

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970.

Martin Buber (1878-1965) was an Austrian-born Jewish philosopher. Buber's family was Orthodox, but Buber left Orthodoxy in a crisis caused by reading Kant and Nietzsche. Buber collaborated with early Zionists, and worked as editor of *Die Welt*, a Zionist political paper. Buber later left Zionist work, favoring Hebrew humanism over a political Jewish state. Buber wrote *I and Thou* in 1923. When Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, Buber abandoned his teaching position at Frankfurt am Main and fled to Palestine. Buber rekindled interest in Hasidism, an eighteenth and nineteenth Jewish mystical movement. Buber taught anthropology and sociology at Hebrew University in Jerusalem through the 1940s. Buber died in Jerusalem.

[*I and You: A Prologue*, by Walter Kaufmann. I have not epitomized Walter Kaufmann's Prologue, which is an elaborate introduction to *I and Thou*. Kaufmann's *Prologue* is itself a valuable contribution in personalist philosophy.]

I. First Part. [I-You and I-It]

Man takes two attitudes toward the world: I-You and I-It. He and She are implicit in It. The I in the two attitudes differs.

Buber calls these two basic attitudes "words." Each word establishes a way for a person to exist in the world. The words are spoken from deep within a person. I-You involves the entire person. I-It never does. I never exists alone. In speaking either word, the You or the It is present. Perceptions, feelings, imagining, desire, sensations, thoughts, even thoughts about inwardness and mystery: there is more to life than these things. They are the stuff of It-ness. Life in It-mode consists in objects and activities related to objects. The word You differs. You has no object. When one says You, one enters relationship. In experience, one skitters over the surface of matters. One fears death, and so seeks control over uncertainty by knowledge. All is information and It-ness. In I-It, one fails to participate. The world remains alone, unchanged. One participates when one enters relationship.

Relationship arises: 1) in nature, where relation remains vibrant but below language, 2) among men, where relation finds language, and 3) with spiritual beings, where relation exceeds language but finds words unutterable. Ultimately, all Yous reveal the divine You. Consider a tree. One can measure, observe, and categorize it. It can be dissected or beheld as an instance of eternal laws. Or I can relate to the tree. Its uniqueness can seize me. All the tree's It-ness remains unchanged. Relationship does not add or subtract from facts. Relation is something else—encountering the tree's essence. Encountering a You fills one up. There is nothing else during reciprocal relations. When we analyze, we cease to relate. We sunder a unity into its constituent parts, and it ceases to be a You. In relationship, we do not experience. You-ness nurtures real life.

Art emerges from You-encounters. The You demands the artist's creativity, and the work comes into being. The relation sacrifices its free form for a specific one; failure can injure the artist. The art acts back upon artist. Receptive persons may also be acted upon by an artwork.

You-encounters generate no experiences or knowledge. They cannot be sought. Relations arise spontaneously, engaging the whole person. You generates I; I says You. Everything real is relation. Nothing mediates relation. One cannot enter relation with a purpose. Purposes dissolve relation. The only real dichotomy in the universe is between You and It. Encounters happen in the present. For It-ness, there is no present, only a past. Objects, by the time they are recognized, are receding into history. Only relationship is present; it meets us and waits for us.

People fixated on ideas imagine themselves shrugging off the dirty clothes of everyday It-ness. They all, apparently, like to talk about doing so. These ideas are vices. You is not an idea. Acts express You-ness in artistic creations, in humans relations, and in the life lived by creatures. Feelings accompany human love, but are not love. Love takes responsibility for the You. Love is the world in its I-You-ness. Reciprocally, I affects You and You, I. The dichotomies of student-teacher, good-evil, human-animal dissolve. This reciprocity is Universal.

Some criticize that this truth ignores hatred. Hatred is blind and partial. Still, hatred is closer to You than to It.

Sadly, humans cannot sustain You-ness. All Yous necessarily become Its, as we tire, collapse into purposefulness, or persist in mixed realities. Yous become tainted by It-ness. You-ness is a contemplative state; those never last a long time. So, Yous oscillate in and out of You-ness and It-ness. But as an object, one can capture only a fragment of You.

Buber speculates that the vast variety of vocabulary evolves out of concepts more aboriginal, ones immersed in the I-You relation. Primitive peoples experience the relational base of existence, and express that in their mystical spirituality. The concepts of *mana*, *dynamis*, or *charis* capture such ancient beginnings. From the primitive encounter with the other emerges the first glimmer of I. Buber speculates that the I of I-It-ness emerges by stages from the primal I-You relationship the primitive person enjoys with his world. Spirit arises from nature, and yet enfolds nature from outside time. The primitive state was relationally pristine, if not a paradise. Its violence and misery did not quench its relational essence. Still, primitive man is only a shadow of primal man.

Children present a more expansive metaphor for I-You. Before birth, life flows directly from mother to child and back. Every human lies like a fetus in the womb of the great mother, which is the primal world untainted by objectification. When we sleep we again enter this womb. Wakefulness is still mostly sleep, livened by irruptions of encounter. Encounter comes first. Slowly, from relationship, the I and the You recognize themselves. But relation comes first. This urge of creation is cosmic. As it develops, encounter seeks reciprocity. As reciprocity grows, one recognizes slowly that the I develops, and finally, the I sees itself and reaches consciousness. Eventually, the I withdraws from encounter, and experiences Its. These reduced Yous occupy consciousness, and one's feeling for the world diminishes.

Organization is a function of It-ness. Yous cannot be coordinated. Beneath human order lies the world's order, different and yet related. The world's order frees perception from man's ordering of things. It disputes human insight.

Man confronts the world as objects or others. As Its, one never really knows the other, and he remains alien. As Yous, one meets the other and the Other who is present in the other. These I-You encounters do not organize themselves into order. They are fleeting signposts of the deeper world. In I-You, borders melt. Things trail away into one another, permeating. Time blurs and loses its order and predictability. You are present, and only present. Past and future vanish in encounter moments. You are alone with the You. The encounter is indescribable; it cannot be shared in ideas. Encounters hint at the divine. Its have dimensions. Yous lack them. Yous become Its as relation tails away. Its become Yous as encounter blossoms. People must avoid extending encounter. It is dangerous to persist in relation past its moment. We dwell in It-ness enlivened with hints of eternity. But to live wholly without the You is inhuman.

II. Second Part. [Critique of It]

Humans have, over the millennia, magnified the role of It. It-ness emphasizes experience and use. Both have increased. Some call this spiritual progress, which Buber confutes. Increasing powers with respect to It-ness decrease one's ability to relate. Only relating is spiritual. Spirit is the human response to You. It has no content. Spirit emerges from mystery. Spirit is word. Spirit lies between the poles of I-You. When one relates to a You, one is in spirit. The more intense the spirituality, the more one wants to notice. And responding turns the You toward It-ness. This sad devolution is man's excellence. Man relates, and ideas, words, and acts spill forth. The devolution is not permanent. Its re-ignite and become present Yous. Relating inverts knowledge, art, and teaching. One encounters the You, and its devolution becomes knowledge. One creates what one has encountered. One teaches, knowing the You stands ever ready to relate. This enlivens dead facts and techniques.

Increasing powers of use and experience impair the powers of relating. Institutions are creatures of It. They exist as means for purposes. Feelings are I objectified. One inspects one's state and reports. In feelings, one recovers from institutional life. Neither institutions nor feelings are relating. Both drive out persons and communities. Public life does not emerge from institutions, and feelings do not yield personal life. Ours is an age suffering a dearth of public and personal life. Some think feelings may loosen up institutional life. But one cannot arbitrarily

throw some people together and expect them to become a community. Expressing feelings, while necessary, is not sufficient. Communities arise among people who share relationship with a living, reciprocal You, and have such living, reciprocal relations with one another. When one reveals the You to another, feelings of love attend. It is so in the best marriages. Having good institutions and expressing true feelings do not create community. Community arises where the You is central. The I-It relationship is not evil. It is thin. When one allows It-ness to dominate, wan institutions and human feelings cannot redeem.

Some object that the scope of modern economy and institutions cannot rely on relation as a base. They believe that You-ness, since it is non-quantifiable, cannot serve as more than inspiring mythology. Modern culture erodes meaningful relationships. Buber responds that people are not in charge of the economy. We all accommodate ourselves to it, not it to our needs. There are no substitutes for the eternal You in human community. In relating, human need for power and profit find purpose. Where relating has been stunted, such needs grow evil. One cannot fix this circumstance by encouraging relating at the edges. The divine You must be at the center of human community. Community is exactly as vital as is the You in its members. Those who relate live a truth above reason, but use reason to support life. You-ness is not another fragment of life, like the economy or politics. You-ness guides and contains all such fragments. The institutions of today which claim the name of spirituality offer flabby mirages.

Causality rules It-ness. But You-ness has no such constraints. You are free. Only those who know this can make decisions. A decider drags the fire of You-ness into the world. True evil is not choosing wrongly. Evil is not choosing. Men come and go from the threshold of You. This I-You, then I-It oscillation is the substance of meaningful life. Fate drags You-ness into It-ness. Fate happens when relating humans act. Those who are You-permeated bring You-ness to all, however dim the many may be. In sick cultures, It-ness swamps man. Causality seems a heartless master speaking doom. In great cultures, first generations bring You-ness to life; subsequent generations follow and contribute their own encounters. In lifeless cultures, necessity hangs around necks and the world becomes dead weight to be borne miserably. Our present culture is sicker than any before it. But You-ness waxes where the dangers of It-ness grow. Our culture glamorizes doom. Dooms come in many flavors: the doom of karma, or doom to a medley of fundamental physical forces, or doom governed by a Darwinian struggle of all against all, or doom of psychological determinism in which man is the sum of his urges, or the Hegelian doom of inexorable historical dialectics. In each, man suffers an inescapable yoke. Men are slaves, though some are so foolish as to rebel. All teach an entropic demise. In accepting these stories, men capitulate to It-ness. You-encounters enliven life and create return. Return restores dying fixities, and scatters the game's pieces. Doom exists only to the extent we credit it. A return to encounter breaks cycles. Entropy has no application to the word You. One frees himself by ceasing to believe in doom. We must call It-ness what it is. How do we find the ability to name It-ness? In truth, chance and doom are neighbors who refuse to talk; we can merely point out their discomfort with one another. In You-ness, freedom leads fate to its conclusions. In It-ness, one throws up his hands at the fickleness of it all. To name doom, one abandons his own will for that of the great will of encounter. He listens to the relation, making its depth real in his spirit and acts, in his life and death. It-life concerns using. It-ness is entangled in unreality and fragmentation. If an It-dominated man lets himself experience It-ness, the consequent despair can become a first step in return. A Brahmanist myth finds demons offering sacrifices by putting the boon in their own mouths. The gods put the boon in one another's mouths, and received as a reward the primal spirit.

Some ask how It-man is diminished, since he possesses self-consciousness. Buber answers that the I of I-You differs from the I of I-It. The It-man is an differentiated ego that uses and experiences. The You-man is a person relating to another. It-ness is a lifetime of dying. You-ness touches another, and is touched by the eternal. Real life is participating. Fragmented It-life appropriates fragments; it is not actual. You-life flows through another; it is actual to the extent of the flow. This You-subjectivity grows. That is maturation. You-life is being with. Ego is being different from another. The It-man fashions a flattering image of himself that he lets deceive him more and more. Ultimately, all men lie along a continuum of You-It-ness. All men are twofold. None is wholly person, none wholly ego. When a man says "I," he may mean different words. The meaning behind the word "I" is what truly differentiates men. The ego says

I and it means a severed I alone. Socrates speaks a conversational I; he reaches out and is never sundered from others. Goethe's I converses with nature. Jesus' I embrace constant relation to his Father. How different is the I of Napoleon! He was addressed as You; he answered It. For demons, nobody is a You. Men like Napoleon treat even themselves as Its. They self-contradict. Their I, lacking a You, turns inward and blossoms there, where there is no room. The I of such men gets increasingly lost. People sometimes get glimpses that they are sundered from what matters most. They get hints that the path of return, of finding oneself, leads through sacrifice; they ignore this counsel. They wonder how to restore bonds to loved ones. Their minds create a room on which are projected two universes. On one wall, all emerges from stars and earth and evolution and history. On the other wall, all emerges from a single undifferentiated thread. So, the alienated man looks at one wall or the other, and soothes himself. In either, he fails to relate. The first wall stuffs him full of the world. The other wall portrays the world engulfing him. When alienated man steps back and sees both walls simultaneously, then that brings horror.

III. Third Part. [The Depth of You]

Encounter leads, ultimately, to the Eternal You. In every encounter, the eternal lies implicit. Our I-You can never be perfected. Only the Eternal You can never become an It. Our theologies seek to make the divine an It. Still, our names for gods remain sacred because they speak not of god but to him. Our divine names are our most freighted language, but the most necessary. In our gods' names, we speak unequivocal You-ness. That You includes all other Yous. Even atheists, when they address a You, speak to God.

One knows only the I-side of I-You. The eternal You comes to us unbidden. One can only wait. Here, passivity collapses into activity; they are the same. One can only steadfastly wait. One cannot dice this encounter up, and examine its pieces. It is supra-rational, but not irrational. One cannot prescribe how to reach encounter. It is just a primally simple state. All is present, without conceptualization. What one sacrifices in encounter is clingy reliance on things. One trades their reliability and solidity for the ephemeral wonder of encounter. One need not deny himself to find God. One sees that all things reside in the encounter with the divine You. God is indeed "wholly other" and a *mysterium tremendum*. God also stands closer to me than my I, and he is also so commonplace as to be obvious.

God is to be found everywhere. One need not seek solitude to encounter the living God. One finds God without looking for the divine. One encounters God. Dependence is not essential. No feeling is essential. Encounter is essential. One feels dependence in encountering the divine You. One also feels freed and creative. Feelings transpire in matched pairs of opposites. All feelings accompany the divine encounter. We are created and creating. With prayer and sacrifice, we act back upon God. We need him; he needs us. We are dependent; so, too, apparently is the divine. To reduce either pole of I-You destroys the relationship. One does no better, theologically, to assert that man and god are only mirages, that in fact if one penetrates sufficiently into the human or divine psyche, one finds unity. So, one gets to truth neither by emphasizing dependence nor by emphasizing immersive unity. Buber criticizes Christian theologians who read into Johannine Christology immersion thoughts. Man finds unity in himself when all distractions are shunted. And man can, for moments, enter into mystical bliss. That "unity" soon collapses again into mundane existence. Some mistake relating for unity. In sexual union, one's sense of self may seem to collapse into the union. Or reverie in nature may hint of union. But these perceptions misinterpret. One revels, in these state, not in union, but in relation. Buber criticizes Brahmanist unity talk, arguing its own texts deny unity of all and one. In reality, our identity is uncompromised. We stand, if fortunate, relating to Yous, and the eternal You. Buber distinguishes Buddha's thought from immersion theology. Buddha urges people to meet the undivided reality in its undivided state, which is salvific. His is not a doctrine, but a way of life. But Buber goes only so far with Buddha. The end is not to escape suffering by release from the karmic wheel of reincarnation, but rather to live in relation. Buddha seems to want us to learn never to say You. Immersion theology turns man upon himself, as though spirit derives from mankind. This is false. Spirit emerges between a man and another. Immersion deludes. All reality is reciprocal. The world neither resides in me, nor originates with me. It dwells between I and You; each pole retains its appropriate features. These ideas are important. If one does not believe in relation, one will neglect or miss it. There is no worldly or other-worldly life that

separate one from God. I-It-ness is necessary, and engaging it truthfully leads one to I-You. God relates to the universe. God relates to me, but is not me. Dialogue leads, in the end, to God.

There are mysteries to be lived. Human life dwells in the shadow of irresolvable antinomies. Free will and necessity are antinomies that cannot be explained away. Both must be simultaneously lived. Animals are in a state of spiritual becoming, stammering toward language. We can enter You-ness with animals. With minerals and other inanimate objects, we may enter You-ness, but its directness proceeds mainly from the human side of the equation. Still, every You alternates between It-ness and relation. Only God remains always a You. We fluctuate in and out of connection with the divine. Space-time is the realm of it. You has neither time nor space, but rather grows from the Ultimate You outside both time and space. You-ness leavens barren space-time. When humans return to the divine, relation permeates the It-world. The mystery of apparent duality resolves in divine unity.

Man has three worlds: with nature, with men, and with the divine. Every You encounter addresses the eternal You. We can strip nature, man, and ideas from their divine context. But they become clouded. We find our home in nature when in it we sacrifice for the divine. We find meaning in love when we see reflected in family a holy presence. And we know the universe rightly only when its secrets reveal the mysteries of divine workings. Each can be doors to the divine. Among these spheres, human relations stand out. Language gives form to relation. Human relations are a metaphor for the divine encounter. Solitude has faces: first, some forsake things to clear space for relation, but others cut themselves off to be possessed by things (covetousness); second, one can seek solitude to prepare for relation, or one can be alone to talk only with oneself (mere spirituality). We meet God only when we stop talking.

Scheler argues that all men worship god, but some replace the divine with lesser values (art, learning, etc.). If one puts these idols in perspective, then the man again begins to worship god. Buber disagrees. When returning to god, one changes not only the object of one's attention, but also the kind of movement. The I-It relation changes a person when I-You falls away. Love becomes lust. Wealth becomes mere hoarding. One forgets how to say You to god.

There are religious men incapable of relation to god. Human community is not mere aggregation of many individuals. Community says You to others. One may speak to god as an It. This man, not the honest atheist, is godless. Another view of the religious man imagines him to have transcended ethics and involvement with the world. God and the world are not divided. Action is required of the You-saying person. It is a natural and organic part of relational life.

Encounter with the divine changes a man. Buber styles the relation as "actual contemplation of the actual." This has three aspects: 1) reciprocity that makes life meaningful, 2) warrant that all life is meaningful, and 3) meaningful life is our life, not some other life. None of this is propositional knowledge. It is a presence that wants to burst into the world through a person. Its expression is unique in every person. The divine remains mysterious; we have encountered, not known, eternity. This constitutes revelation. Of necessity, man reduces god to an It, and then finds his way back to You. This is the human path.

God is no object. An object of faith is not relationship. It is the It we worship between encounter events. This It serves our thirst for continuity. God is not a cult object. The cult is an It-bridge between encounters. In fact, the only appropriate instantiation of the divine encounter is human action in lived lives. Real communities exist to the extent that each member has a relation to the divine You at the community's center. The god-encounter drives man to enact its meaning in the world. Some would focus on god rather than the world, thinking them different things. Such bending back turns god into an It. One who fulfills his mission in the world has god before him. One encounters the You and goes out into the world, returns, encounters and goes again. Revelations that stand at the head of religions are no different than the revelation people experience every day. Historically, all times are not equivalent. Sometimes relation bursts forth and makes "a new form of God in the world." Theophanies mix human and divine perspectives. We see not god, but our world in god, giving god a new aspect. Prayer is relation. When prayer degenerates, men style their god-encounter a psychological moment or they write theology, explaining the event. When encounter is stripped from religion, it collapses. God departs. The word rots. Still, we oscillate between You and It. Our departures from the eternal You grow broader. Our returns to god also grow deeper. Return is, as seen by god, redemption.

Afterword (October 1957 in Jerusalem)

Buber answers some questions and concerns that arose from his book, *I and Thou*. His central concern was to stress the connection between relating to god in relating to men.

First, how does I-You work in relation to nature. It does not respond. Buber answers that animals, plants, and rocks stand at the pre-threshold of relating. We bring the You to them.

Second, how do I-You relations with spirits happen? Those that have not yet occurred are indescribable; they linger in the realm of the barely-perceived. Those events that are already in the world are like hearing a long-dead master's teaching. Hear him. Say I-You to him. One may encounter the dead. When one encounters, one acts out that encounter in the world. So, spirit dwells in words and works, and other spirit waits to become words and works. Nothing is unusual about this. It is humans encountering and responding.

Third, what of relations with men? Are they not always something less than encounter? Buber answers the perfect mutuality does not happen. Some relations are necessarily unbalanced: student-teacher, therapist-patient, pastor-congregation. Wherever one partner acts on the other with a purpose, full mutuality never emerges.

Fourth, how can one have an exclusive I-You relationship with god and yet include human I-Yous in that life? Buber answers that he calls god a person as a metaphor. We are all persons, and god is personlike. God is also spirit-like and nature-like. So, Buber argues that unlike our knowledge of other persons, god is absolute person. Encountering the divine is unlike encountering other Yous. The divine includes all other Yous. So we have paradox. God is a person unlike other persons. Divine encounter cannot be proved, just as divine existence cannot be demonstrated.