

I and Thou

Martin Buber , Walter Kaufmann (translator)

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Martin Buber's *I and Thou* has long been acclaimed as a classic. Many prominent writers have acknowledged its influence on their work; students of intellectual history consider it a landmark; and the generation born after World War II considers Buber one of its prophets. Buber's main proposition is that we may address existence in two ways: (1) that of the "I" toward an "It," toward an object that is separate in itself, which we either use or experience; (2) that of the "I" toward "Thou," in which we move into existence in a relationship without bounds. One of the major themes of the book is that human life finds its meaningfulness in relationships. All of our relationships, Buber contends, bring us ultimately into relationship with God, who is the Eternal Thou.

The need for a new English translation had been felt for many years. The old version was marred by many inaccuracies and misunderstandings, and its recurrent use of the archaic "thou" was seriously misleading. Professor Walter Kaufmann, a distinguished writer and philosopher in his own right who was close to Buber, retranslated the work at the request of Buber's family. He added a wealth of informative footnotes to clarify obscurities and bring the reader closer to the original and wrote an extensive prologue that opened up new perspectives on the book and on Buber's thought. This volume provided a new basis for all subsequent discussions of Buber.

I and Thou Details

Date : Published February 1st 1971 by Charles Scribner's Sons (NY) (first published 1923)

ISBN : 9780684717258

Author : Martin Buber , Walter Kaufmann (translator)

Format : Paperback 185 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Religion, Nonfiction, Theology, Spirituality, Judaism, Psychology

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From Reader Review I and Thou for online ebook

Elliot Sneider says

One of those books you are reading and you are not really sure if you understand it until you have a moment of 'AHA', and then as soon as you try to put into words your 'AHA' you lose it again, and you realize that the author is saying it as clearly as possible, and it takes a whole book. So, I have no idea what this book is about, but I had some clear moments of beauty while reading it, moments that I will remember for a long a time and somehow seem to make me stronger to think back on, even though I have no idea what they were. Self-affirming. Thank you Martin Buber.

Jesse says

I distinctly remember how all of us dutiful grad students collectively scratched our heads when we realized this would be our primary text for a seminar on documentary films taught by Bill Nichols—we were in grad school to read Deleuze and Foucault and Silverman and "sophisticated" contemporary theory of all stripes (as well as his own writing on the topic), but... a Jewish theologian and mystic? Really?

Of course the emphasis on this text turned out to be nothing less than inspired, and perfectly suited to the material: for what else is documentary filmmaking than entering into "a world of relation" and initiating a kind of *Ich-Du/I-You* encounter? Our puzzling over Buber added a deeply ethical awareness to our discussions over the various films we watched that I've never forgotten; "relation is mutual" became the fundamental underlying principle guiding our analysis, forcing us to think about through the moral complications inherent of representing another person.

If the particularities of Buber's formulations have faded from my memory over time, the questions invoked through that initial encounter with *I and Thou* continues to actively shape my thinking to this day.

[Buber also turned out to dovetail ideally with the particular material we were considering in the course, some of which became Cinema's Alchemist: The Films of Péter Forgács, the first major English-language study of the great Hungarian media artist, crucial rememberer of personal traumas of history often lost and forgotten.]

Rebekah says

I was assigned this book in college and kept it, because it struck me as so true at the time. The premise is that there can be no self without an other. You can only come into being through your relationships with others. At the time, I was kind of sick and pretty delusional and thought I was very invisible, so it seemed like a good way to look at the world: you can only exist in so far as you build a relationship with others. I think it still holds true to some extent, but not to the degree I once did.

"The basic word I-You can only be spoken with one's whole being.
The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one's whole being."

"Whoever says You does not have something; he has nothing. But he stands in relation."

"I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. All actual life is encounter."

Czarny Pies says

Martin Buber had an extraordinary career. He was a personal friend of Thomas Herzl and was very active in the Zionist movement prior to World War I. His greatest work was as a theologian in which he not only made a compelling defense of Hasidism but also contributed greatly to the revival of personal Thomism which was so vigorously promoted by Vatican II.

In this short and clear book he proposes a theological model of human existence based on the word pairs Ich-du (I and thou) and Ich-es (I and it). The first-pair represents a life style of encounter with God. The second pair represents a life style of consumerism. The way to redemption is through encounter with God in one's daily life through the Ich-du mode of existence.

Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II) was a self-declared admirer of Buber. One can clearly detect Buber's hand guiding Wojtyla's pen as he composed his great masterpiece "The Theology of the Human Body." Buber is without doubt one of the great theologians of the twentieth century. "I and thou" is a great introduction to Buber's great argument that life should be experienced as an encounter with God.

Mehmed says

Wow, where to start...? This book was not merely a read, but something to be experienced. Admittedly, it was a very difficult text, actually, almost incomprehensible at times. But within this remarkably complex, philosophical and difficult text, lies hidden treasures and formulas to understand the equally complex and difficult human nature and our relations with our surroundings, especially with God. When ideas are so large, words don't suffice to express them and you have to create new words, new concepts. I and Thou does exactly that. It redefines the word 'You' and situates human beings in their true form, presence and relational position... at the face of the earth, society and God...

"The I of the basic I-You appears as a person and becomes conscious of itself as subjectivity (without any dependent genitive). Egos appear by setting themselves apart from other egos. Persons appear by entering into relation to other persons. One is the spiritual form of natural differentiation, the other that of natural association. The purpose of setting oneself apart is to experience and use, and the purpose of that is "living" - which means dying one human life long. The purpose of relation is the relation itself - touching the You. For as soon as we touch a You, we are touched by a breath of eternal life. Whoever stands in relation, participates in an actuality: that is, in a being that is neither merely a part of him nor merely outside him."

Tyson says

The most difficult book to read. And by difficult I mean that I really had to think. No mindless reading. The words are put together in a way that we (modern day Americans) aren't used to. This made it more difficult for me to anticipate the sentence which in turn made me have to re-read and focus more as I read.

Also, it is describing something that had never been fully described before. There are two different ways of having a relationship with everything in this world. I-You and I-It are the words for those two relationships. I-You is a subject-to-subject relationship and I-It is a subject-to-object relationship. For those of you familiar with C. Terry Warner, it could be described as being responsive and being resistant. Being in the box and out of the box. Great read and one that definitely has to be read more than once for full meaning to be grasped.

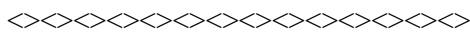
booklady says

So, I can say I read it. And what I understood, I really *really* liked. It opened my eyes to the wonder of each human encounter I have every day, from the most mundane to the ones I consider and label 'significant'. They are all way beyond 'important'. Can I, do I remember this? No. Do I want to? For sure. I need to read books like this which remind me – again and again – that every person, every conversation, every moment is crucial, not just those special occasions designated such.

Martin Buber's *I and Thou* came highly recommended by Fr. Michael Gaitley in his book, *The One Thing Is Three: How the Most Holy Trinity Explains Everything*, which is how I arrived here. Personally I would have loved to have read *I and Thou* in a group or classroom setting. It's a very mystical piece and I know reading and hearing other people's reactions would have helped me. I certainly plan to return to it in the not-too-distant future and see if I do better.

There are some good reviews here on Goodreads for those who are interested. They helped me some.

I am not rating it yet as there is still so much I did not understand.



Dec 02, 2016: This is going to be an incredibly hard book to review so I am putting down a few thoughts now. I read a few sentences and think to myself, "Exactly *what* did you just read?" And often I have to admit that I have no idea! So I go back over it and maybe something comes into focus ... and maybe it doesn't. Then I hit a stretch as clear as crystal. I look down and can see, really *see*-all the way to the bottom-like when you're in a glass-bottomed boat on still water.

So I am carrying this book around with me and pulling it out at odd times and reading a bit. I know what it's *supposed* to be about: the objectification v. the subjectification of people and things in relationship(s) and fluid dynamics therein, but whoa baby, this is one slippery subject!

Back in the boat, looking for more clear water...

Ian "Marvin" Graye says

Ich-Du2 (See also "Ich-Du")

From Wikiboobia, the free encyclopedia:

Ich-Du2 is the lesser known sequel to Ich-Du.

In it, Boober was forced to qualify many of the concepts he had explored in the abstract in Ich-Du.

Relationship

Ich-Du2 ("I-Thou-Two" or "I-You-Two") is a relationship that stresses the mutual, holistic existence of one being and two sub-beings or aspects of one being (most typically, boobs).

It is a concrete encounter, because these beings and sub-beings meet one another in their authentic existence, without any qualification or objectification of one another. (Boober later realised there was more objectification occurring than he originally thought, though it occurred only in one direction.)

Imagination and Ideas

Imagination and ideas play a role in this relation. (Professor Murray Jay Siskind later explored the role of the male imagination with respect to the two sub-beings in his seminal work, "A Bra Full of Expectations".)

Infinity and Universality

In an I-Thou-Two encounter, infinity and universality are made actual (rather than being merely concepts).

Infinity is the expectation of the male being, and universality describes the universal appeal (at least, to males) of the two sub-beings.

Composition and Content

Boober stressed that an Ich-Du relationship lacks any composition (e.g. structure) and communicates no content (e.g. information).

In contrast, an Ich-Du-Two relationship is all composition (e.g. complementarity and structure, sometimes supported by an uplifting bra) and communicates content (e.g. information in the form of the implication of maternity, sustenance, reassurance and comfort).

Experience as Event

Unlike an Ich-Du event, an Ich-Du-Two experience can be proven to happen as an event, e.g. it can be measured, in particular in bra size, scoping with hands or symbolically by emoticon, e.g.:

(((((0))))(((((0))))))

Boober concluded that it is even more intrinsically real and perceivable than an Ich-Du event.

Examples

A variety of examples are used to illustrate Ich-Du-Two relationships in daily life – a man and the two breasts of a woman, a man and the two legs of a woman, a man and the two eyes of a woman, a man and the two buttocks of a woman, a man and his own two balls (Professor Siskind questions whether the latter example is actually an example of "Ich-mich").

Description

Common English words used to describe the Ich-Du-Two relationship include fondle, grope and scratch.

Influences

It is believed that Boober's work inspired the name of the Hollywood firm of entertainment attorneys established by Russ Meyer's son, Manny Meyer, "C. A. Tit, Fondle, Grope and Run".

In 1983, the singer Bono from the Irish band, U2, holed up with David Bowie's copy of "Ich-Du2" in a hotel in Montreux while on tour and refused to come out of his suite until he had finished it.

U2 subsequently released a string of four albums, all with the letter "u" in the title.

The Unforgettable Fire (1984)

The Joshua Tree (1987)

Rattle and Hum (1988)

Achtung Baby (1991)

The song "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" (off "The Joshua Tree") was originally based on a lyric "I'm searching for an 'I' to match my 'Thou'".

Further Reading

Professor Murray Jay Siskind, *"A Bra Full of Expectations"*, 1989

Professor Murray Jay Siskind, Review of *"Gods of the Jungle Planet"*, 2012

<http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

References

1. Professor Murray Jay Siskind, *"Martin Boober's Ich-Du2: A Storm in a D-Cup"*, 2012

External Links

* Simona Halep. Breast size 34DD (21 pics)

<http://acidcow.com/pics/2386-best-bre...>

David Schaafsma says

I read this book twice in my life, the first time in 1976 with Carl Byker, who became an LA documentary filmmaker. That experience of reading and talking IN relationship about a book about the importance of relationships in spirituality, that it was the essence of spirituality, that was new and unforgettable to me.

I was profoundly influenced by existentialism at the time, and I had been "brought up" (as they used to say) "in the church" (and a Dutch Calvinist church) as well, but existentialist theology was something new to me, not a teleological or "heaven focused" or even Jesus-focused religion, with which I had been largely raised. The point was to live in the here and now, which was something I was learning from Zen Buddhism. THAT was being God-like, to BE your conception of God and not live for the future, but now. It seems simple--and Buber shows it is not, really, it is very difficult to do and be--but that change in a view of spirituality from what God is doing to what I am doing was profoundly important to me and shaped a lot of my life, even after I left the church.

Bill Kerwin says

I hesitate to write about this book, for, although it has influenced how I think about—and relate to--people, animals, the environment, works of art, prayer, God, you name it, there is much in it that I do not comprehend, and a few things that baffle me completely.

What I *am* sure about is that—before anything—this book is about the two essential ways in which we relate to the "other"--that is, whatever we perceive to exist that is apart from our self. We may either treat the other as a thing (describe it, classify it, analyze it, and manipulate it) or we may relate to it as a person (experiencing its presence, its uniqueness, its mystery, its irreducibility). These two ways are what Buber calls the two "primary words": "I-It" and "I-Thou."

When I first read Buber as an undergraduate, I must have skimmed over most of the hard parts, for I felt strongly he was championing the "I-Thou" over the "I-It." And this made sense, for it was part of the way we young people thought about life in the late '60's: reverence the earth, listen to the environment, treat animals as you would people, and experience the divine without presuming to conceptualize it. "I-It" was the world of businessmen, technocrats, and bishops; "I-Thou" was the world of artists, poets, and mystics. And I knew which side I was on.

Now I see Buber message as more nuanced, more profound. He is not presenting a dichotomy, or proposing a hierarchy of relations; he is describing the working out of a process, the nature of a dialogue. It is impossible for anyone to speak only one of the two primary words all the time. The mystic, for example, when he speaks the word "I-Thou" encounters God, but when later he describes the nature of this encounter to others, he must speak the word "I-It" if he is to be at all understood. "I-It" theological conceptions are barren without the "I-Thou" experience, but without the "I-It" analysis the mystical "I-Thou" is mere mute sensation, and degenerates quickly into solipsism. To be fully human is to be in habitual dialogue, part of a continuing dialectic with the world and the divine.

As I said before, there is much about this book I do not yet understand. Sometimes it seems like anthropological analysis, sometimes philosophy, sometimes theology, and at other times like a prayer or

perhaps a poem. But I have learned that, whenever I feel baffled, I should I sit at Buber's feet and say "Thou". Every time I do, I return to the world of things a little wiser.

Here is one of many passages of Buber which both mystify and enlighten me every time.

Man can do justice to the relation of God in which he has come to share only if he realizes God anew in the world according to his strength and to the measure of each day. In this lies the only assurance of continuity. The authentic assurance of duration consists in the fact that pure relation can be fulfilled in the growth and rise of beings into Thou, that the holy primary word makes itself heard in them all. Thus the time of human life is shaped into a fullness of reality, and even though human life neither can nor ought to overcome the connection with It, it is so penetrated with relation that relation wins in it a shining stream of constancy: the moments of supreme meeting are then not flashes in darkness but like the rising moon in a clear starlit night.

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Christopher says

Buber's postscript calls this a coherent vision that had coalesced over the course of years, but he's just struggling with the ineffable (but let me make the allowance that the German may be clearer than this particular Englishing).

I don't really know what he means by the "primary word I-Thou" and "primary word I-It." I imagine its like the opening of Genesis. Also could be understood as originary myth of human self-consciousness: the undifferentiated experience of primordial, prelingual being. What emerges when I? and Thou are distinct is the experience of pure relation, the intimacy of the gaze of the other without threat, where parental care allows the other to vacillate between other and self-extension. (The I?-Thou relation, presumably, is not unique to child-parent relating, but this is where it would first occur, I? think.) Finally, yet early, the I-Thou gives way to I-It, where a lingual self carves the world up into objects. Everything lapses into I-It, even the understanding of God. The gaze of the other may be threatening, seductive, or neutral, but always taken to be object, even when nominally recognized as subject. Buber's imperative is to articulate a return to the I-Thou, which for him would be direct experience of the divine. Presumably, both the I-It and the I-Thou relationships entail distinct ethics, though this is not Buber's concern. The I-Thou and the I-It are orientations, where the latter is a natural default and the I-Thou an elevated spiritual relating.

Buber's work makes a quilt work-Hinduism and Buddhism stitch with the Abrahamic triptych. It seems to me to owe a debt to Hegel (origin myth), Heidegger (phenomenology of being), Bergson (duration), etc. yet none of these are referenced.

I was baffled at times, felt things were quite clear and uniquely articulated at others. In the end, I didn't quite feel that hard fought, if evanescent, clarity that I want from reading philosophy. Putting this in the re-read with a high fever pile.

Fred Kohn says

If I could give this book six stars, I would.

After giving up on an impenetrable Buber book a couple years ago, I expected that I would never make the attempt to understand him again. However when I saw this book in the church library, I was encouraged by its thinness and the lengthy introduction by Walter Kaufmann. The writing is incredibly dense: Buber's sometimes sudden introducing of unexplained metaphors reminded me a lot of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, another book which I am having trouble reading (I am less than half way through after some years of trying!)

Many sections, especially in parts one and two, require careful rereading to get the full sense. It is well worth the effort- especially to understand Buber's theology presented in part three. But an interest in theology is not necessary to enjoy the book. The first two parts are not particularly theological at all, and even the third part is not overly theological.

Bill says

Buber says that the concept "I" can only exist in relation to "You".

"I" come into existence in the recognition of "You".

As "up" is a meaningless concept without "down", so "I" am unconceivable without "you".

Who "I" am is determined by how I relate to "You"

It all makes perfect sense to me without any recourse to mysticism at all.

Erik Graff says

I read this book for Howard Burkle's course, PHIL 215, "Existentialism" at Grinnell College during the first semester of 1972/73. It must have been one of our first readings as I read it while the weather was still warm under a tree in central campus. Unfortunately, I read it very quickly, having much else to get through, and it didn't make much of an impression on me beyond the surprisingly tender introduction by its translator, Walter Kaufmann. Indeed, I thought the point rather simple and its exposition unnecessarily long.

Shal J says

This is my absolute favourite book of all time and no matter how many times I read it - I get something else out of it :)

According to Buber, human beings may adopt two attitudes toward the world: I-Thou or I-It. I-Thou is a relation of subject-to-subject, while I-It is a relation of subject-to-object. In the I-Thou relationship, human beings are aware of each other as having a unity of being. In the I-Thou relationship, human beings do not perceive each other as consisting of specific, isolated qualities, but engage in a dialogue involving each other's whole being. In the I-It relationship, on the other hand, human beings perceive each other as consisting of specific, isolated qualities, and view themselves as part of a world which consists of things. I-Thou is a relationship of mutuality and reciprocity, while I-It is a relationship of separateness and detachment.

Buber explains that human beings may try to convert the subject-to-subject relation to a subject-to-object relation, or vice versa. However, the being of a subject is a unity which cannot be analyzed as an object. When a subject is analyzed as an object, the subject is no longer a subject, but becomes an object. When a subject is analyzed as an object, the subject is no longer a Thou, but becomes an It. The being which is analyzed as an object is the It in an I-It relation.

The subject-to-subject relation affirms each subject as having a unity of being. When a subject chooses, or is chosen by, the I-Thou relation, this act involves the subject's whole being. Thus, the I-Thou relation is an act of choosing, or being chosen, to become the subject of a subject-to-subject relation. The subject becomes a subject through the I-Thou relation, and the act of choosing this relation affirms the subject's whole being. Buber says that the I-Thou relation is a direct interpersonal relation which is not mediated by any intervening system of ideas. No objects of thought intervene between I and Thou.¹ I-Thou is a direct relation of subject-to-subject, which is not mediated by any other relation. Thus, I-Thou is not a means to some object or goal, but is an ultimate relation involving the whole being of each subject.

Martin Buber describes the subject to subject relation of love. But only love as he comprehends it, not as most people do. Most people misinterpret love. They believe that love is a feeling, when really it is more like a cosmic force. We do not have love, but live inside of it. Therefore, we are transformed by it. It is only love understood in this way that captures relation between two people. Love is a subject-to-subject relationship. Like the I-Thou relation, love is not a relation of subject to object, but rather a relation in which both members in the relationship are subjects and share the unity of being. This Love transcends the human to between the I and Thou. We stand in Love, it's not in a person, a person who stands in love is open to encounter a person in their uniqueness with their entire being, only when you do this it brings you to a place that you being effective to them. Only in love can we really be open and really care, it brings us to a level where we can be helpful to the universe and to others. Every you becomes an it in our world.

When we love someone we see that person as wholly unique. The person is purely present, and not separated from us by anything. This momentary encounter between human beings is very important because it leads us to yearn for God, the eternal you. So long as we have been in encounter with someone and know that we have the potential to do so again at any moment, we can say that we love that person. If, on the other hand, we have never encountered someone then we do not really love that person.

My interpretation of Buber is that to love someone, it is to feel a responsibility for that person, to want to do everything one can to help that person. Unlike feelings, which can be greater or lesser, all love is equal. This brings up the question, Is hatred not also a relation that can obtain between people? Buber says it is not.

Relation, by its very definition, can only be directed toward a whole being. But hatred, by its very nature, cannot be directed toward a whole being. We cannot hate a whole person, only a part of a person.

Though the notion of encounter is vague and difficult to grasp fully, thinking about encounter as the more familiar experience of being in love can be extremely enlightening. When we are in love our entire perception of the world becomes colored by the beloved, and we view everything in relation to the beloved. Thinking about encounter as love also helps us understand why Buber believes that encounter is so terrifying. When you truly allow yourself to love someone you become incredibly vulnerable. First of all, you suffer the risk of rejection and loss. In addition, if you love in the way that Buber requires, so that the pain and happiness of the beloved are even more important to you than your own, then you are taking on an even graver risk. Suddenly, you are multiplying your potential for grief. The recognition of love as relation between people also brings along some new uncertainties.

For instance, it raises the problem of unreciprocated love. Relation must be mutual, because it is reciprocal and involves shared alteration. It seems strange to claim that you cannot love someone if they do not return your love, but Buber makes the point that you cannot dwell in the cosmic force unless the beloved dwells in the force with you. He seems to clearly believe that entirely unrequited love cannot be love at all.

According to Buber, God is the eternal Thou. God is the Thou who sustains the I-Thou relation eternally. In the I-Thou relation between the individual and God, there is a unity of being in which the individual can always find God. In the I-Thou relation, there is no barrier of other relations which separate the individual

from God, and thus the individual can speak directly to God.

The eternal Thou is not an object of experience, and is not an object of thought. The eternal Thou is not something which can be investigated or examined. The eternal Thou is not a knowable object. However, the eternal Thou can be known as the absolute Person who gives unity to all being.

Buber also explains that the I-Thou relation may have either potential being or actual being. When the I-It relation becomes an I-Thou relation, the potential being of the I-Thou relation becomes the actual being of the I-Thou relation. However, the I-Thou relation between the individual and God does not become, or evolve from, an I-It relation, because God, as the eternal Thou, is eternally present as actual Being.

Buber contends that the I-Thou relation between the individual and God is a universal relation which is the foundation for all other relations. If the individual has a real I-Thou relation with God, then the individual must have a real I-Thou relation with the world. If the individual has a real I-Thou relation with God, then the individual's actions in the world must be guided by that I-Thou relation. Thus, the philosophy of personal dialogue may be an instructive method of ethical inquiry and of defining the nature of personal responsibility.

In exploring Martin Buber's "I and Thou" relationship, I found it to be a theory to incorporate an experience of which he prepares the reader to take that first leap of faith, or courage, to believe that it might be worth a try. In his I and Thou, Buber reveals the valued moments of a reunion with the other, he plows through our materialistic perception of "It" the world. It is only in Buber's self-realization that the idea of the absolute transforms into an idea of the divine, which eventually assumes the face of God.

This first leap of faith in Buber's philosophy, is not very big. It is essentially the one step one needs to take to enter dialogue with an "other" un-conditioned, immediate. The mystery, the un-explain-ability of that moment works for Buber and plays into his following explanation that in these immediate moments we meet the absolute, which - for Buber - becomes God. Buber's exposure and exposé of the moment of dialogue is genuine. His explanation of the situation of dialogue is his reading of the Jewish tradition and understanding of God, his interpretation of the Jewish narrative as one big story of dialogue, and man choosing to relate to God. In so far as leading a life religiously is leading it in dialogue where ethics and the encounter with God fall together, and "where the moral Ought is located", those who choose not to give back the treasure of relating to others in an immediate, un-conditioned manner, lead a religious, or for the Jewish matter, Jewish life. The Jew, in Buber's reading, is the quintessential man. His narrative is the quintessential reference frame for dialogue. While the moment of I and Thou reaches out to all people, "black men and white men, Jews and gentiles, Catholics and Protestants", its ultimate explanation reveals it as an advertisement of Buber's "genuine Jewish religiosity". And if accepting the explanation makes sense, then, all of a sudden - says Buber - God says hello.

I would definitely say that this theory is humanistic. This theory is associated with the understanding of people. This theory is looking at human interaction between individuals and the rituals our culture creates (I-It). This theory also tries to clarify values by evaluating the importance of dialogue vs. monologue, and why we think one form is more effective than the other. This theory definitely has a community of agreement of many scholars. On the other hand, other scholars question, but very few outright disagree. I also think that there is an aesthetic appeal, but only for some people. I and Thou in itself is an art, but only perhaps if you're coming from a philosophical background. This theory also applies to the reform of society. Buber does not approve of the monologue language, and instead wants people to have more dialogue in order to create I-Thou relationships. This theory is not very scientific because it does not predict future events, there is no real explanation of data, and I think it is not relatively simple because we don't know how, or don't want, to make it simple. However, I do feel that this theory (both dialogue and I-Thou) contains practical utility, but only if we allow it. I suppose the main reason why I would argue that this theory is humanistic is because I do not feel it is easy to put intimacy in a scientific standard. Who can test intimacy? People can predict and explain issues until they are blue in the face, but that does not mean any one can truly define what is important for all individuals. What may never be intimate for some may always be intimate for another.

To end, I want to say that although I have mentioned the I-Thou relationship and expanded on this, in reality,

without the Theory of Dialogue, the I-Thou would not exist. I believe that we are all capable of having the I-Thou relationship in every relationship of our lives, but it can be a huge challenge because of socialization. Yet, when this challenge is overcome, that is when we have intimacy with anybody, according to Buber. Since most people want the I-Thou relationship in their lives, one would think that we would make more of an effort to have dialogue instead of monologue. One would also think that once we knew that the personal relationship we were in was not fulfilling a "thou" concept, we would get out A.S.A.P.. I think we are easily swayed, and easily confused by ourselves and society's standards and trends. I also think that it does not have to be this way: that is what choice is for. All in all, I respect Buber's theories and hope to live up to them the best way that I can.

The concept of dialogue encourages a new understanding of people that is largely subjective. Meaning is created by the participants engaged in interaction, which may leave an outsider with a blurred view but it allows for focus on "real" experience and interaction. Dialogue helps us to understand how a community is developed, repaired, and maintained, which is closely related to Carey's ritual model of communication. Dialogue helps us to understand that people relate to each other in one of two ways: I-thou, the means to dialogue, or I-it, the means to monologue or self-centered communication.

This theory is clear in its value for a strong community. A sense of support, acceptance, and appreciation of differences allows for a stronger sense of togetherness. Obviously, in order to reach that sense of community, people must place high value on other people's viewpoints. Walking the narrow ridge, so to speak, removes the blinders from an individual's eyes so that he/she may be able to look, if only for a moment, at the world through a different set of lenses. Buber's theory also has aesthetic appeal. His description of dialogue reads more like a journey, or a path that one follows to reach a certain destination.

This theory clearly attempts a reform of society. Its main function serves as awareness. Dialogue encourages an avoidance of polarized communication, something that tears a community apart rather than builds it up. Polarized communication is a key factor in retarding the development of community, much more so than factors like power inequity. Since dialogue is not a technique and cannot be created merely by displaying the necessary qualities, it serves as more of a tool for awareness. Many times awareness is half the battle. This theory is important in that it promotes togetherness among human societies through respect and open-mindedness. One of the goals of this theory is to cease maximizing one's own opinion while minimizing another's opinion. Dialogue is communication that expands individual viewpoints and develops a sense of "working" together in order to reach a new and wider understanding.

On the other hand, Buber's Dialogue theory may not sit so well with those who hold a scientific perspective (Griffin, 1997). Overall, the explanation of data is clear. The theory does explain the purpose of maintaining dialogue (creating community), but it is not objective in that only the participants "really" know if they have achieved dialogue. An observer has no clear idea of whether or not participants actually established a "connection." Buber's theory is not able to predict future outcomes or events. Knowing how, when, and where dialogue is created is very uncertain. Outcomes are only known and experienced by participants, which makes the theory very unclear as to how we can really know when dialogue will or has occurred, unless some phenomenal social change takes place as evidence of dialogue.

This theory also lacks simplicity, which is a minus according to the scientific perspective. If one is searching for a simple answer for how people create community, s/he will not find it here. Dialogue is complex and involves many factors. Even if all of the qualities that promote dialogue are present, it is still not guaranteed to happen. Dialogue is difficult to achieve because "once one has learnt, like modern man, to become greatly preoccupied with one's own feelings, even despair over their unreality will not easily open one's eyes; after all, such despair is also a feeling" (Kaufmann, p. 94, 1970).

On Buber's behalf, creating a simple theory for a complex problem that involves complex subjects (people) is not always possible. Obviously, dialogue cannot be tested. There are way too many overlapping possibilities for when dialogue may or may not occur. Again, we cannot always be sure that what appears to be dialogue is necessarily truthful. Although the theory is interesting and strives to make a change in society, it is not particularly useful. It is useful in a sense that people will be more aware of what it takes to create

community or an atmosphere of support, but no one can just use it to do these things. Remember, dialogue cannot be planned or willed; it will just happen.

Personally, I like this theory because it promotes unity amongst people. Dialogue shows us that there can be disagreements about certain issues and still have a true community. I don't think that we have much of that today. Disagreements tend to separate rather than integrate. Dialogue may not be useful in that we are not able to create it, but the theory is useful in providing awareness of what it takes to build the groundwork for possible dialogue. Overall, dialogue will happen with or without the theory and only those that believe in valuing others will appreciate it.

Emma says

The school year 1982-1983 brought me the delightful discovery of philosophy, and the reading of *I And Though* was a total revelation to me; it may even have been the unconscious threshold that brought me to conversion. I remember having copied back then dozens and dozens of pages of that book, and I probably quoted it more than once in the 4 hour long essay I had to write the day of the final exam – lucky me, the national theme for the philosophy exam that year was LANGUAGE !

I still enjoy so much this book, some thirty years later; on a dual basis of philosophy and theology, or spirituality should I say, it's a deep reflection on the nature of being, of 'being in communion', to use the title of another book I'm currently reading.

I don't think I have ever read anything as profound on the nature of relationship; on how relations make us human indeed, most especially when our relating to others is inspired and modeled on our relating to the Other, or rather on His relating to us; and on how materialism, that is, treating everything and everyone as simple matter, relegates us to a subhuman status. How relevant this book is today!

EXCERPTS:

“in every You we address the eternal You.”

“The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one's whole being... I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. All actual life is encounter.”

“Freedom and fate embrace each other to form meaning; and given meaning, fate -with its eyes, hitherto severe, suddenly full of light- looks like grace itself.” p. 102

“Egos appear by setting themselves apart from other egos. Persons appear by entering into relation to other persons.” p. 112

“When a man steps before the Countenance, the world becomes wholly presence to him for the first time in the fullness of the presence, illuminated by eternity, and he can say You in one word to the being of all beings.”

“What is it that is eternal: the primal phenomenon, present in the here and now, of what we call revelation? It

is man's emerging from the moment of the supreme encounter, being no longer the same as he was when entering into it." p. 157

"The cult gradually becomes a substitute, as the personal prayer is no longer supported but rather pushed aside by communal prayer; and as the essential deed simply does not permit any rules, it is supplanted by devotions that follow rules." p. 162.

Original review posted here:

<http://wordsandpeace.wordpress.com/20...>

Emma @ Words And Peace

Anthony says

from an analysis of personal pronouns and the modes of relation that spring from them, buber develops an intricate philosophy of religion and human existence. like zukofsky with his "a" and "the", buber with his "ich" "du" and "es" shows us that the little words are the big words, and are literally inexhaustible.

David says

As Walter Kaufmann says in his introduction, Buber's "I and Thou" stands somewhere between the literary and philosophical traditions. This makes the book very hard to summarize and its impact difficult to convey. Suffice it to say, this is 100 pages of honest, resonant writing from a man who believed the most important thing in the world was the relationship between two individuals. It turned an agnostic undergraduate into a believer. A book to return to again and again.

Jake says

We live our lives in a duality. This duality is summed up in two word pairs; I-It and I-Thou. The I-It perspective is when we see things or other people (I-He/She) or God as objects to be utilized, observed, manipulated, pitied, begrudged, etc... This is living in the past or for the future. The higher plane of consciousness is the I-Thou mode in which there is a relationship or communication sublimely in the present. This can be experienced with nature, other people, infinity, God, etc... It is an experience of losing oneself with the object which becomes part of the I, like when you get lost in a conversation or book or a hike and time and material comfort become meaningless until you snap back into I-It mode and remember to eat or piss or whatever. You must experience I-It to survive, but you can't live authentically without experiencing I-Thou as often as possible. The annihilation of the ego/I-It/self reveals the true I-Thou/self, or God. Oh, and as soon as you talk about the I-Thou, you lose it and revert to I-It, so use precaution!. You cannot will yourself into I-Thou. It requires a turning or will and grace.

David Withun says

This is an amazing book with abundant insight into what it means to be human. I recommend this book for

everyone; it is a must-read if you are or desire to be a human being. I especially recommend this edition as Walter Kaufmann's provides an excellent introduction to Martin Buber's work. If you read only one book in your life, read this book -- and then read it again and again.
