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EVANGELICKÁ TEOLOGICKÁ FAKULTA

THE NOTION OF *YHVH* IN THE THOUGHT OF MARTIN BUBER

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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Pojetí YHVH v Myšlení Martina Bubera

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Pavel Šuba

Prague, 20 April 2008

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Pojetí YHVH v Myšlení Martina Bubera

SUMMARY: This thesis concerns Buber´s concept of YHVH. According to Buber, immediate, dialogical relation with YHVH is best exemplified by the prophets in contrast to the offical cult. Buber is an original and text-orientated Biblical interpreter. The author of this thesis is of the impression that Buber is perhaps too selective in his use of source material in his argumentation. This selectivity can lead to the formation of a somewhat subjective picture of historic Judaism, Christianity and Hasidism. Buber's *I-Thou* and dialogical philosophy can be seen as a reaction to the scientific world-view at the beginning of the 20th century. Connected with this is his intended anti-systematic approach, echoed in the anti-institutionalism and anti-legalism of his Biblical theology. Buber also applied it to fields such as education and psychotherapy. Nevertheless, although Buber presents himself as an anti-systematic thinker, the author finds that knowledge of Buber's major works and intellectual problems current in Buber's time reveal broad concepts that repeat themselves in various lines of his thought. These form an implicit system of thought no less demanding than those of his intellectual peers.

Key words: YHVH, Prophetic Faith, Anti-Institutional, Anti-Legalism, Judaism, Christianity, Theodicy, *I-Thou* / *I-It* Primaries, Existentialism, Dialogue, Immediate Relation, Education, Psychotherapy

ANOTACE: Tato práce pojednává o Buberově pojetí YHVH. Podle Bubera je bezprostřední dialogický vztah s YHVHem nejlépe ilustrován proroky v protikladu s oficiálním kultem a kněži, kteří by dali přednost pohodlnému a neměnnému Bohu. Buber je originální a na text zaměřený biblický vykladač. Autor se domnívá, že Buber je někdy příliš selektivní ve způsobu, jak používá prameny v dokládání svých názorů, což může vést k utvoření poněkud subjektiního obrazu dějinného judaismu, křesťanství a chasidismu. Buberovo *Já-Ty* a dialogická filozofie mohou být chápány jako reakce vůči vědeckému světonázoru na začátku 20tého stol. S tím je spojen jeho záměrný proti-systematický postup, který se ozývá v proti-institučním, proti-legalististickém postupu v jeho biblické teologii, a posléze je aplikován v oborech jako je vzdělávání a psychoterapie. Nicméně ačkoli Buber se prezentuje jako anti-systematický, autor má názor, že znalost hlavních spisů Bubera a intelektuálních problémů Buberova období umožňují identifikovat obecné pojmy, které se opakují v různých podobách Buberova myšlení. Ty vytvářejí implicitní systém myšlení neméně náročný než je tomu u Buberových současníků.

Klíčová slova: YHVH, Prorocká Víra, Proti-instituční, Proti-Legalistický, Judaismus, Křesťanství, Teodicea, *Já-Ty / Já-Ono* Základní Slovo, Existencialismus, Dialog, Bezprostřední Vztah, Vzdělávání, Psychoterapie

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The Notion of YHVH in the Thought of Martin Buber

Contents

Introduction:

The Czech public is familiar with the work of Martin Buber primarily through his small but significant book *I and Thou*, a deservedly esteemed and important work which presents what can be described as the core of Buber's *I-Thou* and dialogical philosophy. Notwithstanding that book's weighty contribution to Western thought it has largely overshadowed Buber's other major works which contain elaborations on the main themes of that book as well as cover themes and topics which *I and Thou* does not cover. This applies not only to his philosophical and anthropological works mostly in the form of essays and lectures collected in thematic units titled according to their subject matter but also to his works on Biblical theology and exegesis which are highly esteemed by numerous Christian and Jewish Biblical scholars. Also of note are Buber's works on Hasidism which occupy a major part of his written opus. In writing this thesis the author has chosen to limit himself primarily to Buber's major theological and philosophical writings and has referred to his works on Hasidism only in a very limited context within the framework of a critical assessment of his Biblical theology and exegesis. A work of any depth addressing Buber's interpretation of Hasidism would occupy a thesis at least the size of the one presented here as well as address problems not directly related to those adressed here.

The scope of this thesis is an elaboration on Buber's parallel concepts of YHVH in his Biblical theology; following this we elaborate on his *I-Thou*, dialogical and relational philosophy. The author of this thesis has attempted to show the implicit dialogue and polemic between Greek and Hebrew thought that is a major feature of Buber's writing. We hope to show in what ways Buber has retained Hebrew thought and where this has been coloured by Greek philosophy. The author feels, based on his reading of several of Buber's major works as well as some of those less known to the general reader, that the Greek mode of thinking predominates his writings and that his thought bears less resemblance to historical Hebrew thought than is obvious at first glance. In this context, among the questions the author has addressed in the first part of this thesis are those that might attract the attention of the theologian and critical reader: The tenability of Buber's concepts of direct relation and the dialogue with YHVH or *Thou* without the (as Buber sees it) impediments and dilutions of institutional religion within the framework of historical Judaism. Another important question is the hermeneutic and philological sustainability of Buber's exegesis and translation of the Hebrew Bible as well as to what extent his concepts of Judaism, prophecy and Biblical

hermeneutics are dependent on his philosophical thought. Closely connected to such issues are Buber's critical statements about Christianity: Buber uses a similar exegetic method to support his arguments against Christianity to the one used to interpret Hebrew Scripture in his works on the Hebrew Bible. The author has attempted to show that despite of the profundity and originality of Buber's Biblical thought, the same weaknesses that are present in his works on the Hebrew Bible (and the source of criticism by both Christian and Jewish thinkers) pervade his polemics with Christianity, resulting ultimately in the untenability of his criticisms against Christianity – that it is a pessimistic religion more rooted in Greek than Hebrew thought.

In the second part of this thesis, the author examines the implicit notion of YHVH, as He is understood by Buber in his philosophical works. Here we examine the evolution of Buber's thought and its place within 20th century Western thought. In this context it seems that Buber tries to level the criticisms of the Hebrew mind against Greek thought: He postulates a personal Absolute in *Thou* with whom one can only have a personal, direct and unmediated relation. This is echoed in Buber's *apparent* lack of system. The author hopes to show that Buber holds a firm place within the context of the polemics between anti-rationalist phenomenology and existentialism on the one side, and logical positivism and analytical philosophy on the other. Buber's *I-Thou*, dialogical and relational philosophies are elaborated on in some depth and an attempt has been made to show what sets Buber apart from his contemporaries. Within this context of what can be seen as a profound protest against the scientific world-view, Buber's contribution to the fields of psychotherapy and education (which Buber believes can only be truly successful when permeated by the presence of *Thou*) have also been given space as apt illustrations of the practical dimensions of Buber's concept of YHVH. Ultimately, the author hopes to show that Buber's main contribution is as a thinker for the intellectual public, but that his writings on spirituality, education and psychotherapy seem somewhat detached from historical and empiric reality. They are deeply rooted in Buber's individualism and in themselves make thought-provoking, profound, and complex statements about the subjects they address by an undoubtably great thinker. This fact notwithstanding, they need to be read carefully and their arguments addressed critically.

The method we have chosen proceeds from a descriptive-analytical to critical examination of Buber's thought. In proceeding in this manner the author hopes to produce a balanced and fair view of the topics chosen within the space constraints of this thesis. The main source of

information are Buber's major works on the Bible and his major philosophical works, especially those dealing with topics broached in *I and Thou*. The second major source of information for this thesis has been provided by critical and descriptive essays by the scholarly public of Buber's time, as well as the voices of certain major contemporary Judaic scholars. We hope to substantiate the argument that Buber's dialogical hermeneutics are too deeply rooted in philosophical thought to be practicable in the areas he addresses – religion, psychotherapy and education – and are therefore of most value to Biblical scholars and professional philosophers who are able to truly and edequately appreciate the depth of his thought and profit from it.

Part I: The Concept of YHVH in Martin Buber's Biblical Theology

1.1.YHVH's Relation to Man in the Bible

1.1.1. YHVH's Nature – His Dialogic and Personal Immediacy*: Similarly to Buber's philosophical works, the concept presented in Buber's Biblical theology of YHVH is that of a deity who has a dialogical and immediate relation with man, while remaining invisible and independent. In this sense, YHVH calls man to worship Him and this call requires the faithful devotion of the complete man. No other deity besides Him can nor will be tolerated. The attempt to have a god who is at one's disposal leads to estrangement and sin.*

Buber deals with the Hebrew Bible as a single book which contains, as James Muilenberg puts it, the account of Israel's dialogue with YHVH, concentrating his analysis on the three main themes controlling this dialogue: those of creation, revelation and redemption.[1] Buber's careful exegesis of key passages shows how YHVH identifies Himself to Israel not only as the God who leads them, but also as the God who leads the course of the stars; thus those who love Him are led by his might, and those who hate Him are destroyed.[2] YHVH wants the complete man; and because He is God nothing man-made can be served nor worshipped as His manifestation or representation. Buber translates YHVH as *I shall be there as I shall be there* or *He Who will be present*,[3] implying, as Buber sees it, constant presence: YHVH shows Israel the desire to lead them from the beginnings in the genealogical narratives, where He makes the call upon His chosen, addressing them. According to Maurice Friedman, Buber's interpretation of the name reveals YHVH as *Thou* to the receiver of the revelation, in Moses'

[1] MUILENBURG, James, *Buber as Interpreter of the Bible in* SCHILPP, P. A. and FRIEDMAN, Maurice, eds. *The Philosophy of Martin Buber,* La Salle. Open Court. 1967 (Hereafter to be referred to as "Schilpp and Friedman" and "Muilenburg" respectively) pp. 381–83. Muilenburg draws attention to Buber's existential and sociological concerns in his (Buber's) Biblical theological works, which he believes are partly influenced by Max Weber. Muilenberg quite accurately shows that such issues are of greater importance in Buber's Biblical interpretation than historical issues and that Buber stresses the call on the faithful to live in dialogical relation as the example of Israel clearly illustrates, "The Word of God is never, therefore, a generalisation or abstraction, but always a living, concrete, historical here and now in which Yahweh and His people engage. The Word of God is the symbol *kat' exochen* for the dialogical encounter." (p. 381)

[2] BUBER, Martin. *The Prophetic Faith.* New York. The Macmillan Company. 1949. Transl. by WITTON-DAVIES, Carlyle (Hereafter to be referred to as "*Prophetic Faith*"), pp. 11–25. YHVH identifies Himself as the God who leads the people of Israel and wants to be loved by them. At various pivotal points of Israel's history, the people are called on to eradicate other gods (statues, idols they have collected in their wanderings) from their midst because these have had the effect in diluting and weakening immediate relation with the only God.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

case the same God as the One whom the forefathers worshipped. The revelation is more of a personal nature, revealing the personality of God to a human being rather than merely disclosing information about His essence. Thus the revelation is of a dialogical nature.[4]

The decision to follow the call is a leap of faith, so to speak, in which the chosen gives up the security of home and settlement.[5] The chosen nation becomes somewhat like the heralds going out before their king who leads them with his authority. Buber contrasts this immediate relation to the *Eternal One* with the pantheons of religions such as those of the Babylonians and the Egyptians, in which the other gods are mere manifestations of the supreme god.[6]

Buber's philosophy of dialogue plays an important role in his Biblical theology, although it is not merely read into it forcefully.[7] Genuine relation with God is immediate and undiluted: YHVH is God who is allied to the world and the people He created. Although He remains invisible, He is continuously within His creation though He sometimes appears in divine manifestations such as the messenger who, despite his bodily appearance, has neither a name nor an individual personality that would enable him to be worshipped as a pantheon demigod. Buber goes to considerable lengths to stress the *independent* nature of God. Although He permits Himself to be seen in fire, smoke, *He never assumes a definite form*; He always remains essentially invisible; and despite His revelation in the afore-mentioned manifestations, He will not allow man to create an image that could be considered as representative of YHVH's presence. Never taking on a definite form, YHVH always retains His distance and independence. Buber has a unique and original way of emphasizing the

[4] FRIEDMAN, Maurice. *Martin Buber – A Life of Dialogue*. 1955. Chicago. University of Chicago Press (Hereafter to be referred to as "Friedman, *Martin Buber*"), pp. 246–47.

[5] *Prophetic Faith*, p. 35–37. The calling as well as leading belong to the nature of this God, who calls an individual who is the start of a small tribe which then develops into a community and then a great people. In doing so, the God of man becomes the deity of history.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[7] Cf. Friedman*, Martin Buber*, pp. 239–46. According to Friedman, God, in Buber's theology, creates every man as a unique personality carrying a very specific function within God's creation. In man's relation as *I* to the human *Thou* there is already potential for relation to the *Eternal Thou*. Man completes God's creation and God wants to be present in creation through man whom God also created as a free being and given responsibilities as the creation's steward. Friedman writes that the centre of the Israelite faith is the freedom to enter into dialogue with God in a partnership which can only be entered with the whole being, the realization of faith being only with the whole self.

singular quality of YHVH: This God is different from all other gods in that He lets Himself be seen *only when He wills* and manifests Himself in the leading of His tribes and people.[8]

The *Eternal One* retains contact with a people estranged in the land of slavery, where religious laxity has resulted, according to Buber, in a forgetting of the meaning of the Name. It is as if the Israelites have forgotten their being in the land of Egypt, having forgotten the qualities of their God. They have also perhaps, from Buber's point of view, confused His name with that of the Egyptian deities controllable by the correct use of their names in magic rituals.[9] The situation changes once God reveals Himself to his people, which Buber views as God entering history, as does Israel to whom He has chosen to reveal Himself. Israel is a partner in this dialogue, listening to the command of the zealous God who chooses to remain invisible and brooks no rival. In this sense Israel has become *I,* responding in faith to *Thou.*

The immediacy of this relationship can be summed up by what Buber, in his book *The Two Types of Faith*, frequently refers to as *emunah* – trusting faith in that which remains unseen. Such faith involves allowing God to care for His people by leading them; and an "invisible deity becomes perceptible as the One who comes and goes".[10] The turning towards God is accomplished by prayer – something that Jesus also taught his disciples. In what is essentially

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[8] BUBER, Martin. *Moses*. Oxford. East and West Library. 1946. Transl. by LASK, I. M. (Hereafter to be referred to as "*Moses*"), pp. 39–49. Buber, perhaps curiously, draws attention to such facts as the fire that burns but consumes neither the bush nor itself, which he considers proof that the text *does not* have a mythological character. Buber, however, also makes us aware of such details as YHVH addressing Moses by his name and telling him who He is. YHVH is thus a personal God. Buber takes pains to emphasise this personal element in God's relation with man, and the uniqueness of His revelation to him within the realm of Near-east religions. This God, moreover does not merely rest content to call these men from their world, but desires to lead them, invisibly; yet He is also understanding of human weakness such as fear and resistance to calling. These are countered by the assurance that as the Almighty He will lead His people. See also *Moses*, pp. 126–30, Moses is depicted as a fighter against the natural tendency to trivialize the relation to God by creating a visible image and here institutional ritualism is contrasted with direct relation. For a more detailed elaboration on Buber's polemics with institutional legalism and ritualism see below, section 1. 2.

[9] *Ibid.,* pp. 51–53. The true name carries great importance in the Orient, where it was believed that it could be used as a medium of controlling the other. According to Buber, YHVH's name implies constant presence and is not to be understood as abstract, but rather as personal being. The very nature of YHVH's name retains a distance even though this distance is paradoxically dispelled by the '*I will be present'* aspect of the Name. This signifies the unchangeable character of His nature as well as an unwillingness to be restricted to one place or manifestation. Buber also believes that one can lose the right to address God by His name, as the Israelites in the time of Hosea did. But see also *Muilenburg*, p. 393 for an opposing view: Muilenburg writes that Buber's explication of the name is unpersuasive, drawing attention to the improbability of Israel failing to remember the name. According to Muilenburg, "*to be present*" is not the usual interpretation of the verb *hyh*, but according to modern lexicons, "*is to come to pass*", "*to happen*", giving a translation of the Name as "*I cause to come to pass what I cause to come to pass*". Thus YHVH is a God of event or promise, assuring His people that He will bring about that which He has promised.

[10] *Prophetic Faith,* p. 49.

an imageless religion, prayer is a movement of the soul towards the invisible God and is thus a movement of the entire being. Buber points out the similarities of the Lord's Prayer to the Jewish prayer of Eighteen Petitions. Immediacy is, moreover, strengthened by the personal petitions of the Lord's Prayer in which the Lord is addressed as *Our Father*. It cannot take place in a space-time world but only in immediacy.[11] Careful reading of Buber's writings gives an impression of a deeply personal God who speaks to man in an idiom comprehensible to him through mediators in the shape of the prophets, whose words carry deep meanings and make an impact in the inner man or the heart. Another example of the care for man and creation is to be seen in the institution of the Sabbath, when the community takes part in a single ritual as though they were one man. On that day, the community can experience essential being by experiencing community with its Creator and God. Humanity is essentially alive on the Sabbath.[12]

Sin results in estrangement from YHVH, and in Buber's book *The Prophetic Faith*, one senses the growing estrangement of Israel from their God: We see a metamorphosis in the community from being a small nomadic people who were led by their God based on their following His call. They went from a relationship that was very close, if not quite immediate, to a increasingly pragmatic and distant relationship to YHVH.[13]

Buber's concept of the dialogic relation YHVH has with man is evidently rooted in his book *I and Thou*. The world of objects is described as a clear and predictable world of clear-cut boundaries which is the exact contrary of the realm of *I-Thou* which Buber describes as a relation spoken with the whole being. Such relation is one that has no definite boundaries; and as the primary word of the primary relation is spoken with the whole being, the being

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[11] BUBER, Martin. *The Two Types of Faith*. London. Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1951. Transl. by SMITH, Ronald Gregor (Hereafter to be referred to as "*Two Types of Faith*"), pp. 157–59.

[12] *Moses*, pp. 81–87.

[13] *Prophetic Faith,* pp. 13–43, 63–70. Buber analyzes the institution of the royal office, describing it as the result of a historical situation where the people react to the failure of the sanctuary and the *ruach* to provide them with stability and protection, as well as the unstable interim periods following the deaths of the judges; and they call for a king with charismatic gifts to lead them. Samuel and his retinue view this as an attempt to dethrone God, who has led Israel until then. Buber says it is not YHVH's failure in government but the people's failure to be His and live up to His standards. The prophetic phenomenon is shown to be the result of the theo-political reality rather than historical necessity. Although the period of conquest ends with David being allowed victory over his enemies (1 Sam 5–6) there is, according to Buber (p. 69), no justice in his kingdom; the degeneration deepens during Solomon's reign with his arrogant self-assurance of the Lord's presence nearby in the temple he has erected as an "everlasting abode" for YHVH (1 Ki 8.12 ff). He is far from the kind of faith epitomized by Moses and Samuel.

becomes part of the reality of the word that is spoken.[14] One could say that this kind of relation is more demanding on the faithful because one must have faith in what can neither be seen nor kept a hold of or defined.

This is difficult for the person who desires to have control of what can be defined and *counted*; and a reachable God who can be domesticated in a temple can be controlled. Buber extends this to such phenomena as the Israelites asking for a king who would rule over them like the the kings of the other nations, interpreting that as evidence of the growing distance between YHVH and His people.[15]

In his Biblical theological writings Buber frequently contrasts the man who silently follows God with his heart with the self-satisfied confessor who presumptuously assumes that he has God nearby as though He were a human neighbour. It even seems as though this abstractly contrasts the ancient sage who is willing to accept and follow God in sheer faith without proof as opposed to the modern man of wisdom who is more reluctant to do so given the modern attacks on faith. At the heart of Christian and Jewish faith is the standpoint of its belief that God revealed Himself to man and entered into relation with him, remaining near and present even in times of darkness and pain where God is enigmatically hidden, or, as Buber puts it in numerous places of his book *Eclipse of God*, when God remains eclipsed.[16]

In modern times the claim of faith has come under increasing attack from the side of scientific and historical thinking which are presented as the only reliable standpoints. We can agree with Emil Fackenheim that one of the most pressing issues for the believer is to counter-attack the modern assault on faith by making its relevance contemporary without compromising it or emptying it of content. In an important essay, *Buber's Concept of Revelation* the religious existentialism of Buber is presented as among the most profound currents of thought in defending revelation.[17]

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[14] BUBER, Martin *I and Thou*. Edinburgh. T and T Clark. Reprint 1944. Transl. By SMITH, Ronald Gregor (Hereafter to be referred to as "*I and Thou*"), pp. 3–5. For a more detailed analysis of the twofold relation, the life of dialogue and direct relation, see below, Part II.

[15] *Prophetic Faith*, p. 66.

[16] For a more detailed elaboration on the question of theodicy in Buber's Biblical theology, see below 1.6.

[17] FACKENHEIM, Emil L., *Buber's Concept of Revelation* in Schilpp and Friedman (Hereafter to be referred to as Fackenheim, *Buber's Concept*), pp. 272–77. Fackenheim discusses the emergence of modern sceptical thought and the various attempts to defend revelation against rationalism. Buber's religious existentialism is

Buber finds the soul of the Decalogue in the word *Thou*, in which orders are given or addressed to the listener as a single, unique individual. Only the listener who hears them as an address to himself will be able to fully grasp their meaning; and it is evident that Buber means that only the person who enters into the *I-Thou* relation with the entirety of his being can be said to have entered into a genuine relation with YHVH. The Decalogue is also addressed to the people as a community, and constitutes it by means of common regulation. By this we can see that the believing community as a whole obeying their God also forms *I* as a body, responding in faith and dialogue as much through its ethical conduct as through ritualised forms of worship.[18]

*1.1.2. **The Dialogue through the Prophets**: YHVH calls men from among those whom He has chosen to be the bearers of His word and decree. He speaks to these individuals closely, but His closest communication is with Moses, to whom he speaks directly.*

Although YHVH's relationship with man is immediate, He often communicates His will through the mouths of the prophets whom He has elected from among the people to be the bearers of His word. Buber is under no illusion about man's weakness of heart and unwillingness to be the bearers of such difficult tasks, illustrating how YHVH takes full possession of those He elects.[19] The essential intimacy of this relation is accurately captured in Buber's exegesis by the Hebrew verb "*to know*", where one comes into contact with an

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shown to be rooted in the thought of Schelling and Kierkegaard, who argued that reality ceases to be an object when we cease to view it with detachment. According to Fackenheim, it was Kant who discovered that reality viewed increasingly as a series of laws of cause and effect could only disclose a phenomenal world, but his discovery was first made full use of in the defence of revelation by Kierkegaard and Schelling, who believed that full personal engagement in reality (as opposed to the attempt to possess it by knowing it fully), gives "a knowing access to the transphenomenal, an access which consists not in the discovery of laws and causes but in a direct encounter. And the most important fact that can be encountered is divine revelation." (p. 277) Fackenheim argues that Buber's understanding of the Hebrew Bible is that it is the account of the dialogue between God and man, and is thus a Biblical rather than modern understanding of it (the Hebrew Bible). Fackenheim later (pp. 279–81) goes on to show how Buber's doctrine of the *I-Thou* relation can be a basis for a modern doctrine of revelation, that all genuine religion is *I-Thou* relation with God against the modern theories of religion as a mere subjective feeling.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[19] *Moses*, pp. 57–59. YHVH is depicted as the One who stands behind His chosen, even though Moses describes himself as being of uncircumcised lips. He is sent as the intermediary between heaven and earth to a people who do not accept him. His task is one which despite the nobility of the station as "…leader of his tribe, teacher, prophet, lawgiver; yet in the sphere of the word he remains insurmountably lonely; alone in the last resort with the word of heaven which forces itself through inflexible soul into inflexible throat". God uses the fragile vessel of Moses' "stammering mouth" and "inflexible throat" to speak His word, choosing to limit Himself thus to an imperfect medium to be the mediator of His voice and realm on earth.

object by knowing it, expressed most appropriately by the image of God lifting out men to bear His message by knowing them, and preparing the ways for their lives as it is known to God.[20] Muilenburg draws attention to the central focus of Buber's elaboration of the prophets of Israel, particularly his interpretation of the activity of Elijah, Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah: Once again, historical and political issues that were current in ancient Palestine occupy Buber's exegesis far less than the fateful issues around the prophets' ministries and the momentousness of the struggle between YHVH and the Baals.[21]

The *nabi,* or prophetic bearer in word and deed of God's unfolding will is a crucial theme in the Hebrew Bible and a central area of interest in Buber's Biblical theology. In the chapter *The Great Tensions* in the book *The Prophetic Faith*, Buber carefully maps the emergence of the prophet's vocation from its beginnings as a group of orthodox men of faith that began to develop alongside the sanctuary priesthood, particularly after the capture of the Ark at Ebenezer, the event which made the failure of the sanctuary priests plainly visible (1 Sam 4ff.).[22] The *nebiim,* according to Buber, in the truest sense of the word have their powers based on direct dialogue with Divinity.[23] Buber's depiction of the *nabi*, shown as the one who

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[20] BUBER, Martin, *Right and Wrong, An Interpretation on Some Psalms.* London SCM Press Ltd. 1952. Transl. by SMITH, Ronald Gregor (Hereafter to referred to as "Right and Wrong"), pp. 58–60. Buber's exegesis of this verb is unusually profound here. The righteous, who delight in the way of the Torah, have every stage of their lives in constant direct contact with God who is with them and near them even in the face of failures and disappointments. It enables them to overcome poor affects and withstand the erosion by time and change.

[21] Muilenburg, p. 391. Muilenburg aptly observes that the depth and profundity of Buber's interpretational account of the "inner mysteries of nature worship and of the sexual drives associated with them" is particularly useful in understanding the urgency of the struggle for Israel's faithfulness to *YHVH*. The root of Buber's depth of expression in this regard lies in his complex existentialism, especially his concept of the primary twofold relation *I-Thou* and *I-It.*

[22] *Prophetic Faith*, pp. 60–63. Buber believes that this and other incidents close to it signal a turning point in Israel's faith, but that these tumultuous events were perhaps as a positive development nonetheless, given the mechanical sterility of the oracle. Buber believes that it was YHVH's intention of allowing the Ark to be captured to overcome that sterility, even going so far as to announce beforehand that the Ark would be captured and desecrated. The independence of YHVH is doubly emphasized in His not only allowing this to come to pass, but also by His refusal to be forced into granting a victory over the Philistines. (Author's Note: Scriptural references in this thesis are from the Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible).

[23] *Moses,* pp. 165–69. Moses is described as being the *nabi* based on his close relationship with divinity; the elders who receive some of his spirit (Exo 24.1, 9) are *nebiim* in the derived sense, based on the decision of the Spirit to rest upon them, in somewhat similar fashion to the judges. Moses has, according to Buber, a mission, as opposed to being inducted into office, making his liaison with YHVH of a far more personal and immediate nature. Moses' vocation is a personal strain, primarily because of the responsibility involved, and he wishes that everyone could be a *nabi*. *His* gift is unattainable and unique. Paradoxically, as Buber shows, Moses remains human, but receives God's word face-to-face, as opposed to other prophets who receive their message in visions and dreams.

stands in God's name against rulers – frequently issuing words of rebuke – remains true to the text. Admonishment and warning are directed at wayward rulers and the mighty that oppress the weak.[24] The prophet is thus esteemed in Buber's works as the one who is the true priest as opposed to the "official" priests who are increasingly susceptible to corruption, having grown comfortable with the material benefits of that station. Samuel the *nabi* replaces the soulless sanctuary priests. Because the priests failed in their mission, they are utterly rejected by YHVH (1 Sam 2.13–36).[25] The true priest is in stark contrast with the sorcerer or sanctuary (or later temple) priests who receive their supposed powers from themselves, thus from below. Samuel is thus the lone prophet with his retinue of fellow-prophets, who attempt to replace the corrupted priesthood with the station of the *nabi* and redeem the ever-increasing distance between YHVH and His people but fail to do so given that the people's desire for a king – or earthly needs – is stronger than the interest in religious reforms. Samuel and his men grudgingly have to accommodate the wishes of the people.[26]

Frequently, the prophets are mediators as they speak the divine word from their mortal lips, interpreting it comprehensively. The *nabi'*s powers are not transferable, taken away when the men die to rest after that on those whom YHVH chooses. Out of all the types of leaders in the Old Testament Buber singles out the prophet as the most significant who, as Nahum Glatzer points out, far surpasses the apocalyptic writers in Buber's esteem. The prophet's word gives the listener the choice to turn and cease the estrangement between himself and God caused by sin. The apocalypticist, on the other hand, seems to have neither hope nor faith in the possibility of God's merciful intervention.[27]

YHVH also speaks to the nations through the prophets. Buber analyzes the way YHVH admonishes the people in their contemporary situation. YHVH leads His dialogue with the

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[24] *Ibid.,* pp. 63–68. Buber's rationale of their warnings is sober: The disasters the prophets warn of are not necessarily supernatural in character but can be often seen as the logical consequences of social injustice. Thus neither Moses nor any other prophet is a magician or soothsayer. But interestingly, Buber attributes Moses' success with the Pharaoh to be given by the fact that Moses is even more than a prophet. Events such as the plagues are looked upon as natural disasters of unusually intense proportions; and Buber draws attention to the fact that Moses, although raised in the midst of the Egyptians and their magic, merely foretells of disasters which come to pass rather than putting them into effect.

[25] *Prophetic Faith,* pp. 62–63. "The true *nabi* – this is the intention of the early narrator – is the true priest".

[26] *Ibid.,* p. 64.

[27] GLATZER, Nahum N., *Buber as Interpreter of the Bible*, in Schilpp and Friedman, pp. 371–73 (Hereafter to be referred to as "Glatzer").

nations, sometimes – as in the case of Amos – addressing them as though they were individual people. Although critical of the nations, Israel is subjected to the most severe criticism from the prophets' lips because she was the subject of YHVH's special care: Because YHVH had made His will known to Israel, her falling short of His expectations is even more of a tragedy, shown in the most personal way in the poem of the adulterous wife in Hosea (Hos 2.2–23).[28] Buber goes to considerable lengths to show the poignancy of the prophet's plight: The burden of trusting the divine decree and entreatying the people to turn despite their stubbornness lies on the prophet, who also has the knowledge that God that may turn away from the punishment He had planned and repent (Jon 3.9). Buber uses Amos as an example of the Deuteronomistic accent of much pre-apocalyptic prophecy where the people of Israel are given the paths of good and evil to choose from, and are exhorted repeatedly to repent and turn from sin.[29] And yet the fate of the *nabi*, as is well known from the Biblical accounts, is one of ridicule and scorn at the hands of peers. Buber views the personal suffering of the *nabi* at the hands of the multitude as metaphorically representative of YHVH's own suffering in His disturbed relations with His Chosen. The prophet embodies this secret in the forms of the signs and parables he enacts with his body as in the cases of Jeremiah and Ezechiel.

In *The God of the Sufferers*, a chapter of unusual depth and complexity in *The Prophetic Faith*, Buber draws the reader into the increasing urgency and subsequent radicalism of the prophets' message as the crisis of estrangement grew deeper. Their protest contains three main elements. First, there is criticism of the social order which starts simply but grows increasingly severe. Then there is a crystallization of the divine demand with its underlying issue of religious ethos – what is demanded is a walking in God's way in addition to kindness. Finally, a warning of punishment is given should the addressees fail to heed the prophets' message.[30] The prophet as a mediator between heaven and earth is bound to both by the

[28] *Ibid.,* pp. 96–104. Although God has raised the prophets from among the people, making their language intelligible to their contemporaries, the people refuse to listen, deepening the estrangement between them and God, turning their failure into their judgement.

[29] *Prophetic Faith,* pp. 107–10. True prophecy is rooted in a divine revelation; and insofar as it is not a human calling, its demands on the man are absolute in nature. Failure to heed their words brings divine punishment. Buber defines such punishment in realistic terms of wars, bloodshed and catastrophe – a direct result of the broad destabilisation caused by social injustice and upheaval. The problem of the innocent caught in bloodshed and upheaval, however, remains unsolved here. The author is of the impression that Buber's most interesting work addressing theodicy is *Right and Wrong.*

[30] *Prophetic Faith*, pp. 156.

prophetic word, not the cult. In Buber's view, the priests administer the word, but the *unofficial* prophet is the bearer of the true Word of God in his mouth and utterance. *This* is YHVH's intervention breaking into the world through the tangled web of human sin. The prophet, standing apart from the temple priests, becomes a metaphor illustrative of the relationship with YHVH who will have neither Himself nor His Word at anyone's disposal.[31] A parallel is also drawn between the struggle of the prophet and the wandering in the desert, bringing to mind another vivid metaphor of the true Israel.[32]

There is an interesting modern parallel to these ancient men of faith in Buber's book *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*, one of his early works on Hasidism, where the *Hasidim* are placed at odds with the masters of the Talmud, whose authority was formerly accepted without question. These react to the *Hasidim* by intimidation and disciplinary measures. Yet the later *Hasidim* are not spared criticism by Buber, who sees the institution of "mediators" called the *Zaddikim* as the real cause of the decline of Hasidism: The spiritual demands of purity made on the men of faith being too high, few could meet the required standards of self-searching and sacrifice. Thus, paradoxically, the new institution of mediators hailed as the new spiritual elite gave rise to a group who overran the original teaching of the Hasidim, their spiritual power trusted at the expense of the self-sacrifice and purity that lay, according to Buber, at the heart of the teaching. The fact that these men were supported financially and materially also attracted all sorts – even from among the rabble – to the calling of the *Zaddik*.[33] Buber discusses briefly, but eloquently, the fate of a handful of individuals such as Rabbi Nachman of Bretzlaw, who wished to retain the purity of the teaching of Baal Shem Tov which they felt was becoming corrupted by the new opportunists. In the description of their tragic fates in the opening section of *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*, Buber alludes to the prophets of Israel,

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 164–65.

[32] *Ibid.,* pp. 76–77. Of special interest in this instance is Buber's exegesis of Elijah's flight from Ahab and his wanderings through the desert (1 Ki 19.1–18). Here Buber draws parallels between Elijah's life and the choosing and leading of Israel; and – perhaps more so – to Moses and his struggle with the lack of faith of the Israelites: Elijah is also elected by God and led by Him on a path that can be endured only by faith. Buber draws on similarities to Moses and the wanderings through the desert in a similar fashion to the rabbinic sages by placing different verses alongside one another which together create a single abstract statement. Interestingly, Buber says that these narratives have a historical nucleus as, in his opinion, do numerous others with a legendaristic colouring, Buber, however, does not further elaborate on what this historical nucleus could be, choosing instead to respectfully accept the text in faith.

[33] BUBER, Martin. *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*. Reprint. Bloomington. Indiana University Press. 1962. Transl. by FRIEDMAN, Maurice (Hereafter to be referred to as "*Rabbi Nachman*"), pp. 14–19.

where these particularly faithful individuals seek others like themselves who are men of devotion rather than wonder-workers. These men are, like the prophets, confronted by the barrier of "the smallness of men".[34] Thus the true *Hasidim* become a modern equivalent of the ancient prophets.

The mysticism of these special individuals, or perhaps more specifically, their immediate contact with YHVH is implied, as this author understands it, in Buber's stressing the importance of communication for Rabbi Nachman, who not only had little patience for superficial talk but also "spoke no word of instruction that has not passed through much suffering; each is "washed in tears". The word forms itself late in him; the teaching is with him at first a feeling even and only then becomes a thought, that is, a word".[35] The unusual empathy combined with the depths from which the subsequent words become a balsam for the listener's soul. Often not understood at first, their impact is comprehended when they are repeated to someone else later. The effect of the words is primarily in the dialogue between the listener (who then becomes a speaker) and a new hearer of his words.[36]

1.1.3. ***The Ethical Dimension:*** *If man follows YHVH, he must heed what He has revealed as His will through the prophets and in the teachings of the Torah. That fact notwithstanding, the Torah is to be followed as a guide to the manner in which one is to lead his life and not as a secular Law imposing restrictions and potential punishment.*

Buber sees the *Berith* as the "expansion of leadership" to meet and cover every aspect of the people's lives; the mutual character of the relationship between God and His people is revealed in their willingness to surrender to the divine power and grace as presented in its decrees. According to Buber apodictic laws are intended to emphasise YHVH's rulership over all realms of human life, The *Eternal I* addressing the community as *Thou*. If the people of Israel take His authority as the *melekh* seriously, they are to abide by the statutes of the Torah which recognise the social element and the danger of social injustice that living as a community will bring. Buber views social differences as a source of increase in the distance

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[35] *Ibid*., p. 29.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 30–31.

between people and thereafter, between God and themselves.[37] Buber's mysticism is to be found primarily in his intensification of reality and one could say, with Hugo Bergman, that Buber, especially in the years following the First World War, finds the relationship with God in the imposition of responsibilities upon the human.[38] Genuine religion, and with it, true relationship with God involves an ethical standard that goes beyond mere subjective feeling, and is only possible in genuine dialogue if it is not to be a flight from reality. Relation must be rooted in reality and cannot merely be defined as a set of laws or dogma.[39] Hezekiah's reform (2 Ki 18) is sharply criticized by Buber because of its inability to eradicate social injustice, concentrating primarily on cultic reforms. But, as Buber points out, social reform is what would make the cult reforms credible in YHVH's eyes. In doing so, Buber implies that this was the reason why the reforms ultimately failed to halt the destruction of Jerusalem.[40]

The socio-ethical aspect of the relationship is a central concern of Buber's. In an exegesis on Psalm 82, the nations are compared to gods. The gods referred to are, however, judged for their allowing the weak and afflicted to suffer at the hands of the strong. They are idiomatically compared to divine beings who had their power lent to them (Ps 82.1-6), but whom have now come under judgement, showing their self-supposed divinity to be but a mask, a caricature.[41] In *Moses,* the people elect Moses, who is to become the first among equals on Jethro's suggestion; Moses is to make the crucial decisions. The step is taken, as Buber sees it, in order to avoid the anarchy that seems to threaten. Buber sees a historical core

[37] *Prophetic Faith*, p. 52–55.

[38] BERGMAN, Hugo, *Martin Buber and Mysticism* in Schilpp and Friedman, p. 304 (Hereafter to be referred to as "Bergman").

[39] FACKENHEIM, Emil L., *Buber's Concept of Revelation* in Schilpp and Friedman, pp. 284–85 (Hereafter to be referred to as "Fackenheim").

[40] *Prophetic Faith*, pp. 157-65. Buber clearly analyses this problem parallel to the problem of the *I-Thou* relation. The cultic reforms were inadequate because of their cosmetic nature. God's will is that the people are to be a unity, an *I* relating to *Thou*. This seems to be a Talmudic way of thinking: holiness that penetrates every fibre of the being and enters into every aspect of life: Even everyday activities such as eating and storing food become sacred rituals, forming a nation of priests. But the most important aspect of the dialogic relationship with YHVH is love. YHVH has chosen his people out of love, and out of love they must serve Him.

[41] *Right and Wrong*, pp. 23–30. The "gods" referred to in Ps 82.6–8 are interpreted as the nations who have had their power alloted to them but who have failed in their mission. The representation of God on earth places the weighty responsibility of serving His ends as far as justice and righteousness are concerned. Failure to do so leads to rejection and destruction. Buber also points out that an outwardly just policy is not sufficient as "...a human community can only truly exist in so far as it becomes a community of true human beings" (p. 30). The gods (nations) as YHVH's intermediaries were meant to follow His justice, hence the accusations against their failure to curtail evil.

in the institution of elders by Moses (Exo 18.13–27) in the logical outcome of utilitarian necessity: Because of the problematic nature and the arduousness of the task, Moses borrows from the Midianite gift for system and organisation, allowing the nation to be a group that is easier to manage, more mechanised, less organic in structure.[42] The Decalogue also acts as a unifying force for a nation that has now evolved from a relatively disorganised group into a Body Politic in which *I* is expressed essentially by its interhuman relations. On the other hand, envy is a special type of social disease decomposing the very tissue of society;[43] and the statutes of the Pentateuch itself have a dynamism enabling it to fit into a historical situation. The key issue in the passage cited here is the establishment of a *Berith* by YHVH between Him and the community made holy through Him by obeying his commands. In doing so, Israel confirms Him to be their *melekh* and become His *mamlakah*, His special property.

The commandments of the Decalogue are to be adhered to unconditionally by those who love YHVH the zealous God. Buber defines the nature of guilt in *Moses* as the upsetting of the equilibrium between heaven and earth that can only be rectified by punishment, the consequences of evil conduct being visited on subsequent generations. Whatever one's confessional standpoint, it is evident that Buber is very perceptive in this observation that also emphasises the singularity of the Pentateuch's apodictic warning against transgressors. Oppressors of orphans and widows will be visited by war.[44]

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[42] *Moses,* pp. 99, 103, 114–15. God rules over His people, and now they must constitute themselves as a unity ruled by Him. The contract at Sinai is more than a mere fixed agreement and "YHVH unites himself with Israel as a theopolitical unity".

[43] *Ibid*., pp. 133–38. Buber attempts to unearth the historical kernel that probably underlaid the Biblical account. He believes that the tribes must have known or had prohibitions on their consciences, prohibitions of certain relations now becoming a matter of neccessity. There was also a neccessity of the community becoming homogeneous, no tribe lording it over the other.

[44] *Ibid.,* pp. 141–45. Buber analyzes the problem anthropologically, saying that YHVH is not only zealous in His war against those who hate Him, but also against those who decay the very fabric of society through their corruption. The religious element has a direct effect on the realm of social justice: Without the one, the other the other dissappears. Buber theorizes that there must already have been widespread social abuses or at the very least injustices which led to the formation of single laws formulated to combat evil, the great laws being the *summa* thereof (pg. 144, but see also *Moses*, pp. 130–31). As the author understands it, it seems as though Buber implies that an unstable or unjust community upsets the inner-*I*. *I* thus has a disturbed relation with itself, and with the *Thou* who is God. Israelite law is revolutionary in its willingness to let people decide, giving even the slave the choice of whether he wants to be freed. The slave is treated as a human being, nature is allowed to rest from use by man; Buber (p. 145) attributes this to an ethical principle or concern unique in the ancient Orient applicable even today.

1.2. Buber's Polemic with Institutional Religion.

1.2.1. The Encroachment of Religious Legalism and Ritualism on the Dialogic and Immediate Relation: *Because YHVH is invisible, and the meaning of His name carries the meaning of constant presence, Buber views attempts to build temples and similar permanent anchors of God's presence as various aspects of the I-It relation to the world and therefore represent man's encroachment on the I-Thou primary by giving preference to a predictable, controllable relation.*

In a certain sense, Buber can be spoken of as a religious anarchist. Throughout his major works on the Bible one can clearly see a position taken giving the reader strong reason to believe that Buber also takes an existentialist stance in his polemics with institutional religion. Similarly to the continental existentialists such as Sartre who were ostensibly against academic philosophy, seeking to free it from that institution, Buber tries to do the same with man's relation with YHVH by taking a strongly anti-ritualistic and anti-legalistic stance in what can be said to be a prophetic protest against such practice. In this sense also, Buber's philosophy of dialogue emerges as a crucial factor of his Biblical theology. Because every individual is created by God as a unique and non-repeatable *I,* who must relate to the *Thou* of God (who covers every aspect of daily life) in that same unique importance (in which *I* completes God's creation), he/she cannot confine God to the boundaries of an image.[45] Buber's criticism of institutional religion based on empty legalism is influenced by Kierkegaard's aversion to empty religiosity. Profession of faith becomes a self-satisfied lie where one does so not having been affected to the core of one's soul - something Kierkegaard rails against in his polemic with the self-satisfied bourgeois institutionalised but inconsequential and empty confessional Christianity of his day. The crucial issue becomes whether the substance of man's faith transforms his life as a whole.[46]

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[45] Cf. also Friedman, *Martin Buber*, pp. 240–42. According to Friedman, every person has a specific importance in the eyes of God in Buber's philosophy and every individual has undeniable residues and vestiges of the Creator. Individuals are created as free, and because of this, every person sins as Adam sinned, but also have every opportunity of turning and proving true before God. It is this freedom and human responsibility towards God in immediate relation that forms the essence of the dialogical relationship of Israel to God, based on Israel's belief that such dialogue is possible. It implies partnership and nearness; it permeates every aspect of daily existence. Thus there can be no confining of God to a single image and limiting His freedom in such a manner.

[46] BUBER, Martin, *What is Man* in *Between Man and Man*. Reprint. Boston. Beacon Press. 1959. Transl. by SMITH, Ronald Gregor (Hereafter to be referred to as "*What is Man?*") pp. 161–62.

The primary relation *I-It*, unlike that of *I-Thou*, is not spoken with the whole being. It is an encroachment on God's independence as it seeks clear-cut boundaries, desiring to *possess* what it attempts to define and confine within the criteria and framework of its own choosing. [47] Understanding Buber's attitude to the *I-It* mode of being enables us to understand Buber aversion towards institutional religion. An early example of the strong anti-institutional stance Buber takes can even be found in his early book *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*, perhaps most markedly in the tale *The Rabbi and His Son*, where the path of orthodox Talmudic Judaism compares negatively to the mysticism of the *Hasidim*. In the tale, apparently minor details create a subtle combination of psychological hints leading to a critical image of religious dogmatism.[48] It is, however, useful to note that Buber pieced his Hasidic tales from notes left by the pupils of the Hasidic masters and Buber retold these stories in such a way as to preserve *what convinced him as belonging to the originals*.[49] His licence in editing these tales is particularly significant because Buber supports his anti-dogmatic and legalistic views with his editing of these tales but also lays him open to criticism by other authors on scientific grounds.[50]

One of the most illuminating texts on this issue is Buber's exposition on the Egyptian state system and religion in his book *Moses,* with its description of the awe-inspiring systematic hierarchic infrastructure of the society and its love of control and predictable results. On the

[47] *I and Thou*, pp. 3–5. See below, Part II: The Implicit Notion of YHVH in Buber's Philosophical Thought.

[48] *Rabbi Nachman*, pp. 49–58. Although the story *The Rabbi and His Son* is a retelling of a tale by Rabbi Nachman, it appears particularly suited as an illustration of Buber's views on religion. The Rabbi is described as a particularly devout man who tries to teach his son to be as orthodox as himself, and warns him to avoid any kind of contact with the *Hasidim*, whom he describes as having rambling dreams which they dare to join to the Torah. Interestingly, even the letters of the books of the Scriptures are described as having rigid letters despite their mystery which the boy needs all his strength to absorb himself in (p. 50). This is compared, perhaps even ironically, to the mystic "rambling" of the *Hasidim* (p. 49). His very room is described as a narrow prison, and the boy's soul wanders away from the room like a bird every time he sits deep in thought over the Scriptures. Even his soul is described as imprisoned. Ultimately, the Rabbi's dogmatism results in the boy's death. The Rabbi then learns that the Messiah was prevented from coming because the boy had the *Rung of the Lesser Light* which was supposed to join with the *Rung of the Greater Light* which a *Zaddik* in a nearby town had in order for the eschatological event to occur. Thus dogmatism and legalistic institutionalism succeeds in thwarting, albeit unintentionally, the arrival of the Messiah. In Buber's retelling of this tale, he unwittingly comes close to Gnostic mythology, which held similar views of the Hebrew Scriptures and had a similar eschatology to the one described in this tale. There is also a Platonic element present in Buber's low esteem of the written reminiscent of the Seventh Epistle (which describes a fire that cannot be effectively captured in the phenomenon of writing).

[49] *Ibid*., Foreword.

[50] See below, section 1.3.0. *A critical assessment of Buber's Biblical Hermeneutics* for a further elaboration on this point.

surface, one might be of the impression that Buber is expressing wonder at the meticulously organised work - from the harnessing of the Nile's natural power to the hierarchy of labour involved in the architecture divided into groups, each with task master, leading all the way to the Pharaoh.[51] For all this grandeur, in these passages Buber makes us well aware of the demonic element of such structures, especially by elaborating on the attempt by the Egyptians to extend the sphere of their control past the boundaries of the technical and the living to the realm of the dead and conquer it. The deceased ruler must be preserved from the indignity of death at all costs and is appropriately equipped by his magicians to endure in the world of the spirits so he may be able to continue his rule after his demise. In doing so, he becomes immortal. According to the Egyptian belief, the ruler is king even of the realms of life and death.[52]

Buber then introduces the *Habiru* (the Hebrews?), the people without an anchor who worship a God who remains unseen and who adapt easily to the conditions they come across in any land giving them hospitality. This indomitable kind of nomadic people is a thorn in the side of the Egyptian state that hates what cannot be possessed or controlled. Although Joseph's family are tolerated and make a considerable contribution to Egyptian society, they remain outsiders as they maintain a nucleus of inner life that cannot be systematised. By the very essence of His name, YHVH will not be restricted to being a deity at the believer's disposal. The very prohibition of images ensures that He will retain that status over the clay temple dwellers. Moses, writes Buber, was not a hater of art but stood against the tradition frequently found in many religions to create a sensible image of the deity. Moses wanted to establish an imageless cult for the invisible absolute God YHVH. But as early as the days of the wanderings numerous rebellions and murmurings of the people disturbed the relations between YHVH and His people. Such murmurings have their root in the people desiring a visible deity they could "have" at their convenient disposal through a sacral system, a security which Buber emphasises that Moses cannot and must not give them.[53] Moses brought them assurance from YHVH that He would lead them out of Egypt and not desert them. But YHVH, who wanted to be their God, would also remain invisible to them. And the people – conditioned to the Egyptian deities who could not only be seen, but whose strength lay

[51] *Moses*, pp. 20–25.

[52] *Ibid., idem.*

[53] *Moses*, pp. 128–29.

precisely in their image – are suspicious of Moses, who cannot simply produce this God. This is what led the people to create the image of the bull.[54]

In another passage of *Moses*,[55] Buber is as sceptical of any kind of stone or graven setting of God's Word as he is of palaces and temples that might attempt to limit God to one place or dwelling and assure of His presence. Buber implies that the lack of human faith in God and His presence makes it necessary for these people to have a testament in hard stone that could be called upon to testify against them. *That* should outlast the flimsy medium of human word of mouth. The stone monument shrouded in mystery gives off an atmosphere of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, but which is nonetheless supposed to be evidence of revelation. Although the stone tablets ostensibly serve as a permanent witness to be referred to in future times, Buber compares them to other monuments of stone such as Solomon's temple which attempted to fix YHVH's presence – or a piece of it in the case of the tablets – to one place. Because His Word alone endures, however, it cannot be held in a material that is subject to erosion by the forces of time and change. Any attempt to hold that Word without end meets with failure or destruction. The stone tablets were lost but the Word has remained.

In another important chapter of a book concerning this problem – *The Great Tensions* in his book *The Prophetic Faith* – YHVH is described as God who wants to be worshipped and not used, even allowing the ark to be captured at the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam 4 –5). Buber attributes this to the failure on the part of the priests and people, who believed too strongly in the guarantee of the Lord's presence among them thanks to the presence of the Ark, and came to think of YHVH as a deity at their disposal and try to control Him.[56] The Israelites are devoted to YHVH and know him as the liberator and leader of their journey, seeing the hand of God in everything that came into their paths, extending to the realms of sickness and health, as well as that of nature, where sudden adverse conditions are interpreted as the work of YHVH. Buber mentions the numerous amulets and fetishes that were taken out and used only when the owner remembered them, reminding the reader that these were forgotten after a time. Thus a deity which can be controlled and called at the owner's bidding will ultimately

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[54] *Moses,* p. 151.

[55] *Ibid.,* pp. 138–40.

[56] See also above, 22n.

be forgotten, so that continuity must be primary basis of faith and worship. And yet "after surmounting, time and time again, many stumbling blocks do these men, who recognise every unusual event with violent feeling, learn to recognise their God and His activity in the spheres which seemed necessarily foreign to Him".[57]

*1.2.2. **The Building of Temples and Idolatry:** Idolatry, institutional legalism and ritualism are estranging factors in the I-Thou relation; they are also a way of attempting to usurp YHVH's leadership.*

Buber analyses the phenomenon of idolatry and nature worship in the greatest depth in *Moses* and *The Prophetic Faith*. We will reserve a more detailed elaboration of his thoughts on sin and the problem of theodicy to a section below in this essay. For the present, let us concentrate on what made idolatry so tempting to the Israelite. Buber traces this great struggle to its historical roots in the Moses's time. Perhaps one of the earliest incidents of man trying to usurp YHVH's power and call it one's own is the Korahite rebellion (Nu 16). Here the Korahites murmured against Moses in the belief that the entire people were the possessor of the Lord's divine presence, and were thus holy. They believed that, possessing this god, "they could transform their own will into the will of God".[58] Buber argues that at the root of this rebellion lies the human folly of Korah presumptuously believing he was holy and that by being so, he was in some sense equal to God.[59]

The particular danger facing the nomad now moving into the life of the farmer is a way of life diametrically opposed to the nature of YHVH and His people coming into Canaan.[60] The new

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[57] *Ibid.,* pp. 70–71.

[58] *Moses*, pp. 187.

[59] *Ibid.,* pp. 184–90. Buber goes to considerable lengths to explain the inner nature of the rebellion: Moses is a mediator between YHVH and the people but he is not a priest. He is a prophet, and even in that sense is unique in his direct dialogue with YHVH, who does not speak to Moses in the usual way through dreams or divinatory methods, but directly. His special relationship with YHVH enables Moses to decide between right and wrong in the camp, which is something the Korahites and similar people resent and seek to shake: If the nation was said to be holy, everyone in it must be holy as well and has the right to decide between right and wrong as well. The leaders of the rebellion want to get a hold of the divine might; yet in their disputing with a man who has been expressly chosen for this purpose, they are practically calling God a liar. The leaders believe, moreover, that the Law displaces spirit. But Buber argues that this is false specifically because it is grounded upon doubt in eschatology. Devotion to God's Kingdom should be spontaneous, grounded in belief in the age to come in spite of harsh present historical realities. Moses was humble and did not wish to use force against the rebels but he considered, according to Buber, thinking such as theirs to be spiritual death. Thus he left the rebels to their fate.

[60] *Prophetic Faith*, p. 71.

centre of interest is the "depths of the ground" cultivated – ground that Buber effectively describes as full of mystery insofar as the plants seem to spring from it, as opposed to the living cattle that clearly procreate by pairing.

What makes the *Baalim* (the local vegetative cult deities) a stronger temptation – besides the fancied ability to imitate them by the act of procreation and thereby entice their blessing of their fields – is the fact of their plainly visible and evidently deeply entrenched presence in the land into which the nomads enter. This, according to Buber, is part of what makes these local deities not only hard to forget but easy to follow and believe in: Although the settlers still remain devoted to YHVH in matters of war and strife they now find these local deities more convenient and closer to their earthly affairs and charms. They drop worshipping these idols in times of crisis, returning to them only once safety has returned, finding the rites of their cultic ceremonies nearer to their earthly hearts than YHVH, who is above all this and will not tolerate the hallowing of an aspect of earthly life such as the sexual sphere. The *Baalim* gradually work their ways into the cities and soon the kings such as Solomon and Ahab have places in the temple for them alongside YHVH. The power of the *Baalim* is only broken by YHVH Himself through the agency of men such as Elijah who form a group of men purely devoted to YHVH who show that He is also the Lord of nature by performing miracles.[61]

Hand in hand with this, according to Buber, is a certain desire on the part of man to free his mundane life from the rule of YHVH, especially in the aspects of daily matters and state affairs. An attempt to limit the sacral aspect to the temple grows: It is for the king, not the priest or prophet, to decide when the kings are to go to war. The king (Saul) takes matters into his own hands when a Samuel is unavailable, even though he faces rejection from YHVH afterwards for doing so. The prophet no longer offers sacrifice with the coronation of David as king, and Buber argues that "this is another stage in the battle for YHVH, the battling by the word as such".[62] With the institution of the king into office, there is a strong desire to free the king from accountability to anyone over earthly affairs and an effort made to keep YHVH and His sovereignty safely relegated to the stone temple, despite YHVH's wish to only

[61] *Ibid*., pp. 74–80. Buber notes that the truly faithful of YHVH's followers understand that the attempted "baalising" of YHVH is really an attempt to introduce Astarte into the sanctuary. Buber maps the movement from these many individual local *Baalim* to their growth in stature to their being placed alongside YHVH in His temple as though competing with Him as a deity.

[62] *Ibid*., p. 81.

occasionally come down to the earth to the moving Sanctuary. Solomon's dedicatory speech (1 Ki 8.12–61), argues Buber, is evidence that the king finds the prospect of YHVH as the leader of the people discomforting. The author believes that Buber is suggesting that in such a position where the king would be potentially accountable to YHVH for social and human rights abuses, he would be far more vulnerable, and it would thus be advantageous to keep His (YHVH's) power as limited as possible to a realm where there are fewer threats.[63] And what is this if not an attempt to control YHVH: even if not by magic? Man is essentially trying to wrest something from the hand of God to which he is not entitled. Now the lone prophet is the only one left holding the king accountable, at risk of his life, for his (the king's) misdeeds. That was something that the sovereign understood and in order to limit the prophetic influence, perhaps in particular among the people, there was the official cult with its officially approved prophets who, given their station of privilege, were in fact little better than the king's stooges.

Buber rejects traditional source and literary criticism in numerous places of his major Biblical theological works as an inadequate explanation of the structure of the Biblical text.[64] He takes a redaction-critical departure-point in *The Prophetic Faith* when he believes that the genealogical narratives are edited with the specific prophetic purpose to stretch from Eden to Moriah, believing that one of the purposes of the book is to write a history of the faithful witness, set as a criterion contrasted with and placed against the diluted cult and royal court with its attempt to free man from his daily obligation to God. Later in *The Great Tensions*, Buber summarises the narrator-prophet's purpose: to impress deeply upon his hearer, by means of the literary devices we have mentioned above, that YHVH is the God of the

[63] *Ibid*., pp. 83–85. This is, in Buber's opinion antithetical to the nature of God, because all the realms of life are subject to religion, and YHVH wants to remove the notion from man's heart that the two realms (i.e. those of God and man) can be separated. Buber also says (p. 85) that "...the opposition of the kingdom is supported by a negative tendency common in the history of faith…This tendency…claims to take from God's actual leadership and from man's actual response their character of reality, by fostering the mythico-cultic sphere independently of individual and public ways of life."

[64] *Prophetic Faith,* pg. 90. Buber draws attention to the numerous repetitions in Gen 3, writing that the author's purpose is to show, by repetition, the connection between events: The parallel creation stories are intended to emphasise different aspects of man's relationship to God and to the earth. Man's rebellion has resulted in the earth's being cursed. By man's sin, suffering comes to the earth. He also writes that the intention of the author of Gen 4 is to illustrate the difference between right and wrong offering, saying that the key to the offer being accepted or not is the right or wrong intention, saying that the soul remains closed when the intention is wrong, making the offer to God worthless. It is significant to note, however, that the majority of commentators on Gen 4 generally write that God's rejection of Cain's offer is a mystery, there being no compelling textual evidence that could viably support another conclusion. Buber's interpretation of this passage, although logically plausible, is not supported by the text.

universe; He reveals Himself in history; and besides accompanying man in the history in which he has played such an important role, YHVH demands absolute devotion from him. YHVH, however, leaves the resisting man to the fate he has chosen with his resistance.[65]

In a sense, the prophet in Buber's theology reminds this author of Plato's slave who has escaped the cave into the blinding light, away from the shadows of the phenomenal world. Buber's prophet likewise has access to a world far removed from the world of earthly ambition and greed. Like the slave misunderstood and resented by his peers who feel secure in the phenomenal world, the prophet encounters resentment and misunderstanding among his peers who are content to be in the world disturbed and corrupted by human sin.[66]

1.3.0. Critical Assessment of Buber's Hermeneutics of the Old Testament: *Buber's hermeneutics of the Biblical text is highly text orientated, paying careful attention to the Hebrew text. Nevertheless, he sometimes opens himself open to the criticism of putting forward unqualified arguments. His interpretation of Judaism and Hasidism has been also criticised by certain scholars as too subjective and individualistic.*

Perhaps more so than most other scholars before him, Buber paid very close attention to the text of the Hebrew Bible. Along with Franz Rosenzweig, he was responsible for translating the Hebrew Bible into German in a manner that attempted to retain in German some of the basic features of the Hebrew original. Their labours have received both acclaim and criticism from scholars, some hailing it as a masterpiece of beauty, and yet others who pointed out that this faith to the original text was sometimes retained at the expense of overall coherency. There have also been disagreements among scholars regarding the fidelity of the translation to the original.[67] Muilenburg describes the translation as an important attempt to transmit the text faithfully into a modern idiom and a valuable tool for exegesis, describing the translation as a palimpsest whose task is to remove this or that word, sometimes using words which sound unusual to the modern ear, but at the same time seeking to retain the philological complexities of the original. Muilenburg believes that the Buber-Rosenzweig translation

[65] *Ibid*., p. 95.

[66] PLATO. Republic, 514[a]-518[b], Oxford. Oxford University Press. 1993. Transl. by WATERFIELD, Robin (Hereafter to be referred to as Plato, "The Republic".

[67] Friedman*, Martin Buber,* p. 239. Friedman cites several views praising Buber and Rosenzweig's translation as a masterpiece of translation of the Hebrew.

provides clues to the Biblical author's intent.[68] Nevertheless even Muilenburg draws critical attention to Buber's translation of certain cultic terms, as well as Buber's theology of the divine appellations and God's name, saying that Buber has not taken into sufficient account the diversity of meaning in these key words, that sometimes etymological concerns dominate the translation in the interests of retaining the dynamic of the original text. Muilenburg, moreover, considers Buber's translation of YHVH as *He who is present* to go against what we know about the history of words. His criticisms of what he sees as Buber's problematic translation and interpretations of certain key passages imply that Buber leads the text in a direction that it was not originally intended to go.[69] This is a pitfall for any translator and interpreter of the Bible. Indeed, every translation is already to a greater or lesser extent an interpretation based on a more or less subjective understanding of the original text. But in Buber's case, matters are more complicated.

In Buber's Biblical hermeneutics, whether regarding the Old or New Testament, one can immediately notice an almost uncompromising attention to textual detail. In the preface to his book Moses, he not only dismisses the standard scholarly interpretative methods (Biblical source and literary theory that divided the Biblical text into strata of source documents), but also gives the reader what can be taken as a compact statement about his general approach to Biblical hermeneutics in his books on the Bible: He says he "has treated the Hebrew text in its formal constituents more seriously than has become the general custom in modern exegesis." He then adds that various passages, word-plays, connections between texts with words are repeated in other passages, adding different dimensions to their meaning.[70] Indeed, he will often connect various apparently unrelated passages by making the reader aware of key words in one passage that have been used in related ways in others, thus connecting them.[71]

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[68] Muilenburg, p. 385.

[69] Ibid., p. 387. See also above, 9n.

[70] *Moses*, pp. 6-7

[71] The amount of passages that using this approach are too numerous to list here completely, but are evident throughout his books *Right and Wrong,* pp. 12, 36, 53–5; *The Prophetic Faith* pp. 31–41, 60–93*,* 215*; Moses*, pp. 21–32, 40–55, 86–93 *et al*. See also *Glatzer*, pp. 362–3; 366–67. Here Glatzer analyses Buber's approach, pointing out similar arguments to those written above regarding attention to rhythm, key words and phrases, describing Buber's method as a demand for perfect attentiveness (p. 362) in which the documents are to be treated as originals in their own right and scrutinised rather than paying attention to "…literary or linguistic influences on the Biblical texts, nor with historical dependencies, parallels, or relationships, Buber follows the guidance of the text itself." He describes Buber's translation of the Hebrew Bible as a work freed from layers of academic overgrowth. Buber's approach is one that tries to make the Biblical text alive to the modern reader in

Repetition is described as a device to prompt association which connects and completes passages as they are placed near one another in the hearer or reader's memory given his / her familiarity with the text.[72] This is an approach some commentators might use as evidence that these texts were intended for use in liturgical contexts where a given passage would often allude to others, creating a rich interplay of memory, association and connotation. Such close attention to intertextuality as Buber's at a time concerned primarily with the issue of whether the Biblical narrative was to be taken as an historical account of temporal events (and tried to prove as far as possible that the Biblical text was based on them) makes Buber a pioneer of recent reader and text-orientated critical Biblical hermeneutic methods advocated by such scholars as Walter Brueggemann.[73] According to Glatzer, the duty of the scholar is, in part, to be a good listener, and Buber's approach makes the reader aware of often unnoticed nuances. Glatzer also rightly points out the importance of Biblical hermeneutics as lying primarily in its approach to the text as a dialogue between God and man.[74] The reader of the text enters into a dialogue, which can be facilitated and strengthened by a careful and perceptive translation and interpretation.

Buber nevertheless does not entirely remain text orientated and sometimes comments on historical issues around the text which actually focus attention to similar topics to the historical critics. And yet at the same time he does not want to rely on such evidence, which places his writing in a difficult position. One cannot dismiss the broad spectrum of critical scholarship as unconvincing and yet use such methods where it suits one without being self-contradictory to at least some extent.[75] A shortcoming of Buber's approach *from a Biblical*

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its primeval sense hence the reason why Buber translates the text in a manner that sometimes leads to the paradoxes and riddles which are so characteristic of the Hebrew text.

[72] *Prophetic Faith*, p. 215.

[73] BRUEGGEMANN, Walter. *The Theology of the Old Testament.* Minneapolis. Augsburg Fortress Press. 1997. Reprint 2005, pp. 78–80.

[74] Glatzer p. 366.

[75] Cf. *Moses*, pp. 20–32, Here Buber refers to extra-biblical sources such as the Tell-el-Amarna correspondence, discusses the word *Habiru* etc. In the chapter of Moses titled *Legend of the Beginning* (pp. 33–38) he compares the legend of Moses being saved from death in the Nile to other Semitic literature (such as a cuneiform text of Sargon of Akkad from 2600 BCE). In the same chapter Buber, like numerous other scholars of his generation theorises about the historicity of the Exodus, trying to pinpoint the Pharaoh under which the oppression of the Israelites took place and theorising about Thutmose III, known as the *Pharaoh of the Oppression*. But he then takes the curious step of saying that, "In any case there can be no doubt as to the historicity of the servitude of Israel…no people would care to invent so ignominious a chapter of its own history." These are just two examples among others found in Buber's Biblical theological works that are representative of his style of writing

scholarship perspective, connected with the above, is the fact that Buber often makes statements he does not qualify, which consequently seem closer to a philosophy of religion or history than to Biblical scholarship. He attempts to delineate the historical kernel from the cover of the magnificent events written about in the text. This approach is especially marked in his study *Moses* which is written in the style of a biography. In numerous places, Buber adds that the core of the events described has a historical nucleus that can be noticed time and time again.[76] In doing so Buber places himself somewhere between critical Biblical scholarship and simple faith in the historicity of the events described. Where the Biblical text describes events not imaginable to most modern readers, Buber respectfully says that these are events where the historical nucleus cannot be pieced together by modern approaches. Where passages describe events closer to our perception of reality, Buber says that such things are perfectly plausible and have happened time and time again. Perhaps this is the most viable approach, one that tries to hypothesize about the historical kernel of the legend-coloured narrative rather than try to back it with flimsy historical or archaeological evidence which in turn only seem to further contradict the Biblical narrative: Clearly the approach needed is the one concentrating on the Biblical *message* rather than its historical facticity.

Considerable criticism of Buber concentrates on his approach to Judaism as a dual-Torah religion. In this respect, the strongest criticism comes from Jewish authors who differ strongly to his beliefs against the Torah as revelation and Law. In this sense, Buber emphasises the dialogical aspect of the guidance of the Torah as God's gift to man to guide him. Buber knows that man is the recipient of the Law, but believes that God is not the giver of a law. Nor does he believe that the Torah is essentially law although it contains numerous commands and statutes. But we can agree with Nahum N. Glatzer that although empty legalism is a sign of late decline, and that although the Torah is more than a mere law, "...in the law is Torah".[77] This is a similar position to the one taken by James Muilenburg when he

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and interpretation which defies categorisation but show, nonetheless, that Buber yet does not free himself entirely of the same scholarship he criticises elsewhere as inadequate. Cf. also *Prophetic Faith* p. 34–41 where Buber tries to trace the historical roots of the calling of Abraham from Ur and the Semitic origins of God's name. Such an approach is in fact very close to traditional historical criticism. Then, however, on p. 61, He once again makes the statement that there is no reason to doubt the historicity of the disaster at Ebenezer (1 Sam 4.21 ff) on the mere basis of the fact that "no people would invent such a thing". pp. 70–80 contains a further comparison of historical extra-biblical sources and Biblical data in the discussion about the *Baalim*.

[76] Moses, pp. 13–19, 33–38, 61–65, *et al*.

[77] Glatzer, pp. 376–80.

criticises Buber for denying that the Decalogue was the basis upon which the covenant at Sinai was made, resulting in what Muilenburg describes as one of the Old Testament's central messages – in which the people of Israel are most certainly described as the people of the Torah.[78] Another author, William Kaufman views Buber's religious writings as more a reflection of Buber's general approach to life which sees being Jewish as the most intense experience of being human: Buber, according to Kaufman, emphasizes the Jew's passion for unity with God as well as the Messianic ideal of Judaism – the distinctiveness of the Jewish people lying "in a unique combination of nationhood and spirituality". Kaufman also notes Buber's high regard for the narrative parts of the Bible, which Buber considers to be accurately representative of the primal religious encounter of the Chosen People with God, in contrast with the *Halakhic* sections and Rabbinic Judaism, in which Buber sees only a hardening of this primal experience, and therefore rejects it, dismissing it as a way not to approach God. Like his philosophy, Buber's Biblical theology "emphasizes the encounter and concrete life-situation of the individual."[79] In this respect, Leibowitz, places Buber under still harsher criticism when he says that Buber was a Jewish theologian for non-Jews precisely because his (Buber's) views have nothing to do with historical Judaism which Leibowitz describes as a Judaism of the Torah and *mitzvot*.[80]

It also must be said that Buber's anti-intellectualism and religious anarchism appears individualistic when confronted by the fact that no historical religion has ever survived history without a coherent group and identity. Even the anti-Talmudic position he takes in his theological, and to some extent in his Hasidic tales seem based more on his subjective and philosophical views than historical reality. Catholic authorities in medieval Spain and Portugal attempted to eradicate Judaism by banning the Talmud and destroying any copies of

[78] Muilenburg, p. 397. Comp. *Moses* p. 137.

[79]KAUFMAN, William E. *Martin Buber: Can God be Encountered* in *Contemporary Jewish Philosophies*. New York. Reconstructionist Press and Behrman House. 1976 (Hereafter to be referred to as "Kaufman, *Encounter"*), pp. 70–71.

[80] SHASHAR, Michael. *Hovory o Bohu a Světě s Ješajahu Leibowitzem.* Prague. Sefer. 1996. Transl. By BLAHOVA, Alena, pp. 30–33 (This book, a translation from the Hebrew original, was unavailable in English). Leibowitz specifically draws attention to Buber's treatment of the Hasidim, saying that the unitiated reader would be led to the impression that they did not follow the Torah or *mitzvot* despite the fact that they actually took these two worlds exceptionally seriously. But when Leibowitz calls Buber a "philosopher for ladies" and says that he cannot see anything meaningful about Buber's philosophy without qualifying his opinion, his attacks on Buber become too personal for critical readers. As much as one might agree with his view regarding *mitzvot*, his other criticisms seem untenable at least to this author because Leibowitz makes no effort to substantiate his statements made in the above-mentioned interview.

it they could find. They apparently believed that by doing so, and by suppressing and severely punishing the practise of Judaism, they would eradicate it over time. The backbone of Judaism as being formed by the collection of laws and traditions contained in the Talmud is a view held almost any pious Jew. Adin Steinsaltz in his classic book *The Essential Talmud* noted that in places where authorities managed successfully to suppress the Talmud, Judaism simply disappeared as if it never existed there.[81] It is perhaps a further note of interest that in cases such as the persecution of Jews in Spain in 1492, where Jews were forced to convert to Catholicism, many people either forsook their former beliefs completely, practising Catholicism only outwardly for professional reasons or in order to escape harassment, while others practised Judaism in secret at high risk. The lack or non-existence of religious literature, however, led to highly irregular forms of worship that had only remnants of classical Judaism, curiously mixing in aspects of Catholicism that had somehow found their ways into these secret communities' worship.[82]

The view stated elsewhere in this essay that Buber is a religious anarchist is one shared by another author, Gershom Scholem, who actually calls Buber a religious anarchist and his teachings religious anarchism. One of Scholem's main criticisms in the context of this section of our thesis is that his (Buber's) teaching amounts essentially to an ethics that say that one's conduct is important without specifying exactly what that conduct should be (lest Buber fall into *I-It* mode of thought). In a different context, but one relevant to this discussion, Scholem reminds that Hasidism remained faithful to the Jewish tradition, which of course, as a religion of Torah and *mitzvot*, says what one should and should not do.[83] Although Scholem

[81] STEINSALTZ, Adin. *The Essential Talmud*. 1976. Reprint. New Jersey. Jason Aronson Inc. Edition. 1992, pp. 81–89, 266–79. Steinsaltz deals with this particularly unfortunate period of European history in which Catholic authorities attempted to wipe out all traces of Judaism by forbidding worship and outward profession of Judaism, as well as the confiscation and burning of the Talmud and other formative Judaic literature. Steinsaltz also believes that Judaism was defined by the *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* in the traditions and laws collected in the Talmud.

[82] YOVEL, Yirmayahu. *The Marrano of Reason*. Princeton. Princeton University Press. 1990, pp. 40–128. Yovel presents the reader with a particularly fascinating account of the Spanish *Conversos*, their background and their literature in what forms the background of his theories on some of the possible roots of Spinoza's philosophy and the reasons for the controversy it caused among the Jews in his community in 17th century Amsterdam. Ironically, Spinoza's "excommunication" from the Jewish community, as Yovel points out, was an aspect of Catholic influence that had crept into Judaism and was used as a tool by the Amsterdam Jewish community leaders to show the Calvinist authorities that they were strict about keeping their Jewish faith free of heterodox elements.

[83] SCHOLEM, Gershom. *Pojetí Hasidismu u Martina Bubera* in *Davidova Hvězda*. Prague. Nakladatelství Franze Kafky. 1995 Transl. by BLAHOVA, Alena, p. 108 (Hereafter to be referred to as "Scholem"). Because of unavailability of the German original or English translation, the Czech is cited here.

acknowledges the literary value of Buber's writings about the *Hasidim*, calling them works of deeply soulful and serious prose, he writes that Buber does not proceed as a researcher, confirming what has been said above that the uninitiated reader of Buber's Hasidic tales might get the impression that the *Hasidim* were religious anarchists who scorned anything theoretical.[84] Buber moreover believed that the most we know about Hasidism is through legend and even in the *Foreword* to *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*, he writes that he has retold these tales "with full freedom, yet out of his spirit as it is present to me". He dismisses the notes left behind by a disciple as being deformed and distorted, saying that he had to edit these tales considerably in order to retain *what he felt to be part of the original.*[85]

And yet Scholem, an important authority on Jewish mysticism, polemizes with Buber, saying that the first generation of Hasidim left behind a large corpus of theoretical works – homilies, lectures, Biblical text interpretations and later expansions and interpretations of those, all numbering some several thousand volumes – which provide vital clues to their teaching. Because of their roots in Lurian Kabbalism (which Scholem accurately says Buber probably scorned in concordance with his anti-Gnostic / Platonic and anti-dualistic standpoint), Buber in later years would refer to them only minimally, choosing instead to rely on legends, quotes and anecdotes which Scholem says were a secondary development and certainly *not* of the same authority as the theoretical works left behind that no researcher could or should ignore.[86] Although *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman* which we have referred to here belong to the earlier mystical period of Buber's works, the same approach as can be found in his later works on Hasidism is plainly evident even here: Buber (probably intentionally) does not write this book like a critical scholar, drastically affecting its usability *as a work for the critical researcher*: the fact that Buber does not leave any references to primary sources for further investigation seem to make these books of little use in the study of Hasidism.

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[84] Ibid., p. 95.

[85] *Rabbi Nachman*, Foreword.

[86] Scholem, pp. 96–98. Scholem gives a very convincing elaboration on the inherent weaknesses in Buber's work on Hasidism as works of research, discussing the various strata of primary literature left behind by the early Hasidic masters that sharply contradict the view of Hasidism as a laity movement. Scholem notes that the biographies and legends that Buber uses come from a period when it was believed that telling legends was on a more spiritual level. But Scholem notes that despite the permeation of Kabbalistic language in the early theoretical works, these works do in fact come from a period when Hasidism was truly productive. Scholem writes that the fact that Buber chose to ignore these primary works makes his work inaccurate, greatly decreasing the scholarly value of Buber's works on Hasidism.

1.4.0. Buber and Christianity

1.4.1. Judaism and Christianity: *Although Buber's attitude to Christianity is often polemical, he still feels love towards the historical Jesus and places the Jesus of history in the same line of faith of Judaism with its basis in the Old Testament.*

Buber's weightiest comparative elaboration of the relationship of the faith of the Christians and Jews is found in his study *The Two Types of Faith*.[87] Like his other major works of Biblical theology, it is based on careful exegesis of the text and it is demanding, weighty reading addressing numerous problems. It is also his greatest polemic with Christianity, and even a theologian as sympathetic to Buber and his thought as Emil Brunner defines it as a "..major attack on Christianity".[88] Although *The Two Types of Faith* examines Christianity – especially the Pauline direction it took – critically, we will now try to summarise and elaborate on Buber's arguments in more depth. Firstly, Buber places at odds what he defines as two types of faith different in kind: *emunah* and *pistis*. Buber is not favourably disposed towards *pistis*, the type of faith that believes something is true based on belief in something one has heard, believing that this second kind of faith is a derived kind of faith adulterated by Greek thought and therefore not faith in the truest sense of the word..[89]

Buber's thoughts about Jesus and his (Buber's) attitude towards him can be traced back to those attitudes to the two kinds of faith we have briefly discussed. He writes, in the preface of

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[87] The discussion of Buber's polemics with Christianity focus attention on his argumentation as it is contained in this book.

[88] BRUNNER, Emil. *Judaism and Christianity* in Schilpp and Friedman (Hereafter to be referred to as "Brunner, *Judaism*"), p. 314.

[89] BUBER, Martin. *The Two Types of Faith*. pp. 7–11. *Emunah* is the kind of faith that believes something even though the faithful person is not able to say exactly why. The other kind of faith is the type which believes something is true and acknowledges it as such, although even in this case, the person who acknowledges something as true also puts his trust in it without being able to says why. But Buber clearly leans towards *emunah*, the relationship of faith with the entire being, using the early community of Israel as its example, insofar as it had its birth in faith in YHVH. Christianity emerged as a "new formation" amidst the decay of this ancient nation and others around it. Buber finds the origin of Israel in a unity of more or less disintegrated family members who had concluded a covenant between themselves and their God; Christianity arose from the death of Jesus, whom Buber (p. 9) calls "a great son of Israel", and begins as a Diaspora and mission. In all, Buber implies that the *emunah* relationship of ancient Israel with their God is a more genuine kind of faith, whereas the Christian faith principle of *pistis* has its origins in Greece, "...the faith principle...that so-and-so is true is of Greek origin...made possible only through the comprehension reached by Greek thought of an act which acknowledges the truth. The non-noetic elements which were combined with it in the primitive Christian mission, originate essentially from the Hellenistic atmosphere". This will be elaborated on in detail in the subsection on Buber's polemics with Pauline Christianity.

The Two Types of Faith, that he thinks of Jesus as his great brother, and finds the fact that Christianity has found in Jesus the Saviour of mankind a fact of the greatest importance, regarding him as holding an important place in Israel's history of faith.[90] He also finds that Jesus' faith and that of his disciples is one that is different in kind and not degree, believing that true faith is accessible to any man, that even a small amount of pure faith is sufficient enough, for example, to work miracles, interpreting the verses of Mk 10.27 and Matt 19.26 to mean that the truly faithful are taken into God's realm and possessed by His power, not the other way round. Thus the faithful witness of purity can work that which is within God's power, anything being possible for God. Buber interprets faith as a pure inner certainty of God's power, and as this author sees it, is an extension of Buber's dialogical philosophy, where emphasis is placed on the immediate and direct relationship of *I* to *Thou*.

Buber goes very far in his acknowledgment of Jesus in *The Two Types of Faith*, especially in his elaboration on the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7). Compared to the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Mark is already held in lesser esteem. Matthew's Jesus who exhorts the faithful to repent and turn from their erring ways is not the Markan one who invites them to believe his word. Nevertheless, even the Markan Jesus is shown to be a man who resists any form of deification. Jesus' answer to the wealthy young man (Mk 10.17 parr; Matt 19.16–30; Lk 18.18–30) shows that he continues in the Old Testament demarcation of divine and earthly when he reminds the young man that only God is good.[91] Buber stresses the fact that Jesus speaks like a prophet addressing the faithful person as the one who has free choice and is able to turn and come into fellowship with God.[92] The faithful person also trusts God and has faith in Him, and Buber stresses the unusual steadfastness of Abraham, noting his faith as one of the central incidents in the seven revelations in the Genesis account when

[90] *Ibid.*, p. 12–13.

[91] *Two Types of Faith,* pp. 114–16.

[92] *Ibid.,* pp. 24–25. One of the central principles of the message concerns, besides Israel – in whom, according to Buber "...the being of man as addressed has its concrete reality, and through him, Israel as such in which the intended humanity has its concrete reality" – man alone: The reality of the relationship with God is rooted in the individual life of the faithful and "...cannot elsewhere take effect". Buber traces the call (pg. 26-27) to turn to the prophets, where the call to turn was their primary word; he finds that "turning and returning are related to one another as two corresponding parts in a conversation, in which the one who is infinitely subordinate preserves also his mode of freedom."

he compares this to Paul's faith, Paul being the figure whom Buber regards as the real originator of Christian faith as we know it today.[93]

Buber's affinity towards the Jesus of history can be traced back to Buber's thoughts about the Torah and Jesus' attempt to make its teaching current. Buber writes that the Jewish position regarding fulfilment of the divine command "...is only valid if it takes place in conformity with the full intention of the revelation and from the whole intention of faith – in which however the conception of the intention of faith receives an eschatological character".[94] Buber takes the meaning of *Torah* in the Hebrew Bible not as *law* but *direction* or God's *instruction*, noting the meaning of the Hebrew word *Moreh* as *teacher*, believing that the rendition *law* is the result of a Greek mistranslation which ultimately deprives it of its inner dynamic and force. Buber finds the reasons for such mistranslations going back as far as Sinai where a tendency began which led to the increasing objectification of the Torah and its becoming even more static by the time Christianity began. Buber finds the strength of the Torah in its ability to resist the process of petrifaction insofar as hearing the Word had a strength which was able to "...liberate again and again the living idea".[95]

Perhaps the relationship of the historical Jesus to the Torah lies at the heart of Buber's thoughts on Jesus, especially at the Sermon on the Mount. Buber's understanding of the fulfilment of the Torah extending to the hearing of the Word with the entire being in order to prevent its hardening meant that Jesus at the Mount wanted his followers to comprehend the Torah in its entire depth. Buber agrees that empty legalism could be easily maintained without any belief, going so far as to admit that the struggle against trivialisation and loss of inwardness became a crucial issue in Judaism reaching back as far as the prophets and their accusations against a cult which had become increasingly superficial despite sacrifices: Without inner intention, the sacrifice and the multitude of cultic actions was all but meaningless. Buber shows that the struggle for the "direction of the heart" goes from the Pharisees throughout history all the way down to the *Hasidim* who emphasise the complete turning of the heart towards God in order for an action to have validity.[96]

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[93] *Ibid*., p. 44.

[94] *Ibid*., p. 56.

[95] *Ibid*., pp. 56–58.

[96] *Ibid*., pp. 58–59.

Buber still esteems the Gospels for retaining the *emunah* sense of faith, even though the Gospels themselves use the Greek word *pistis*. He approaches their philological aspects with similar care and attention as he does the Hebrew Scriptures, also saying that Jesus still occupies the "simple, situation-bound original dialogical relationship of the man of the Bible...who found eternity...in the profundity of the real moment of time".[97] Max Brod draws attention to the exegetic fidelity of Buber in his analysis of Buber's comparative theology as well as the possible reasons for Buber's quite specific portrait of the Jesus of the Gospels, and as we shall see, Buber prepares the way for his main line of argumentation, his polemic with Pauline theology.[98]

Buber connects Jesus with the Pharisaic phase of Judaism current in Jesus' time, drawing a comparison between the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5.48) and the saying "Ye shall be holy, for I am holy". To Buber, these words are a sublimation of the Pharisaic doctrine which gives direction to an initially directionless heart in need of being turned towards God. This is significant and decisive in one's actions, the wicked heart being incapable of being turned towards God's will. The reflective imagination of sin is thus ultimately worse than the act itself in its ability to estrange the heart from God. Jesus, in Buber's interpretation, understands the Torah as instruction to the heart rather than fixed law, which is why he emphasises the inwardness, the heart as the place where obedience to the Torah truly begins.[99] Ultimately, Buber "claims" the historical Jesus for Judaism, by placing him, as Brod puts it, "together with the prophets and the non-hypocritical wing of the Pharisees, the true representatives of this attitude, in the camp of classical Judaism which Buber in the long line of works mentioned above has depicted as a living unity".[100] By doing so, he separates Jesus from what

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[97] *Ibid*., p. 34.

[98] BROD, Max. *Judaism and Christianity* in *Buber's Work in Schilpp and Freidman* (Hereafter to be referred to as "Brod*, Judaism*" pp. 326–27.

[99] *Two Types of Faith*, pp. 61–68. The inward direction of the heart influences the outer manifestations thereof in one's actions. Buber further connects (pp. 70–78) even Jesus' command to love one's enemies to the *emunah* faith of the Old Testament by connecting it to the love of God for His creation: Because God sheds His love on all without exception, we are to imitate His love by doing the same. Moreover, because of the creation of man in God's image, discriminating between people and races is inadmissible. Because all men are sons of God they are to love one another. Jesus' command to love one's enemy is also seen by Buber as being of Jewish origin, and he goes to some lengths to prove this, citing parallels in Rabbinic literature as well as Hasidism

[100] Brod, *Judaism*, p. 329.

he depicts as the Pauline type Christianity which has formed and remained though the centuries, which Buber believes goes contrary to the Old Testament teaching.

1.4.2. The Heart of Buber's Polemic with Christianity: *It is in Pauline Christianity, adulterated, in Buber's opinion, by Hellenistic elements completely foreign to Jewish faith, that Buber finds the most radical departure from the Old Testament faith of Israel. It carries with it a deep pessimism which has its origins in Gnosticism*.

The central problem radically separating Paul's teaching from that of Jesus is the way the two think of the Torah. At the centre of Buber's polemic against Paul lies Buber's firm conviction that the faith preached by Paul is different in kind from that preached by Jesus and the Old Testament line in which he stands. In general, he views the New Testament faith as far more rooted in Greek thought than in Hebrew thought. One example of this is his illustration using the need of the man of the New Testament to be convinced by proof of the rectitude of his belief. Because the non-existence of God is something foreign to the Old Testament person of faith, proof of God's existence is superfluous for him / her: The presence of God in daily life is manifest in all aspects of the creation. Buber uses the Epistle to the Hebrews as an example of the existence of God as not being a matter of course in Christianity, but an article of faith to be believed in. The Old Testament witness of faith experiences God's nearness in nature and history, and the Synoptic Gospels retain something of this faith. But it is already in John where Buber identifies Greek and Iranian influences which change the essence of the New Testament faith, alienating it from that of the Old.[101] The Jesus of the Synoptics, according to Buber, still believes in man's ability to fulfil the commands of the Torah. With Paul, the case is different. A part of Buber's main arguments in his polemic with Paul lies in his elaboration on Paul's way of understanding Abraham's faith. Central to Abraham's faith is that he trusted God unconditionally, allowing himself to be led away from the land of his fathers. But according to Paul, based on his reading of the Septuagint – which Buber decries as a

[101] *Two Types of Faith*, pp. 37–41. Buber elaborates on the Israelite to whom God is a matter of course and to whom all depends on whether he trusts the God who is "as a matter of course" as his God, and refers all things that happen to Him. Even in the moments of hardship and darkness, God is ever present, even if eclipsed. Buber then contrasts this to the Johannine Gospel which exhorts the believer to believe in him who has been sent, and threatens the non-believer with judgement. The Israelite is the one to whom faith or unfaith is not an issue, not only because of the Covenant out of which Israelite faith grew, but also because of the Hebrew faith which is realised within the bounds of everyday conduct as well as in the face of unexpected upheavals (e.g. as in the case of Job).

completely Hellenised translation of the Hebrew text – Abraham was able to believe in view of a promise, and his faith was further strengthened by this.

Buber's Paul has an entirely forensic understanding of Abraham's faith, where 'righteousness', or a rightness of conduct is added to the proving true of Abraham's faith, brought about paradoxically by God's own action in what is described by Buber as an 'inner divine dialectic' leading ultimately to God in the Pauline letters, surrendering His son to the world in order to save it.[102] Buber goes to considerable lengths to emphasise what he believes to be Paul's distorted understanding of the Masoretic text which Buber believes is untranslatable. He believes that Paul's view of the absence of real faith before Christ is based on his concept of the previous faith of Israel and later Judaism as a mere grouping of works. Moreover, Paul's belief that the works of the Law cannot be fulfilled and that yet "all the things" which are written in the Book of the Law must be fulfilled in order to live is missing from the Masoretic text.

It is primarily in the concept of the Torah as Law where Buber's opinions about Christianity are at their most critical, specifically because they are based on Paul's concept of the Torah which not only Buber, but other Jewish scholars object to as robbing the Torah or impoverishing it of its content.[103] At the heart of Buber's arguments is Paul's apparently direct contradiction of Jesus' teaching not only as far as the Torah was concerned, but also his desire to know Jesus in Spirit, implicitly denying the teachings of the historical Jesus as he did so. According to Buber, after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, Paul puts forward that the Torah is impossible to fulfil by man, indeed that it was given precisely so that sin may abound, that man may be frustrated by the imperative to fulfil it and his inability to do so, in order that he may seek refuge in the Lord's grace. The essence of sin for Paul, consisting in one's seeking to justify oneself instead of seeking mercy in God actually makes God's own

[102] *Ibid*., pp. 45–49.

[103] See also Brod, *Judaism* p. 331. Here one can read another view supportive of the arguments Buber uses against Paulinism. He, like Buber believes that Jesus regarded the Torah as being capable of fulfilment, and that the essential meaning of the word Torah is "instruction". Paul's translation to the word "Law" is based on Hellenistic / Alexandrine Judaic understanding of this word. Brod points out the close relationship of the Lord's Prayer to its original Jewish elements. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is said to have a close relationship to Rabbinical Judaism given the radicalism of his obedience to the Torah, but he nevertheless has a different understanding of the present age insofar as the present epoch, although a struggle of competing powers for world dominion still allows free decision for good or evil, as well as the possible "return to the good way through trust in God."

law ineffectual, paradoxically by God's own intention. Thus Paul's concept of the Law leads, in Buber's opinion, to God's self-contradiction.[104] But Buber also accuses Paul of leading the reader down ambiguous paths of unclear text, especially in his "theocentric history of the cosmos and of man".[105]

Buber harshest criticism of Paul concerns Gnostic dualism; and the arguments he uses are both instructive and thought-provoking. Buber sees an inescapability of evil so pervasive in the writings of Paul that not even God can control it anymore. Now in opposition to its original function, the Law inescapably excites God's wrath and man's death. The Jews are kept captive under the very same Law given to them to possess but which only serves to further indict them, in order to make way for the *Parousia*. But Buber finds this antithetical to the concept of YHVH, the God of the Fathers who *leads His people from the house of slavery*, who always seeks the salvation of even the wayward. There is the added problematic element of the hardening of man in the New Testament serving God's purpose, which is one of the main reasons why Buber thinks that the God of the New Testament bears little relation to YHVH of the Old Testament. There God as the Creator gives man freedom, and gives him the Torah as a way to life – as a gift. *People*, however, reject its direction. Buber finds the concept of original sin absurd; it goes against the word of Jesus in the Gospels who postulated forgiveness through prayer, prayer being the essence of immediacy with God. Yet in Paul's theology one remains far from God's mercy and grace except through Jesus, and is abandoned hopelessly to the powers of Satan, to whom the God of wrath has given man and the world.[106]

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[104] *Two Types of Faith*, pp. 148–49. Although Paul writes that the Law is just and good, it merely brings about the knowledge of evil and the desire in persisting in it. Man, flesh and Israel are still sold under sin; yet the Law is still ostensibly there to save man. Moreover, Buber finds the fact that Paul does not pray for the mitigation of judgement of mankind but puts forward a God who will have nothing less than full punishment for man's sin as being unsustainable and going beyond measure.

[105] *Two Types of Faith*, pp. 80–81.

[106] *Ibid*. pp. 86–87; 138–49; 158–61. One of the most vehement objections to Paul concept of God's wrath is found in the latter text (pp. 138–49), in which Buber compares the Old Testament concept of God with Paul's, whom he accuses of saying nothing about God's love. The fatherly wrath of YHVH towards his disobedient child is contrasted with the Pauline God who is completely alienated from the world in which wrath has been given complete power over mankind until the coming of Jesus. God's wrath in Paul's writings has entirely taken the character of hostile fate determined by the elements which Paul has derived from Hellenistic Judaism in which God and fate have combined to crushing the individual will. God then causes his Son to save the elect (p. 140). There is a strong opposition to the doctrine of original sin which Paul's teaching originated, and Buber espouses the view (pp. 158–61) that men sin as Adam sinned, and that God, being Almighty, ever-present eternally is just as capable of forgiving eternally – not eschatologically – without the need of a mediator.

See also Brod, *Judaism*, pp. 334–35. Brod writes that Paul's concept of the God who gives the Law to His people as a stumbling block so that they may be convicted of sin misleading, saying that it differs widely from

Buber is at wide variance with Paul regarding the function of works. Although Paul sees works as a way of illuding oneself into self-righteousness in terms of the Law (Rom 5–6), Buber shows that such matters were also an issue for the Pharisees e.g. in their *Lishmah* doctrine which stresses the importance of the act's place in the heart: The Torah itself cannot bestow life, and the act cannot be separated from the soul. Paul and John are also accused of moving the centre of Christian faith away from devotion to God, and nearer to the hope and expectation of individual resurrection. Paul and John exhort the believers to follow them (1 Cor 11.1; Jn 8.15) and listen to their message in order to be saved. Individual resurrection is ultimately connected to faith in Jesus Christ – in recognizing him as the door to salvation; that he is Lord and that he was raised from the dead, all of which Buber classifies as *pistis* or *faith that*.

Buber maps the Old Testament occurrences and roots of the belief in ascension from death, from the doctrine of such holy men as Enoch or Elijah being taken by God, to the idea of resurrection in Pharisaic Judaism. Buber writes that the belief in resurrection applied to the nation and was believed to be realised in the course of history. The Pharisee as well as the individual Jew did not have their faith centred on the belief of individual resurrection, which was more an aspect and concern of Greek thought at the time. Although such belief was comprehended by Hellenistic Judaism, Buber writes that Judaism nonetheless chose to remain separate from it, which he believes is the core reason why Paul's and John's teaching found the response they had expected in the Gentiles, whom Buber believes the apostles had unwittingly chosen for.[107] In essence, this not only results in a loss of immediacy by making the condition of salvation a faith in something, but also goes against the very self-identity of Jesus, who did not demand or desire that he be deified by believers. One of the primary sources for Buber's argumentation is Mk. 8.30 and related passages, in which Jesus charges Peter not to tell others that he is the Christ.[108]

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the Old Testament conception of God whose wrath is directly connected to the wilful disobedience of His children.

[107] *Ibid*., pp. 91–101.

[108] See also Friedman, *Martin Buber*, pp. 274–76. Friedman supports Buber by criticising Christian belief in Jesus the God-man, saying not only that Jesus did not summon his disciples to have faith in him, and tried to discourage them from speaking in public about whom they supposed him to be. Friedman repeats in brief the arguments brought up by Buber in *Two Types of Faith* which have been written about in this thesis, but also speaks of the strengthening of the loss of immediacy in the strong dualism of wrath and mercy in the Pauline concept of God, saying that the result is a dual God, one good, the other evil.

Another direction Buber's criticism of Christianity takes is his mapping of the understanding of the Messiah in Judaism after the exile through to the time of Jesus. Buber sees an important influence of Second-Isaiah on Jesus' self identity, especially in the concept of the suffering servant who remains hidden, his sufferings a mystery to those around him and even to himself: Jesus understood himself to be the bearer of Messianic hiddeness which Buber believes is the meaning of the Messianic secret. Here the servant is compared to an arrow in the quiver that is not its own master; its purpose yet to be determined. The fact that the figure of the Messiah was supposed to come from the ranks of humans is as important in Buber's argumentation as the fact that this figure changed considerably from the time of the exile, in which the Messianic commission is divided between the king Kyros and the remainder of Israel, the servant of YHVH. Both conceptions involve an ascending, human Messiah rather than one that has been sent from heaven. Buber argues that the figure of the Messiah changed in substance and essence in John and Paul's conception, transforming their conception of the Messiah from the verse in Daniel (Dan. 7.14) to one nearer to deification.[109]

According to Emil Brunner, Buber's criticisms of Paul are the result of careful exegesis and scientific study in comparative religion, and his exposition of the meaning of *pistis* goes deep to the heart Christian doctrinal tradition determined by the belief that something is true. It is even true that there was incorporation of some Gnostic ideas into the Christian dogma, especially in the first five centuries. But Brunner emphasises that although there was some Hellenising of faith, a true understanding of the doctrine of justification through faith alone in fact requires distancing of oneself from Gnostic doctrines. A similar view can be found in Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament* in which Bultmann confronted the Gnostic and Jewish Apocalyptic influences of the New Testament in exceptionally deep and broad terms.[110]

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[109] *Two Types of Faith*, pp. 104–13.

[110] Brunner, *Judaism*, pp. 314–17. Brunner argues that although Buber criticises the making of a historical event (the Cross) the subject of faith, he leaves the historical aspect of revelation in the Jewish faith out of consideration even though it was precisely historical events such as the revelation at Sinai in which YHVH revealed His name. And yet, according to Brunner, recognition of Jesus' life and death at the Cross as God's self-revelation and the knowledge of being judged and forgiven are of the same nature. *Believing that* is thus an act in which one man opens himself unreservedly to God in self-commitment. Brunner writes that sin is an estrangement from God and His will which no act of turning can repair. In the Cross, God communicates Himself to man, who recognises Christ as the vicariously suffering servant of God and has his righteousness imputed to him. Man must go beyond himself, not believe in his own righteousness and trust God completely. Brunner argues that such faith has the result of a transformational turning of the self to the direction of God, loving Him and one's neighbour with all one's strength.

1.4.3. God's Hiddeness: *Although God is invisible and sometimes needs to hide Himself in order to be seen, the Jew never gives up faith because he realises that although God sometimes judges, God's last word is always mercy. To the Christian, God is only present in the person of Jesus Christ, who has come to save the world from its destitute state. These different concepts of God in history are the last major element that separates Judaism and Christianity by an unbridgeable chasm in Buber's Biblical theology.*

Maurice Friedman describes the integration of God into every aspect of everyday life in dialogic relation which makes the idea of a God confined in the person of a human being – Jesus of Nazareth – impossible. Friedman supports Buber in his belief that Christians attempt to confine God in this form through which the only contact with Him is possible. This is offensive to Buber not only because God cannot be limited to the realms of the supersensual or spiritual, but the very impossibility of limitation in God means that He can manifest Himself in nature whilst remaining hidden. Buber and Friedman believe that Christians aim to prevent God from doing so.[111] In the Old Testament, God hides Himself whenever the relations between Himself and His people have become estranged, because the people stray in wilful disobedience.

For Buber, Christianity after John brings about a new article of faith which gives up the *emunah* paradox for a palpable image of God with a human face, telling us that this new image is the revelation of the Eternal God in man, appearing to us as He is Himself. In what Buber believes is an unacceptable anthropomorphism, the Christian God now has a countenance, something unacceptable to Jewish faith. Then Buber continues to say that in precisely *this countenance* persisted and became known in the Christian faith as God Himself. For this reason, Christians do not let YHVH be Himself. Because God is in all powers and mysteries but is not an object, so that images such as those the Christians have of God oppose the immediacy of the Jewish relationship with the *Imageless One* where God can only be

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See also BULTMANN, Rudolph. *Theology of the New Testament Vol. I.* London. SCM Press Ltd. 1951. Transl. by GROBEL, Kendrick, pp. 164–83. Bultmann examines the Gnostic mythology which had an influence on the Hellenistic Church but shows the great difference between the two doctrines, one of the most important being that the Church did not consider man to contain fragments of the Divine Light. See also below *1.5. Critical Assessment of Buber's Thoughts on Christianity.*

[111] Friedman, *Martin Buber*, pp. 242–46. Friedman emphasises the connectedness of this line of thought to Buber's understanding of relation as the dialogue in which man can experience God without coming to know about His essence. Before man can speak about revelation, he must experience it as a living reality.

loved with the entire believing heart. Thus Christians, in Buber's interpretation, only succeed in further concealing God, although Buber acknowledges that a certain kind of immediacy is achieved when the object of love is that of a loved person who has precisely *this* form. But closer to Christian doctrine is the belief that God revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ, and that Jesus Christ is humanity as God intended it to be. Buber ignores the fact that the Hellenistic Church was extremely cautious about saying that Jesus Christ was God. One could go so far as to say that Buber's conception of Jesus Christ is closer to Monophysitism than orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity and the two natures of Christ. Mention has been made of Buber's low esteem for the Apocalyptic. Philo and the late Hellenistic Apocalypticism influenced by Iranian dualism are listed by Buber as being among Paul's other theological influences, influential also on his attitude to the human body as the seat of the passions. This goes some way towards explaining Buber's low esteem for Paul.[112] Yet Buber conveniently omits the fact that Judaism of the Hellenistic age was burdened by precisely the same influences as Christianity.

Closely connected with this is what Buber presents as the Pharisaic attempt to retain immediacy in a world changed by Hellenistic ideas of fate and the Mediator. They espoused a doctrine of Providence against fate in which God is present in all creation, always changing the *middah* of judgement to that of mercy. Justice and grace form a unity in Pharisaic doctrine that Buber finds absent in Paul.[113] The conclusion Buber arrives at is that our era is still in the grip of Pauline pessimism, with the tendency of dividing the world of wrath from the world of grace. But the the redeemed Christian, despite being redeemed, stands alone and powerless in a world possessed by evil powers. In contrast to theologies based on the satisfaction theory, Buber uses the argument that God, being God, is superior to all that is human and is above all laws; He would remain even if the world ceased, thus needing no mediator. Buber uses Franz Kafka to illustrate *emunah*. Kafka's tangle of absurdities in which the individual is inexorably

[112] *Two Types of Faith*, pp. 144–45. In the case of Philo, God uses the powers to mediate between Himself and man, and in such apocalyptic literature as the Ezra Apocalypse, man's nature is suffering under the burden of freedom that God has given him powerless against the root of evil common in the hearts of men that was sown in Adam's heart from the very beginning. Paul's world-view and negative attitude towards the body which is powerless against the passions developed from these ideas. Adam – instead of being God's good creation – is evil from the start in a Gnostic conception of flesh created by the Demiurge as evil.

[113] Ibid., pp. 152–54. See also Friedman, Martin Buber pp. 276–79. Like Buber, Friedman concludes that the two types of faith stand side by side, irredeemably separate despite the impassioned statements Buber makes about Jesus in the Jewish community.

judged by an unseen judge with cruel kings as intermediaries and the remoteness of the judge is a recurring theme in *The Castle*. Buber says that this is precisely the Jew's security in the dark: without illusion, a place where no-one can hurt you. Kafka's faith is the belief in a God who remains hidden "without disowning reality". God's hiding Himself does not diminish His immediacy because He remains manifest in His creation and is present throughout it.

1.5. Critical Assessment of Buber's Thoughts on Christianity: *Although Buber's thoughts on Christianity are to be taken seriously, his thoughts in sum lead to a new form of dogmatism. Buber is too selective in his portrayal of the historical Jesus, not taking sufficiently into account numerous passages in the Gospels that are highly critical towards Pharisaic Judaism. Quite the contrary from being separable from Paul, the two are in fact closely connected. Buber also ignores numerous passages of Paul which are markedly anti-Gnostic in tone and thinking.*

Without doubt much of what Buber says about Christianity deserves to be taken seriously by Christians, especially given the careful exegetic attention with which Buber scrutinises the New Testament text. Most specifically, *The Two Types of Faith* is an important work in so far as Buber does much to "clarify the religious message of Judaism from its basis in the Old Testament."[114] Buber also goes some way to clarify, lest the Christian forgets, Jesus' origins in the Jewish faith, not only acknowledging his greatness, but also seeing in Jesus a brother and a great son of Judaism. But despite Buber's assurances in the preface of his book that polemics are not his intention, the tone of his words about the apostles, and especially Paul ultimately combine to form one of the harshest of modern attacks on Christian faith.

To begin with, a Christian reader may find even Buber's interpretation of the Gospels too selective insofar as he often conveniently ignores the fact that Jesus himself did not spare Pharisaic Judaism any criticism in the Gospels, evidently finding faith as they practised it to be insufficient. Pharisees and Sadducees are called hypocrites and an adulterous generation for seeking a sign i.e. for their lack of faith in Jesus (Matt 16.1–6; Mk 8.15; Mt 12.38–42; Lk 1.29–32); they are also strongly criticised for mere outward fulfilling of ritual and cultic demands without adequate substance (Matt 12.1–14; Mk 2.23–28; 3.1–6; Lk 6.1–11). Elsewhere, the scribes and the Pharisees are described as a "generation of vipers" when they accuse Jesus of having his healing power from Beelzebub (Mt 12.22-37; Mk 3.19–30; Lk

[114] Brunner, pp. 313

11.14–23); elsewhere they are described as tempters when they question him about divorce (Mt 19.1–12; Mk 10.1–12; Lk 16–18) and try to incriminate him in the questioning about paying tribute to Caesar (Mt 22.15–22, Mk 12.13–17; Lk 20.20–26) or about the greatest commandment (Mt 22.34–40; Mk 12.28–34).

The strongest denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees is, however, to be found in passages amounting to the harshest criticism of legalism and dogmatism (Mt 23.1–36; Mk 12.38–40; Lk 11.37–54; 20.45–47). Despite what Buber writes about Jesus thinking that the commands of the Decalogue could be fulfilled, it is clear that the opposite is the case. In Mt 23 and Lk 11.37–54 Jesus condemns outward yet spectacular fulfilment of commandments and rituals, calling the Pharisees vain lovers of attention for precisely this reason (Mt 23.1–8; Lk 11.41–43). He calls the demands they make on people burdens that are impossible to fulfil, calling the Pharisees hypocrites and blind guides for making demands on people that they do not fulfil themselves, or says that they take care only of what is on the outside, but that their inside is full of "ravening and wickedness" (Lk 11.39, 46). To look at matters from the other side, the prolific Judaic scholar Jacob Neusner speaks of Pharisaic Judaism as a dynamic reform movement that sought to sanctify every aspect of everyday life, to literally create a nation of priests by bringing the temple to the very home, complete with a great multitude of complex laws to achieve this goal. This created the backbone of the laws and traditions collected and codified in the Talmud.[115]

It is also to be noted that the rabbinic literature of Judaism's formative age was no more sparing in its criticism of early Christianity. The primary documents of that age are full of mutual verbal disputes; the polemics have a particular tone and seem time-conditioned. Unfortunately, the fact that interpreters on both sides have taken these remarks with less reserve than they should, has led to a mutual deepening of animosity which will take a lot of work to remove.

All in all, the above are only a few of the examples precisely from the Gospels that show that Buber oversimplifies matters by selectively taking a small, if significant passage from the Gospels (most specifically Mt 5–7) and laying the greater part of the burden of his argumentation by connecting Jesus with the faith of the Old Testament primarily on the basis of this passage. Jesus did indeed seek to radicalise the faith of the time, saying that "one jot or

[115] NEUSNER, Jacob. *Invitation to the Talmud.* Birminghamton. Global Publications. 2001.

one title shall in no wise pass from the law, till all shall be fulfilled" (Mt 5.19) but also added that unless one's righteousness *exceeds* that of the scribes and Pharisees, one would not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Perhaps in doing so, he acknowledged the justification for the moral demands of the Pharisees, but at the same time said that righteousness is something unachievable by man. While it is true that Jesus stands in the line of Old Testament faith, no reader of the Bible can ignore the fact that Jesus clearly does *not believe* that man is capable of fulfilling these demands and achieving righteousness. He also speaks of confessing him before men in order to be accepted before the angels of God (Lk 12.8–12), and warns his disciples against being deceived by others who come in his name claiming to be Christ (Mt 24.4–5 parr.). Although Jesus was aware of his messianic identity very early (Mk 1.9–11), others were not. The reason Jesus did not want his identity to be spread was because he knew that it was not the right time.

Perhaps one of Buber's greatest contributions to the Christian-Jewish dialogue is his reminder to the Christians of the rootedness of the two faiths in the faith of Abraham. In a study, Hans Urs Von Balthazar writes that he thought he had understood Paul for the first time after reading Buber, who also points out that Paul writes quite clearly in Rom 4 about the "holy root" (the Jews) which sanctify the wild grafted roots (the Gentile Christians), emphasising in the process that Christians would only be accepted as believers if they acted as such.[116] Christians have rarely been aware of the Jewish roots of their faith; over the ages there has been a narrow, strongly anti-Judaist theology despite primitive Christianity's debt to Judaism. Balthazar looks for the connection to the Abrahamic faith of Judaism elsewhere; for example in the Law, cult, kingdom, and priesthood, but especially in suffering, where he sees the anticipation of Christology precisely in Israel's experience in being knowingly ordained to vicariously suffer for the world's sins.[117] Balthasar is critical towards Buber for what he sees as a dogmatism in which Buber attempts to discredit Christianity because of its inability to fit into his (Buber's) "prophetic" faith thesis, whilst ignoring developments in historical Judaism.[118]

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[116] BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Martin Buber and Christianity* in Schilpp and Freidman, p. 345.

[117] *Ibid*., p. 346.

[118] *Ibid.*, p. 347–49. Buber's thesis borders on absoluteness, and Balthasar notes that Buber's thoughts on the essence of Judaism practically ignores its development after 70 C.E., as well as the material content of Law / legalism. But we agree that Buber's reduction of Judaism down to a "prophetic" faith of immediate relation of *I* to *Thou,* with his demands of complete unity of the earthly with the divine with no earthly intermediates places

But it is perhaps Buber's attacks on Paul regarding his conception of a world held in sin that poses the greatest stumbling block for Christians. Although Buber believes that the world's evils and shortcomings are evidence of the eclipse of God and not evidence that the world is held in sin, any observer of events in recent centuries could seriously question the tenability of that line of thought. There is little evidence to suggest that man's nature is not evil at the core and that without God's grace humankind would not survive long. Buber's thinking that man is able to save himself by turning is flatly contradicted by the fact that over the millennia, man has merely shown himself to become increasingly adept at finding new and more effective ways of causing his own destruction. As Balthasar notes, Buber's paths lead to a utopia involving a salvation coming from man, based on an optimistic belief that man is good by nature and has it in his power to save himself, to change the world and create a genuinely good society.[119]

As disturbing as one may find many of the passages in the Pauline corpus on Judaism and the human body, as well as passages that borrow from Gnostic ideas, a reader of the New Testament apocrypha will immediately notice the divergence between Gnostic and Christian thought. Perhaps some of the most important of these are the fact that Jesus is not considered to be the Saviour of mankind in the Gnostic Apocrypha, but merely a messenger who has come to make man aware of the divine spark that dwells within him and free him from this plane of corporeal existence considered to be the lowest, in line with the Platonic dualism of the Gnostics. This newfound divinity liberates man not only from corporeal existence but from its moral constraints as well, leading to unlicensed moral libertinism. Moral restraint was, however, strongly urged by Paul; the body, being the temple of the Lord, was to be sanctified. A significant part of his works concern the ethical conduct of the members of the church in expectation of the *Parousia*, which although delayed was nonetheless to come.

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him outside the boundaries of historical Judaism. Balthasar correctly points out that the "Judaism" of Martin Buber goes beyond both liberal and orthodox Judaism, as we have discussed above in *1.3.0*. Later, in the same essay (pp. 352–56), Balthasar speaks of Buber's conception of Judaism as one that seeks to eliminate the duality between the divine and earthly, and that this is then to become the propelling force of mankind, but that his demand goes further than a mere political Zionism and in fact becomes a dogmatism that can be found only in Catholic Christianity which also makes absolute demands on earthly religion. Balthasar notes that for Buber, all that is good, true and pure in Christianity is that which has its origin in Judaism before it was adulterated by Manichaeism and Paulinism, that Jesus himself was a Jew. But because we have drawn attention to the fact that Buber's conception of Judaism is untenable from at least the scholarly point of view, are his polemics with Christianity are not too subjective bearing in mind the selectivity with which Buber handles its formative documents.

[119] *Ibid.*, p. 356.

Many passages contain what could be described as laws and statutes based on the Decalogue (1 Cor 6.12–7.40; 10.1–33; Eph 5.1–21; Col 3.5–25; Gal 5.16–26; 1 Thess 4.1–12; 1 Tim 6; Tit 1–3.11). Because Paul was well aware of the danger of fusing the divine with the earthly, he issued numerous warnings urging sobriety in worship (1 Cor 12–14; Gal 1.6-10; 1 Tim 1.3–11).

Ultimately, acceptance of Christianity involves rejection of Gnostic attempts to fuse the divine with the earthly. Sin is the estrangement of man with God his Creator, leading to an estrangement of man with his neighbour and the proliferation of sin in the world which man on his own, without help from above, is unable to halt. This is what Brunner believes to be the true meaning of the Cross, in which man looks beyond himself and his own powers and trusts in God's self commitment to man in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[120] Perhaps the most important characteristic of this new life is love which is the greatest gift of all (1 Cor 13), which is patient, kind and accepting of others' weaknesses. Buber, however, almost entirely disregards the above.

1.6.0. The Problem of Theodicy

1.6.1. The Mystery and Paradox of Suffering: *Suffering in some of Buber's writings is an incomprehensible mystery that yet places the afflicted near to God. Yet some of Buber's writings on this question show strong characteristics of existentialist interpretation.*

Buber's small but powerful book *Right and Wrong* and the chapter *The God of the Sufferers* of his book *The Prophetic Faith* contain some of his most penetrating insights into the perplexing problem of theodicy. Here some of the key figures in the Bible – Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Job, Psalm 73 and Second Isaiah – are analyzed in depth. Buber's treatment of Job and Second Isaiah is particularly instructive. The suffering prophet is contrasted with the superficial attempts at reform in the days leading to the destruction of the first temple. Rather

[120] See also Brunner, p. 316. Brunner writes that Paul recognised the central salvific act in the Cross where God addresses man as a child in the event of God's self-communication to man who, in recognising in Christ the *Ebed Yahveh,* is brought to salvation in a manner that repentance alone cannot bring. This kind of faith is described as an extension of *emunah* because it trusts in God rather than oneself, returning to God in the process by identifying himself with the one on the Cross. This brings about a new being by turning away from the old kind of being in a turning back to God that is enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit which has a profoundly changing effect on the inner man, turning man's intentional being towards God.

than telling the people what they want to hear (the sign of the false prophet) Jeremiah chooses to tell the bitter truth and be a vessel for God's word, suffering as he does so; yet in his suffering we see the Eternal Thou in distress too. The prophet in his suffering takes the punishment of his people's iniquities upon himself in order to purify them, God's presence being nearest to the afflicted and suffering. His sharing in their plight forms a mysterious and paradoxical connection between God and suffering.[121] "The sufferings which he bears because of Israel he bears for Israel".[122]

Buber ascribes the Book of Job to the time of exile. Job's cries of anguish are interpreted collectively in terms of the Babylonian exile, becoming an effective metaphor for Israel. Several views of God's relationship to suffering are presented in response to the question of theodicy.[123] Although Job knows he is not sinless he believes that his punishments are disproportionate to his sins (Jb 29–31). And in line with Buber's concept of the God that remains close even when hidden, Job the faithful man believes a solution will come, even in the face of great adversity. Although perplexed and mystified, he feels close to God in his suffering, and can only accept his plight and ask for his God. Struggling with the hidden God who is remote, Buber's Job believes in the God who hides Himself (Jb 19.23–24; 26). He embodies a faith close to primitive Israel in a near and ever present, rather than being a stilted and mechanical god who acts causally and according to human laws. Thus Buber's God sometimes does not give people the answers they might want. God's speech (Jb 38–41) is depicted as the fourth view of God's relationship to human suffering forming a complement to the faithful believer's steadfast and devoted trust in hidden God. Buber notes details of the text such as the poet of the book of Job, calling Job God's servant several times because of his

[121] *Prophetic Faith*, pp. 178–81, 183. Jeremiah is depicted as hurting inside but unable to keep silent with the word he has to bear. He suffers with and for the people whom he knows are in the wrong. Buber sees the suffering of an *Eternal Thou* in the prophet Jeremiah's suffering; yet Jeremiah's suffering has a personal element and is representative of the suffering of the people. "The "I" of the individual remains transparent into the "I" of the community. It is no metaphor when Jeremiah speaks of the people of Israel not only as "we" but also as "I", just as it is no more figurative language to speak of Rachel weeping for her children." (Jer 31.15)

[122] *Ibid.,* p. 18.

[123] *Ibid.,* pp. 188–95. The reader of the Biblical text knows that God has allowed Satan, one of his creatures, to entice Job by attacking his family and smiting him with sores (Jb 1–3). Job's friends believe the cause of his ailments points to Job's sin (Jb 4; 8; 11; 15; 18; 20), which leads Job to complain against God who has withdrawn Himself leaving Job to the false representation of his friends (Jb 19.1–22). The third view of the relationship is Job's, of a God who contradicts His revelation by remaining hidden yet noticeably near in the face of disaster. Both Job and his friends know about justice only from a human perspective, knowing that human agents act and punish others representatively. Human activity is willed by God but opposed by His acts. But because God appears to torment Job gratuitously, no answer that Job can think of is of any avail to his suffering.

steadfast faith in the face of his suffering. Buber places Job in the same line as the great men of faith designated by God – Abraham, Moses, David and Isaiah, leading up to the Servant of YHVH in Deutero-Isaiah. Job's intercession for his friends before God appears to be another link to this figure. The prophet intercedes on the behalf of men and Buber links the utterances of various suffering prophets by pointing out similarities in their speech and words. The prophetic experience is a terrifying and weighty occurrence that touches the lives of those it affects deeply; and yet in suffering, the prophet attains the vision of God.[124]

In *Right and Wrong*, a small series of exegetic studies of unusual depth and profundity, Buber discusses the plight of Israel in exile. In *The Heart Determines*, Buber elaborates on Psalm 73, where a man discusses the meaning of his experience in life. Here we see The Psalmist describe how he penetrated to the deeper heart of his experiences in the face of the prosperity of the wicked; the speaker is described as the man of Israel, suffering in Israel's hour of need. Communal suffering is condensed into the suffering of the individual. The speaker is brought to the edge of despair by seeing the wicked prosper. God reveals His goodness to the pure of heart. Buber demarcates a dividing line between the pure and impure of heart. The repentant sinner can also experience that God is good to him. From this perspective, the wicked are "those who persist in impurity of heart". Attention is drawn to the keyword of this Psalm "heart" meaning "inner man" in Hebrew.[125] The Psalmist, on the brink of despair and even envious of the landowners who remained in Palestine during the exile, is almost ready to accuse God, experiencing the enigma of wicked people's happiness; Buber emphasises the persistence of this enigma, even though the Psalmist tries ever harder to see deeper into his plight with "the eyes of the spirit, but always subsequently comes back to the same conflict."[126] The conflict is resolved when the Psalmist enters into the sanctuary of God, and Buber writes that only the pure of heart can receive God's blessing and enter into his sanctuary, know His mysteries or enter into the sphere of holiness where the true meaning of conflict is revealed. In what can be described as a truly existentialist interpretation of this Psalm, Buber says that the evil do not really exist, and whatever they experience only leads

[124] *Ibid.,* pp. 192–97.

[125] *Right and Wrong*, pp. 34–39.

[126] *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

back repeatedly to the non-entity of their being: They constantly experience their non-existence in lives that are lived in mere shadows of God's reality.[127]

The way of the wicked is one of struggle, and in his exegesis of Psalm 1,[128] they are those who continually stray from the path to follow their own ways. Buber once again examines the way the Psalmist uses such literary devices as parallelism to compare the way of the wicked, righteous and sinful. Buber is struck by the words "O happiness" that commence the Psalm and with it the entire Psalter.[129] It is not a promise of a reward of happy life for those who follow the way, but a cry of joy. The actions of the good are always ultimately a success in spite of numerous setbacks and failures. The way of the wicked, on the other hand, leads nowhere; and Buber believes that they eventually come to comprehend the nullity of their existence at a time when it is actually of no avail to them "...neither before nor after, their life is wayless."[130] The expression of the Psalm "For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous" (Ps 1.6) is grasped by Buber in the context of his analysis of the word "to know" which carries the meaning of someone knowing something by coming into contact with it by knowing it at its centre.[131] Buber sees the most intimate knowing in the calling of the prophets to be the bearers of God's word; in Israel whom He is sending out on its mission. He accompanies these even in the face of adversity. God shows the way in the Torah, and one cannot merely follow it, but must delight in its teaching and live in it actively. By doing so, he remains rooted in God's eternity no longer burdened by the concerns of time. The wicked *actively* oppose God's way; they are evil. Sinners sometimes stray and do evil. Buber sees the difference between the two in the inability of the wicked to change their paths, whereas the sinner may yet repent and turn. The wicked are not closed from God's side but their own in their complete lack of desire to turn, hence the nothingness their lives amount to. The

[127] *Ibid.*, p. 43. "Their life has been a shadow structure in a dream of God's." Buber also writes that the Psalmist wants to teach us that the struggling man's being with God is revealed to him at the time of his distress, when he has become purer in heart, and having become purer, stays in God's sanctuary continually. This gives the speaker strength. Buber describes the central experience as one of the father leading the son, being continually with him. See also *Prophetic Faith* pp. 199–202 for a parallel account of this Psalm.

[128] *Ibid.*, *The Ways*, pp. 53–62.

[129] *Ibid.*, p. 55 This is Buber's translation of the verse that begins "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly." (Ps 1.1)

[130] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

[131] See also above p. 6, 21n.

possibility of such firm resistance to God's will is a mystery which Buber then turns silent about, leaving it alone as something only God can fathom.[132]

Although being near to God in His sanctuary gives the pure strength, it does not absolve the individual of the weighty responsibility of being free to choose in the course of his life. Yet the revealing insight changes the perspective of life and death. Death is no longer the meaningless end of life, although there is no doctrine of life after death, and Buber writes that it is into God's eternity that the pure of heart moves into; this eternity is different to any time we experience. Attention is drawn to the distance of the wicked from God in what is called "lost existence" by Buber.[133] Such vocabulary and phrases are very reminiscent of such existentialist concepts as *inauthentic existence* (Heidegger) or *poor faith* (Sartre). Buber himself calls his book a work of "existential exegesis"[134], adding that true existence is the nearness of God.

1.6.2. The Redemptive Nature of Vicarious Suffering: *In the figure of the suffering servant of Second Isaiah is the culmination of Buber's concept of YHVH's relationship with suffering. In the willing, suffering love of the servant of YHVH the estranged relationship between Israel and YHVH is renewed. The servant is to become a light for the nations.*

God is near to his faithful, even in death: People of faith place their trust in God and His eternity, not in the immortality of the soul. Because they live in communion with God who is eternal, God is their portion. And yet: "This communion is acquired through suffering."[135] In the hours of the greatest darkness, in the depths of exile, the prophets are to reveal the message of salvation, so that the faithful of Israel do not despair. This small remnant will return home from exile. Israel's redemption and that of the nations are part of God's single redemptive act among men.

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[132] *Ibid*., p. 62.

[133] *Ibid*., p. 48–51.

[134] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[135] *Prophetic Faith*, p. 202.

It is Buber's complex and illuminating treatment of Second Isaiah that some commentators hold in particularly high regard, especially that of the servant of YHVH. From a strongly text-based, philological departure-point, Buber throws in relief the meticulous pattern of connecting words and phrases which serve to integrate passages in such a way that they complement and explain one another.[136] It is here, in this part of Isaiah that the sovereignty of YHVH against all other human images of gods is asserted. These so-called gods are only inventions of the minds imagining them and are thus dependant on the same for their being; and YHVH is God who is living and being, who inspires the prophetic word; He is God of the prophet and the suffering. The strongest assertion is of YHVH as God – who not only controls history but also enters into it and intervenes, rising above His enemies and prevailing over them – is to be found in Second Isaiah. For all its complexity, the Babylonian pantheon is yet another human invention or mere talk about God.[137]

In line with some Biblical scholarship, Buber is aware of the greatest textual unity connecting Israel and the servant of YHVH, citing numerous examples from Biblical passages in what is reminiscent of rabbinic hermeneutics where attention is also paid to various textual parallels and connections developing a single theological problem or concept.[138] "Israel's redemption and the redemption of the nations are merely different stages in the one great act of redemption which God performs in the world of men."[139] The people's suffering was also to carry meaning in the light of the salvation that was to follow. And yet Buber ultimately argues neither for the figure of the suffering servant as a single individual nor corporate Israel in the Songs of the Servant (Is 49.1 ff; 50.4 ff). The servant was all those people who were the prophetic bearers of God's Word who suffered resentment for it at the hands of the people,[140] primarily because of what Buber describes as the need to set the anonymous servant, in whom he delights and upon whom He puts His Spirit (Is 42.1), against the Israel whom He had

[136] *Ibid*., p. 206. Buber believes that the connection of these words is more than mere repetition: Basic words and groups of such words that recur from section to section show that in the manner and sequence these occur, there must be an unmistakeable intention.

[137] *Ibid*., pp. 208–13. Here God is the master over history as well as the forces of nature over which he has power insofar as he is its Creator. The creation and acts of redemption coincide in a history of God's intervention in time to save his people.

[138] *Ibid*., pp. 219, 221.

[139] *Ibid.*, p. 217.

[140] *Ibid*., p. 224.

"chosen" and "held", but who had failed historically. It is, however the individual figure who, in the songs, speaks of his sufferings and vocation in the first person in a manner similar that to Jeremiah.[141] The suffering servant constantly hears YHVH's word; and living ever more steadily by the Word of God the servant is able to bear unusual suffering. Buber incorporates the personality of the prophet with that of the servant, the prophetic stage being first stage of the servant's life; the second is the acting of the affliction: The servant has willingly accepted to bear affliction for God's sake, not knowing the reason for such suffering, but not questioning either; and his offer is accepted.

Buber views this as a sort of completion of what was commenced in the figure of Job, who experienced suffering as an insoluble mystery and "the Psalmist who recognised that God loves those who suffer willingly."[142] The third stage is described as the success of God's desire: The redemption of the subject people and nations "which the purified servant as its "light" has to bring in, the covenant of the people of human beings with God, the human centre of which is the servant."[143] Against the external governmental offices, there is the Buber's *nabi*, whose calling has become increasingly dangerous because of his unpopular views based on that direct communion and dialogue with God. He brings peace, *shalom* with him, but must attain it through suffering. Buber stresses the tie between the servant Israel and the personal servant, the personal servant being those among Israel who remained faithful to YHVH; in those He glorifies Himself. Here Buber fuses the many bearers of the prophetic word with the suffering servant, the meaning of whose suffering, once understood, will become a light for the nations. Then Israel and the prophet will no more be at odds with one another. The servant's vicarious suffering is, in substance, a love for God's sake which brings about renewal. Whereas the prophets of the older generations had worked for the renewal of Israel, now the vicariously suffering prophets are to work directly for the redemption of the nations, having taken Israel's role in being the living embodiment of her essential meaning and truth.[144] Thus Buber seems to reduce faith to that which he believes is the prophetic faith, based on direct, unmediated dialogue with YHVH. The great witnesses of faith are the great prophets whom He has led away from their homes, who suffered in their generations, given

[141] *Ibid*., pp. 223–24.

[142] *Ibid*., p. 229.

[143] *Ibid., idem.*

[144] *Ibid*., pp. 231–35.

strength by God giving them the prophetic faith which enabled them to bear their hardships, whose Name they carried in their hearts throughout their wanderings. Yet although the suffering servant is spoken of as the various individuals over the centuries who prophetically lead YHVH's faithful, one nevertheless has the impression that the individuals form, over time, a universal of the prophet; embodying all that the prophet essentially is: the bearer of God's Word, leader, critic, courageous and suffering admonisher of social ills and finally, redeemer of Israel and the nations.

Part II: The Implicit Notion of YHVH in the Philosophical Thought of Martin Buber:

2.0. Buber's Dialogue with Some Past Thinkers: The Problem of Man: *Buber examines the problem of philosophical anthropology in his series of lectures* ***What Is Man?*** *Here he analyzes man's place in the universe and relation in the light of the concepts of various major thinkers who have concerned themselves with this problem, whose concepts he assesses primarily from the point of view of relational and dialogic philosophy. Important clues to the influences on Buber's I-Thou, dialogical and relational philosophy, as well as his points of departure from these thinkers can be found in this set of lectures and selected early essays.*

Buber opens this interesting set of lectures *What is Man* with a description of certain questions and problems that philosophy addresses and attempts to answer, such as those of an epistemological or ethical character. Such disciplines ultimately make philosophical analysis of man fragmentary in character, reducing the whole man. Thus a successful and legitimate philosophical anthropology must consider man in his multi-faceted wholeness and must place man within the nature he is part of, yet separated from – in contrast to scientific anthropology – aware that the investigator is also a man. Buber feels that the philosopher's knowledge of man crystallises around self-knowledge, his subjectivity and the putting forth of his whole being into his observation being integral aspects of his reflections. According to Buber, empiric sciences place impediments to man's self-understanding.[145]

Buber traces the development of philosophical anthropology from where man is considered as an almost separate part of the world – Augustine feels wonder at that in man which cannot be understood as a thing among other things. Medieval man comes to be at the centre of the world in the thought of Aquinas – the horizon and dividing line between physical and spiritual nature. After a pause until the late medieval ages the anthropological issue rises once again, and Buber subtly shows the gradual shift towards lesser security as man begins to comprehend that he is able to know all except God. Then Buber discusses the discoveries of Copernicus, Bruno, Kepler and Pascal, which confirm that man is but a relatively insignificant part of the increasingly infinite universe. Despite the disquiet and diminution of man in the face of making these discoveries, his knowledge continues and he knows yet more about the

[145] BUBER, Martin. *What is Man?* in *Between Man and Man*. Boston. Beacon Press. 1959. Transl by SMITH, Ronald Gregor (Hereafter to be referred to as "*What is Man?"*), p. 122. But see also previous paragraphs of this essay dealing with Buber's thoughts on the empiric sciences.

relation between the universe and himself. Buber now considers philosophical concepts that analyze man's place in the universe, having become insecure and a "problem to himself".[146]

Hegel and Marx are both blamed for secularising Messianism insofar as they proclaim a certainty bordering on perfection; and Marx's proletarian man enters into this Messianism and makes it his faith, no longer concerned with the universe. Interestingly, it is with Marx where Buber finds that the concern regarding society begins. Concerned with society's quest for perfection, the Hegelian idea or universal reason is replaced by human conditions of production. The conditions of production alone now become the very foundations of human life, transforming man's world into society. Thought no longer assures life, but rather the circumstances of the immediate present simultaneously have a transforming effect on the future, the proletariat self-awareness being a catalyst for events which are to lead to the abolition of capitalism. Although Buber agrees with Marx inasmuch as present circumstances can indeed affect the future in numerous ways, he finds that Marx's weakness lies in the fact that he (Marx) does not adequately take into account how the quality and direction of thought can also shape future events, nor does he adequately consider human decision. This can lead to a potential totalitarian state where men can perform negative or evil acts using their own belief in the quality of their decision.[147]

Buber feels that the community aspect of philosophic anthropology is begun in earnest with Feuerbach, whose reduction of anthropological being reduces man to an unproblematic state, even though man is consistently overpowered by that which is not human. But it is Feuerbach who adequately analyzes man in his community aspect and setting – which was something that Marx's philosophy lacked. Marx's collectivism becomes as false an alternative as the individualism he opposed. The last of the three great radical Hegelians, Nietzsche, is then considered. Buber's response to the will to power is especially interesting. Power in itself is considered by Buber as evil, especially so when man believes it is his own possession. It has a

[146] *Ibid.,* pp. 128–42, In Spinoza, man's place in the universe is given by God's love for Himself. Hegel attempts to secure man a home in history and, according to Buber, tries to replace man's faith in God with the certainty of man's increasing knowledge or evolution, but Buber writes that faith in salvation is stronger and thus not replaceable by a mere conviction of the perfecting of the world by an idea because only trust in the trustworthy can establish a relation of unconditional certainty towards the future. Concerning Hegel, Buber concludes that "...thought does not have the power to build man's life and the strictest philosophical certainty cannot endow the soul with that intimate certitude that the world which is so imperfect will be brought to its perfection." (p. 142)

[147] *Ibid*., pp. 143–46.

corrupting effect on the world when divorced from responsibility, in betrayal of its very source – the spirit. Ultimately, Buber is critical of philosophical anthropology up to Nietzsche for not considering carefully enough the community along with the spirit, and nature as a power we can approach for information. Buber criticizes these for having invoked either the spirit or nature but then neglecting the power of community, leading to an inadequacy of the knowledge of man reached until then.[148]

Buber was strongly influenced by both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard although he deals with them critically in this and other essays of his. The main criticism he aims at Kierkegaard is the renunciation and denial of the whole which, for Buber, is a part of God's creation. God created the world and keeps it whole. Communion with God is the aim and goal of creation.[149] Some readers might find Buber's thinking in this regard similar to Christian thought, which

[148] *What is Man?*, p. 153, 156.

[149] *Ibid.,* p. 179. But see also Buber, Martin, *The Question to the Single One* in *Between Man and Man*, pp. 52–58, Buber modifies Kierkegaard's concept of the *Single One* insofar as he believes that God wants us to come to Him by means of other creatures he has placed in our way, the creation being the road to God. God lets us reach Him by the world He has made accessible to man. All things living in the world have a purpose that lead ultimately to Him. This line of argumentation may strike some readers as Hegelian. Buber, however, does not consider the world fallen insofar as God is Almighty; His creation thus cannot break away from His power. God's creatures cannot be stronger than His action and Buber arrives at the conclusion that God embraces His creation by relating it to Him personally. Kierkegaard, according to Buber, isolates God by cutting Him off from men, leaving only God to Himself. Buber also argues that the God of the theologians is a logical God; religion becomes, in theology, a specification. To Buber, the ethical means helping God by loving His creatures and creation (For a more detailed discussion by Buber concerning Kierkegaard's ethics, see also Buber's lecture *On the Suspension of the Ethical* in *The Eclipse of God*, pp. 115–21 in which he confronts Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*: Abraham is unique in his faith and obedience to God. His faith meant that he could not confuse God for Moloch, unlike those after him who confused the voice of the Absolute with those of demons to the degree that they inappropriately sacrificed their first-born. The voices of demons come out of the darkness, sometimes whispering, at other times roaring, most often from inside, demanding that which involves a turning away from integrity and becoming cruel to one's brethren. Buber concludes that people suffer from the inability to probe their hearts to distinguish the real origins of the voice addressing them.) Further, in *The Question to the Single One* (pp. 58–77), Buber elaborates on the difference between the crowd and community, the crowd being the most miserable state, in which one's person becomes prone and subject to the easy influence of the crowd, which Buber calls a form of idolatry. The person in the crowd allows oneself to be answered for by it, leading ultimately to a loss of individuality. The crowd can strangle the awareness of the approach of God in His Word and the answer that this address demands, the allowing of oneself to be answered for by the crowd is, ultimately, the fall from faith. This does not mean that one cannot join a group, but one must, according to Buber (*The Question to the Single One*, p. 70) "...remain...submissive …to the One who is his Lord", sometimes making decisions opposed to it. The revelation of truth involves the risk of incomprehension, sometimes the risk of being ostracized. Humans have a history - which beasts do not have. Moreover, because they have knowledge of good and evil, they are both of these rather than simply corrupt. Good and evil are not opposites: the former moves in the direction of *Thou*, the latter is aimless, a shirking away of the soul from its intended community with God. The collective holds the person bound to it in such a way as to erase the responsibility. Thus "True community and true commonwealth will be realised only to the extent to which the Single Ones become real out of whose responsible life the body politic is renewed" (p. 82) The individual who breaks out of the crowd and its untruth to become a Single One and with it, the truth, is of great importance to Buber: Man becomes human by confronting and entering into relation with divine, unconditioned truth and by "entering into decisive relation with it." (*What is Man*, p. 173).

holds that God's intention for man was to live in community with Him in his creation; to some degree, this explains the great acclaim and popularity Buber has found in Christian thinkers despite the critical points Buber has addressed towards it.

When reading Buber's writings about philosophers both past and contemporary to him, one is struck by the fact that the same criticism he levels at institutional religion, elaborated upon earlier in this thesis is aimed at the God of the philosophers: Because God is beyond any systematisation by virtue of His nature, the God of the philosophers is reduced to an idea despite the fact that, as Buber understands it, God encompasses all ideas.[150]

2.1. The *I-Thou* and Dialogical Philosophies of Martin Buber

2.1.1. ***The Wholeness of Being in the Immediacy of the I-Thou Relation:*** *True living and being is in meeting and dialogic relation of I with Thou. This meeting is direct, immediate and experienced with the whole being, having a character that cannot be captured or held. The attempt to do so leads to the inauthentic being of the I-It relation defined as alienation by Buber. This is one of the main points of conflict between Buber and traditional philosophy and religion which he feels tries to capture and hold that which remains only in the present*.

Early in the 20th century, philosophy began to separate into two major directions which were to determine much of its later development: logical empiricism – emphasising science and mathematics; and the other with its emphasis on ontology – phenomenology and later on, existentialism. In the late 19th century Edmund Husserl was among the first to attempt to transcend the boundaries of the empiric sciences with his programme of transcendental reduction delineated in his *Ideas I*. Although Husserl presents phenomenology in the introduction of his *Ideas I* as an *eidetic science* "which exclusively seeks to ascertain "cognitions of essences and *no "matters of fact" whatever"*; and phenomenology as an "*eidetic doctrine of transcendentally reduced phenomena"*,[151] his philosophical thought was

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[150] See *The Love of God and the Idea of Deity* in *The Eclipse of God*, pp. 49–50. Buber finds that the philosopher's concept of God does not correspond with the loved living Absolute: such an Absolute would not be an Absolute anymore, but God Himself.

[151] HUSSERL, Edmund. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. FIRST BOOK: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*. Dordrecht. Kluwer Academic Press. 1976 (Reprint 1998). Transl. by KERSTEN, F. (Hereafter to be referred to as *Ideas I*). Preface, p. xx.

actually a protest against the world-view presented by the empiric sciences which he believed made claims towards absolute truth.[152] The author believes that this background is relevant to the understanding of the major aspect of Buber's philosophy which crystallized in his small but meaningful book *I and Thou,* further elaborated in two collections of some of Buber's important essays *Between Man and Man* and *The Knowledge of Man*.[153]

Man's identity and the authenticity of his being is defined by his two-fold relation to the two realms of *Thou* and *It*. Words are described as signifying a reality, and the binaries *I-Thou* and *I-It* are the two primary words. The first is spoken with the whole being, the second is not. The relation to *Thou*, having no clear-cut boundaries is a relation with being, as opposed to the relation with *It*, which in Buber's view is a superficial accumulation of information; with its clear-cut boundaries it is always a relation to something. Buber describes the realm of experience as one of alienation defined in the concept of *I-It*. By contrast, the world of *I-Thou* is that of relation, extending the spheres of relation to the realms of nature, man and intelligible forms.[154] True being is relation which cannot be described but only brought forth, as meeting. Relation is, moreover, immediate, without any means or mediation.[155] Thus true living is relation to the present, because *Thou* always remains in the present, whereas *It* remains in the past, as does the *I* of the *I-It*. Friedman describes the meeting with *Thou* as the moment when one's being becomes concrete, calling it a moment experienced with the whole soul, compared to the moment of *I-It* which remains in the past.[156] The present endures; thus the present is living.

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[145] It is interesting to note that Husserl, early in his career, parted ways with Gottlob Frege, (one of the pioneers of mathematical logic as we know it today) precisely because of Frege's over-emphasis on logical calculus rather than meaning, as well as the anti-psychologistic viewpoint that Frege took. Cf. PIVCHEVICH, Ivo. *Husserl and Phenomenology*. London. Hutchinson University Library. 1970 (Hereafter to be referred to as "Pivchevich"), pp. 23 – 33. The clash with Frege was to lead to the development of the two major diametrically opposite schools of philosophic thought in the 20th century.

[146] *I and Thou*, pp. 3–8. Buber extends the *I-Thou* relation even to such things as trees. We can view other things or people as objects and view them in the conventional manner as a collection of causes and effects or we can relate ourselves to them. Our relation to human beings mirrors our relation with *Thou* because a human being in his essential unknowableness is "a whole in himself…lives in his own light" (p. 8).

[153] What follows bases itself mostly on findings from these three books.

[147] *Ibid*., pp. 11–13.

[156] Friedman, *Martin Buber*, pp. 57–60.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of this multi-faceted thinker is the style of writing in his philosophical works, in which his basic concepts spiral into demanding, pregnant and densely systematic sets of wordplay that take on a fugal character of several voices; overlapping, leading the reader into a labyrinth of unexpected turns, inverted themes, juxtapositions and contrasts which have things of depth and importance to say to anyone patient enough to think and read carefully: Perhaps the most crucial aspect of Buber's *I-Thou* philosophy is its emphasis on love; even if the reader does not necessarily agree with Buber, his (Buber's) love and wonder towards man - and with it, for his reader - is always evident.

Buber distinguishes between love and feelings. Feelings are separate from love; they are passing, fleeting emotions that do not necessarily have any permanency. In love, *Thou* cannot become an object, nor can it be viewed as one. This may remind some readers distantly of Kant, to whom every person is to be regarded as an individual end, but never as a means merely to achieve one's ends. Love is between *I* and *Thou*; it is a relation of full mutuality, taking responsibility for the other. Although one cannot hate and remain in relation – as hate sees only partial aspects of the other and restricting relation – it is better to hate someone than to objectify him / her.[157] Later in *I and Thou*, Buber elaborates that if true living and love is mutuality and relation, the community of love arises when people take their stand towards a living centre and secondly, to one another – most perfectly embodied in the relation of marriage, in the revealing of the *Thou* in the other.[158]

Because the *I* of the *I-It* is lived in the past, it is a form of non-living existence based on man's simplified models of the phenomenal world. The reader familiar with philosophy will notice the polemic here with thought that seeks to capture the whole in crisp, abstract concepts of universals. One senses the implicit criticism of the logical positivistic thought which was breaking new ground when *I and Thou* was written. Some readers may find that Buber's arguments against this philosophy over-simplify a very rich and complex movement of thought, leading unawares to an implicit dogmatism. For instance, it is significant to note that even a logical positivist such as Bertrand Russell holds views against dogmatism and the

[157] *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

[158] *I and Thou*, pp. 14, 15, 45.

narrow-mindedness of the common world-view, but expressed in balanced and comprehensible language.[159]

Our relations with others mirror our relation with the *Eternal Thou*. This absolute appears to be whom Buber refers to as YHVH in his Biblical theology. His *I-Thou* philosophy seems grounded on the two most important commandments of the Torah – to have no other gods besides YHVH, and to love one's neighbour as oneself. Perhaps this is because man bears the image of God, an inborn *Thou* that becomes realised in relation. Man has called this Absolute by many names, yet even these names later become a form of idolatry; but by addressing God with the whole being one addresses the *Eternal Thou*, the true *Thou* of our lives. Being confronted by *Thou*, man steps into direct relation with Him, something Buber describes as becoming an effective whole, going out with the whole being to meet *Thou* – the *unum necessarium* being a visible, full relation to the present.[160] God can be addressed but not talked about; yet because He is the Creator, *Thou* permeates all life on earth. Community and the collective are compared in the essay *Dialogue,* in which community is described as being the living of persons with one another, compared to the living next to one another in order to keep in the marching step of the collective. In community, *I* flows into *Thou*; it is the confirmation of life lived towards the other.[161]

Although *I-It* is viewed by Buber as a form of alienation from true being, he nonetheless finds some value for that relation in the hermeneutics of the everyday, even acknowledging that man cannot progress without *It*. But true humanity is also to be found in the correct balance between these two types of relation. Childhood is an intensely relational part of human life, the development of the child being bound with a longing for a *Thou*. The individual also develops through *Thou*, and yet becomes increasingly aware of self, separating from *Thou*

[159] See especially RUSSELL, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. Oxford. Oxford University Press. 1912. Reprint. 2001, pp. 89–94. Russell finds the value of philosophy precisely in its uncertainty. Russell writes that he *does not believe* that philosophy can provide us with definite and clear-cut answers about even the most mundane aspects of everyday life. Russell also criticises what he call the "tyranny of common sense", saying that the opening of our minds with philosophic thought can free us from this prison. Quite the contrary from being able to give us any certainty, philosophy paradoxically frees us precisely in the scepticism in which it leaves us. Russell is strongly anti-dogmatic in this sense, also taking a position against the kind of existence which is simply concerned with the "goods of the body" (p. 89). Russell is equally aware of the limitations of science which bases its concepts upon simplified models of reality.

[160] *I and Thou*, pp. 78–80, 102–3, 109–13. The arguments of relation and the immediacy of relation with the whole being to *Thou* repeat themselves numerous times in *I and Thou.*

[161] BUBER, Martin. *Dialogue* in *Between Man and Man* (Hereafter to be referred to as "*Dialogue*"), p. 30–33.

over time – the body and the individual having matured to be capable of arranging things in the space-time relations which are not an aspect of the *I-Thou* primary relation: the *I-It* relation increases alienation to *Thou* as knowledge grows.[162]

The overrunning of *It* into the essential relation leads to evil. Buber traces its root to decisionlessness, believing that causality does not weigh on the free man. Besides causality, Buber also believes that the age is sick with the quasi-biological and historical thought leading to ever greater belief in fate, in which man believes that life has been set in an inescapable framework. This gives the reader a clue to many of the criticisms Buber aims at apocalyptic writing. In his early book *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*, Buber's retelling of the Rabbi's story of the clever and the simple man foretells Buber's later position, which can largely be described as anti-rationalistic.[163]

I and Thou has been called a "philosophical-religious poem" by its first translator Ronald Gregor Smith, and the phrase, as Malcolm L. Diamond points out "captures the flavour of the work". Precisely what makes Buber's essay take on a religious as well as philosophical tone is his insistence that ultimate questions of human thought and existence have a character defying objectification which in fact defy precise wording.[164] One of the criticisms, to some extent true, that have frequently been levelled at Buber is his apparent lack of system. His essays, many of which are written in deceptively simple language, frequently defy definition or categorisation. Although Buber is frequently identified with the existentialist school of thought, his writings do not entirely fit in with that description; he has also been known to aim criticism at other philosophers identified perhaps more strongly with existentialism such as

[162] *Ibid*., pp. 25–31. Man perceives the world around him as things organised in a system of causes and effects, thus he tries to control them. pp. 37–44, History is an augmentation of *I-It*, and Buber uses similar arguments that remind one of phenomenology when he speaks of the thwarting of the life of spirit by man who turns life into his own account. The realm of experience where objects that are placed in order can extend to that of humans in which case it intrudes on relation. Interestingly, both feelings and institutions are necessary in Buber's writings, but they do not create human life; and although Buber acknowledges the value of *I-It* in man's being able to find his bearings in the world, he nevertheless shows a tendency towards a similar anarchism that is found in his Biblical theology discussed earlier.

[163] *Rabbi Nachman,* pp 71–94. The clever man is a quick-witted and shrewd fellow whose nature becomes increasingly demanding as his knowledge grows, but who becomes impossible to please and looks down scornfully upon all whom he meets. The simple man, the clever man's childhood friend who grows separately from the clever man, is initially the laughing stock of the town, but eventually gets placed in a position of power by the king who values his simple honesty. He grows to be loved by the people. Ultimately, the simple man is the object of praise in the tale for his heartfelt, generous nature that does not falter even when he is the subject of ridicule. The clever man is cold and insensitive, earning him the indignation of others and even a beating (pp. 91–2).

[164] DIAMOND, Malcolm L., *Dialogue and Theology* in Schilpp and Friedman.

Heidegger and Sartre. The author believes this is probably intentional on Buber's part, fitting in with his religious and philosophical "anarchism". Buber is, however, equally capable of holding ground using complex philosophical terminology as his series of lectures contained in *What is Man* and *Eclipse of God* and other philosophic works clearly show. The reader is sometimes reminded of Plato's Seventh Epistle in which the fire that is kindled between two souls is a mutual fire that burns *between* the two and therefore defies being set down into words. Despite the profoundly poetic prose Buber sets into writing, a reader with even modest philosophic training might feel that Buber's thoughts are closer to the Greek than the Hebrew tradition in this regard.

2.1.2. Dialogue and Relation: *Man's ability to relate to the other and engage in dialogue sets him apart from other animals. Parallel to the primary words I-Thou and I-It are dialogue and monologue. Another important part of man's life is his ability to set the other over against himself in relation. These two aspects of Buber's philosophy evolve into an elaborate anthropology which can be viewed as an interpretation of the two commandments of love.*

In the essay *Dialogue*, the Word of God can be borne witness to but not produced, and the community is the place where we expect theophany. Genuine religious dialogue is, according to Buber not necessarily a community that shares the same faith but one where there is genuine common life in which man is turned towards the other in genuine dialogue that transcends mere conversation. Interestingly, Buber believes there are many potential vessels for the Word of God. Something being said to us needs an answer. The only limits of dialogue are the limits of our own awareness; everything that occurs to us is a form of address. The estrangement lies partly in the fact that we close ourselves off to the signs of address to the degree that we no longer notice them. Like the immediacy of the relation to *Thou,* which remains ever in the present and cannot be captured or held, what is said in the address to us remains indescribable and yet familiar.[165]

Buber draws religious consequences from this, saying that religion is all of that which is lived in the possibility of dialogue. God, the God of the moment, is the giver of words and signs. Our communication with God is in the daily speech of our communication with others around

[165] *Dialogue*, pp. 1–11.

us in its immediacy. Lived life is a never-finished situation; and speech is constantly directed at man in the multitude of events both great and small which he encounters. Thus Buber arrives at the conclusion that man experiences God in the "sacrament of dialogue",[166] aptly characterised as the "theology of encounter" by William Kaufman who says that in the thought of Martin Buber, we only know God through encounter.[167]

Three kinds of dialogue are named – genuine, technical and monological. Dialogical life is not necessarily one lived in continuous love – no man, according to Buber, can only love; but it does mean always standing in direct relation to the other – a movement towards the other, addressing with our souls.[168] Monologue is a refusal to turn towards the other, called a "reflection" by Buber, in which one refuses to accept the other in his or her particularity, allowing the other to exist only as a part of the self. But one human soul is not that of all, thus even the action of thinking in philosophy must be dialogical: We have to think about the *Thou* in the other as the activity of thought also belongs to the other person. Present being dwells among men when both turn to one another with the wholeness of their being.[169] In another essay, *Elements of the Interhuman*, Buber defines, in a compact form, this meaning of genuine dialogue in which neither of the partners of the dialogue try to impose themselves upon each other: Besides making the other present as one's "partner in genuine dialogue", we receive the other. It is a mutual effort which requires honesty and involves risk. It must, according to Buber expect nothing in return and there must be no semblance, or the dialogue loses its genuine character. It is also of importance that one must not remain closed to the contribution of another person nor think that it is not valid enough to be considered. Each participant must be in a frame of mind and think in a manner enabling them to take part in genuine dialogue. Buber does not see intellect as a gateway to this sublime discourse: Not even men of

[166] *Ibid*., pp. 15–18.

[167] Kaufman, *Encounter*, pp. 56–7, Kaufman draws attention to similar points as the author: In Buber's philosophy, relationship with God is similar to the relationship with other humans, *I-It* not enabling us to know the other person because of the intellectual barriers it erects by keeping us reserved, not trusting the other. He also emphasises the immediate and mutual nature of the *I-Thou* relation, calling it more profound than any aspect of *I-It* knowledge.

[168] *Dialogue*, pp. 19–21.

[169] *Ibid*., pp. 25–30.

considerable intellectual stature are immune to becoming imposing, fighting and destroying the dialogue.[170]

Buber delineates three modes of being in language: present continuance, potential possession and actual occurrence of a particular language. The third mode, found in the *in-between* of genuine dialogue involves both participants: Something happens not only to and inside us, but *in-between* us. In *The Word that is Spoken*, Buber contrasts monologue with dialogue in considerable depth: The monologue is predictable, without surprises or room for growth, whereas the dialogue contains a tension echoing the unpredictability of the human being. This tension is present even when two people agree with one another, although Buber perhaps somewhat circularly writes that "it can be fruitful, it always becomes fruitful where, out of understanding each other, genuine dialogue unfolds".[171] Linguistic ambiguity echoes that present moment that defies capturing – a living language always in the present: Man *comes to be* partly in language, a manifestation of his unique relationship with the world set over against himself in which the reality created by words combined into sentences. This phenomenon enables the articulation and bringing to life of highly complex inner worlds otherwise hidden to the listener, making the listener part of that world by providing the linguistic window to the soul. There is also the tool of facticity's idiom, in which man becomes one with his daily hermeneutic circle. The continuing linguisticality, in a sense a word without end, comes alive in genuine relation between *I* and *Thou*, the truth an attainable ideal in the word genuinely spoken.[172]

In waking reality people work and struggle together in the being-in-the-world common to all; but within that world the individual is to understand his uniqueness and not be dragged along

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[170] BUBER, Martin. *Elements of the Interhuman* in *The Knowledge of Man – Selected Essays*. New York. Harper and Row Publishers. 1965 Transl. by FREIDMAN, Maurice and SMITH, Ronald Gregor. (Hereafter to be referred to as "*Elements of the Interhuman*"), pp. 84–88. See also *Distance and Relation*, transl. by SMITH, Ronald Gregor in the same collection of essays (Hereafter to be referred to as Buber, "*Distance*") p. 65. In trying to convince the other of the correctness of our opinion, it is vital to recognise the other as an equal and respect his / her individuality.

[171] BUBER, Martin. *The Word that is Spoken* in *The Knowledge of Man,* transl. by FRIEDMAN, Maurice (Hereafter to be referred to as "*The Word that is Spoken*") pp. 110–14. The fact that Buber's argumentation frequently overlaps is a reality that makes his work the most difficult to place in an ordered system. Although many of his commentators, especially from anti-rationalistic schools praise his work for this, it is in fact a source of bedevilment for the author trying to make an informed comment about his thought. Many of his basic lines of argument, however, are complemented and elaborated in different words, creating an implicit system.

[172] *Ibid.*, pp. 114–20.

by facticity and the collective. The genuine *We* is the common life in which genuine living constructs the very fabric of daily existence. Speech plays a central role in this, although in contrast to dialogue, it plays a secondary, more pragmatic role of helping us achieve our ends, sometimes to help one another, or sometimes to help point outside facticity.[173] Gabriel Marcel credits Buber with making a significant contribution to the philosophy of intersubjectivity in an age which has been increasingly concerned with control and calculation. Buber, according to Marcel, rescues us from the *impasses* of collectivism and individualism. Marcel, who also made significant contributions to the *I* and *Thou* considerations of humankind writes that man tries to overcome the isolation of living in the mass by becoming a part of it, but that life in such a mass is just that of one man alongside the other. He also places great importance on mutual understanding in order to overcome what he calls the circle of solitude, adding that it is precisely the life of man lived with man which makes human existence so fundamentally unique: Genuine meeting and encounter takes place between two individuals, not to both separately.[174] Let us now turn to the next facet of Buber's *I-Thou* dialogic philosophy and his anthropology – his concept of the *in-between*, which we shall now discuss in more detail.

In order to bring out the uniqueness of man, Buber contrasts what sets man apart from the other living beings in his environment. Whereas animals live in a world bounded by their senses and corporeal needs, man understands himself as an individually existent being; and in doing so, man transcends the corporeal realm. Man is able to grasp the whole and set the realm of what is over against himself as an *independent* opposite. Precisely this ability forms the essence of humanity, continuing regardless of space and time. Turning to this separated realm, man enters into a relation with it; and in doing so, man becomes aware of the wholeness and unity constituting being. The ability to distance or separate oneself produces the human situation; this in turn enables one to enter into relation with that separated realm and, upon understanding its individuality, respond to it meaningfully. In relation with one another, the *in-between* becomes even more clarified.[175]

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[173] BUBER, Martin. *What is Common to All* in *The Knowledge of Man* (Hereafter to be referred to as "*What is Common to All*"). Transl. by FRIEDMAN, Maurice, pp. 105–107.

[174] MARCEL, Gabriel. *I and Thou* in *Schilpp and Friedman* (Hereafter to be referred to as "Marcel"), pp. 41–43.

[175] BUBER, Martin. *Distance and Relation* in *The Knowledge of Man* (Hereafter to be referred to as "*Distance*"), pp. 59–64, See also *Elements of the Interhuman*, p. 78.

One senses an implicit Hegelian dialectic in the three step thesis-antithesis-synthesis of man as a solitary being aware of himself, then becoming aware of that which he has set apart from himself, the two becoming complete only once man enters into relation with that which he has set apart from himself. But it is in the same essay that Buber polemizes with Hegel's concept of art as the will to expression of the inner state. Buber argues that the ability to enter into relation even with objects that are generally implements and represent them in the forms of art is in fact more evidence of man's uniqueness, evident in the ability to enter into even more personal relations with the non-human in such ways and create the formal representation of the *in-between*. Human communication in intelligible speech is essentially different from the sounds and body language animals use to communicate among themselves, and words are like tools which are able to give clues to the reality within us. The independence of the otherness of our neighbour is given greater depth and completed by becoming a part of the other by making him / her present as a human being. Buber says that this is done by making our neighbour's experience partly ours by comprehending it in its essential depth in an action described by Buber as being of an ontological rather than a psychological category, complete only when the other recognises that he / she has become a self to us. According to Buber, man wants to be accepted and acknowledged by the other, constantly waiting for the "Yes" confirming him as a human being, and this can come only from one human to another.[176] The reader familiar with Biblical thought in the Hebrew Bible will realise that if we are to say truly that we love God, we must also love our neighbour, because our neighbour is God's creation created in his image. It could thus be said that this philosophy of dialogue and relation echoes those commandments.[177]

Yet the interhuman goes beyond mere intersubjective communal life. One is unavoidably part of a community but the crowd and its pressures can often carry the person away. Nor is the interhuman mere comradeship, but rather an actual relation that goes beyond psychological

[176] Ibid, pp 67–70. See also LÉVINAS, Emanuel. *Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge* in Schilpp and Friedman (Hereafter to be referred to as "Lévinas"), pp. 138–41. According to Lévinas, in the *I-Thou* relation, the *I* fully recognises the other as something radically other, a subject external to the self, but confronts the other as a *Thou*; and in doing so *I* becomes fully human. Lévinas also interprets Buber's conception of *I* as one whose relation to *Thou* belongs to his very essence. The *in-between*, the interval between the *I-Thou* relation is where being is realised; always novel, it has its own particular quality. By distancing and putting *Thou* over against oneself, man is meeting. Lévinas, in his interpretation of Buber, emphasises the immediate quality of such meeting, as well as the recognition of the independence and individuality of the other by allowing that other to be.

[177] See above, pg. 30, 98n.

phenomena. This can happen in the most banal daily situations where the anonymity of the crowd is broken and two strangers meet and mutually acknowledge each other's individuality. Lies are not only in defiance of particular facts, but also in threaten the interhuman by jeopardising the *I-Thou* relation: In truthful relation we communicate one another as we really are, whereas putting on masks by desiring to seem a certain way to the other is inauthentic. Buber calls the "giving in to seeming" cowardice and its overcoming courage. Genuine relation involves risk because what we reveal of ourselves may not necessarily be reciprocated.[178] This to some degree mirrors the risk God took in creating man and giving him a free will and the choice to decide – between being upright and following God by listening to him and remaining in community with Him and refusing and rebelling against His goodness. Unlike Sartre, however, who sees man as essentially alone and whose existence precedes his essence in the absence of God, Buber believes that man's frequently wretched state *can* be broken. Emmanuel Lévinas writes that the *I-Thou* relation is the condition of all intentional relations; and by reducing the other to a third person level, we reduce the other to the most superficial surface experiences, where the person takes on a neutral, disposable character which does not fulfil the condition of grasping the other – resulting in a meeting that cannot be called presence.[179]

In Buber's philosophy, no-one can have no claim to absolute truth: Ethical decisions and acts must take into account an Absolute that is beyond the self and not derived from it. Man is not God; all human decisions thus involve the risk of possible error. Man's conduct must be rooted in revelation if it is to be correct. In an important and critical essay addressing Buber's moral philosophy, Marvin Fox calls Buber's philosophy a kind of natural theology. He describes the role of the inner man's conscience or the sense of inner obligation in the heart of Buber's man as a guiding light and a confirmation for Buber that the Absolute exists. As this Absolute is the source and judge of morals, the individual becomes accountable even for his / her very thoughts. One does not, nor would one feel obliged to hold fast to values perceived merely as invented, as the passions often intrude on what appears to be a better decision. God and his revelation thus become the giver of morals in man's life, the revelation having an unmistakeable and life-changing quality about it. This is defined succinctly by Fox as the

[178] *Elements of the Interhuman*, p. 72–77.

[179] Lévinas, p. 137.

immediate, direct awareness of the presence of the divine in one's life. Such a voice can often address the listener subtly, perhaps being little more than a whisper in the silence.[180]

Fox, however, raises the question about some of the other ethical problems that occupy Buber, such as the question about how we can know if it is really the Absolute addressing us or a demon, as well as the question about how we can know any values without the systematized or set values that Buber so defiantly opposes in his works. We shall deal with this issue in more depth in the section below regarding critical points on Buber's philosophy by other authors.

2.2. The Ethical Dimensions and Consequences of Martin Buber's I-Thou Philosophy.

*2.2.1. **The Encroachment of I-It on Genuine, Dialogical Relation:** Buber recognises the value and importance of the I-It primary word in the world at hand, but views its predominance in the world as evil. Because of its objectifying nature and the thickening of distance it causes it leads to an alienation from the primal source in a forgetting of being. This alienation from the primal source leads to many manifest social ills.*

Buber writes that it is "the exalted fate that every *Thou* in our world must become an *It*": once the relation is not immediate, the other ceases to be a *Thou*. Buber considers many of our civilised modes of being to be simple, worn-out formulas. *I-It* is the separation of the human body from that which surrounds it at birth.[181] Relation is the freeing impulse of man's existence in the world: The man who lives relationally with *Thou* is free, being able to find the correct balance between the two primary relations; able to permeate the realm of *It* with the relation and dialogue with *Thou*. Buber, as we have said earlier, grants the necessity of *It* in communal life. But man's profit is only meaningful when such life is lived in the Spirit. Separated from being, man's life becomes evil.[182] As Lévinas puts it, in more technical language: Subjective knowledge is dependant on the objective, phenomenal reality reaching

[180] FOX, Marvin. *Some Problems in Buber's Moral Philosophy* in Schilpp and Friedman (Hereafter to be referred to as "Fox"), pp. 152–55.

[181] *I and Thou*, pp. 16–17, 41–43. Some things can remain in the realm of *It* and yet point to *Thou*. Scientific understanding is important for man to keep his bearing in the world, but *Thou* must always permeate the realm of *It* (which must not be allowed to assume primary importance).

[182] *Ibid.*, pp. 48–51.

the subject. Yet that very same reality is affected by the subjective perception which conceptualises it. Lévinas sees Buber's philosophy as a direction away from the object towards being: The knowledge of being is more than a mere object orientation. Buber, according to Lévinas, conceives of the self / subject as a *relation to the objective world*: *I-Thou* relation is the condition of all intentional relations. He aptly sees Buber's inquiry as one into the "ontological structures anterior to those which characterise the objectifying intellect."[183] The ability to set over against self and accept the other implies Buber's parting of ways with classical epistemology dealing with the problems of the correct mediation of the object to the subject. This is because the subject is aware of the fact that he shares in a reality not belonging to him. The sharing aspect is of crucial importance given the relation always involved in it. But because man frequently tries to master the world which does not belong to him, and estrangement from *Thou* results, the pseudo-predictable world of *I-It* predominates the essential relation, causing the illnesses and evils in society that prevail. Because relation is a correct balance of *I-Thou* and *I-It*, *I* becomes a self-contradiction when there is a failure to relate to the other and *I* becomes the self of consummation.[184]

In elaboration of a point mentioned earlier it is perhaps useful to remember the philosophical backgrounds of phenomenological ontology in the existentialist and anthropological schools and their polemics with logical positivism and its concerns about scientific verification. Buber seems to polemize in much of *I and Thou* with the prevailing scientific and analytic world-views which he believed were threatening to destroy humanity in the face of its apparent progress.

[183] Lévinas, pp. 134–37.

[184] *I and Thou*, p. 69. See also Friedman, *Martin Buber*, pp. 62–68, for a detailed and compacted elaboration on the permeation of lived life with the *I-It*. To summarise, institutions and feeling are the two worlds that separate the realms of *It*, institutions knowing only specimens, feelings only the object. Modern man is obsessed mostly with his feelings, and the mastery of *I-It* over man and community brings many evils, but *evil can be redeemed for the service of the good*. The man who finds the correct balance between the two primaries and lives in relation is free. In contrast to him, the self-willed man neither believes nor meets – his life amounts to the shadow world of the past he wishes to control and use. The free man responds with his whole being, the captive is the slave of public opinion, social status, his own neurosis etc., never responding spontaneously, but always measuring the other in terms of status or usefulness. Thus the *I* of the *I-It* also becomes conscious of self as the object of experience and using; this *I* then tries to divert thought away from his / her spiritual poverty. Friedman's interpretation of Buber's concept of *I-It* are reminiscent of Heidegger's thought on inauthentic existence and the inauthentic existent's obsession with living according to public opinion instead of leading an authentic existence in expectation of death and the anxiety it brings with it.

The controversies raging between the two opposed schools of thought – phenomenology and analytic philosophy could be summarised, if only very briefly, as follows: phenomenologists felt that mankind was increasingly threatened by science that could be potentially exploited and abused for the annihilation of Man – quite the contrary of the progress that was hoped for. Both the First and Second World wars brought about a scepticism and disillusionment in the potential of technical progress and analysis to be put in the service of mankind. Even though Husserl commenced phenomenology as a transcendental "science", he was soon criticised for a position found to be too intellectual and scientifically orientated to be of practical use in the *Lebenswelt*. The philosophy of such thinkers as Sartre, Marcel or Camus placed increasing weight on emotion and its analysis, "rejecting" systematic and academic thought.[185] On the other hand, there were the logical positivists who sought to clear philosophic thought from layers of unclear concepts that had accumulated in philosophical thought through metaphysics. Instead of attempting to provide crisp definitions of the whole, they concentrated on solving the micro-problems of correspondence of sentences with reality using logical calculus (previously used for the verification of truth in mathematical propositions) to test the consistency of the abstract truths philosophy aspired to. They hoped to find and eliminate tautologies and contradictions. Although this movement attempted to find truth through the correct and clear use of language, its way of thought was diametrically opposite from the dialogic and relational philosophy developed by Buber, who held the theory that the elemental relation of the making present of the other is hampered by what he calls the modern viewpoint as well as by analytical and reductive viewpoints. Although he grants that such sciences have their value he believes their usefulness is limited and thus they must know their boundaries.[186] On this note, however, it must be said that the arguments that Buber advances against excessive dependence on empiric sciences is by no means new and in fact has its roots firmly in the Greek rather than the Hebrew tradition. Although we can hardly accuse Buber of being a dualist, the lack of esteem that he holds for these sciences is reminiscent of the scorn Plato and his followers had towards the phenomenal world and the limits of empiricism which could be termed *techné* or *doxa* rather than *epistemé*. One recalls that the phenomenally

[185] See also Pivchevich, pp. 146–54.

[186] *Elements of the Interhuman*, p. 80.

perceived world is but a mere shadow of the world of ideas and true knowledge.[187] But Buber feels, unlike Plato, love and wonder towards the sensory world, seeking to experience its reality and beauty to the full, which is why he tries to devote as much strength as possible even at mundane levels such as trees or a well-loved pet cat and does not want to call that world the lowest level of existence.[188]

There are numerous ethical consequences brought about by the encroachment of *I-It* into the primary relation. We have already mentioned the potential abuses of science when it is used to annihilate man. There are, however more subtle levels of the encroachment of the *I-It* primary into genuine relation. In his essay *Man and His Image-work*, Buber shows how the modern world of the senses accepted uncritically in the past became gradually transformed into an increasingly (if only deceptively) reliable, measurable world. Yet that predictable world paradoxically evolved to become increasingly foreign in its estrangement from the *Lebenswelt*. Science, despite its replacement of older theories with more consistent, versatile ones, did not trouble itself over what Buber describes as man's continuing need for a metaphysical grounding providing "a real world constituted in a certain way".[189] Yet that same image given by empiric sciences appears abstract and symbolic in itself, it runs contrary to what *we know about the world*. A metaphysical dualism within itself arises insofar as these theories (based on empirically observed reality - the validity of which science has cast into increasing doubt) mean that we proceed and make advances based on an ever-less-familiar world. In recalling a conversation with the scientist Albert Einstein,[190] Buber traces the *hybris* of the scientific in their 'we' that almost claimed to draw the very lines of being after God despite the unsteady grounds upon which their progress was based.[191]

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[187] See esp. PLATO, *The Republic*, 514^{a}–518^{b}. The criticism Buber and his supporters direct at the scientific and analytical world-view may often seem to the reader to be a continuation of the polemics between Platonism and Aristotelianism. The knowledge needed to perform a trade is held in lower esteem than philosophical knowledge especially by Plato, belonging as it does to the sensory world subject to time, change and decay – in contrast to philosophical knowledge (*epistemé*) gained by contemplation of the Good which is constant and lasting.

[188] Cf. *I and Thou* p. 7. For example, Buber's thoughts about the tree, in which he contrasts perceiving the ordinary, sensory details of the tree to noticing the tree in its exclusiveness and its originality.

[189] BUBER, Martin. *Man and his Image-work* in *The Knowledge of Man* (Hereafter to be referred to as "*Man and his Image-work*"), pp 154–56, (quote p. 155).

[190] *Ibid*., p. 155.

[184] *Ibid.*, pp. 156–58. As Buber observes, our behaviour in the world is largely affected by our hermeneutics of facticity, that is – based on our perceptions of it, our adjustments made in order to satisfy intentions: Because our observations and intentions change when we attempt grasp things outside of our surroundings and understand

The reader may remember what has been said about the elemental relation of the interhuman in which we accept the other in his otherness and become a part of his reality in mutual relation that becomes dialogue. We can now contrast to this relation to the method of persuading our neighbour typical for propaganda. The propagandist forces his views or political beliefs on the other until that other begins to understand and accept the foreign view as his own latent thought. In contrast to the educator – who seeks to bring someone's individuality to the fore by nurturing and developing it – the propagandist seeks to understand another's individuality in order to exploit and manipulate it at his own discretion. The propagandist simultaneously tries to stifle the personal individual perceived as a threat to his intentions amounting to little more than a search and grouping of adherents for a certain cause. Buber rightly observes that political methods at their extreme depersonalise the human.[192]

Despite the depth and intelligence of Buber's philosophy, the intentional lack of system pervading his ethics is a source of criticism by authors such as Fox.[193] Buber's argumentation on this topic is very similar to his arguments regarding revelation: He believes that man is to follow his heart because the heart knows what is right based upon revelation and direct, immediate relation with the absolute. Evil is a lack of direction; it is never done with the whole being and its direction is always turned away from God. Because morally correct action is always done with the fullness of being and the heart in the right direction, there is no need for a fixed moral codex, which is nearer to idolatry. Even the Bible and the Decalogue is ultimately the work of man. Although Buber's thoughts on such matters as racial prejudice

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them as they are in themselves, things then become an *x* or a *y,* and it is in this that Buber finds the main encroachment of empirical science and the mathematical world on the object. Buber relates the story of the Linden tree emptied of its reality once it is broken down according to mathematical formulae, concluding that nature becomes robbed of its content until we learn to accept it as a thing of the senses in immediate existential reality in the multiplicity, not as an object cut and dried.

[192] *Elements of the Interhuman*, pp. 82–3.

[193] Fox, pp. 151–68. Fox's deep and thought-provoking article discusses the foundations of Buber's ethics in revelation which transform the entire being of man and addresses the problem of the human who does not know whether the revelation received is truly from the Absolute or an idol. Because no-one is ever entirely pure there is the added problem of the purity with which the revelation is understood. Because Buber feels that everyone is convinced of their own truth and must act accordingly as this is all that is expected of them – to act with the entirety of their being – ethical conduct cannot be fixed. Fox nevertheless poses the question of how we can attack morally reprehensible behaviour if there is no real normative ethical codex. Fox also criticises Buber for not taking a clear enough standpoint even as regards his own views despite the sensitivity he shows towards social grace which is the fulfilment of the command to love one's neighbour in the Pentateuch.

and love towards the neighbour are rooted in the Pentateuch, he does not insist that such moral standards are binding. They are a guide but are not to be confused with the Word.

2.2.2. *Buber, Religion and Philosophy:* *Martin Buber's philosophic thought is strongly based on the revelation of YHVH, whom Buber evidently refers to in his philosophy as Thou. The permeation of the Thou in our being in the world has ethical consequences affecting our lives and contacts with our neighbours. Worship of the Absolute in the forms of religion has a legitimate place in society, but not even religion is immune to the alienation of I-It that can result from religion worshipping its own forms. When religion loses sight of revelation and lives for itself it becomes idolatry.*

The moment of revelation, which cannot be experienced, is that of the meeting with the *Eternal Thou*. The Word of revelation is "*I am that I am*". Even though the *Eternal Thou* cannot become an *It*, in pursuing religion for the sake of religion, man exchanges the *Eternal Thou* for an *It*.[194] A god who condescends to become the object of a religion or a cult can only be spoken to, not about. The Spirit's presence is a liberating force bringing joy to life and work. Buber believes that all men have, somewhere in the depths of their souls, some awareness of Thou and points out the meaninglessness of *It* in sickness or boundary situations. He also depicts society that has ceased to be grounded in the relational as metamorphosing into *It,* where causality replaces the former harmony in the cosmos to oppress its people in fate.

In the lecture *Religion and Philosophy* Buber writes that the genuine relation of self to being is also decisive for true religion; it is not of primary importance to be able to talk about God in order to believe in Him. Genuine relation and belief are both calls to God. The question about proof of God's existence is a negative one because of the lack of experience; and even the ancient philosophers such as Protagoras understood that one could neither prove nor disprove the existence of God. Buber sees the difference between the great religions and philosophy as lying in the fact that the great religions are such in which there is a living relationship to Being – believed-in, Absolute Being results in a belief which has an existential reality in a mutuality of *I* and *Thou*. In philosophy, the Absolute is objectified and all else is derived from it. The duality here is that of subject and object; and the philosophical attitude

[194] *I and Thou*, pp. 112–15.

tries to gain and seek autonomy for itself, viewing religion as something between clear knowledge and confused opinion. In religion, faith does not understand relation as noetic, but rather stresses reciprocity insofar as it comprehends mutual relation as mutual contact. Philosophy, being concerned with essences, tries to liberate itself from religion and "wills to become life".[195]

Buber finds the essence of religion in concrete reality and not above the struggle with reality. Once again, he stresses the immediacy of the moment which is lost by trying to experience that moment. Buber believes that one must stand firm before reality and answer it fully in order to experience meaning. He believes there is an absolute and essential mystery which is unknowable here but which can be found in the everyday. This is the realm in which we hallow the divine: Fear of God involves something seemingly as simple as accepting the situation as given by the Giver. We cannot love God without fearing Him first: An easy god thus loved becomes a mere idol, fashioned according to one's needs. Knowing God, *Thou,* in fear means putting oneself in the hands of His mercy; this is the only thing that can bring man to truly love God in the deeply personal religious experience.[196]

But Buber feels that philosophy does the opposite to this in its looking away from the concrete towards abstraction. Reality is thus only the starting point of philosophy, where man lifts himself above the sphere of concrete reality further into the sphere of precise conceptualisation where the object is the higher reality of the Good or the Absolute that can be found in universals. Buber criticises the too general nature of Greek thought as well as the fact that it denounces the immediate relation of *I* to *Thou*. Although the world would not be comprehensible without the conceptual thought characteristic of philosophy, Buber's arguments show that God is present and shines through all forms and yet cannot be held in any kind of image. Because in philosophy, thinking plays the key role in all faculties one becomes, as Buber seems to suggest, insensitive to surroundings. The highest intensity of being is to be found in truly religious reality – permeated as it is by the *I-Thou* primary. Considering the above, it is not surprising that Buber finds the highest concentration of the *I-It* primary in philosophical knowledge in which the subject is extracted "from the *I* of the

[195] BUBER, Martin. *Religion and Philosophy* in *The Eclipse of God*. 1952. New York. Harper and Row Torchbooks. Reprint 1957. Transl. by FRIEDMAN, Maurice (Hereafter to be referred to as "*Religion and Philosophy*"), pp. 28–35.

[196] *Ibid.*, pp. 36–38.

immediate togetherness of *I* and *It* ...and produces the exact thinking of contemplated existing beings, yes, of contemplated Being itself."[197] Buber says that philosophy can offer a corrective to theology that has strayed from its path when the symbols and anthropomorphisms it uses place barriers to genuine relation with the God, *Thou* who has suffered them. Precisely the critical atheism of the philosopher – who opposes symbols and metaphysics – can rouse the religious back to following the God they had previously destroyed with their fashioned images.[198]

Connected with Buber's thoughts on the turning away from *Thou* are those regarding the abolition of relation, specifically Buber's critical words addressing mysticism and Gnosticism – both of which he believes seek to abolish *I* by unifying it with *Thou* in what Buber specifically calls the "loftiest peaks in the language of *It*". In this process of the human becoming unified with the divine, the soul senses or imagines a unity with the divine. Yet Buber ascribes little more than a flight from reality to it, because this unification only takes place in the soul of man. The flight from reality is of little help in its detachment from the earthly situation, leading ultimately to the annihilation rather than affirmation of the self.[199] "Eastern flights from reality" are, moreover, an evasion of genuine existence as *We*, where dialogic speech carries a realm in which response (and responsibility carried within that response) is required. The man of flight leaps into the flight of the multitude or into the self but always away from that all-important mutual responsibility lived as *We*. Such individuals, who grow deaf to the voice of the other, cease to hear *Thou*.[200] Reality exists only in mutual

[197] *Ibid*., pp. 44–6.

[198] *Ibid.,Idem*. See also Friedman, *Martin Buber*, pp.127, 130–31. Friedman describes a social and cosmic insecurity which strengthens the breakdown in community living causing a loss of ability to respond with the whole being, leading to an existential mistrust and a loss of trust in God. This he describes as an eclipse of God experienced primarily in Being itself, with the human side of God hiding its face. Man is able to glimpse God, yet unable to produce images of an Absolute who eludes direct contemplation. Friedman sees the most serious consequence as the loss of God's nearness and the inability to renew relations with Him; man does not believe himself addressed by God; and in a world full of horror, we feel unable to call to God.

[199] It is interesting to note that this criticism – the flight from reality and lack of rootedness in the lived world of man was one of the main moving forces in the parting of existentialism with early phenomenology as represented by Husserl, which itself sought to part with the scientific world-view making greater claims to absolute authority.

[200] *Elements of the Interhuman*, pp. 108–9. See also Buber's polemics with Aldous Huxley in *Idem,* pp. 98–102. Buber opposes Huxley and his experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs, saying that these are only a flight into the world of the self. Such chemical holidays divorce one not only from the *I* of facticity but also from the world and the personhood the world brings about in us. The loss of situation in such self-paradises shuts one away from other people and makes them look suspicious. Although Huxley considered his mescaline experiences mystic,

action in Buber's thought.[201] Moreover, in relation, man feels his dependence on God as a creature. The doctrine of *Karma* is similarly negative to Buber given the inescapability of fate in which it keeps its believers (and the cosmos).[202]

It is of interest to note here that Buber was himself influenced by mysticism, and started out as a mystic early in his career. He himself writes that in his earlier years the religious experience was the exceptional, defining it as the "experience of an otherness which did not fit into the context of life".[203] The attraction of mysticism was the ability of the religious to tear time apart which, Buber says, could lift one out of one's accustomed existence with its everyday affairs and concerns into a sphere where "illumination and ecstasy and rapture held without time or sequence."[204] In the same passage, however, Buber decries this "division of the temporal life which is streaming to death and eternity and which only in its temporality can be fulfilled in the face of these" as illegitimate. The suicide of a man who had come to see him, not simply in order to chat but rather to seek a decisive answer, shook Buber deeply. Blaming himself for this man's death, Buber writes that he had been in too much of a religious rapture after a mystical experience to respond (to Buber's mind) appropriately to the man's questions when he was still alive (even though Buber says he listened to the man attentively, answered his questions as carefully as anyone else who called on him with similar matters as had this man). This incident disturbed Buber profoundly enough for him to stop seeking out religious experiences divorced from the everyday.[205] Among the other influences

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Buber reminds us that the artist and the mystic are both removed from the community in which they belong and (p. 102) "...must deliver not less than themselves...in order to withstand what has taken possession of them."

[201] *I and Thou*, pp. 83–89. See also pp. 91–99. Buber dismisses Buddhism as a false goal because it seeks the cessation of pain i.e. the becoming and passing away. Because Buddhism also leads to the rejection of the sensory world, Buber decries it as an extinction of the ability to say *Thou* and a renunciation of the meaning of life, which is to remain in relation. Ultimately, Buber dismisses Buddhism as an illusory belief that God dwells in the soul. God is near, but remote at the same time, and is not our Self.

[202] *Ibid.,* pp. 51, 54, 55. According to Buber, *Karma* is a tyranny which shuts "...us into a prison that we cannot break in this life….a heaven was established in a law...stars now rule in oppressive might…But now, whatever we do, we are laden with the whole burden of the dead weight of the world, with fate that does not know spirit. The storming desire for salvation is unsatisfied after manifold attempts, till it is stifled by one who learns to escape the cycle of births.." This quote is among the more representative of the light in which Buber views most mysticism and Gnosticism, which shall be discussed later.

[203] *Dialogue*, p. 13.

[204] *Ibid., idem*.

[205] *Ibid*., pp. 13–14.

on Buber's thought in the early 20th Century were Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism (which persisted) and German mysticism. Also of importance are the *Haskalah* and Hasidic movements in Judaism which Friedman believes Buber synthesized into his philosophy; Buber saw Judaism's main task as a synthesis of word and deed, the truly creative man being the one who could bring inner division into harmony and follow a new direction in one's life yet remain rooted to a people through and in whom one is enriched.[206]

2.3. The Permeation of the *I-Thou* Primary into Daily Life in the Practical Sense.

2.3.1. Education and Character Formation: *Buber's awareness of the importance of genuine relation in such fields as education closely follow the ethical aspect of I-Thou relation and dialogic philosophy. The teacher has a responsibility over his / her charges not only in the sense of teaching them facts but also for the building of their character by accepting and bringing their individual personalities to the fore. Because education not only teaches mutuality to children, but also develops the educator's person, it is intensely dialogical and relational, and thus an important aspect of the I-Thou primary.*

Buber's contribution to a philosophy of education can be found in his essays *Education* (1926) and *The Education of Character* (1939). He begins the first by discussing the reality into which children are born by the hour. Children are born with a disposition of a given historical reality that begins its encroachment into character even before the child is born. Despite this, the future is not simply a deterministic mechanism that causally pulls the individual hither and thither. In fact, the individual plays a crucial role in shaping the future – as do educators.[207] Buber connects intellectual development to creation; and the creative process is an instinctive ability common to all. The desire to take part in speaking or even the destructive urge – but yet seeing something new emerging as the result of our efforts – are particularly apt examples taken from the everyday world of human desire to be a part of the world-at-hand.[208]

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[206] Friedman, *Martin Buber*, p. 31–32.

[207] BUBER, Martin. *Education* in *Between Man and Man* (Hereafter to be referred to as "*Education*"), pp. 83–85.

[208] *Ibid., idem.*

We have all experienced the wonder of a completely unexpected result forming after a seemingly long process of various steps led by our teacher. For example, a candelabrum that emerges from the negative space between two identical profiles one has carefully drawn facing one another. Buber uses the example of a choirmaster creating a polyphony of voices from a formless, somewhat disorderly mass of faces, voices and personalities. The activity of singing teaches one to be less selfish insofar as it trains regard for the other and the group as a whole, learning to keep one's individuality within its appropriate boundaries. Like the choirmaster, the teacher plays an indispensible role in the sharing and mutuality that is necessary for a meaningful society lived as a communal *We*. Buber finds the essence of being in the communal opus. The artistic, creative opus is meaningful, but needs someone who can relate the individual to that which is beyond the arts as a fellow-creature lost in the world. We have discussed how the child is born into primal relation. Yet as the child's personality grows once the person learns how to separate self from objects, the *I-It* primary beings to encroach on what was primary relation. But once the child begins to navigate his way into the world, this must be tempered and permeated by *Thou* if the child is not to take on a one-sided relationship with the world by objectifying it at the same time as internalising it. There is a danger of the child coming to recognise the world purely as a tool to be used. [209]

Buber believes that there is the instinct and desire for communion, the longing for the world at hand to become present to us as person who teaches us to say *Thou*. We desire a world that is responsive to us, that respects and confirms us as a person in our uniqueness - in other words, we desire the communality of the relational being of the *I-Thou* primary. Keeping in mind the child's inborn capacity to receive the world, it is the educator's field of concern to develop that capacity by condensing and selecting the "effective world" and making it manifest though him. Another interpretation of this is the teacher's role and ability to edit the plethora of input the child receives and build his / her character from the outlines and the basic structures through the depths and inner relationships.[210]

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[209] BLENKINSOPP, Sean. *Martin Buber: Educating for Relationship* in *Ethics, Place and Environment*, Vol. 8, No. 3, October 2005. London. Routledge. 2005 (Hereafter to be referred to as "Blenkinsopp"), p. 299. Blenkinsopp repeats the need for the *I-It* primary in the hermeneutics of facticity; but it is a means rather than an end, in which the child learns to explore and categorise. The teacher is a mediator of the scientific and relational world. That is why his work with the child is of such importance.

[210] *Education,* pp. 86–90. See especially p. 89, "The world, that is the whole environment, nature and society, "educates" the human being…education...means *a selection by man of the effective world*: it means to give decisive effective power to a selection of the world which is concentrated and manifested in the educator…through the educator, the world for the first time becomes the true subject of its effect."

In his ability to condense and represent the rest of the world reaching the pupil the teacher provides the starting point of education. The teacher needs to develop potential as opposed to merely allowing compulsion. The teacher allows freedom to his pupils, freedom being the contrary of compulsion by nature or fate. The teacher in a sense echoes God, in a certain sense His representative insofar as he not only has a great responsibility, but also takes a great risk by allowing his pupils freedom, as well as in the manifold variety he sees in the pupils' faces and personalities when faced with them for the first time. Buber likens it to a "veritable, chaotic multitude of unknown faces" so that the educator becomes a creator in the sense of Gen 1.1, where there is only chaos and darkness before God created the world.[211]

There is a moment of wonder when the educator experiences reality from the other, receiving side which, although lasting only a mere instant, forms the indelible impression of the other, making him present. This is viewed by Buber as a transfusion, making it impossible to think of teaching the child as a mere elaboration of subjectivity. Buber lays strong emphasis on the inclusion which takes place in such cases where mutual realities overlap and are woven together to form the experience of the *in-between* in this unique event. In inclusion, one extends one's own reality into that of the other, conversation itself only becomes genuine by inclusion (the main elements of which are relation and a common event), and the acknowledgement of the actual being of the partner in dialogue. Thus education is a branch of

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See also Blenkinsopp, pp. 287–89. The human has an instinct for community and it is the teacher's responsibility to realise and nurture this ability. In true dialogue one embraces the other. *I* becomes complete in relationship, both with the individual and the external world and this becomes a reuniting of the temporal with the eternal. Blenkinsopp emphasises Buber's numerous encounters with the more than human in his early life as instrumental for his later thought – the reminder in the commonplace run of events of the voice of the *Eternal Thou.*

[211] But see also Blenkinsopp pp. 289–93 for a different view. Blenkinsopp traces the influence of Buber's thoughts on education in Hasidism, especially in the concepts of *Shekina* and *Shiflut*. Two aspects of Buber's God are His eternal completeness above, and in the *Shekina*, his exiled glory in little pieces in all His creation. Hasidism finds and recognises these sparks in the world and seeks to unite them both in themselves and with reference to the Creator. It is our duty to do so as well, and thus the teacher tries to bring out the sparks which may be hidden (through ignorance and choice), the sparks of the good, the God within everyone. This is because it is the duty of mankind to seek the connections of the *Shekina* in service of God in time and space. Buber's concept of *Shekina*, according to Blenkinsopp, relates to teaching and teachers insofar as the teacher tries to develop love in students by seeking the good in them. The aspect of *Shiflut* is to be found in the humility of being able to be oneself in uniqueness – "becoming from within and translating that understanding of self into action." (p. 293) Blenkinsopp also likens Buber's educator to God in his ability to bring the world to the trusting pupil in its condensed form. He sees the teacher as a creator of a world for the students rather than the creative task in forms the student's characters from the amorphous mass which he encounters at the first meeting. Blenkinsopp sees the teacher's duty in recognising the sparks of *Shekina* in the darkness and connect them in mutuality and bring them into fruition by nurturing them (pg. 300).

the pure dialogue we have elaborated upon in previous paragraphs. In the formative aspect the educator forms the child's trust in the outer world, shows him meaning by facing him in reality, by relating to him and in doing so, the teacher increases the child's responsibility for the world. The child becomes one of the bearers of the teacher's "communion with the world, one of the focuses of his responsibilities for the world." [212] The meaning of education thus lies in our ability to become free through communion. The presence of the *Eternal Thou* is required in the educational setting to give us this ability. In the context of his essay on education, Buber mentions three forms of dialogical relation, the first of which rests on the experience of mutual inclusion. This is even present when there is a dispute where the two disagreeing parties recognise the legitimacy of the other's point of view without relativising one's own standpoint and in recognising the other, fulfilling our relation to Present Being by receiving what is "manifested of it and incorporating it into our own being. The other two forms, based and therefore proceeding from this full inclusion, are relation in education and, finally, friendship. Relation in education involves the acknowledgment implicit in inclusion – not merely experiencing the other side, but allowing oneself to be changed by it rather than merely second-guessing the interlocutor. Mutual education is the fruit of this process. The teacher remains in the child's individuality but reverts to his own, catching moments, enlightening the child based on his observations. The educator experiences both sides of this relation, the child only one side. Finally, if the pupil is able, after some effort, or sometimes suddenly, to burst over to the teacher's side, the educative experience becomes one of friendship.[213]

The experience of the other side, whether it be one of acceptance or rejection of the other's views also give a valuable insight into the other's needs in order to grow. The teacher is bound by his subjectivity to edit what he deems formatively meaningful for the child. The dangers of this are to be dispelled by the educator being an integral part of the communal process turned as *We* to *Thou*. But one of the largest problems facing the views of

[212] Buber, *Education*, pp. 94–99 (quote pg. 98). See also Friedman, *Martin Buber*, pp. 176–81 Friedman sees the greatness of the teacher in his teaching, despite the fact that he does not see who he will have in front of him. The teacher can only educate in mutuality when he is trusted by the child, taking the child into his own store of experiences. The child, according to the philosophy of dialogue, grows through the teacher's personality and the *I* of the author. Between total authority and freedom lies communion, and Friedman sees the way out of isolated individualism and oppositeness of teacher and pupil through communion and dialogic relation. The teacher's task is to bring the child's personality to full flower and yet giving him the opportunity to think for himself and formulate his own opinion. Friedman finds the main concern of teaching in its character-building properties.

[213] *Education*, pp. 99–101.

Blenkinsopp, Friedman and Buber on education is that they hold the opinion that the teacher must mediate the outside world to the pupil and develop his character without imposing his own values upon the child. This view lays itself open to a contradiction insofar as the teacher, in his subjectively individual interpretation of the world, is likely to colour the information chosen to be condensed as well as how it is chosen to be presented to the pupil. But Buber makes rather high demands upon the teacher by expecting him not to impose his subjective values upon the pupil: No matter how much the teacher would tries to distance the self from subjectivity, he is still likely to (perhaps even unconsciously) impose the norms of society, those presented by the media, those that form his own opinion etc. on the pupil. One asks how many educators fit the intellectual physiognomy presented by Buber.

Buber's solution to this is presented as the teacher's rootedness in God, but this it remains a question as to how to apply these undoubtedly profound thoughts of Buber's to a society as deeply secularised and consumerist as today's. There is also the issue of keeping religion and belief outside the classroom, especially in educational institutions funded by state subsidies and the public. The educator, as Buber presents him, would find it difficult to work in a pluralistic reality, there are too many different kinds of belief for an educator to simply be rooted in God as Buber suggests (in line with his religious anarchism). It is a paradox that Buber is well aware of the dangers of propaganda in its attempt to seize the person by eliminating his individuality and using him as an object: Buber's educator would have to essentially forget his creed, and with it, an essential part of his individuality lest the faith sensibilities of certain individuals in the pluralistic-era co-educational classroom are offended by a concept of God that goes contrary to that of their own faith communities. The enlightened spiritual man who firmly believes in the ability of good education to better mankind, confessing no particular faith is the only educator who could truly be rooted in God as Buber describes it. Buber does not seem to consider any established religion to be truly representative of the *I-Thou* primary. Yet how can the educator's individual religion not colour his rootedness in God and what he / she presents to the children? Buber's thoughts on education are interesting as an elaboration of his *I-Thou* philosophy, but may strike some readers as utopian (as far as its being realized is concerned) and dogmatic (in Buber's anarchic religious sense).

The author believes that Buber could even remove God from his educational philosophy without any harm done to the main content of his essays concerning education. In most

respects, Buber introduces God here, it seems, out of respect rooted in his (Buber's) own belief in Him – somewhat like Bach's *Soli Deo Gloria* at the end of each of his works. But the main content of Buber's educational content seems more rooted in the enlightenment, with its emphasis on the education of character and its importance for the individual's later life as a functional member in society. God is superfluous in the essay *Education*, and even more so in *The Education of Character* with its emphasis on the role of the teacher as a mentor and builder of character.[214]

Buber's educator sees himself in the position to help someone become a unique person and the bearer of that particular task to which the individual has been called. The educator believes that he is right and allows time for the truth to gently unfold whilst developing it. Buber contrasts this with the propagandist who does not (in Buber's opinion) believe in the truth of the propaganda being taught and has to impose himself on the other and use special methods to achieve his ends. The educator believes in the 'primal power' of what he sees as his calling to scatter and develop.[215]

It has to be said, however, that a convinced Fascist, racist, Nazi or Communist could also be thoroughly convinced of the rectitude and power of his beliefs and try to disseminate such beliefs in the classroom, not even so much because the party requires that he do so, but because he himself believes that these doctrines are correct. Buber's propagandist, like his teacher, strikes the author as a theoretical-conceptual construction fitting neatly into Buber's implicit system. As unfortunate a part of life as propaganda and its disseminators are, Buber also reduces both the educator and the propagandist to entities that become a part of his

[214] BUBER, Martin. *The Education of Character* in *Between Man and Man*, pp. 104–111. The essay is an elaboration of *Education*. Here Buber discusses the more complex task of education of character in comparison with education in empiric facts. There is resistance to one's character being educated. Buber says that the teacher must proceed directly and spontaneously, trying to affect the whole being of the pupil with his character, and for this purpose must be able to communicate himself directly. Buber draws attention to the Greek meaning of character "impression", meaning that one's personality is formed by extranatal factors that impress themselves upon one's being. The educator understands this as well as his role as redactor in which he yet remains distinct. In understanding this, he remains humble he has a formative responsibility. The pupil gives him confidence after the teacher has won over the pupil's resistance, giving way to trust once the pupil has accepted the educator as a person. The educator has a real character-building potential especially when pupils approach him in confidence and the teacher answers as a human to the best of his knowledge. Character-building also happens in games and discussions about controversial topics. These controversies are the ultimate test for a teacher not only in his ability to answer, but to be ready to apply ointment to soothe the vanquished. Learning to become a person, a self, and overcoming the traps of collectivism are essential for entering into a relation with the Absolute. Again, Buber leads his argument from the formative role of the teacher to a relation with *Thou* or God.

[215] *Elements of the Interhuman*, p. 83.

dialogic philosophy. In doing so, is he not also objectifying them and using them as parts in a more or less closed system, as much as he might deny this himself?

2.3.2. The I-Thou Primary's Inclusion in the Field of Psychology: *Like the educator, the healer of souls cannot simply view his patients as objects fitting into the character of observed empiric science. He must try to transcend their illness relate to them as a person and then bring them back to health. This is a process involving recognition of three spheres of guilt and, with it, three steps to recovery. One of the central problems in psychotherapy in this regard is that of existential guilt consequent from the inability to say Thou. Despite the depth of Buber's observations, these remain on the level of an in-depth melding of psychotherapy and anthropological philosophy rather than a successful inclusion of his I-Thou philosophy into these fields.*

The researcher's field of interest is in the empiric sciences. The psychoanalyst's field of research concerns itself with the inner processes of guilt and guilt feelings beyond the factual course of events in the patient's life. Most researchers limit themselves to the latent processes making up patient's reactions; the analyst works within an inverted reciprocation. Buber defines mental illness and neuroses as a monological subjectivity or self-relation. The empiric sciences are concerned with guilt and guilt-feelings, conscious and unconscious. Yet Buber sees the problem of guilt as an ontic problem, its place more in being as such than in the soul. The scientific investigator must encounter guilt thus, and in his obligation to give help he must occasionally step out of the rules and boundaries of his school and approach the work of healing as a partner.[216]

In the works of Jung and Freud, evil is not considered as an ontological phenomenon. They see guilt as the fear of loss of love, a result of a transgression against ancient or modern taboos – fear of the parental or social tribunal (Freud), or failure in the process of individuation (Jung). Neither of these, according to Buber, adequately considers the intersubjective aspect of guilt, viewing the phenomenon as a problem of inadequate individuation, or essentially a failure in one's relationship with oneself. Buber tries to search deeper, finding the source of madness in the inability to say *Thou* and the insightful awareness of this estrangement in wrongdoing against what is then perceived as irretrievably lost time.

[216] BUBER, Martin. *Guilt and Guilt Feelings* in *The Knowledge of Man* (Hereafter to be referred to as "*Guilt and Guilt Feelings*"), pp. 122–25.

Illness occurs when the guilty refuse to acknowledge their guilt. Thus the therapist, when confronted by such patients, must do more than merely remove the existential guilt which goes deeper than the general categories of repression and becoming conscious.[217]

Buber believes there is an event at the root of guilt which has been avoided and suppressed; this returns later to generate existential guilt. The healer has the role of returning to the event where an act was committed to transgress the order constituting human beings, and implicitly the order God or *Thou* created, for what is guilt if not sin or a transgression against the Absolute and His created order?[218] The researcher finds that he has to transcend the boundaries of his detached methods; and in encountering this event causing illness he might find the overwhelming burden that his learned methods are too general. The researcher begins to understand the problem as one of interpersonal guilt in the relational aspect, not attempting merely to mask the problem by converting the authentic guilt into a feeling of relief provided by empiric methods such as hypnosis or dream analysis. Buber criticises such methods as destructive to any potential reconciliation to an alienated environment.[219]

Because dialogue and genuine relation lie at the essence of man's being Buber implies that the psychotherapist should, within his professional duties, enter into essential relation with the infirm soul summoning him by understanding its lapse and need. Although experts in the field say that the therapist should not, cannot enter into such relations with the patient, Buber believes it necessary in order for the expert to carefully lead the distressed soul to a vantage point where the patient can view the distorted geography of his mental landscape perhaps at a better distance and in comprehending the problem, see what needs to be done. Buber stresses

[217] *Ibid.*, p. 126.

[218] *Ibid.,* p. 127. "Existential guilt occurs when someone injures the order of the human world whose foundations he knows and recognises as those of his own existence and of all common human existence. The doctor who confronts such a guilt in the living memory of that patient must enter into his situation…if he wishes to persist as a healer he must take upon himself a burden he was not prepared to bear."

[219] *Ibid*., pp 128–30. According to Buber these methods only help to silence the problem rather that face it. He also poses the question as to whether the psychotherapist can viably venture beyond the boundaries of his empiric science when summoned for help as a human being rather than a scientist. He says that the human being is more than an amalgam of conscious and unconscious processes, adding that the great moments of existence are when essence is discovered, realised and moved onto a higher plane. The moment of healing begins when the infirm decides anew to become what he is, and establish, as he does so, a genuine relation with the world.

the need to learn about and understand guilt in its depths.[220] In his ability to enable the patient see the wholeness, he enables the soul to see the essence through him, as Friedman puts it.[221]

Like Carl Rogers, Buber postulates a client-centred therapy which strongly emphasises considering the client as a human being, having respect towards him and trying to view the outside world through the client's eyes. This kind of therapy also involves taking into account and comprehending guilt as different from anxiety. Friedman believes, with Buber, that this means laying aside preoccupations with diagnosis and becoming more involved based on a deep respect towards the patient rooted in understanding him. Friedman draws a comparison between Buber and Rogers insofar as Rogers finds the essence of therapy in direct experience and mutual relationship with the client. This means entering the relationship and responding with the whole being; risking the patient's repudiation and losing both the patient and self in the process.[222] Buber identifies three spheres in which guilt can fulfil itself and where it is necessary to reconcile relations:[223] There is society, whose laws and taboos have been infringed upon, bringing about a subsequent fear of retribution by that society. Then there is the sphere of faith. Neither of these two areas is the doctor's area of concern – conscience with its own set of values can condemn the individual even when society is permissive and turns a blind eye to certain misdeeds. Even if the analyst is a God-fearing man, he cannot intervene in the religious sense if he does not want to be a dilettante. It is in the sphere of conscience – the sphere where past, present and future misdeeds and failures to act are condemned – where the doctor becomes active. Conscience goes beyond the commands and prohibitions a society has set – though these play some part in shaping the conscience and do not create conscience as such. Its inner working processes and criteria remain hidden and are not traceable to societal or tribal taboos. Buber is concerned with the relation of conscience and existential guilt. Good can only be done with the entire self and wrongdoing causes a

[220] *Ibid.*, pp. 131–32.

[221] Friedman, *Martin Buber,* pp. 185–90. In Buber's inclusive approach the therapist experiences the other side rather than remain on the objective side. The doctor experiences the other's pain and tries to imagine the other side without losing sight of his own. Friedman sees the value of Buber's approach to therapy in its attempt to look at the whole man in its anti-systematic approach to the concrete and unique. The analyst thus helps to reassemble what has been shattered. It is his calling to make the shattered soul whole again.

[222] *Ibid*., 190–94.

[223] *Guilt and Guilt Feelings*, pp. 133–47, what follows in the elaboration of the healing process is based on the reading and interpretation of Buber's description of the healing process.

disturbance in the surrounding equilibrium, meaning that the self starts to lack completeness leading to an estrangement from society.[224]

Corresponding to the three steps of guilt is a process of three steps which lead back to wholeness. This can begin once the healer has reached into the depths of existential guilt and does not cower to the anguish found there. The first step, *illumination*, is where one is confronted by the great conscience where the infirm soul enters the depths of what one has known or recognised for a longer time but not been able to grasp in all its essence and consequences for life. The second, *confession*, involves dialogue and self-illumination. Without illumination of essence confession remains superficial. Refusal to take the step towards self-illumination and confession of existential guilt causes a resultant inability to overcome it at the crucial hour – Buber uses literary figures such as Kafka's Josef K. as illustrations of how this failure ultimately results in loss of life and embodies the condition of modern human, whose disrupted condition is yet capable of inner-illumination of the state of guilt. But like Josef K. this is resisted. Thus existential guilt remains in the memory, not allowing itself to be repressed, but enters into the conscious memory in a different form. Only when the inner resistance is overcome can self-illumination begin: Here Buber describes a place where the soul is lead in the great light that is in the very interior of the law. The third step is perseverance in the identification of self but also of importance of the awareness of guilt to our neighbour. Life afterwards is a tightrope of self-illumination and self perseverance and the struggle for reconciliation through reparation. Although reparation is not, strictly speaking, possible, meeting those whom one has injured and admitting one's guilt to their face makes some progress towards repairing the damage at least to some extent. None of this is for the psychotherapist, whose role in healing is at most to point out the direction of the true root of the problem to the patient – the existential guilt where one can begin the work of existential self-help – which, according to Buber can only take place once the patient has realised the reality Buber has described.[225]

It seems that Buber is not describing the historical reality of the psychotherapist, but the psychotherapist as Buber would have such specialists be. One often understands when reading Buber's work that he is drawing the reader into a complex world of his own deep

[224] *Ibid.,* pp. 133–35.

[225] *Ibid*., pp 147–48.

understanding of the human condition. The passages of Buber's dialogical philosophy make for deeply moving reading that provoke thought in the reader. One nonetheless arrives at the conclusion that for all the depth of Buber's writing such people as his healer and his educator remain rooted in Buber's dialogical philosophy, anthropology, and to some extent, his Hasidism. The psychotherapist is reminiscent of Rabbi Nachman, who did not speak a word that was not bathed in many tears. As Buber has written, the therapist descends into the depths of existential guilt in order to point the patient in the direction of self-illumination and reparation. In order for the therapist to help he must put aside his detachment and empirical methods and become involved. Yet this does not fit the "accepted" description of (probably) the vast majority of psychotherapists who must, like others in the medical profession, retain a distance and *not* become too involved with the patient lest the lack of objectivity compromises medical judgement. This is perhaps especially valid for those dealing with mental ailments. No professional and objective therapist can viably wade into the murky depths of mental disturbance and remain untouched. Buber uses language which never strays far from the core of his dialogical philosophy when he writes that mental disturbance results from the inability to say *Thou*. The therapist becomes somewhat like a prophet or a rabbi in secular attire, but one who yet cannot liberate himself from his theological grounding. This in itself does not detract from the depth of Buber's writing, but it ultimately seems better suited to the intellectual public than to the medical profession.

3.0. Conclusion: *Martin Buber's concept of God is strongly rooted in his I-Thou and dialogical philosophy, which in turn is closer to Greek than Hebrew thought. His thoughts about the practice of religion and the permeation of God in such fields as psychotherapy and education are of great intellectual depth, but will be valued the most by the thinker rather than the practitioner.*

In his Biblical theology, Buber espouses a genuine relation between man and YHVH. Buber goes to considerable lengths to illustrate the difference between monotheistic Hebrew faith and the pagan polytheism of the nations surrounding Israel. The Israelites respond to the address of the Absolute who calls them from the safety of their homes and leads them on a journey. Theirs is a response of *emunah* or faithfulness in comparison to the nations surrounding them; the nations prefer the safety of settlement and attempt to understand and thereby control both the human and non-human world. Buber adopts an anti-institutional, anti-legalistic departure-point in many of his works – apparently influenced by Kierkegaard – which pervades much of his Biblical theology.

At the core of this lies Buber's *I-Thou* philosophy, which in turn holds the thesis that the *I-Thou* primary is personal, immediate, direct and always in the present; it refuses to be held or controlled in a convenient system. In this regard, Buber is no less critical even of historical Judaism, which he accuses of attempting to confine the Absolute within the boundaries of the system of *mitzvot*, and then later the Dual-Torah. Buber is thus highly critical of both orthodox Torah-camp Judaism (which has established itself as a major branch of Judaism) *and* intellectual currents within that religion – viewing intellectualism as another way of reducing the *I-Thou* primary to *I-It*. In doing so, however, Buber places himself outside mainstream historical Judaism both in its orthodox and more liberal branches, often laying himself open to criticism from its exponents.

Despite Buber's depth and intelligence as a Biblical exegete, his highly selective approach to the Scriptures has been a target of criticism by both Jewish and Christian scholars. This applies to both his exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, as well as the conclusions he draws from it. Buber dismisses historical criticism as being of little value in the hermeneutics of the Hebrew Bible; yet he readily adopts it when it is convenient for his purposes. At other times he brings forward unqualified arguments which detract from the otherwise undoubted quality of his interpretative analysis. He believes that true Judaism is a

religion lacking a system, based rather on its highly personal relation to YHVH based on *emunah*. Yet Buber does not consider (except to dismiss it) how structured and obedient to the Torah historical Judaism really is. For most Jews, however, obedience to the dual-Torah is definitive of Judaism and normative for that religion.

But Buber also tries to read *his* concept of Judaism into historical Judaism, as though it were the essence or kernel within the empiric and historical-phenomenal reality of Judaism. The license, however, with which he treats words and passages of the Bible (as well as the selectivity with which he deals with historical primary material on such movements as Hasidism) has laid him open to and drawn criticism for presenting an image of Judaism that is more his own highly individual interpretation rather than a critical examination of the phenomenon. This applies even to such matters as his thoughts about theodicy and the suffering servant: His theodicy lies closest to the existentialist concept of inauthentic existence and related currents of thought. His interpretation of the suffering servant is of unusual depth and highly original, but seems closer to a philosophical than a theological interpretation.

The same problems that pervade his interpretation of Judaism are evident in his criticisms of Christianity. Buber's main line of criticism towards Christianity is that strayed from the teaching of the historical Jesus, whose teaching is best represented by the Sermon on the Mount which is itself rooted in the Two Commandments of Love and thus in the *emunah* faith of the Israelites. To Buber, the direction Christianity took after Paul is based on Paul's forensic interpretation of the Torah based on the Septuagint misinterpretation of the word *Torah*. Paul's interpretation of the Hebrew Bible is, according to Buber burdened by his pessimism rooted in Greek and especially Gnostic thought. Johannine Christology is held in low esteem by Buber for similar reasons. Buber rejects the concept of original sin as going against the Word of the Bible which says that man is God's creation and therefore always capable of turning and coming back to God. God remains near even in times when He chooses to remain hidden. Buber's theological works, however, remain thought-provoking and complex studies that are worth the considerable intellectual effort it takes to read them.

Buber's anti-systematic approach is only on the face of both his philosophical and theological writings. A careful reading will show several themes which reappear and overlap one another. These ultimately coalesce to form an implicit system based primarily on the core of his

thought as it is represented in Buber's book *I and Thou*, including such themes as the two primaries, genuine relation, dialogue and the *in-between*, which we have tried to deal with in some depth in this thesis. Although Buber is sometimes presented as a thinker even for the layman or the grass-roots believer rather than the academic, his writing makes for no less demanding reading than any major thinker of the period. His thought, we have attempted to show, has its firm place within the context of existentialism and the polemics it held with the scientific world-view and the latent threat posed by science to mankind in viewing everything as definable by neat formulas. We see that Buber was importantly influenced in his philosophical thinking by Kierkegaard, who gave Buber an impetus with his own anti-legalist, anti-institutional standpoint.

Although even philosophically less educated readers can profit immensely by reading Buber's work, his writing are truly best understood with at least some background knowledge of existentialism, as well as the debates and polemics between the phenomenologist and the logical positivist schools of thought – especially after Husserl when phenomenology in its existentialist form became increasingly anti-rationalistic and anti-academic. With this in mind, it becomes evident that Buber, despite what his supporters such as Friedman might say, is very much a man of his time. Ultimately, Buber is most profitably read by more educated readers who take the time and effort to read not only *I and Thou*, but other books and essays by Buber and are willing to retain a critical distance from what they read. These works remain thought-provoking and important contributions to the history of Western thought; paradoxically they meander into a *system* of ideas no less complex than any other thinker's. Buber's God-permeated "religion", "prophet", "psychotherapist", and "educator" are entirely his own concepts. In themselves, these are profound and complex; and practitioners and educators would do well to become acquainted with them and think about them carefully. It does, however, remain a question how many of the multitude are willing to go into the depths of the mind and soul the way Buber has done.

Pavel Šuba

Prague, April 2008

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APPENDIX: Contents and pagination of the bound version of this Thesis:

For technical reasons the pagination of the paper version of thesis thesis differs slightly from the bound version. The following represents the contents and page number information of the paper version.

The Notion of YHVH in the Thought of Martin Buber

Contents