have a living awareness to the object as a rationally defined fixity: Shall we not be more true to the facts if we replace this dichotomy by a hierarchically diversified concept of »object«? 15

*Buber:* 1. By community I understand a connection of men who are so joined in their life with something apportioned to them in common or something which they have apportioned to themselves in common that they are, just thereby, joined with one another in their life. The first and the second unity are not meant as continually actual, but as of such a nature that no essential hindrance stands in the way of its transition from time to time from a vital latency to an actuality. 20

With this presupposed, the present constitution of the human race and, over and above that, that which manifests itself in the present as »historically« surveyable, does not seem to me to authorize the idea of an all-embracing ontological community. 25

It would be otherwise if the ontological conception of an idea might be consummated independently of the actualities known or knowable by us. It is a part of my strongest concern, however, to contest this. But for me this idea is, in fact, connected in its innermost base with the faith accorded us that the human race is given, by creation, the task of becoming a community and that, according to the promise, the achievement of this goal of creation is eschatologically true. 30

2. Meetings stand – as I have repeatedly indicated – under freedom and under grace, therefore not under an »unbending law.« A fixed order 35

of meetings is, in any case, neither in our hands nor accessible to them. When we truly say »Thou,« we do not experience »order« and »law,« but liberation and blessing in one; shall our thinking really disregard this experience?

5 What love is I can know; what a law of love is I cannot know, not even imperfectly. The biblical commands of love of God and man are not unfolded in the form of law; the disclosing of their meaning was left to the recurringly loving heart alone.

3. This question touches on the foundation of what I have to say. For were the »dichotomy« replaced by a »hierarchic« diversity, then the decisive distinction between I-Thou and I-It would be dissolved by degrees.

10 Certainly there is a graduated structure of I-It relationships where stage by stage the distance from the I-Thou relation becomes grater, and this graduated structure is, by its nature, to a certain extent surveyable.  
 15 But its highest stage is unmistakably set in contrast to the realm of the I-Thou relation, since even there an objectification prevails for which there is no room in this relation. A being to whom I really say »Thou« is not for me in this moment my object, about whom I observe this and that or whom I put to this or that use, but my partner who stands over against  
 20 me in his own right and existence and yet is related to me in his life. I can adequately contemplate this being as »a rationally defined fixity« when I again see it as It. When we do not resolutely effect the distinction between the two attitudes, we further, even if very much against our wills, the tendency which has grown so strong in our time to »manipulate« the  
 25 existing being.

Kuhn rightly objects that the relationship of the human person to nature has not been sufficiently dealt with by me. There remains here, as in many of the border areas between the two attitudes, something of basic importance to be done that is not granted me to do myself. But I may  
 30 hope that it will be done without surrendering the unconditionality of the distinction.

Kuhn also rightly sees that I have not fully liberated myself from Kant. That I have not been able to do so probably lies in the fact that no one has yet been able to explain to me what, for example, the hardness in the bark  
 35 of a lime tree means independently of my perception of the hardness. I simply do not succeed in understanding the existing lime tree as the sum of my perceptions of it. Even the otherwise-useful symbols of the physicist are incapable of helping me here. Now then, the lime tree that became known to me only in elaboration through my perceptions, the lime  
 40 tree that *is*, that, although it became known to me, yet remains unknown – this I mean when I say x.

*F. H. Heinemann:* 1. What is the precise philosophical meaning of the dialogical principle? Is it to be understood as *either* (a) an ontological principal («pointing to a neglected reality»), or (b) an existential category (*Kategorie der Existenz*), or (c) a category of a philosophy of life (*um neuen Grund für menschliches Lebenkönnen zu legen*) or (d) are all these meanings and functions implied in it? 5

2. Your philosophy has been called »dialogical philosophy«. Would you accept this? (a) Do you hold that the dialogical principal could be the basis of a philosophy in the same manner as, for instance, the axioms »Being is,« »God is,« and »*Cogito ergo sum*« were the first principles of Greek, medieval, and the modern philosophy respectively? (b) If yes, would you regard it as the basis of (1) a system of philosophy or (2) of a manner of philosophizing? (c) In other words, would you regard your principle, in Kant's terminology, as (1) constitutive or (2) regulative? 10

3. What is, in your opinion, the relation of the dialogical philosophy to the philosophy of existence? Would you regard yourself as a philosopher of existence, and if so, in what sense? 15

4. I believe I have shown in my book on existentialism (especially in the second English, German, and Spanish editions) that the principal of existence is insufficient as a basis of comprehensive and systematic philosophy, and that it has in fact been given up by all the leading existentialists. 20

You have certainly not given up the dialogical principle, and it has proved most fruitful in many fields, from anthropology and the study of prehistory to theology. It would be of great interest to philosophers if you could show that the dialogical principal differs in this respect from the principle of existence. 25

*Buber:* 1. The dialogical principle is an ontological one because it is concerned with a basic relationship between man and being; hence with the being of man, since this is grounded in his relationship to being. This principle is to be regarded as existential only insofar as it is necessarily realized in the sphere of existence of the person. It is not, on the other hand, to be understood as a category of a »philosophy of life« (*Lebensphilosophie*); what is cited of this nature, to suggest that it is such, does not belong to it itself, but merely to the motivation behind its presentation. 30 35

2. As I have explained in full in my *responsa* in the volume of the *Library of Living Philosophers* dedicated to my philosophy, to join a basic experience, which became evident to me as a basic experience of man, with its proper sphere of thought, I had to go the only way suitable to 40

that purpose, the philosophical. It has not been my intention to give a basis of philosophy in the sense indicated by Heinemann cannot be, although I cannot foresee what may yet come out of it in other hands. I call my philosophy »dialogical philosophy« not without a certain irony, because basically it cannot be pursued otherwise than dialogically, but the writings dealing with it have been cast into the, for the most part, quite undialogically constituted human world of this hour – and must be cast there.

3./4. »Philosophy of existence« appears to me an imprecise and unsteady concept. I have never included myself in such, but feel myself as standing perhaps between an existential thinking in Kierkegaard's sense and something entirely different, something which is still out of sight.

The dialogical principle presupposes existence, to be sure, but not a self-contained principle of existence. It is rather, as it seems to me, summoned to call in question every self-sufficient principle of existence in that it posits in ontological unconditionality the essential presence of the other as the other. I welcome every philosophy of existence that leaves open the door leading to otherness; but I know none that opens it far enough.

*Emmanuel Levinas*: 1. Is it not the case that the reciprocity of the I-Thou relation compromises rather than promotes the originality of the I for whom separation is essential? Is not the absolute distance of the Thou or other thereby compromised?

2. Should the other be posited as Thou? »He,« »she,« and »they« cannot be constructed as Itness (*Das Es*). For in the encounter with the Thou they are present and »participate« in the dialogue as »the voice of your brother's blood that cries to me from the ground.«

3. Are we not compelled to substitute for the reciprocity of the I-Thou relation a structure which is more fundamental and which excludes reciprocity, that is, one which involves an asymmetry or difference of level and which thereby implies a real distancing? The metaphysician is always oriented toward the Other and is incapable of meeting himself in the same way that he meets the other. Even when he philosophizes on the I-Thou relation, he perceives the Other, so that a totality is never encompassed. Dialogue, in effect, signifies the ontological impossibility of a totality.

4. The I-Thou relation cannot be characterized in purely formal terms as a contact without either content or a principle. The asymmetrical nature of the I-Thou relation implies the realization of an ethics which is distinguished by the inequality of the I and the Thou, and the latter creates an original dimension of ideality and height.

5. Consciousness, the realm of our inner processes of thought, is not subjected to any analysis by Buber. Such analysis, however, is indispensable if a *synousia*, or social communion, as distinct from a mere union, is to be considered as a philosophical question. For the Western philosophical tradition this relation to what windings and turnings, the path of philosophy from Socrates to Heidegger follows the itinerary to which Plotinus referred when he affirmed: »When the soul begins again to mount, it comes not to something alien, but to its very self; thus detached it is in nothing but itself.«<sup>1</sup>

*Buber*: I have never designated the between as »the concept of the foundation and ultimate structure of being« (»le concept de base et la structure ultime de l'Être«), nor have I ever understood it thus; I have only pointed out that we cannot do without this category for a full comprehension and presentation of what passes between two men when they stand in dialogue with each other.

My critic mistakenly identifies this concept of the between, which belongs to the sphere of the I-Thou relation, with the essentially different concept of *Urdistanz* (primal distance), which provides the anthropological presupposition for the origination of the duality of the »primary words,« of which the I-Thou relation is one (cf. my »Distance and Relation«<sup>2</sup>): I-It signifies the lived persistence in the primal distance, I-Thou the movement from it to relation, which at times, to be sure, establishes itself only as overcoming the given distance between two beings.

Since Levinas, in the first place, accepts a signification for the two concepts which they do not have in the context of my thought and, in the second, equates with each of them other concepts belonging to totally different spheres of this thought, he makes a direct answer to his questions impossible for me. I must therefore content myself with making a few clarifying comments on his objections so far as that fundamental misunderstanding allows.

1. It is not true that I »unceasingly affirm« (*affirme sans cesse*) the reciprocity of the relation. On the contrary, I have always had to talk about it with great reservations and qualifications, which I recently summarized in my Postscript to the second edition of *I and Thou*.<sup>3</sup>

2. I cannot concede that the I and the Thou offer themselves to each

1. *Enneads*, VI, 9, 11.

2. Trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, *Psychiatry*, XX, No. 2 (May, 1957), pp. 97-104.

3. Trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pp. 123-137.

other »as objects« in the relation. Becoming an object is, in fact, precisely what most strongly characterizes the I-It relationship in its opposition to the I-Thou relation.

3. No matter how all-embracing the relation of two beings to each other may be, it does not in any sense mean their »unification.« If I posit a »correlation,« it still in no way follows from that, that a »totality« exists. Hermann Cohen speaks in his posthumous work of the »correlation« existing between God and man; with what kind of totality can that be equated?

4. The importance of the indications concerning ipseity I readily acknowledge. Between the I that in a given moment detaches itself from the other existing being and the I that in another given moment turns to the other existing being, there exists, incontestably, a special kind of continuity that is preserved despite all discontinuities; and it is this which one customarily designates as self-consciousness. But I do not see that this fact justifies the acceptance of an isolated I that stands over against neither a Thou nor an It and is not even comprehended in the transition from the one to the other relationship to being. Levinas assigns the ipseity its place in the »happiness« of the human person at being an I. To me it seems that this self-identification involves at the same time the deepest suffering of which we are capable. The polarity of these feelings points us back to a deep duality of which the pronominal concept on which I have founded my philosophy perhaps merely makes manifest the foreground that we can grasp.

5. The »asymmetry« is only one of the possibilities of the I-Thou relation, not its rule, just as mutuality in all its gradations cannot be regarded as the rule. Understood in utter seriousness, the asymmetry that wishes to limit the relation to the relationship to a higher would make it completely one-sided: love would either be unreciprocated by its nature or each of the two lovers must miss the reality of the other.

Even as the foundation of an ethic, I cannot acknowledge »asymmetry.« I live »ethically« when I confirm and further my Thou in the right of his existence and the goal of his becoming, in all his otherness. I am not ethically bidden to regard and treat him as superior to me through his otherness. I find, by the way, that our relationship to the domestic animals with whom we live, and even that to the plants in our gardens, is properly included as the lowest floor of the ethical building. The Hasidim even see it as beginning with the implements of work. And shall there not perhaps be an ethic for the relationship to oneself?

6. That the acknowledgment of the other as my Thou does not originate in a mere act of consciousness belongs to those elements of my



thought whose actuality I can neither prove nor wish to be able to prove. I offer the philosophical expression of an experience to those who know this experience as their own or are ready to expose themselves to it. More than this I cannot do; but I venture to believe that in this »not« I am faithful to my task. 5

*Walter Blumenfeld:* By what justification does Buber see the dialogue as decisive in man, since there are enough other methods of differentiation as, for example, symbolic expression, knowledge, science, art, and religion, which in any case do not cover all examples of the genus *Homo*. Is that preference not merely the expression of a personal evaluation and therefore in a certain sense arbitrary? 10

*Buber:* I am of the opinion that an attentive reader of my book *Eclipse of God* will find the foundation demanded by Blumenfeld.

#### E. Philosophical Anthropology

*Walter Blumenfeld:* 1. Is »the« human being of Buber the real human being or a rare, if ever realized, ideal, the »authentic« and especially the mature, normal person? Buber's teaching can hardly be applied to the mentally ill, to small children, and to idiots. Is not his »man« only a potentially and in no case a universally prevalent being? 15

2. Is there a dialogue with things and with God in the same sense as with persons? Surely there can be no discussions with them, even if one grants that one can be »addressed« by God and by things. Furthermore, a conversation does not always develop between persons, however present good will may be: for example, in the case of unhappy, unrequited love, it remains a one-sided attempt. And how are those cases to be regarded in which good will is lacking? Do such individuals cease to be human beings? 20 25

*Buber:* 1. I believe that I have made sufficiently clear that that, which concerns me does not belong to an upper story of human nature. I have shown in detail how the I-Thou relation establishes itself, naturally as it were, in the small child as in »primitive« man. As for the so-called idiots, I have many times perceived how the soul of such a man extends its arms – and thrusts *into* emptiness. On the other hand, I have, not at all seldom, learned to know persons of a high spiritual grade whose basic nature was to withhold themselves from others even if they let this one 30 35

and that one come near them. No, I mean no »spiritual elite,« and yes, I mean man as man. Hindrances everywhere place themselves in the way, from without and from within; it is heart-will and grace in one that help us mature and awake men to overcome them and grant us meeting.

5 What is of importance? That the spirit execute in a spiritual manner the projects that nature lays before it.

2. So far as I am able to formulate it, I have given the answer to this question in the Postscript to the new edition of *I and Thou*.

10 That man can »discuss« with God can be learned ever anew from the Book of Job; he who undertakes such must bear in mind the one crushing answer that Job receives, an answer that allows no reply. That one cannot discuss with things, simply as such, is self-evident, since he who does not hear cannot rejoin. In any case, it can be reported here, as the repartee of reality, what befell me several times in my youth: I wanted to fix an object, to compel it, as it were, in order to find through so doing that it was »only« my conception; but it refuted me through the dumb force of its being.

## II. Theory of Knowledge

### A. In General

20 *William Ernest Hocking*: Calling the experienced presence of the Real (as in the togetherness of dialogue) »realization,« in arriving at realization, is dialectic operative? In spreading realization, is dialectic useless? In winning universal assent to realization as »truth,« is dialectic a broken reed? Although we properly distinguish realization of the Real, as in  
25 the immediate experience of togetherness in »meeting,« from any process of conceptual thought or any result thereof, may not conceptual reasoning – let us say dialectic – be present in that realization, as it were in solution? And may not that dialectic be a potent aid in giving currency to the experience itself?

30 *Buber*: Professor Hocking's questions give me the welcome opportunity to elucidate an important point more fully.

He rightly distinguishes between »arriving at realization« and »spreading realization.« I must distinguish between them far more sharply. According to my experience, conceptual thinking can, to be sure, play a part  
35 in the first of the two, but it is not essential for it. For the second, I too hold it to be essential.

The experience from which I have proceeded and ever again proceed is simply this, that one meets another. Another, that does not mean, for example, a »dog,« an »English sheep dog,« one that is to be described thus-and-thus, but this particular animal, which a child once, about to run by him, looked in the eyes and remained standing, they both remained standing while the child laid his hand on the head of the dog and called him by a name that he had just invented or found. When later at home he sought to make clear to himself what had been special about the animal, he managed without concepts; he only needed them when he had to relate the occurrence to his best friend.

But now Hocking leads me in an entirely other direction: on the heights of the conceptual turmoil that he once went through, and as I make this present to myself, I feel myself standing in a genuine dialogue. That the dialectical rules here is not, indeed, to be doubted. But the question arises as to what was it then that called forth the decisive turning. Was this too of a dialectical nature or was it not rather something that broke through the conceptual framework as a real event, something of which only the consequence was the »vision«? Was it not a direct dialogical reality that brought the transformation? This was my own experience: I must, according to my own way, answer Yes to every analogous question.

It is otherwise with the stretch of the road leading beyond the vision. In order to insert what is thus experienced into my thought on being at the place that belongs to it and then, in order to communicate it to others who have not stood with me in a common experience, I am now, according to my understanding, directed to conceptuality, dialectic, reason. To come to an understanding with myself and with others over the truth of something I have thought can naturally take place only in the realm of »dialectic.«

Does not, however, the deep and fearful problematic of the idea of truth open up? Can the truth attain its authenticity otherwise than when it steps out of the realm of concepts into that of meeting? What the dialectic must name »truth« is not something that one possesses; it is a preparation and a practice.

*Perry LeFevre:* Professor Buber, in your writings you have emphasized the interrelationship between the world of I-It and I-Thou; the I-It world is necessary to the I-Thou world; the I-Thou world is continually falling into, or returning to, the I-It. The important thing is which relationship dominates the life of the individual, of the group, of society. How do you then conceive the relationship of objective knowledge

(especially from psychology, psychotherapy, education etc.) to the world of I-Thou? Can knowledge of the processes of human growth and development, of the processes of therapy and education contribute to our individual and social movement into the achievement of dialogue? Do  
5 you believe that any normative generalizations can be derived from these objective studies of the person?

*Buber:* I have often indicated how much I prize science, so-called »objective knowledge.« Without it there is no orientation in the world of »things« or of »phenomena,« hence no orienting connection with the  
10 space-time sphere in which we have to pass our individualized life on earth. Without the splendid condensations, reductions, generalizations, symbolizations that science turns out, the handing down of a »given« order from generation to generation would be impossible. On it, on its current »position,« man's current world-images are built. More than  
15 that, the remarkable basic knowledge of mathematics has a relation – one that remains ever mysterious to me – to being itself; and from this arises an incomparably compact body of reliable knowledge on which the triumph of the inherited knowledge of the human race from Euclid to Einstein is founded.

20 I honor science, the astonishing sphere of the sciences with its always expanding borders behind which the twilight horizon ever further recedes. But when I am asked what is its contribution to the work of a man who executes faithfully his office in the service of life, for the work of a true therapist, for the work of a true educator, then I stand in an  
25 entirely different perspective. Rather, I have exchanged all perspectives for the heart-point of life; and then, to stay with the examples already chosen, I can only regard science as a help: psychology as a help for the therapist, pedagogy as a help for the educator; both, in the hands of a man without a true vocation, manifoldly deceptive and misleading; both,  
30 in the hands of one who is truly called to his task, useful and regulative. Modern psychology is an especially instructive example. Its province, as is well known, is divided into several, in good part mutually contradictory, »schools« and methods. No school, in my judgment can claim the predicate of truth for its manner of dream interpretation. Every genuine  
35 therapist can heal with any of the methods that have been developed; every psychotherapist can destroy with any of them. What matters and what is inseparable from the being and becoming of the person – the right relation to the Thou – will be furthered in their work whenever they reach toward the events of the research. Science always stands ready to

serve the server; it is up to him to make the right, cautious, reserved, knowing use of it.

Beyond this, thus outside the responsibility practiced by a responsible man with all its Yes and No, »normative« generalizations that are made in the name of science have no real meaning for me. 5

*Maurice Nédoncelle:* Does not the passage from Him to Thou in religious philosophy risk leading us to the void or to illusion? I have read *Eclipse of God* with admiration; but I had, perhaps incorrectly, the impression that the author was not sufficiently attentive to the danger that I have just indicated; and I asked myself whether philosophy, insofar as it is such, is able to be an invocation or an interpellation. 10

*Buber:* The passage from Him to Thou is not »dangerous« for philosophy, it is impossible. I myself feel obliged, when I philosophize, to avoid »invocation,« but justified in pointing to its meaning.

*Kurt H. Wolff:* What is the locus of reason in cognition, both of the Thou and the It (although it may not be proper to apply »cognition« to the former)? This raises the question of the relation between ecstasy, enchantment, the unique, on the one hand, and philosophizing, theorizing, the general, on the other. While the unique is related to the I-Thou, and the general to the I-It relation, these relationships are not identities; hence a third question, about the nature of these relationships. Do not answers to these questions, at least to begin with, have to take the form of »Man is such that,« »The world is such that,« and »The relation between man and world is such that«? 15 20

*Buber:* Just in that way, with a sentence about the relation between man and the world, I once began my first book on the dialogical principle, *I and Thou*, characterizing this relation as »twofold.« Only I would not willingly speak of ecstasy »on the one hand«; it is easy to, forget in so doing that it is not a matter of the exceptional hours, but, of the everyday (cf. the chapter »A Conversion« in »Dialogue,« *Between Man and Man*). 25 30

*E. la B. Cherbonnier:* While it would require pages to express my own indebtedness to Martin Buber, my principal criticism can be exhausted in a single sentence: Is his philosophy in fact open to criticism at all? The hallmark of philosophic discourse, as distinct from bare assertion or arbitrary insistence, is corrigibility. That is, the philosopher acknowl- 35

edges a criterion by which his mistakes, if any, might be detected. Professor Buber's writings, however, not only appear to lack such a criterion, but indeed to preclude it.

5 Every objective criticism of his philosophy would belong, by definition, to the realm of I-It. But no I-It statement could ever impinge upon an I-Thou statement, either to refute or to confirm it. The philosopher is thus provided with a built-in immunity to criticism. He can, at his pleasure, disqualify any objection simply by placing his own statements under the sign of I-Thou. Maurice Friedman's brilliant exposition of Professor Buber's position apparently acknowledges this; it speaks of »the logical impossibility of criticizing I-Thou knowing on the basis of any system of I-It.«<sup>4</sup> Perhaps this explains the tendency of Professor Buber's apologists to dismiss the critic, not with refutation, but by declaring that he has failed to understand.

15 In this respect, I-Thou dialogue appears inferior to Socratic dialogue. The Socratic philosopher is corrigible. When he contradicts himself, he acknowledges that he has fallen into error. I personally am convinced that Professor Buber's writings contain the rudiments of a philosophy which, with intensity and relevance undiminished, could satisfy a rigorous Socratic examiner. Professor Buber himself, however, repudiates consistency and embraces paradox as the appropriate vehicle for »existential truth.« My question therefore is: How might his philosophy be corrected, should it contain any errors? Specifically, how does one determine which paradoxes are true and which are not? Unless these questions can be answered, would not the »narrow ridge« of »holy insecurity« broaden, in practice, into a boundless plain with unlimited room for maneuver? Would not I-Thou statements then begin to resemble statements *ex cathedra*?

30 *Buber*: My answers to my critics in this Interrogation and my fuller (more detailed, comprehensive) answers to them in the volume of *The Library of Living Philosophers* devoted to me seem to me to remove all force from the suspicion of a claim to speak *ex cathedra*. Inner contradictions are no less possible here than in a Socratic philosophy, and with him who seriously seeks to point out to me such a contradiction, I go seriously into it. In no way, therefore, do I reject consistency. But where I am compelled to point to »paradoxes,« there are none that are meant as being beyond possible experience; rather a silent understanding is

4. Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), p. 168.

again and again established between me and those of my readers who are ready without holding back to make their own the experiences that I mean.

*William H. Poteat*: 1. First of all, I should like to ask about philosophical method. In the philosophic climate powerfully influenced by the Vienna Circle, the early Russell and Wittgenstein, then the later Wittgenstein, and now by the Oxonian »ordinary language« analysis, it might occur to one to wonder whether what you have done in your distinguished career – and I will take the hardest case, for example, *I and Thou* – is philosophy at all. I might say that philosophy is a highly technical analysis of the logical syntax of language or a kind of therapy for an irresponsible and pretentious use of language or, at most, a seeing where before there has been either a not-seeing or a mis-seeing, a seeing, however, whose only instrument is argument. But what is *I and Thou*? A poem, like Rilke's *Duino Elegies*? A prayer, like Augustine's *Confessions*? A series of apothegms, like La Rochefoucauld's or like Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*? Or is it that what you are doing is such that any inquiry concerning »method« must take place in a purely analogical way? That is, »method« is an *I-It* concept.

2. You say: »The primary word *I-Thou* can only be spoken with the whole being. The primary word *I-It* can never be spoken with the whole being.« What am I to understand by »whole being«? To use an idiom quite different from your own: »What is the logical status of the concept »whole being«?

We cannot fill it out by multiplying propositions about what I do, think, say, feel etc. (»[Human life] does not exist in virtue of activities alone which have some *thing* for their object.«) We cannot distinguish »whole« from »partial« by pointing to »inner« against »outer«. (»Inner things or outer things, what are they but things and things!«) »Whole being« seems to mean a nonobject – something »outside« the subject-object structure of *all* language, which is to say, »outside« the world and hence unutterable. Must we not, then, remembering Wittgenstein's aphorism, remain silent?

*Buber*: 1. I think that I have already answered this question sufficiently. I point, I believe, to what has not yet been sufficiently »seen« and, of course, as it seems to me, through the kind of »argument« requisite for it.

2. »With the whole being« can be described most simply thus: I enter into the act or event which is in question with all the available forces of

my soul without conflict, without even latent much less perceptible conflict. A surmounted conflict can create a condition accessible to the decisive self-awareness that can no longer, to be sure, be compared to vacillating, but perhaps – if one may use such an image – to a vibrating of the edges of the soul. »Wholeness« is not yet there, but a transformation of the total condition can now, as it were, take place from which it follows. Note well, the resistance must certainly not be presupposed in any given situation; there are souls that have long since overcome analogous resistances and now are already capable of meeting as a whole the situation that accosts them; indeed, there are souls of whom we do not know that the battle within them has ever been fought through, yet whose wholeness nonetheless in an unforeseen situation begins forthwith to shine like the sun.

*Jakob B. Agus:* In your exaltation of the I-Thou relationship, do you not consign reason to the subordinate role of manipulation in the realm of I-It, failing to recognize the objectivity of reason as a supreme value category, coeval with love and supplementing its impetus?

*Buber:* Since I am not authorized to philosophize by any metaphysical essences, neither of »ideas« nor of »substance« nor even of the »world reason,« but must as a thinker concern myself alone with man and his relations to everything, so reason as an object of my thought is important for me only insofar as it dwells in man as a property or function. In such a manner, therefore, regarded from the viewpoint of philosophical anthropology, reason seems to me to take different attitudes in different times and circumstances. Either it knows itself as belonging as a part to the total being of the human person, and is active in full co-operation with the other properties and functions, and can in just this sense have a significant, yes even a leading, share in the intercourse of this person with other persons. Or it claims for itself the supremacy to which all the other faculties of man have to subordinate themselves. If it makes such a claim, then it appears to me presumptuous and dubious. To take the example lying nearest to hand, the »corrective« office of reason is incontestable, and it can be summoned at any moment to set right an »error« in my sense perception – more precisely, its incongruity with what is common to my fellow men; but it cannot replace the smallest perception of something particular and unique with its gigantic structure of general concepts, cannot by means of it contend in the grasping of what here and now confronts me.



*Peter A. Bertocci:* 1. In the epistemological relation, epistemic dualism of a Kantian sort is both accepted (in It) and rejected in Thou-I; epistemic confidence is won by insisting ultimately on the unity and solidarity of knower-known relation. But no account seems to be forthcoming of how epistemic error, which means that man can have »in mind« what is not objectively there, is possible on this view. 5

2. Inferential knowledge of other minds, divine or human, is rejected once more in favor of unity and direct presence. But, again, how is error in knowledge of other minds even possible on this view?

3. Granted that there are many experiences whose psychological certitude may indeed suggest epistemological monism, should not the fact of error force us to reconstruct our view of what is involved in such relations: Perhaps the underlying conception of knowledge which we should distrust is that of knowledge as a kind of infallible relation. What I wish were possible, at any rate, is less of a *declarative* tone in this total perspective, and more an expository-explanatory one in which the grounds for weaknesses and errors of other views became more articulate. By what criterion does one judge the »apprehensible« as opposed to the »comprehensible«?<sup>5</sup> 10 15

*Buber:* 1. As I have repeatedly stated, I know no criterion for the »objective existence« of what becomes present to me in the I-Thou relation; indeed, to me none is conceivable. I have never concealed the fact that he who wishes to live securely would do better to stay far from the way which I have indicated. So far as I have a philosophy, it treats man as a being to whom it is given to make present what stands over against him and to exist without guarantees. 20 25

2. In the true I-Thou relation there is no knowledge of objective facts, hence also none that in the state of the I-It relationship can be compared with any of these data that it has yielded and corrected as an »error.« That is implicit in the sentence that the world is twofold for man. But in the I-It relationship we do, indeed, elaborate much that we have received in the I-Thou relation and that, manifoldly broken up, persists in our memory; here »errors« are possible because in this state one has the possibility, even though a limited one, of »objectively« establishing and comparing what has passed and passes in the minds of others. 30 35

The concept of knowledge of the divine mind is for me, moreover, pure contradiction. God gives us signs for the establishing of our relation to him, but he still does not make himself into an object for our observa-

5. *I and Thou*, p. 94.

tion. In the language of the prophets of Israel, the »knowledge of God« properly means intercourse with him.

3. An epistemological monism is entirely alien to my thought; I have always fought the attempt to establish any such in our time. A knowledge, in the sense of an objective given and what can be discussed accordingly, a knowledge in this sense that would be »infallible,« is for me, in the human world, a *non-ens*.

For the rest, I have the impression that Professor Bertocci has only read a little of my works; most of what I have written in this province after *I and Thou* seems to me precisely to possess »an expository explanatory« character.

*Maurice S. Friedman*: 1. To discover the implications of the I-Thou philosophy for epistemology, is it not necessary to distinguish between two types of »I-It« knowledge: that which, as word, symbol, image points back directly to the unique reciprocal knowing of particular I-Thou relationships and that which, because it takes the form of abstract and general categories, can no longer point back to the concrete and the unique, but can only take its place?

2. If the above distinction is valid, what then is the relationship between this second type of I-It knowledge and I-Thou knowing? Is it correct to say that it derives indirectly from I-Thou knowing by a double process of abstraction? Or must one say that here an independent order of reason and objectification enters in and that the alternation between I-Thou knowing and I-It knowledge is not after all a sufficiently comprehensive approach to understand either the rational categories of logic, on the one hand, or the empirically-based generalization of scientific method, on the other?

*Buber*: 1. Certainly there exist various stages of the I-It state, according to how far these are alienated from the I-Thou relation and relinquish the pointing back to it. But I am not inclined to replace these stages by two types different from each other by their nature. On the one side, there is no abstraction so ethereal that a great living man could not conjure it with its secret primal name and draw it back down to the earth of bodily meetings. On the other side, however, just in our time the crassest absence of relation has begun to find a consistent »empty« expression in novel and in drama. It may be harder to oppose to it the genuine might of human meeting than to the behaviorist defective description.

2. Since a »world« in which we find our way and whose coherent knowledge we transmit from generation to generation can exist only on

the basis of the I-It relationship, I cannot hold its logical foundations to be secondary derivations. These foundations that bear human thought are not to be derived either from the one or from the other of the two »basic worlds,« that is, the two human world-aspects that I distinguish. I am not empowered to formulate a metaphysical thesis that would lead beyond the duality of these aspects. But how the two aspects again and again have cooperated and co-operate in the human construction and reconstruction of a »world« accessible to human thought, I have attempted to indicate by the category of »we,« in »What Is Common to All.«<sup>6</sup> 5

*Paul E. Pfuetze:* What are the criteria by which we can distinguish the true I-Thou relation from the alienated world of I-It? 10

*Buber:* I would have to be untrue to my basic experience, which is an experience of faith, if I should seek to establish such »objective« criteria. I do indeed mean an »insecurity,« insofar as criteria are concerned, but I mean – I say it once again – a holy insecurity. 15

### III. Education

*Robert Assagioli:* Your essay on »Hasidism and Modern Man« contains in my opinion an important and most timely message. How can present-day humanity, and particularly modern youth, be induced or helped to the rediscovery and the recognition of the »Sacred«? In what ways and by what means – expressed in terms understandable and acceptable by modern man – do you think that (also apart from the message of Hasidism) the *totalité lésée de l'homme* (the injured wholeness of man) can be re-established? 20

*Buber:* This question is especially important, but in this general form hardly adequate to be answered. I know no generally applicable methods that merely need to be set forth in order to effect a transformation. I do not believe that a How, formulable as a principle, exists here. Only the personal involvement of the educating man can help, the man who himself knows the holy and who knows how; in this our time, persons of the most varied kinds suffer the often unavowed, indeed, on occasion, vigorously denied, pain over the unholiness of their lives. I say personal involvement; therefore, not an already existing teaching that lies to hand 25 30

6. Trans. Maurice S. Friedman, *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (March, 1958).

and needs only to be transmitted to those who suffer in this manner in order that they may learn that the holy exists and what the holy is; furthermore, that it is just this which the sufferer misses, and finally what he has to do to attain it. No, what can help is the simple personal life, the educator's own life, in which the everyday and its actions are hallowed, a life that is so lived that he who suffers from the unholiness can, and finally even will, participate in it. I have known no one whom I might call a saint, but many whose everyday performances, without being meant to be holy actions, work exactly such.

10 But what is meant here by holy? Now, quite simply this, that the one who lives in contact with this man feels against his will, against, his *Weltanschauung*: That is genuine to the roots; that is not a shoot from an alien stem; its roots reach into that sphere from whose inaccessibility I suffer in the overlucid hours of midnight. And at first unwillingly, then  
15 also willingly, the man thus affected in contact is himself drawn into connection with that sphere. It is indeed a matter of »hallowing«; it is a matter, hence, of the *humanly* holy; and what is to be understood by that, in my view, does not admit of any definition and any method that can be taught; one learns to know it in doing something spontaneously,  
20 otherwise than one is accustomed to do, at first only »more really,« that is, »putting more of oneself into it,« then with more intention, more meaning, finally opening oneself to the sphere from which the meaning of our existence comes to us.

The crisis that has come over the human world has its origin in the dehalloving of existence. It appears, at times, as if the crisis would assume the sinister tempo of »world history.« Is there not reason to despair that education could overtake it, or at all obviate it? True education is never in vain, even if the hour makes it appear so. Whether it manifests itself before or in or after the threatening catastrophe—the fate of man will  
30 depend on whether the rehalloving of existence takes place.

*Heinz-Joachim Heydorn*: How is it possible to liberate the relationship of the individual to himself from its distorted state, without at the same time destroying his relationship with his total environment, and while maintaining this relationship as meaningful?

35 *Buber*: I speak expressly of the *first* task of the educator because the awakening of pain and of longing is the indispensable presupposition. But I do, indeed, say ever again that one can only become a genuine person through a genuine relation to the real, through genuine saying of Thou. To further, to strengthen, to encourage the readiness and open-

ness to this relation in the young cannot be separated in time from that »first« task; here there must again and again be decided, according to the individual and the situation, what is bidden in this and that hour. Certainly the young person today feels himself largely the object of reality; but how can one help him break this spell? Why, only through 5  
guiding him – it goes without saying, in an unemotional, unromantic, unsentimental manner – toward coming into a genuine contact with the reality *accessible* to him. But, you say, he lacks the courage. How does one educate for courage? Through nourishing trust. How does one nourish trust? Through one's own trustworthiness. 10

*Robert M. Hutchins:* I have spent all my life as an administrator. That means that I have been primarily concerned with the management and direction of institutions. *Émile* is very little good to me because the hero did not go to school. My question has been, What is possible in educational institutions, granting the inevitable handicaps of numbers, organization, finance, etc.? Moreover, I have been required to face the fact that the great teacher – Buber, for example – is a rarity. What are the best guides for ordinary teachers dealing with ordinary pupils? 15

The question is therefore not merely, What is man, but, What is the *special* role of educational institutions with regard to man? Have they 20  
the same role as that of the family and the church? How can American educational institutions best play the role that should be assigned to them?

For example, I am as much against a one-sided intellectualism as Buber is. I believe that man is not a centaur and that human reason is to be understood only in connection with human nonreason. These statements are not a guide to the American educational administrator because they do not tell him what aspects of man are the special obligation or object of the educational system. No doctrine has promoted the disintegration of American education as much as that of the »whole man«: it 30  
has been used to justify the inclusion of the most frivolous trivialities in the course of study.

There is grave danger in too literal and immediate an interpretation of Buber's insistence on »our present situation« and »our hour.« If it is Buber who is defining the situation and naming the hour, one can with 35  
confidence select educational material in the light of his decision. But the whole view of American education that we must adjust the student to his environment – which I regard as radically erroneous – can be justified by an interpretation of Buber's language, of which he would be the last to approve. Only in a Buberian sense do we know what the situation 40

of our pupils will be or understand the exigencies of the hour. In a literal, narrow sense, we do not know what economic, political, social situation they will confront, or what time it will be. Since we do not know the situation or the hour, we should try to help them to learn how to deal with any situation and with any time.

»A truly reciprocal conversation in which both sides are full partners« suggests a situation that would be wholly unreal in the vast majority of cases. Those cases are those from kindergarten up in which the assumption of full partnership would be an elaborate fake, where the pupil is immature and his experiences and opinions, no matter what his age, were of the most infantile kind. If what is meant here is that the pupil and teacher are full partners in the search for truth, I heartily agree; but if the implication is that a man of great experience and profound wisdom must act as though pupils who are *ex hypothesi* of little experience and small wisdom had the same experience and wisdom as himself, and if he must allow them to act on the same assumption, then I must protest.

A great teacher, like Socrates or Buber, can start with anything and move by ordered stages to the most tremendous issues. The ordinary teacher who begins with triviality is almost certain to end there. The virtue of great books is that they are the thoughts of great men about great issues, most of which are so fundamental that they are issues of our present situation and our hour in any definition of those terms. We must bring our own concrete reality to our reading, of course. We need to bring these ideas to our concrete reality.

*Buber*: 1. Dr. Hutchins rightly sees a great danger in an all-too-literal interpretation of my view that the decisive pedagogical task is to educate men so that when they are grown they will be equal to the historical situation that then confronts them. Every all-too-literal interpretation of a truth is dangerous. What is important is not formally to fix the true, but to preserve it in its living context.

That the educational task consists of adjusting the student to his environment I too regard as a fateful error. We must not adjust our selves to the changing situations, but we have to take our stand toward them and master them.

Naturally we cannot foresee the situation before which our pupils will one day stand, and consequently we cannot prepare our pupils for it. But we can and should teach our pupils what a situation means for the mature and courageous man; in other words, we can and should teach them the right relationship between idea and situation, namely, that the idea receives its reality from situations in which it has to authenticate itself.

We live in a time when, less than in any earlier time, men dare to look in the face the situation into which they have fallen. From this comes the frightening lack of leadership in our days. The fathers have imparted principles to the generation ruling today, but not the capacity of the soul to let the principle-true praxis be determined by the situations. This must change if the coming generations are to trust themselves to undertake the salvation of the human race. 5

This must change, that is: education must change; and that means above all: the educator must change. We must begin with the education of the educator. More exactly: the leading men of the teachers colleges must be chosen most carefully; they must be men who know the connection of idea and situation both conceptually and practically; and from the community of these men one of the highest professions of the land must be formed. 10

2. That there can be no question here of a full partnership I have already stated and offered specific reasons for in my »Education«<sup>7</sup> and recently again in my Postscript to the second edition of *I and Thou*.<sup>8</sup> I have indicated that and why an inclusive reciprocity between teacher and pupil neither should nor can exist. The good teacher knows the soul of his pupils; the pupils would cease to be pupils if they knew the soul of their teacher. The teacher is obliged to *mean* the person of the pupil in its highest possibilities and, so far as it is up to him, to develop it; it would be absurd to conceive anything analogous from the side of the pupil. The educational relationship that is desirable is, to be sure, founded on trust on both sides; but the trust is basically different on each side: the pupil has in relation to the right teacher the trust that he is what he is; the teacher has in relation to the right pupil the trust that he will become what he will become. It would also be contrary to all pedagogical sense, as Hutchins says, if the teacher acted as if he were not far superior to the pupil in experience. 15  
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But from all this it is not to be inferred that no real dialogue is possible between the educator and his charge. Hutchins' acknowledgment of the fact »that the pupil and the teacher are full partners in the search for truth« does not satisfy me. However much the teacher is superior to the pupil in experience, there is, nonetheless, something that the former can learn from the latter: this is the personal experiences that the pupil has had and that he communicates directly or indirectly. Every teacher has ears and a heart will willingly listen to such reports, which are irreplace- 35

7. *Between Man and Man* (Boston: Beacon Press paperback, 1958), pp. 83-103.

8. *I and Thou* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pp. 123-137.

able because they are grounded in individuals; and he will incorporate them in his manifold world-and-life-experience; but he will also help the pupil to advance confidently from the individual experience that he has now had to an organic knowledge of the world and life. Such an interchange, although it cannot be a full one, I call, in spite of all, a dialogical one.

I esteem highly the educational value for the growing man of reading »great« books; it once did much for me. But it cannot replace the dialogue, for the highest work of the spirit, no matter how high it exalts its reader, cannot offer him what the simple human meeting between teacher and pupil again and again can give: the helping immediacy. It educates the pupil because he is here meant as he whom he is created to become.

3. I know of very few men in history to whom I stand in such a relation of both trust and veneration as Socrates. But when it is a matter of using »Socratic questions« as an educational method, I am against it. I agree, indeed – with some qualifications – to the statement of Confucius that in order to clarify human realities one must clarify concepts and names, but I am of the opinion that such clarification should be united with a criticism of the function of concepts and names. Confucius overvalued the significance for the life of man of designations in comparison with proper names; Socrates overvalued the significance of abstract general concepts in comparison with concrete individual experiences. General concepts are the most important stays and supports, but Socrates treated them as if they were more important than bones – that they are not. Stronger, however, than this basic objection is my criticism of a pedagogical application of the Socratic method. Socrates conducts his dialogue by posing questions and proving the answers that he received untenable; these are not real questions; they are moves in a sublime dialectical game that has a goal, the goal of revealing a not-knowing. But when the teacher whom I mean (apart from the questions he must ask in examinations) enters into a dialogue with his pupil and in this connection directs a question to him, he asks, as the simple man who is not inclined to dialectic asks: because he wants to know something: that, namely, which this young person before him, and precisely he, knows to report on the subject under discussion: a small individual experience, a nuance of experience that is perhaps barely conceptually comprehensible, nothing further, and that is enough. The teacher will awaken in the pupil the need to communicate of himself and the capacity thereto and in this way bring him to greater clarity of existence. But he also learns, himself, through teaching thus; he learns, ever anew, to know concretely the becoming of the human creature that takes place in experiences; he learns what no



man ever learns completely, the particular, the individual, the unique. No, certainly no full partnership; but still a characteristic kind of reciprocity, still a real dialogue.

But now you will object, dear Dr. Hutchins, that there are too few good teachers, and you will be right: there are far too few. What follows from that? Why, just this, that our most pressing task is to educate educators, is it not so? 5

## V. Philosophy of Religion

### A. General

*Friedrich Thieberger*: The »awakening« is no mere psychological process; it seizes the whole man, as well as his thinking and the decision of his will. That also holds true for the I-Thou relationship. Therefore Buber can speak of an interhuman reality, particularly when the »Thou« that confronts me is seized by a similar relationship to my »I«. 10

Now here the question arises: What if the »Thou« to which I am raised from the I-It into the I-Thou relation is not a visible living creature or a concrete object or event that accosts me, but an idea or a mental image formed in imagination, of which we have innumerable examples in personal, artistic, or political life? In that case, does not the *dialogue* become in fact a *monologue* into which one can enter so dramatically that even from the idea or the image one seems to hear an answer or reply from the »Thou«? 15 20

To be clear on this point seems to me particularly important, because in the realm of religious experience above all others, one should not counterfeit a reality which transcends the transformed »I« and think to discern in the idea a superhuman being, a »Thou«, which exists independently of me. Here we would have confronting us nothing but the repetition of the ontological proof of God on another plane. For it would only be saying »Thou« to an idea or figment of the imagination, unless the belief in the existence of a higher being stems from quite another source. 25 30

*Buber*: That one can turn with passionate devotion to a fantasy image that one regards as God we know from the lives of individuals and from that of the human race. How often too is he who genuinely believes in God driven beyond the indispensable anthropomorphism that even dwells in prayer to »make an image«! It is very easy to understand how Freud, steeped in the psychologism of his age, saw in religion in general 35

such an illusion. But how can we avoid calling a pure »fantasy image« by the name of God? An objective criterion that could be employed for a comparison, so to speak, naturally does not exist. However, Thieberger adds: »Unless the belief in the existence of a higher being stems from quite another source.« If by this is simply meant that eternally indeterminate primal source from which all genuine faith comes, then question-and-answer has already reached its end. But perhaps this is meant still otherwise, namely, so that it is, despite all, to be known from something whether the Thou of my language of faith rightly exists. From something – from what then? Does Thieberger perhaps mean a no longer religious, in the narrow sense, but perhaps »ethical« content of what I sense as addressed to me by God? But then Abraham – who in the decisive moment certainly did not, as many imagine, feel sufficiently reassured through the promise – would indeed have had to become suspicious as to whether he did not mistakenly imagine a Moloch image talking to him, which had passed over from the folk fantasy into his own! There is, in fact, no other »source« that can be discovered than the simple experience of a leading of God through good fortune and bad; without reason does the speech about the beginning of the way »that I shall show you« recur here, in the final trial. But there is one inward »source,« even a double source, that has become well known just to us latecomers. That is, first of all, the wholeness of the soul: I know only to repeat ever again the same thing – that we can speak the true Thou only with the whole soul, where the stubborn contradiction no longer lurks in the corners. And there is, after that, the unity of life: life as the service of an idol, however it is called, disintegrates hour by hour, success by success; life as the service of God collects itself ever again in all stillness, even in the shallows of disappointments and in the depths of failures.

*Maurice S. Friedman:* Does the relation to the Eternal Thou include not only the temporal I-Thou relation, but the I-It relation too?

*Buber:* I perceive in this question, from words of mine which have been quoted here, that I have already come close to the limit of what is accessible to our experience. I hesitate to go a step further with words the full responsibility for which I cannot bear. *In our experience* our relation to God does not include our I-It relations. What is the case beyond our experience, thus, so to speak, from the side of God, no longer belongs to what can be discussed. Perhaps I have here and there, swayed by the duty of the heart that bids me point out what I have to point out, already said too much.

*Paul E. Pfuetze:* Is not a metaphysics necessary for a religious thinker and do you not have an implicit one, even if not an explicit and systematic one? Must we not put forth some sort of argument for the reality of God if faith is not to be an incommunicable mystery or psychic event? Does a »philosophy of religion« serve any useful function, or is it only »grace« which operates here? Is the only assurance of God to be found in the concrete particular I-Thou relation with the Eternal Thou? 5

*Buber:* »Some sort of argument for the reality of God«? No, I know no cogent proof of God's existence. If one were to exist, there would no longer be any difference between belief and unbelief; the risk of faith would no longer exist. I have dared to believe – not on the basis of arguments, and I cannot bolster my faith with arguments. I have no metaphysics on which to establish my faith, I have created none for myself, I do not desire any, I need none, I am not capable of one. When I say that something has for me an ontological significance, I mean thereby to state that it is not a purely psychological event, although it encompasses such an event, or rather phenomenalizes itself »inwardly« into such a one. If I say that my faith-relation has an ontic character, what is said thereby is that it is not to be reduced to a psychic process, that it happens between my body-soul person and God. In saying that, I give my faith-experience the conceptual expression necessary for its being understood, but I posit no metaphysical thesis. Certainly I am not concerned about the communication of the individual, but about the common clarification of the common, of what has become and what is becoming common; I build no towers, I erect bridges; but their columns are not sunk into »isms« and their arches are not fitted together by means of »isms.« 10  
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## B. Creation

*William H. Poteat:* Assuming that there are two primary words which man speaks, »I-Thou« and »I-It«; assuming further that the former expresses a *religious* posture and that the latter does not; and granting that any »thing« in the world which may be addressed as an It may also be encountered as a Thou; it must follow that, the world being »twofold, in accordance with [man's] twofold attitude,« no It, as It, can ever be the bearer of the divine, no being the incarnation of Being. If this is so, how can we ever say that the world is God's creature? (Cf. »How the world is, 30  
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is completely indifferent for what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world.« L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*.<sup>9</sup>)

*Buber*: I do not say that the world is twofold, rather, the world is twofold to man. I do not thereby say anything concerning anything existing independently of man. Moreover, in the biblical creation story God creates the things through the fact that he *calls* them out of their not-yet-being into being; in the third person, to be sure, but the grammatical form is not decisive here for what is meant: clearly God does not dispose here over something with which he otherwise has nothing to do; he really turns to what shall come into being, the light, the water, the earth; and it is only the completion of this turning, when he finally says to man who has come into being, »you.« Wittgenstein is right: God does not reveal himself in the world; he is wrong: God addresses the world thus existing, thus created as his own.

15 *Maurice S. Friedman*: Is God loved *only* through the creature and never apart from him?

*Buber*: When I speak of the exclusion of the world from the relation to God, I do not speak of the *hour* of man, but of his *life*. I regard it as unqualifiedly legitimate when a man again and again, in an hour of religious fervor, adoring and praying, enters into a direct, »worldfree« relation to God; and my heart understands as well the Byzantine composer of hymns who speaks as »the alone to the Alone,« as also that Hasidic rabbi who, feeling himself a stranger on earth, asks God, who is also, indeed, a stranger on earth, to grant him, just for that reason, his friendship. But a »life with God« erected on the rejection of the living is no life with God. Often we hear of animals who have been loved by holy hermits, but I would not be able to regard anyone as holy who in the desert ceased to love the men whom he had left.

### C. The God Who Becomes

30 *Arthur A. Cohen*: In *I and Thou* you reject the concept of the »God who becomes« as »turgid and presumptuous talk.«<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless it would

9. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922, 1933), VI, 432.

10. *Between Man and Man*, p. 82.

appear from your view of revelation that such a view of becoming in God is unavoidable. If God's self-disclosures are never normative or apodictic, but depend for meaning only on the situation and moment in which God and man meet, then in some sense God is never the same. From the point of view of man (although perhaps not from God's point of view) God does change, for the simple fact that he is encountered ever anew and must be encountered ever anew for genuine meeting to occur. 5

*Buber:* Here a misunderstanding clearly holds sway.

The teaching of the God who becomes that I have indicated sets the divine at the end of the world process, as its event and its fulfillment. I can, of course, only perceive a trace of God's eternity, but it suffices to show me how foolish it is to wish to lodge him in time, namely at its end. According to my insight of faith, God is before as well as after time; he encompasses time and he manifests himself in it. When he manifests himself in it, when he »reveals himself,« he gives a norm to men, that is, he shows them the direction to right living. When men, in their need for interpretation and supplementation, make out of the holy norms »laws,« that is in particular, specifications of forbidden actions, then my faith compels me at times to prostrate myself and ask for illumination as to what I must do in a given situation, and what I must not do in it; I must, not seldom, refuse to follow the traditional, because my faith prevents me from acknowledging that God wants this of me. And that means, that God changes himself, or even, that he is a »God who becomes«! 10 15 20

*Peter A. Bertocci:* To say, »What turgid and presumptuous talk that is about the ›God who becomes,« and yet never to explain how God can be otherwise *to some extent* if man is to have any effect on him, is a good instance of being declarative but not illuminating. More basically, any relation which is a real relation, as opposed to a logical one, must *relate*, that is, a difference must be made to both terms in the relation. I never discover what it is that man does to God – even in the passage referred to above. For what does God need man? 25 30

*Buber:* Here, too, what the content of the teaching is that is under discussion – and for which the Nietzschean »superman« represents a generally known example – is not at all taken into consideration. Instead of a God who is conceived of as becoming and who in some indeterminate future will have become, Bertocci speaks of the effect of man on God that necessarily means a change in God. But is it really so incomprehen- 35

sible that our concepts shatter when they are applied to God, and that we nonetheless must use them in order to talk about our relation to him? Because I point to the effect that the pure relation exercises on man, may it for that reason be demanded of me that, in order to be »illuminating,« I discuss its effect on God, something about which I know nothing and can know nothing? Or shall I, when I experience myself as addressed and addressing, and when such experience also is made known to me by others, keep silent about this fact because it is only possible to speak »declaratively« of it?

10

## D. God as Person

*Helen Wodehouse:* In Professor Buber's own view, does God have a special and separate center of consciousness, as a Person apart? When Martin Buber writes that God wishes to redeem us<sup>11</sup> and that »everything desires to become a sacrament,«<sup>12</sup> is he speaking literally in the first case and metaphorically in the second? Or is he in *both* statements using a legitimate metaphorical extension of much the same kind?

*Buber:* What it means to me to speak of God as a person, more exactly, as a being that is also personal, I have tried to explain in the Postscript to the second edition of *I and Thou*. However, I must repeat here that no concept can be applied to God without a transformation taking place in it, and that it is the task of him who thus applies the concept to characterize and explain this transformation so far as possible. To ascribe to God a »special and separate center of consciousness« means to say at once too much and too little. I have sought to guard myself against such simplifications through designating God as the absolute Person.

I beg that my interpretation of Hasidic teaching not be confused with my own thought; I can by no means in my own thinking take responsibility for Hasidic ideas, although my thinking is indebted to them and bound up with them. But when, in my interpretation of Hasidic teaching, I say of God that he »wishes to redeem us,« then that is, in this context, meant literally; and when I say in the same interpretation that »everything desires to become a sacrament,« then that is of course not fully, but still in good part meant literally; since, in fact, according to this

11. *Hasidism*, trans. by Greta Hart (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), pp. 95-116.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

teaching, divine sparks, stemming from a precosmic primal catastrophe, hide in the beings and things – sparks that long for redemption by man, namely, through man relating to these beings in holiness and using these things in holiness. In my own thinking, I would not be able to talk of a wish of God's or even of a desire of things in such a manner; and yet the reality that is ultimately meant by the former and that which is meant by the latter have their place in my more cautious thought. 5

*Frank B. Dilley:* Does not knowledge of God in relationship to him, knowledge of God as a person, also imply that knowledge of the nature of God which Martin Buber has insisted is outside the province of man? If we know God as the »Absolute Person,« the »Eternal Thou,« the Creator who created men to love and be loved by him, do we not already know a good deal about his nature? 10

*Buber:* A more exact clarification of what I mean and what I do not mean is evidently desired. Let us make the matter more precise, therefore. But one thing must be stated in advance: My interpretation of Hasidic teaching is not, to repeat, to be understood as a presentation of my own theology or philosophy. 15

Hasidism has exercised a great personal influence on me; much in it has deeply affected my own thinking, and I have felt myself called ever again to point to its value for the life of man. But there is also not a little in Hasidism that I am, to be sure, obliged to interpret within the framework of my presentation of it, but that I cannot in the least make my own, in particular the Kabbalistic ideas, taken over and developed by Hasidism, of the emanations of God and their relationship to one another. These are essentially Gnostic ideas, and I have ever again most decisively opposed Gnosis, which presumes to know, so to speak, the inner history of God. Hasidic theology always comes into contact with my own at those points where the relation between God and the world is concerned, as it manifests itself to us in our own experience of the relation between him and us. 20 25 30

That I proceed just from the relation between God and man, when I speak of God as the absolute Person and the eternal Thou, I have stated many times, most explicitly in the concluding chapter of the Postscript to the second edition of *I and Thou*. But I believe that I have already indicated sufficiently in *I and Thou* itself that one cannot comprehend a Thou outside of the relation to an I that says Thou and a person beyond his relations to other existing beings. If there existed no I in the world, it would make no sense to call God the eternal Thou; and I have said after 35

due reflection that, in order to enter into relation with the existing beings that he calls into being, God has put on himself »the servant's garment of the person.«

### E. Revelation

- 5 *David Baumgardt*: If, as you emphasized again at Columbia University (Spring 1957), man in the dialogue with God must adhere to him unconditionally, even if God's ordinances appear to us immoral, is there still any fundamental gulf between the pagan *amor fati* and the Jewish *emunah* (trust) to the personal God? And can one, as you do in »Spinoza, Sabbatai Zevi, and the Baal-Shem,« reject Spinoza's »monologic *amor dei intellectualis*« as a *glorreiches Verdorren* (glorious withering) of the soul in *monologischer Verselbständigung* (monological self-sufficiency)?

- 15 *Buber*: What I have said and mean is the following, which is, for the believing man, properly self-evident: when he becomes aware that God demands something of him, then he must just do it, if necessary involving himself in it with all his strength. In other words, the positing of an »ethical« criterion that is to be consulted as to whether one shall fulfill God's will, of which one has become aware, is pure contradiction: he  
20 who really believes in God cannot acknowledge any other court above his. He who deduces the question from a situation so simply incomparable to ours as that of Abraham, construes it; the believing man of our world can confidently subordinate his ethics to his religiousness because he knows that it is God who shows him the right way, and that means  
25 just: because he trusts God. But what then does this trust have in common with the *amor fati*? When someone not merely receives what befalls him from a »blind« fate, but accepts it, affirms it, »loves« it, and when someone seeks to follow with trust a divine being who knows and instructs him, what has the one in common with the other? I do not at  
30 all and in any sense feel myself an object in the hands of God. I stand over against one who holds the world in his hands; nonetheless I stand with my own meaning and will. My father Job (no Israelite, it seems, and yet my father) protests and trusts in one; we come to feel that he loves God, whom he charges with injustice, but that to love his own fate remains alien to him to the end, and God encourages him not to love it.  
35 He stands in an unsurpassably awesome dialogue; but God does not deny himself to him as a partner in dialogue.



And the »*amor dei intellectualis*«? Spinoza characterizes it as *pars infinitis amoris, quo deus se ipsum amat*. This concept of »a part« I reject basically. I stand over against God because I have been set by him in my own being in the most real sense, that is, I have been »created.« Because I stand over against him, I can love him. Besides, the idea that a being loves himself stems from a dislocation of the concept of love. »Egoism« is not self-love but a lack of love. To ascribe to God love of himself is to use an illegitimate metaphor. 5

*Norman Kelman*: In your William Alanson White Memorial Lecture on »Guilt and Guilt Feelings« you define existential guilt as follows: »Existential guilt occurs when someone injures an order of the human world whose foundations he knows and recognizes as those of his own existence and of all common human existence.« You also, in that lecture, speak of it as »guilt that a person has taken on himself as a person and in a personal situation ...«<sup>13</sup> 10 15

When Abraham is asked to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22), is he not also in such a personal situation? Is he not also tempted by God, and does he not make a decision to obey, a decision that entails an action that would »injure an order of the human world«? In the brief dialogue with Isaac, there seems to be no indication that Abraham is involved in guilt, nor does there appear to be the tension or the problem that modern man is involved in when confronting his account, or a concrete situation. It appears that Abraham behaved in the way he did and not otherwise since there was no otherwise for him. (It was God's command, you have said, and without this Abraham's response meant nothing.) But for most, there is an otherwise, thus posing a problem, a conflict, a tension. To act as did Abraham would seem to involve a person in the existential guilt you speak of. To fail to heed God's command would be to sin. 20 25

*Buber*: I believe that I have answered this question in my book *Eclipse of God* in the chapter entitled »On the Suspension of the Ethical.« Kierkegaard did wrong to quote the biblical narrative of the temptation of Abraham in order to make understandable his renunciation of his fiancée as a sacrifice desired by God; he knew no way out, as we see from his diaries, in the highly complicated motivation of this action. »A divine protest opposed it,« he says; but since he also says explicitly that a man only learns that God demands a sacrifice of him, but not also which sacrifice, then, with the word »protest,« the sphere of the experi- 30 35

13. *Psychiatry*, Vol. XX, No. 2 (May, 1957), p. 117.

ence of faith is already overstepped, especially as we read with astonishment in another place in his diaries: »Had I had faith, then I would have remained with her.« Had not God perhaps – so I venture to ask – actually demanded of him the sacrifice of his »melancholy,« his renunciation  
 5 of it – and that would mean just the opposite of his renunciation of Regina.

From the narrative of the temptation of Abraham nothing is to be concluded *in abstracto* as to what one of us must do if God's voice demands of him tomorrow to become existentially guilty toward a fellow man.  
 10 Such stories, in their terrible uniqueness, are placed at the beginning of the instruction (»Torah«): something representative is concealed in the narrated event, but it itself is not reported for imitation; never again has a man of faith heard the like from God; and since then, it is just faith that helps us distinguish from one another the voice of God and the  
 15 Moloch voices of the idols of the age.

*Jacob B. Agus:* Does not the conception of a »hiding God« rob human initiative of decisive significance and deny to all human valuations any permanent import?

*Buber:* What I say is, first of all, enormously exaggerated, and then what  
 20 is thus exaggerated is attacked. I have never said that God is »removed from all that is humanly conceivable«; what I have said ever again is this, that we know God in his relation to us, not apart from it.

The conception of a God »who hides himself« is not »mythological« but biblical. The prophets proclaim time and again to the insubordinate  
 25 of Israel that God will hide his face from them, and in the hour of the great world crisis the peoples who turn themselves to him call to him (Isa. 45:15): »Verily, thou art a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, liberator.« In the darkness of the crisis they had experienced his hiddenness; now in the radiance of the redeeming hour they perceive his helpful  
 30 self-revelation. And what then is »revelation« in general other than the coming forth out of a (greater or lesser) hiddenness?

The conception of a »hiding God« as I use it is by no means »designed to solve the problem of evil.« Nowhere have I indicated anything of the sort; I have never sought the origin of evil anywhere else than in the  
 35 primal freedom of man. In the Bible, the hiddenness of God is not a cause of evil, it is his answer to it. But an answer that is not powerless over against man: when he turns back to God, then he can again share God's revealed nearness.

To ascribe to me the view that God's essence is indetermination means

to stand what I say on its head. But I do, indeed, believe that God manifests himself ever again in different forms, all of which, of course, point to his all-subduing unity.

*Paul E. Pfuetze:* Professor Buber, will you clarify your doctrine of revelation, both as to the divine initiative and the human appropriation of it? I know you remain close to the dialogue and interpret revelation in terms of the dialogue as an address by God to man. 5

But how do you know whether and when the revelation is actually from God and not from the Devil or from within oneself?

How do you know when any *mitzvah* in your life is really a command from God? 10

And a related question: How do you derive the specific law or moral imperative from revelation? How do you *know* the will of God? And when the alleged address by God to particular individuals is interpreted and fulfilled in such widely divergent ways, how do you or can you reach any confident agreement as to what is *mitzvah* in the community? 15

Is the *Existenz*-thinker, trying to communicate his insights out of his particular I-Thou relation, reduced to sheer autobiographical utterance? Where are the objective criteria and methods by which one can communicate his insight or revelation to others so as to evoke a similar experience, to reach agreement with the others in the community? 20

*Buber:* I repeat once more that I know no »objective criteria« and no »methods« in the relation to God. He who asks me concerning such misunderstands my intention. The question »How do you know?« is answered of itself in the personal experience of the believing man and in the genuine living-together of men who have analogous experiences; rather, there it is not asked. I give no guarantees, I have no security to offer. But I also demand of no one that he believe. I communicate my own experience of faith, just as well as I can, and I appeal to the experiences of faith of those whom I address. To those who have none, or imagine they have none, I recommend only that they do not armor their souls with preconceived opinions. I turn to those readers who either know from their own experience that of which I speak or are ready to learn it from their own experience. The others I must leave unsatisfied, and content myself with that. 25 30 35

## VII. Evil

*William Ernest Hocking*: Agreeing that wherever there is a »relative« there is an absolute to which the relative is relative, then if, as against Vedanta, evil is relatively real and not illusion, must there not be an absolute evil toward which our attitude must be »fight, eject, destroy«? In brief, absolute rejection?

*Buber*: First of all, speaking quite generally, I am not at all of the opinion »that wherever there is a »relative« there is an absolute to which the relative is relative.« We become acquainted day after day with all degrees of relative stupidity; shall we conclude from that that there exists an absolute stupidity?

An absolute evil, however, would mean that there is a power opposing the divine that cannot be derived from God. A modern Manichaeism of this kind, however, is not what Hocking means.

What Hocking means is rather »radical« evil as it enters into the reality of life. That something of the sort exists I have explicitly pointed out in the final chapter of my book *Good and Evil*,<sup>14</sup> and, in fact, it exists in what I call the »second stage« of a definite individual life reality, the stage, namely, in which the man who has abandoned himself to directionlessness and decisionlessness affirms this proclivity of his just as his own, and presumes to want to remain in it as in the basic attitude proper to him. But since it is always a question of the stage or stages of an individual life-way, I prefer to speak of it not as a »radical evil« (as, for example, Kant does) but rather as an evil that radicalizes itself. Note well, we always remain in the sphere of the facts of individual existence, in the sphere of individuals. Certainly we must often fight this evil, especially when it joins with its like and unites with all kinds of wretched mixed forms and then entrenches collectively upon human history. But when we have »destroyed« it, have we then really helped the good to victory over the evil? Is not the true fight against the demons of a wholly different kind? Must we lead the »bad« man to his unredeem- edness? Does there not exist ever again what is almost incomprehensible, the possibility that we can help the man who has apparently completely succumbed to that arrogant self-affirmation to find the way out? Certainly there have been many in this our time who would not have

14. *Good and Evil* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), pp. 133-143.

believed themselves capable of wanting to save some son of this time<sup>15</sup> before themselves. And nonetheless, I confess that I can hold no one to be »absolutely« unredeemable.

The saying that there is no forgiveness, which Hocking has taken over from the Jewish tradition and applied to him who says, »I will sin and then I shall repent,« does in fact touch the most serious injury of the relation between divinity and humanity. But is it impossible that, in a later hour, the insight into the fact that he cannot be forgiven may seize hold of the man who has spoken and acted thus, like a heartpurifying lightning flash? What can transpire between the real God and a real man is of so paradoxical a nature that no saying, be it ever so »true,« is equal to it. Something, the idea of which is unforgivable, may be resolved in paradox. And we – shall we, if this is so, hide from ourselves the possibility that we too could be called on in certain circumstances to forgo »absolute rejection«?

Yes, evil radicalizes itself – and it is granted us to co-operate in its deradicalization.

*Kurt H. Wolff:* 1. What is the locus of evil? Within the I-Thou relation, how is one to discriminate between good and evil: for instance, how does one know when to acquiesce in the demand of the other, when to resist it; how does one know when one acts as the »single one,« rather than as the pseudo »single one«?

2. Whatever answer this question receives, one implication of the answer would appear that reason is relevant to it. The statement, »Evil cannot be done with the whole soul; good can only be done with the whole soul,«<sup>16</sup> suggests that in doing evil, one part of the soul is excluded, and this part I cannot identify as other than reason; and this is why evil cannot be done with the whole soul.

*Buber:* 1. I know a »locus of evil« only within the concrete individual life-reality, and here I know it, as I have said, as the willed direction and decisionlessness. Therefore, I have naturally not set up an objective criterion that tells one in the manifold situations »how one does know,« and I cannot do so. One must quite often, indeed, struggle hard in a given situation, without having an adequate criterion to hand, until one knows and takes the right direction here and now. But in a life in which the good is more and more realized, the strength of finding often grows.

15. »Such as Goebbels,« Professor Buber offers as an example in a letter to me. (Friedman.)

16. *Good and Evil*, p. 130.

The more complete an I-Thou relation is, so much the more one knows what the other really needs in order to become what he was created to be. And he who has become a genuine »single one,« he receives confirmation – even though he never has a share in blank security – but from  
 5 other sources, certainly, than from reflection on whether he is genuine or not genuine.

2. That it is »reason« that opposes in me the evil that I do seems to me an inadmissible simplification. When I think about doing an injury to my neighbor who has vexed me, and I succeed in sensing somewhere in a  
 10 corner of my being the injury that I want to do, or when I want to deceive my partner in an action and a little drop of lying substance corrodes the rim of my own heart, and I nonetheless do the evil, although »not with the whole soul,« what role has »reason« played in the event? It was not at all, in fact, a thinking that took place there; it was only that gentle protest  
 15 of the soul to which we so often are accustomed to pay no attention.

*Walter Goldstein:* 1. First of all I pose the question regarding the nature of evil in Buber's works. Allow me to add that I do not mean the *phenomena* of evil. The fact that they are represented in Buber's work *For the Sake of Heaven* in great enough detail, I think I have sufficiently  
 20 pointed out in many writings. Besides, I share Buber's opinion that man is not born in sin, and is able to free himself from it without assistance from outside. On the other hand, however, it would be quite impossible to deny that evil *as such* does exist on earth. Thus I do not wholly agree with Buber that man in general is neither good nor bad. Possibly this  
 25 type of person constitutes the overwhelming majority, but I have met in my life a number of conspicuously good people and, unfortunately, a yet greater number of bad people who *consciously willed* the evil and the bad. It appears to me that Buber treats of evil adequately in its *manifestation*, but he does not deal exhaustively with evil *as such*. Let me add,  
 30 by way of suggestion, what I have already told Buber: I am aware that he rejects the isolation of evil in order not to permit even the slightest trace of a satanic rival divinity to emerge.

2. This problem of evil again and again plays a disturbing role for me in my thinking through his system of the dialogue. I am also reasonably  
 35 certain that all the lines of genuine meeting intersect in the eternal Thou. Yet these meetings form only a very small percentage of all earthly meetings. Let us suppose that the lines of the numerous indifferent meetings likewise intersect in the eternal Thou. What then of *the* meetings with men which aim fundamentally at extracting evil from this  
 40 meeting and leaving nothing undone to give the meeting a painful as-

pect? That there are such meetings, unfortunately not too rare, can likewise not be denied. It is, however, difficult to accept the thought that the lines of all of these meetings also intersect in the eternal Thou, since in this case attributes would have to be ascribed to the Almighty which are all too earthy. No principle of »loving more« was able to save Hasidism from premature decline, and it collapsed not as the result of opposition from without, but rather from within, as was decisively shown in *For the Sake of Heaven*. No Jew of our generation needs to be told that there are people – indeed masses of people – for whom the principle of »loving more« broke down in complete failure. On the other hand, since I am equally convinced of the invalidity of the opposite principle (»hating more«) – for he who conquers by the sword has always inevitably perished by the sword – I am unable to determine the role of evil in the meetings of men, and I ask Professor Buber to say a word on this point.

*Buber:* 1. I do not know evil »as such,« but only as a condition and attitude in the life of individuals. As condition, I have characterized it probably most clearly as »the convulsive shirking of direction« (»The Question to the Single One,« *Between Man and Man*), as attitude probably most clearly as the self-affirmation of those who remain in directionlessness.<sup>17</sup> If the good that I mean is already in its origin the direction of the human being to God, then it is still certainly clear that no one of us is simply evil, for none is denied by his nature taking the direction. It is also certainly clear that none of us by his nature is simply good, for it is accorded to none by his nature to become free from all the impulses of the passion revolving in itself. The individual experiences both in the depths of his self-awareness. It seems to me in the same way to be at variance with the hidden reality to hold the other to be simply bad and oneself to be simply good. Man is – to this I hold fast – »in an eminent sense good-and-evil«; he is fundamentally twofold, and he is empirically capable of attaining to unification, that is, he is capable time after time of lending his passion the direction to the truth, to God; wholly one, wholly good is no mortal being.

2. Here a misunderstanding prevails. By »meeting« in the pregnant sense in which I use the word, I understand an occurrence of the genuine I-Thou relation in which the one partner affirms and confirms the other as this unique person. That the lines of these relations intersect in the

17. *Good and Evil*, pp. 133-143.

eternal Thou is grounded in the fact that the man who says Thou ultimately means his eternal Thou.

The innumerable cases in which the men who encounter one another intend and do to one another incalculable evil is indeed an incontestable  
 5 basic fact of existence. I know nothing else to oppose to it than the warning renewed time after time that the man who makes the other from a Thou into an It thereby destroys his own life at its core.

*Paul E. Pfuetze:* If the I-Thou relation, man with man, is the real way of things, why is it such a task to »socialize« people? Why is it so difficult  
 10 for man to live in the world of Thou, so easy to slip into the world of It?

*Buber:* I have never said, so far as I know, that the I-Thou relation is »the real way of things.« I have ever again said that it is one of the two basic attitudes of man, one of the two possibilities of existence. That in the present human world the other is the more frequent, the more  
 15 powerful I have never concealed, nor have I even neglected to explain why the man of our time is so very much inclined to treat all existing beings as It, as the object of his observation and his use. Yet I hold the statement that »even at his best, man feels an inordinate tug of self-interest,« to be inexact. Certainly, every living being, including man, experiences his life in its relationship to himself; each is naturally concerned with the preservation of its existence, the betterment of its lot, striving after advantage and all kinds of pleasures, and I have no criticism of this basic biological fact; I would not dream of removing man from it. But that in the lived day of man, day after day, selfinterest is always  
 20 operative, in no way accords with many men whom I observe in my environs and of whose inwardness I can perceive something. I see how they concern themselves, each in his own way, the one noisily or awkwardly, the other goodnaturedly and at times even tenderly, with their environs – family, comrades, passers-by – with open spirit for what takes place, and, not at all seldom, ready with participation, information, and help. In all this the relationship to oneself is a self-understood, undetachable constituent, but not an important factor. I sometimes watch boys playing. What really concerns the individual is just the game itself, and that means, of course, before all, his share in it; but I see such  
 25 a boy, not at all infrequently, also really concern himself about another, about the other's share, his fortune and misfortune, and at times I see such a young heart, as it were, fly across to where the other stands, with the wish that he could help there where, according to the rules of the game, no help at all is possible.



I will certainly not deny that the earth abounds with so-called self-seeking, in lower and higher varieties. But that seems to me to mean nothing else than that the biological self-relatedness in man, with its so strongly developed ego-drive, easily becomes a »mania,« thus takes on a basically pathological form. Self-seeking is not something given man by nature, but the event of a twisting through which the biological presupposition of the individual life-reality, the self-relatedness, is made into goal and intention and thereby becomes the more or less pathologized. 5

In this connection there should not remain unmentioned the interesting fact that an entirely different development, to another end, so to speak, can also take place in self-relatedness. This is especially true with men of strongly differentiated intellectuality, if they have a special talent for reflecting in a perceptive manner on their own share in the events of their lives, and particularly on the psychic side of this share. Thus arises the so-called egotism. This kind of reflexion often begins in modern man at the moment of the event itself, perhaps at the moment of an action, as a result of which the spontaneous character of the action can be injured or even destroyed. 10 15

That man »is actually in harmony with the law of life« I have never asserted; indeed, I have rather advocated the opposite view, since I have tirelessly pointed to the fact that the I-Thou relation between men is ever again interrupted by an I-It relationship. 20

To pronounce me a romantic optimist is very easy because, despite all adverse experiences, I have always clung to the messianic belief in the redemption of the world by God with the participation of the world. But it is quite false; for I have never and nowhere asserted that man can overcome his disharmony, the inner conflict of human existence through his own fullness of power, through his own »good will.« I am a realistic meliorist; for I mean and say that human life approaches its fulfillment, its redemption in the measure that the I-Thou relation becomes strong in it, the relation in which man, without surrendering his self-relatedness, has to do with the other not as with his object, but as with his partner. 25 30

If one prefers to think that God does not exist, then man must be regarded as the most dangerous experiment of nature, but still as one in whose success he himself has a share. 35

## Über Leo Schestow (1964)

Schestow ist ein repräsentativer Denker unserer Epoche. Er ist ein fragender Denker. Aber nicht wie Sokrates, der die richtige Antwort weiß und sie zunächst »ironisch« seinem Gesprächspartner vorenthält. Schestow hat keine fertigen Antworten in seiner Tasche; aber er weiß, was heute und hier zu fragen ist; er lehrt uns fragen. Dabei scheut er sich nicht, zuweilen statt einer einzigen Antwort zwei zu finden, die einander widersprechen. Er hat selber (in einer Bemerkung, die »Pro domo« überschrieben ist) darauf hingewiesen, daß er von solchen Widersprüchen offen zu reden pflegt. Damit lehrt er uns aber etwas für uns heutige Menschen sehr Wichtiges: daß man solche Widersprüche nicht vorzeitig – und das heißt: scheinbar – überwinden darf.

Diese unerschrockene Redlichkeit seines Fragens ist es, die Schestow zu dem eminent religiösen Denker gemacht hat, der er ist.

