

I AND THOU

Martin Buber

A NEW TRANSLATION
WITH A PROLOGUE "I AND YOU"
AND NOTES

BY

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First Part

THE WORLD IS TWOFOLD for man in accordance with his twofold attitude.

The attitude of man is twofold in accordance with the two basic words he can speak.

The basic words are not single words but word pairs.

One basic word is the word pair I-You.

The other basic word is the word pair I-It; but this basic word is not changed when He or She takes the place of It.

Thus the I of man is also twofold.

For the I of the basic word I-You is different from that in the basic word I-It.¹

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Basic words do not state something that might exist outside them; by being spoken they establish a mode of existence.²

¹In the first edition the next section began: "Basic words do not signify things but relations." This sentence was omitted by Buber in 1957 and in all subsequent editions.

²*siften sie einen Bestand*. The locution is most unusual, and *Bestand* in any applicable sense is very rare. Buber intends a contrast with "that might exist" (*was . . . bestünde*).

Basic words are spoken with one's being.³

When one says You, the I of the word pair I-You is said, too.

When one says It, the I of the word pair I-It is said, too. The basic word I-You can only be spoken with one's whole being.

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

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There is no I as such but only the I of the basic word I-You and the I of the basic word I-It.

When a man says I, he means one or the other. The I he means is present when he says I. And when he says You or It, the I of one or the other basic word is also present. Being I and saying I are the same. Saying I and saying one of the two basic words are the same.

Whoever speaks one of the basic words enters into the word and stands in it.

The life of a human being does not exist merely in the sphere of goal-directed verbs. It does not consist merely of activities that have something for their object.

I perceive something. I feel something. I imagine something. I want something. I sense something. I think something. The life of a human being does not consist merely of all this and its like.

All this and its like is the basis of the realm of It.

But the realm of You has another basis.

³ *Messen*: see page 46.

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Whoever says You does not have something for his object. For wherever there is something there is also another something; every It borders on other Its; It is only by virtue of bordering on others. But where You is said there is no something. You has no borders.

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

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We are told that man experiences his world. What does this mean?

Man goes over the surfaces of things and experiences them.⁴ He brings back from them some knowledge of their condition—an experience. He experiences what there is to things.

But it is not experiences alone that bring the world to man.

For what they bring to him is only a world that consists of It and It and It, of He and He and She and She and It. I experience something.

⁴ *Der Mensch befaßt die Fläche der Dinge und erfährt sie*. Both *erfährt* in this sentence and *erfähre* in the preceding paragraph are forms of *erfahren*, the ordinary German equivalent of the verb, to experience. The noun is *Erfahrung*. These words are so common that it has hardly ever occurred to anyone that they are closely related to *fahren*, an equally familiar word that means to drive or go. *Befahren* means to drive over the surface of something. The effect of the German sentence is to make the reader suddenly aware of the possibility that *erfahren* might literally mean finding out by going or driving, or possibly by traveling. But by further linking *erfahren* with *befahren* Buber manages to suggest that experience stays on the surface.

In the original manuscript this point was elaborated further in the sentence immediately following upon this paragraph, but Buber struck it out: "Thus the fisherman gets his catch. But the find is for the diver."

All this is not changed by adding "inner" experiences to the "external" ones, in line with the non-eternal distinction that is born of mankind's craving to take the edge off the mystery of death. Inner things like external things, things among things!

I experience something.

And all this is not changed by adding "mysterious" experiences to "manifest" ones, self-confident in the wisdom that recognizes a secret compartment in things, reserved for the initiated, and holds the key. O mysteriousness without mystery, O piling up of information! It, it, it!

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Those who experience do not participate in the world. For the experience is "in them" and not between them and the world.

The world does not participate in experience. It allows itself to be experienced, but it is not concerned, for it contributes nothing, and nothing happens to it.

*

The world as experience belongs to the basic word I-It. The basic word I-You establishes the world of relation.

*

Three are the spheres⁵ in which the world of relation arises.

The first: life with nature. Here the relation vibrates in

⁵This locution echoes the Passover Haggadah which contains a famous song in which each stanza begins: One is . . . , Two are . . . , Three are . . . , etc.

the dark and remains below language. The creatures stir across from us, but they are unable to come to us, and the You we say to them sticks to the threshold of language.

The second: life with men. Here the relation is manifest and enters language. We can give and receive the You.

The third: life with spiritual beings. Here the relation is wrapped in a cloud but reveals itself,⁶ it lacks but creates language. We hear no You and yet feel addressed; we answer—creating, thinking, acting: with our being we speak the basic word, unable to say You with our mouth.

But how can we incorporate into the world of the basic word what lies outside language?

In every sphere, through everything that becomes present to us, we gaze toward the train⁷ of the eternal You; in each we perceive a breath of it;⁸ in every You we address the eternal You, in every sphere according to its manner.

*

I contemplate a tree.

I can accept it as a picture: a rigid pillar in a flood of light, or splashes of green⁹ traversed by the gentleness of the blue silver ground.

I can feel it as movement: the flowing veins around the sturdy, striving core, the sucking of the roots, the breathing of the leaves, the infinite commerce with earth and air—and the growing itself in its darkness.

I can assign it to a species and observe it as an instance, with an eye to its construction and its way of life.

I can overcome its uniqueness and form so rigorously

⁶*sich offenbarend*. A few lines earlier, *offenbar* was translated as manifest.

The adjective, unlike the verb, generally has no religious overtones.

⁷*Saum* means hem or edge, but this is surely an allusion to Isaiah 6:1.

⁸*Wehen*: literally, blowing (of a breeze or wind), wafting.

⁹*das spritzende Gegrün*: the noun is a coinage.

ever
hugged
tree?

that I recognize it only as an expression of the law—those laws according to which a constant opposition of forces is continually adjusted, or those laws according to which the elements mix and separate.

I can dissolve it into a number, into a pure relation between numbers, and eternalize it.

Throughout all of this the tree remains my object and has its place and its time span, its kind and condition.

But it can also happen, if will and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an It. The power of exclusiveness has seized me.

This does not require me to forego any of the modes of contemplation. There is nothing that I must not see in order to see, and there is no knowledge that I must forget. Rather is everything, picture and movement, species and instance, law and number included and inseparably fused.

Whatever belongs to the tree is included: its form and its mechanics, its colors and its chemistry, its conversation with the elements and its conversation with the stars—all this in its entirety.

The tree is no impression, no play of my imagination, no aspect of a mood; it confronts me bodily¹ and has to deal with me as I must deal with it—only differently.

One should not try to dilute the meaning of the relation: relation is reciprocity.

Does the tree then have consciousness, similar to our own? I have no experience of that. But thinking that you have brought this off in your own case, must you again

¹ *Er leibt mit gegenüber* . . . *leibt* means body; *leibt* is most unusual and means literally: it bodies—across from me or vis-à-vis me. Locutions that involve *gegenüber* abound in this book. A few lines below, in the first sentence of the next section, we find *Siehe ich* . . . *gegenüber*, in the following section, *gegenübertritt* and *des Gegenüber* and—a variant—*entgegentritt*. Cf. p. 45.

divide the indivisible? What I encounter is neither the soul of a tree nor a dryad, but the tree itself.

*

When I confront a human being as my You and speak the basic word I-You to him, then he is no thing among things nor does he consist of things.

He is no longer He or She, limited by other Hes and Shes, a dot in the world grid of space and time, nor a condition that can be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities. Neighborless and seamless, he is You and fills the firmament. Not as if there were nothing but he; but everything else lives in *his* light.

Even as a melody is not composed of tones, nor a verse of words, nor a statue of lines—one must pull and tear to turn a unity into a multiplicity—so it is with the human being to whom I say You. I can abstract from him the color of his hair or the color of his speech or the color of his graciousness; I have to do this again and again; but immediately he is no longer You.

And even as prayer is not in time but time in prayer, the sacrifice not in space but space in the sacrifice—and whoever reverses the relation annuls the reality—I do not find the human being to whom I say You in any Sometime and Somewhere. I can place him there and have to do this again and again, but immediately he becomes a He or a She, an It, and no longer remains my You.

As long as the firmament of the You is spread over me, the tempests of causality cower at my heels, and the whirl of doom² congeals.

The human being to whom I say You I do not experi-

² *Verhängnis* means, and has been consistently translated as, doom; *Schicksal*, as fate.

ence. But I stand in relation to him, in the sacred basic word. Only when I step out of this do I experience him again. Experience is remoteness from You.

The relation can obtain even if the human being to whom I say You does not hear it in his experience. For You is more than It knows. You does more, and more happens to it, than It knows. No deception reaches this far: here is the cradle of actual life.

*

This is the eternal origin of art that a human being confronts a form that wants to become a work through him. Not a figment of his soul but something that appears to the soul and demands the soul's creative power. What is required is a deed that a man does with his whole being: if he commits it and speaks with his being the basic word³ to the form that appears, then the creative power is released and the work comes into being.

The deed involves a sacrifice and a risk. The sacrifice: infinite possibility is surrendered on the altar of the form; all that but a moment ago floated playfully through one's perspective has to be exterminated; none of it may penetrate into the work; the exclusiveness of such a confrontation demands this. The risk: the basic word can only be spoken with one's whole being; whoever commits himself may not hold back part of himself; and the work does not permit me, as a tree or man might, to seek relaxation in the

³ *Es kommt auf eine Wesenstat des Menschen an: vollzieht er sie, spricht er mit seinem Wesen das Grundwort. . . .* Henceforth, *Wesenstat* and *Wesenstat* are translated "essential deed" and "essential act"; but the meaning that is intended is spelled out here.

"Form": *Gestalt*. One might consider leaving this word untranslated because *Gestalt* has become familiar in English; but the associations of *Gestalt* psychology might be more distracting than helpful, and *Gestaltung* (below: "forming") needs to be translated in any case.

It-world; it is imperious: if I do not serve it properly, it breaks, or it breaks me.

The form that confronts me I cannot experience nor describe; I can only actualize it. And yet I see it, radiant in the splendor of the confrontation, far more clearly than all clarity of the experienced world. Not as a thing among the "internal" things, not as a figment of the "imagination," but as what is present. Tested for its objectivity, the form is not "there" at all; but what can equal its presence? And it is an actual relation: it acts on me as I act on it.⁴

Such work is creation, inventing is finding.⁵ Forming is discovery. As I actualize, I uncover. I lead the form across —into the world of It. The created work is a thing among things and can be experienced and described as an aggregate of qualities. But the receptive beholder⁶ may be bodily confronted now and again.

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—What, then, does one experience of the You?

—Nothing at all. For one does not experience it.

—What, then, does one know of the You?

—Only everything. For one no longer knows particulars.

⁴ actual: *wirklich*; acts: *wirkt*; act: *wirke*. Earlier in the same paragraph, actualize: *verwirklichen*. In English "real" and "realize" would sometimes be smoother than "actual" and "actualize"; but it is noteworthy that the German word *wirklich* is so closely associated, not only by Buber but also by Nietzsche and Goethe before him, with *wirken*, *Werk* (work), *Wirkung* (effect), and *wirksam* (effective). Cf. p. 45f.

⁵ *Schaffen ist Schöpfen, Erfinden ist Finden. Schaffen can mean to work or to create; schöpfen means to create. Erfinden is the ordinary German word for invent, and finden means to find.*

⁶ *dem. . . . Schaulenden. Schauen is a way of looking that in this book is not associated with experiencing, with objects, with It. It has generally been translated "behold."*

The You encounters me by grace—it cannot be found by seeking. But that I speak the basic word to it is a deed of my whole being, is my essential deed.

The You encounters me. But I enter into a direct relationship to it. Thus the relationship is election and electing, passive and active at once: An action of the whole being must approach passivity, for it does away with all partial actions and thus with any sense of action, which always depends on limited exertions.

The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one's whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You.

All actual life is encounter.

*

The relation to the You is unmediated.⁷ Nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You, no prior knowledge and no imagination; and memory itself is changed as it plunges from particularity into wholeness. No purpose

⁷*unmittelbar* is the ordinary German word for immediate. *Mittel* is the ordinary word for means (the noun, both in the contrast of means and ends and also in the sense of being without means). This noun is encountered in the last two sentences of this paragraph. In the first sentence of the following paragraph Buber contrasts *Unmittelbarkeit* and *alles Mittelbar*. In the present context it seemed feasible and important to reproduce this counterpoint of concepts in English, but elsewhere *unmittelbar* has often been translated as direct. While this word is positive and *unmittelbar* is negative, "direct" suggests more forcibly the absence of any intermediary than does "immediate" with its primarily temporal connotations.

intervenes between I and You, no greed and no anticipation; and longing itself is changed as it plunges from the dream into appearance. Every means is an obstacle. Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur.

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Before the immediacy of the relationship everything mediate becomes negligible. It is also trifling whether my You is the It of other I's ("object of general experience") or can only become that as a result of my essential deed. For the real boundary, albeit one that floats and fluctuates, runs not between experience and non-experience, nor between the given and the not-given, nor between the world of being and the world of value, but across all the regions between You and It: between presence and object.⁸

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The present—not that which is like a point and merely designates whatever our thoughts may posit as the end of "elapsed" time, the fiction of the fixed lapse, but the actual and fulfilled present—exists only insofar as presentness, encounter, and relation exist. Only as the You becomes present does presence come into being.

The I of the basic word I-It, the I that is not bodily confronted by a You⁹ but surrounded by a multitude of "contents," has only a past and no present. In other words: insofar as a human being makes do with the things that he experiences and uses, he lives in the past, and his moment

⁸*Gegenwart und Gegenstand*: this contrast is developed and echoed in the following sections. The words are discussed on p. 45: *Gegenwart* means both presence and the present as opposed to past and future; and in the next sentence it has been translated "the present."

⁹See note 1 on page 58.

has no presence. He has nothing but objects; but objects consist in having been.

Presence is not what is evanescent and passes but what confronts us, waiting and enduring.¹ And the object is not duration but standing still, ceasing, breaking off, becoming rigid, standing out, the lack of relation, the lack of presence.

What is essential is lived in the present, objects² in the past.

*

This essential twofoldness cannot be overcome by in-

¹ *Gegenwart ist . . . das Gegenwärtende und Gegenwährende*. The first word is the usual term for the present or presence, the other two capitalized words are coinages and represent plays on the first word.

² *Wesenheiten werden in der Gegenwart gelebt, Gegenständlichkeiten in der Vergangenheit*. This is an extraordinary sentence. Both *Wesenheit* and *Gegenständlichkeit* are rare words with no very precise meaning: the effect of the suffixes (*heit* and *keit*) is to add a note of abstractness and generality, comparable to "essencehood" and "objecthood." Using these two words in the plural is most unusual, and saying that the former is lived in the present and the latter in the past is a *tour de force*. In German, as in English, only life can "be lived." Had Buber said *erlebt* (experienced in a living or vital manner), the sentence would be much less puzzling; but in this book he treats experience (*Erfahrung*) as a corollary of object and It, and generally he does not exempt *Erlebnis* which, though more vital and intense, suggests an aesthetic orientation. The last half of the sentence is much less difficult than the first. We have been prepared for it by the two preceding paragraphs; e.g., "objects consist in having been." Whatever is not present to me and—to use my own expression—addressing me as a person, whatever is remembered, discussed, or analyzed, has lapsed into the past and is an object. "Beings are lived in the present" does not make much sense of the first six words, although *Wesen* in this book means being or nature more often than it means essence. Beings simply are not lived; they live, they may address us and change our lives, but to say that they are lived is not merely a solecism but contrary to what Buber says in this book. "What is essential is lived in the present" is linguistically not so outrageous, is much more meaningful, and suggests an idea that is in keeping with the central motifs of the book.

voking a "world of ideas" as a third element that might transcend this opposition. For I speak only of the actual human being, of you and me, of our life and our world, not of any I-in-itself and not of any Being-in-itself. But for an actual human being the real boundary also runs across the world of ideas.

To be sure, some men who in the world of things make do with experiencing and using have constructed for themselves an idea annex or superstructure in which they find refuge and reassurance in the face of intimations of nothingness. At the threshold they take off the clothes of the ugly weekday, shroud themselves in clean garments, and feel restored as they contemplate primal being or what ought to be—something in which their life has no share. It may also make them feel good to proclaim it.

But the It-humanity that some imagine, postulate, and advertise has nothing in common with the bodily humanity to which a human being can truly say You. The noblest fiction is a fetish, the most sublime fictitious sentiment is a vice. The ideas are just as little enthroned above our heads as they reside inside them; they walk among us and step up to us. Pitiful are those who leave the basic word unspoken, but wretched are those who instead of that address the ideas with a concept or a slogan as if that were their name!

*

That direct relationships involve some action on³ what confronts us becomes clear in one of three examples. The essential deed of art determines the process whereby the form becomes a work. That which confronts me is fulfilled through the encounter through which it enters into the world of things in order to remain incessantly effective,

³ *ein Wirken an*: an odd locution.

incessantly It—but also infinitely able to become again a You, enchanting and inspiring. It becomes “incarnate”: out of the flood of spaceless and timeless presence it rises to the shore of continued existence.⁴

Less clear is the element of action in the relation to a human You. The essential act that here establishes directness is usually understood as a feeling, and thus misunderstood. Feelings accompany the metaphysical and metaphysical fact of love, but they do not constitute it; and the feelings that accompany it can be very different. Jesus' feeling for the possessed man is different from his feeling for the beloved disciple; but the love is one. Feelings one “has”; love occurs. Feelings dwell in man, but man dwells in his love. This is no metaphor but actuality: love does not cling to an I, as if the You were merely its “content” or object; it is between I and You. Whoever does not know this, know this with his being, does not know love, even if he should ascribe to it the feelings that he lives through,⁵ experiences, enjoys, and expresses. Love is a cosmic force.⁶ For those who stand in it and behold in it, men emerge from their entanglement in busy-ness;⁷ and the good and the evil, the clever and the foolish, the beautiful and the ugly, one after another become actual and a You for them; that is, liberated, emerging into a unique confrontation.⁸ Exclusiveness comes into being miraculously again and again—and now one can act, help, heal, educate, raise, redeem. Love is responsibility of an I for a You: in this consists what cannot consist in any feeling—the equality of all lovers, from the smallest to the greatest and from the blissfully secure whose life is circumscribed by the life

⁴ *das Ufer des Bestands*: see page 53, note 2.

⁵ *erlebt*.

⁶ *Liebe ist ein welthaftes Wirken*.

⁷ *Getriebe*.

⁸ *berausgetreten, einzig und gegenüber wessend*.

of one beloved human being to him that is nailed his life long to the cross of the world, capable of what is immense and bold enough to risk it: to love *man*.⁹

Let the meaning of action in the third example, that of the creature and its contemplation, remain mysterious. Believe in the simple magic of life, in service in the universe, and it will dawn on you what this waiting, peering, “stretching of the neck”¹ of the creature means. Every word must falsify; but look, these beings live around you, and no matter which one you approach you always reach Being?²

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Relation is reciprocity. My You acts on me as I act on it. Our students teach us, our works form us. The “wicked” become a revelation when they are touched by the sacred basic word. How are we educated by children, by animals! Inscrutably involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity.

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—You speak of love as if it were the only relationship between men; but are you even justified in choosing it as an example, seeing that there is also hatred?

—As long as love is “blind”—that is, as long as it does not see a *whole* being—it does not yet truly stand under the

⁹ *die Menschen zu lieben*.

¹ Since 1957: “stretching the head forward.” Surely, we are to think of a cat: see pp. 144 ff.

² *die Wesen leben um dich herum . . . du kommst immer zum Wesen*. In another context many translators would, no doubt, render *die Wesen* by “the creatures” and *zum Wesen* by “the essence.” That way something important would be lost, but these meanings are present.

basic word of relation. Hatred remains blind by its very nature; one can hate only part of a being. Whoever sees a whole being and must reject it, is no longer in the dominion of hatred but in the human limitation of the capacity to say You. It does happen to men that a human being confronts them and they are unable to address him with the basic word that always involves an affirmation of the being one addresses, and then they have to reject either the other person or themselves: when entering-into-relationship comes to this barrier, it recognizes its own relativity which disappears only when this barrier is removed.

Yet whoever hates directly is closer to a relation than those who are without love and hate.

*

This, however, is the sublime melancholy of our lot that every You must become an It in our world. However exclusively present it may have been in the direct relationship—as soon as the relationship has run its course or is permeated by *means*,³ the You becomes an object among objects, possibly the noblest one and yet one of them, assigned its measure and boundary. The actualization of the work involves a loss of actuality. Genuine contemplation never lasts long; the natural being that only now revealed itself to me in the mystery of reciprocity has again become describable, analyzable, classifiable—the point at which manifold systems of laws intersect. And even love

³ *Mittel*. The word translated as “direct” and “directly” in the immediately preceding lines is *unmittelbar*. Even if that were rendered as “immediately”—at the cost of giving the impression that Buber speaks of those who hate right away, instantly—“means” would then have to be circumscribed by “that which mediates.” Cf. p. 62, note 7.

cannot persist in direct relation; it endures, but only in the alternation of actuality and latency. The human being who but now was unique and devoid of qualities, not at hand⁴ but only present, not experienceable, only touchable,⁵ has again become a He or She, an aggregate of qualities, a quantum with a shape.⁶ Now I can again abstract from him the color of his hair, of his speech, of his graciousness; but as long as I can do that he is my You no longer and not yet again.

Every You in the world is doomed by its nature to become a thing or at least to enter into thinghood again and again. In the language of objects: every thing in the world can—either before or after it becomes a thing—appear to some I as its You. But the language of objects catches only one corner of actual life.

The It is the chrysalis, the You the butterfly.⁷ Only it is not always as if these states took turns so neatly; often it is an intricately entangled series of events that is tortuously dual.

*

In the beginning is the relation.

Consider the language of “primitive” peoples, meaning those who have remained poor in objects and whose life develops in a small sphere of acts that have a strong presence.⁸ The nuclei of this language, their sentence-words—primal pre-grammatical forms that eventually split into the multiplicity of different kinds of words—generally designate the wholeness of a relation. We say, “far away”; the

⁴ *vorhanden*.

⁵ Before 1957: fulfillable.

⁶ *ein figurhaftes Quantum*.

⁷ Before 1957: eternal chrysalis, . . . eternal butterfly.

⁸ *gegenwartstarker Akte*.



Zulu has a sentence-word instead that means: "where one cries, 'mother, I am lost.'" And the Fuegian surpasses our analytical wisdom with a sentence-word of seven syllables that literally means: "they look at each other, each waiting for the other to offer to do that which both desire but neither wishes to do." In this wholeness persons are still embedded like reliefs without achieving the fully rounded independence of nouns or pronouns. What counts is not these products of analysis and reflection⁹ but the genuine original unity, the lived relationship.

We greet those we encounter by wishing them well or by assuring them of our devotion or by commending them to God. But how indirect are these worn-out formulas ("Hail!" no longer suggests anything of the original bestowal of power) compared with the eternally young, physical, relational greeting of the Kaffir, "I see you!" or its American variant, the laughable but sublime "Smell me!"

We may suppose that relations² and concepts, as well as the notions of persons and things, have gradually crystallized out of notions of relational processes and states. The elementary, spirit-awakening impressions and stimulations of the "natural man" are derived from relational processes—the living sense of a confrontation—and from relational states—living with one who confronts him. About the moon which he sees every night he does not think much until it approaches him bodily, in his sleep or even while he is awake, and casts a spell over him with its gestures or, touching him, does something wicked or

⁹*Zerlegung und Überlegung.*

¹*Heil!* Toward the end of the year in which *Ich und Du* was published, Hitler made his abortive putsch in Munich; ten years later *Heil!* and *Heil Hitler!* attained official status in Germany as *der deutsche Gruß*, the German greeting.

²Before 1957: designations (*Bezeichnungen* instead of *Beziehungen*).

sweet to him. What he retains is not the visual notion of the migratory disk of light nor that of a demonic being that somehow belongs to it, but at first only an image of the moon's action that surges through his body as a motor stimulus; and the personal image of an active moon crystallizes only very gradually. Only then is the memory of that which was unconsciously absorbed every night kindled into the notion of an agent behind this action. Only then does it become possible for the You that originally could not be an object of experience, being simply endured, to be reified and become a He or She.

The originally relational character of the appearance of all beings persists and remains effective for a long time. This may help us to understand a spiritual element of primitive life that has been discussed a great deal in recent literature without having been adequately interpreted: that mysterious power whose concept has been found with all sorts of variations in the faith and science (both are still one at this point) of many primitive peoples—that *mana* or *orinda* from which we can trace a path all the way to the original significance of Brahman and even to the *dynamis* and *charis* of the magical papyruses and the Apostolic letters.³ It has been designated as a supra-sensible or supernatural force, in terms of our categories which do not do justice to those of primitive man. The boundaries of his world are drawn by his bodily experiences to which the visits of the dead belong quite "naturally." Any assumption that the non-sensible exists must strike him as nonsense. The appearances to which he attributes a "mystical potency" are all the elementary relational processes—that is, all the processes about which he thinks at all because they stimulate his body and leave an impression of such

³In the original the passage from the beginning of the paragraph to this point forms a single sentence.

stimulation in him. The moon and the dead who haunt him at night with pain or lust have this potency; but so do the sun that burns him, the beast that howls at him, the chief whose glance compels him, and the shaman whose song fills him with strength for the hunt. *Mana* is that which is active and effective,⁴ that which has made the moon person up there in the sky a blood-curdling You, that of which a memory trace remained when the impression of a stimulus turned into the impression of an agent. It is that with which *mana* itself always appears only in an agent. It is that with which we ourselves, if we possess it—say, in a miracle stone—can bring about similar effects. The primitive “world” is magical not because any human power of magic might be at its center, but rather because any such human power is only a variant of the general power that is the source of all effective action.⁵ The causality of his world is not a continuum; it is a force that flashes, strikes, and is effective ever again like lightning, a volcanic motion without continuity. *Mana* is a primitive abstraction, probably more primitive than numbers, for example, but no more supernatural. Memory, educating itself, constructs a series of the major relational events and the elementary upheavals. What is most important for the drive for preservation and most noteworthy for the drive for knowledge, namely, that which is active and effective,⁶ stands out most clearly and gains independence, while the less important, that which is not shared, the changeful You of the experiences, recedes, remains isolated in man’s memory, gradually becomes an object and even more gradually gets arranged in groups and species. But the third element, gruesomely detached and at times spookier than the dead and the

⁴ *Mana ist eben das Wirkende* . . .
⁵ *der alle wesentliche Wirkung entsammt.*
⁶ *eben das “Wirkende” . . .*

moon, becomes more and more inexorably clear until finally the other partner that always remains the same emerges: “I.”

The original drive for “self”-preservation is no more accompanied by any I-consciousness than any other drive. What wants to propagate itself is not the I but the body that does not yet know of any I.⁷ Not the I but the body wants to make things, tools, toys, wants to be “inventive.”⁸ And even in the primitive function of cognition one cannot find any *cognosco ergo sum*⁹ of even the most naïve kind, nor any conception, however childlike, of an experiencing subject. Only when the primal encounters,¹ the vital primal words I-acting-You² and You-acting-I, have been split and the participle has been reified and hypostatized, does the I emerge with the force of an element.

*

In the history of the primitive mind³ the fundamental difference between the two basic words appears in this: even in the original relational event, the primitive man speaks the basic word I-You in a natural, as it were still unformed manner, not yet having recognized himself as an I; but the basic word I-It is made possible only by this recognition, by the detachment of the I.

⁷ Cf. the chapter “On the Despisers of the Body” in Part One of Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*, which the young Buber translated into Polish: “‘I,’ you say . . . But greater is . . . your body and its great reason: that does not say ‘I,’ but does ‘I.’”

⁸ *Urheber*

⁹ I know, therefore I am.

¹ *Urerlebnisse*.

² *Ich-wirkend-Du* is as odd as the translation above.

³ *in der Geistesgeschichte des Primitiven.*

I-You is primary

The former word splits into I and You, but it did not originate as their aggregate, it antedates any I. The latter originated as an aggregate of I and It, it postdates the I.

Owing to its exclusiveness, the primitive relational event includes the I. For by its nature this event contains only two partners, man and what confronts him, both in their full actuality, and the world becomes a dual system; and thus man begins to have some sense of that cosmic pathos⁴ of the I without as yet realizing this.

In the natural fact, on the other hand, that will give way to the basic word I-It and I-related experience, the I is not yet included. This fact is the discreteness of the human body as the carrier of its sensations, from its environment. In this particularity the body learns to know and discriminate itself, but this discrimination remains on the plane where things are next to each other, and therefore it cannot assume the character of implicit I-likeness.⁵

But once the I of the relation has emerged and has become existent in its detachment, it somehow etherializes and functionalizes itself⁶ and enters into the natural fact of the discreteness of the body from its environment, awakening I-likeness in it. Only now can the conscious I-act, the first form of the basic word I-It, of experience by an I, come into being. The I that has emerged proclaims itself as the carrier of sensations and the environment as their object. Of course, this happens in a "primitive" and not in an "epistemological" manner; yet once the sentence "I see the tree" has been pronounced in such a way that it no longer relates a relation between a human I and a tree You but the perception of the tree object by the human consciousness, it has erected the crucial barrier between sub-

⁴ Pathetik.

⁵ Lebhaftigkeit.

⁶ sich selbstem veräußern und funktionalisierend.

ject and object; the basic word I-It, the word of separation, has been spoken.

*

—Then our melancholy lot took shape in primal history?

—Indeed, it developed—insofar as man's conscious life developed in primal history. But in conscious life cosmic being recurs as human becoming. Spirit appears in time as a product, even a byproduct, of nature, and yet it is spirit that envelops nature timelessly.

The opposition of the two basic words has many names in the ages and worlds; but in its nameless truth it inheres in the creation.

*

—Then you believe after all in some paradise in the primal age of humanity?

—Even if it was a hell—and the age to which we can go back in historical thought was certainly full of wrath and dread and torment and cruelty—unreal it was not.

Primal man's experiences of encounter were scarcely a matter of tame delight; but even violence against a being one really confronts⁷ is better than ghostly solicitude for faceless digits.⁸ From the former a path leads to God, from the latter only to nothingness.⁹

*

⁷ Gewalt am real erleben Wesen.

⁸ ins Nichts.

Even if we could fully understand the life of the primitive, it would be no more than a metaphor for that of the truly primal man. Hence the primitive affords us only brief glimpses into the temporal sequence of the two basic words. More complete information we receive from the child.

Here it becomes unmistakably clear how the spiritual reality of the basic words emerges from a natural reality: that of the basic word I-You from a natural association,¹ that of the basic word I-It from a natural discreteness.

The prenatal life of the child is a pure natural association, a flowing toward each other, a bodily reciprocity; and the life horizon of the developing being appears uniquely inscribed, and yet also not inscribed, in that of the being that carries it; for the womb in which it dwells is not solely that of the human mother. This association is so cosmic that it seems like the imperfect deciphering of a primeval inscription when we are told in the language of Jewish myth that in his mother's womb man knows the universe and forgets it at birth. And as the secret image of a wish, this association remains to us. But this longing ought not to be taken for a craving to go back, as those suppose who consider the spirit, which they confound with their own intellect, a parasite of nature. For the spirit is nature's blossom, albeit exposed to many diseases. What this longing aims for is the cosmic association of the being that has burst into spirit with its true You.

Every developing human child rests, like all developing beings, in the womb of the great mother—the undifferentiated, not yet formed primal world. From this it detaches itself to enter a personal life, and it is only in dark hours

⁹ *naturhaftigen.*

¹ *naturhaften Verbundenheit.* "Association" is used in this book only to render *Verbundenheit*.

when we slip out of this again (as happens even to the healthy, night after night) that we are close to her again. But this detachment is not sudden and catastrophic like that from the bodily mother. The human child is granted some time to exchange the natural association with the world that is slipping away for a spiritual association—a relationship. From the glowing darkness of the chaos he has stepped into the cool and light creation without immediately possessing it: he has to get it up, as it were, and make it a reality for himself; he gains his world by seeing, listening, feeling, forming.² It is in encounter that the creation reveals its formhood;³ it does not pour itself into senses that are waiting but deigns to meet those that are reaching out. What is to surround the finished human being as an object, has to be acquired and wooed strenuously by him while he is still developing.⁴ No thing is a component of experience or reveals itself except through the reciprocal force of confrontation. Like primitives, the child lives between sleep and sleep (and a large part of waking is still sleep), in the lightning and counter-lightning of encounter.

The innateness of the longing for relation is apparent even in the earliest and dimmest stage. Before any particulars can be perceived, dull glances push into the unclear space toward the indefinite; and at times when there is obviously no desire for nourishment, soft projections of the hands reach, aimlessly to all appearances, into the empty air toward the indefinite.⁵ Let anyone call this animalic:

² *es muss sich seine Welt erschauen, erborchen, erstasten, erbilden.* Cf. p. 55, note 4 on *erfahren*.

³ *Gestaltigkeit* is a coinage.

⁴ *Was den fertigen Menschen . . . umspielen wird, muss vom entstehenden in angestrengter Handlung erworben, umworben werden.*

⁵ *und . . . allem Anschein nach zwecklos suchen, greifen die weichen Handentwürfe in die leere Luft . . .* The word order and the choice of words are most unusual.

that does not help our comprehension. For precisely these glances will eventually, after many trials, come to rest upon a red wallpaper arabesque and not leave it until the soul of red has opened up to them. Precisely this motion will gain its sensuous form and definiteness in contact with a shaggy toy bear and eventually apprehend lovingly and unforgettably a complete body: in both cases not experience of an object but coming to grips with a living, active being that confronts us, if only in our "imagination." (But this "imagination" is by no means a form of "panpsychism"; it is the drive to turn everything into a You, the drive to pan-relation—and where it does not find a living, active being that confronts it but only an image or symbol of that, it supplies the living activity from its own fullness.) Little inarticulate sounds still ring out senselessly and persistently into the nothing; but one day they will have turned imperceptibly into a conversation—with what? Perhaps with a bubbling tea kettle, but into a conversation. Many a motion that is called a reflex is a sturdy trowel for the person building up his world. It is not as if a child first saw an object and then entered into some relationship with that. Rather, the longing for relation is primary, the cupped hand into which the being that confronts us nestles; and the relation to that, which is a wordless anticipation of saying You, comes second. But the genesis of the thing is a late product that develops out of the split of the primal encounters,⁶ out of the separation of the associated partners—as does the genesis of the I. In the beginning is the relation—as the category of being, as readiness, as a form that reaches out to be filled, as a model of the soul; *the a priori of relation, the innate You.*

In the relationships through which we live, the innate You is realized in the You we encounter: that this, com-

⁶ *Urerlebnisse.*

prehended as a being we confront⁷ and accepted as exclusive, can finally be addressed with the basic word, has its ground in the *a priori* of relation.

In the drive for contact (originally, a drive for tactile contact, then also for optical contact with another being) the innate You comes to the fore quite soon, and it becomes ever clearer that the drive aims at reciprocity, at "tenderness." But it also determines the inventive drive⁸ which emerges later (the drive to produce things synthetically or, where that is not possible, analytically—through taking or tearing apart), and thus the product is "personified" and a "conversation" begins. The development of the child's soul is connected indissolubly with his craving for the You, with the fulfillments⁹ and disappointments of this craving, with the play of his experiments and his tragic seriousness when he feels at a total loss. Any real understanding of these phenomena is compromised by all attempts to reduce them to narrower spheres and can be promoted only when in contemplating and discussing them we recall their cosmic-metacosmic origin. We must remember the reach beyond that undifferentiated, not yet formed¹ primal world from which the corporeal² individual that was born into the world has emerged completely, but not yet the bodily,³ the actualized being that has to evolve from it gradually through entering into relationships.

*

⁷ *Die erlebten Beziehungen sind Realisierungen des eingeborenen Du am Begegnenden; dass dieses als Gegenüber gefasst . . .*

⁸ *Urhebertrieb* Cf. p. 73, note 8 and the preceding text.

⁹ Until 1957: Satisfactions.

¹ *vorgestaltigen.* This is a coinage. See p. 77, note 3.

² *körperliche.*

³ *leibliche.* In ordinary German *körperlich* and *leiblich* are synonyms.

Man becomes an I through a You. What confronts us comes and vanishes, relational events take shape and scatter, and through these changes crystallizes, more and more each time, the consciousness of the constant partner, the I-consciousness. To be sure, for a long time it appears only woven into the relation to a You, discernible as that which reaches for but is not a You; but it comes closer and closer to the bursting point until one day the bonds are broken and the I confronts its detached self for a moment like a You—and then it takes possession of itself and henceforth enters into relations in full consciousness.

Only now can the other basic word be put together. For although the You of the relation always paled again, it never became the It of an I—an object of detached perception and experience, which is what it will become henceforth—but as it were an It for itself, something previously unnoticed that was waiting for the new relational event. Of course, the maturing body⁴ as the carrier of its sensations and the executor of its drives stood out from its environment, but only in the next-to-each-other where one finds one's way, not yet in the absolute separation of I and object. Now, however, the detached I is transformed—reduced from substantial fullness to the functional one-dimensionality⁵ of a subject that experiences and uses objects—and thus approaches all the "It for itself," overpowers it and joins with it to form the other basic word. The man who has acquired an I⁶ and says I-It assumes a position before things but does not confront them in the current of reciprocity. He bends down to examine particulars under the objectifying magnifying glass of close scrutiny, or he uses the objectifying telescope of

⁴ *der zum Leib reifende Körper*: see the two preceding notes.

⁵ *Punkthaftigkeit*: a coinage meaning pointlikeness.

⁶ *Der ichhaft gewordene Mensch*.

distant vision to arrange them as mere scenery. In his contemplation he isolates them without any feeling for the exclusive or joins them without any world feeling. The former could be attained only through relation, and the latter only by starting from that. Only now he experiences things as aggregates of qualities. Qualities, to be sure, had remained in his memory after every encounter,⁷ as belonging to the remembered You; but only now things seem to him to be constructed of their qualities. Only by drawing on his memory of the relation—dreamlike, visual, or conceptual, depending on the kind of man he is—he supplements the core that revealed itself powerfully in the You, embracing all qualities: the substance. Only now does he place things in a spatio-temporal-causal context; only now does each receive its place, its course, its measurability, its conditionality. The You also appears in space, but only in an exclusive confrontation in which everything else can only be background from which it emerges, not its boundary and measure. The You appears in time, but in that of a process that is fulfilled in itself—a process lived through not as a piece that is a part of a constant and organized sequence but in a "duration"⁸ whose purely intensive dimension can be determined only by starting from the You. It appears simultaneously as acting on and as acted upon,⁹ but not as if it had been fitted into a causal chain; rather as, in its reciprocity with the I, the beginning and end of the event. This is part of the basic truth of the human world: only It can be put in order. Only as things cease to be our You and become our It do they become subject to coordination. The You knows no system of coordinates.

⁷ *Beziehungserlebnis*: literally, living experience of relation.

⁸ *Buber in March 1937*: What is meant is Bergson's *durée*.

⁹ *als Wirkung und als Wirkung empfangend*.

But having got this far, we must also make another pronouncement without which this piece of the basic truth would remain an unfit fragment: an ordered world is not the world order. There are moments of the secret ground in which world order is beheld as present. Then the tone is heard all of a sudden whose uninterpretable score the ordered world is. These moments are immortal; none are more evanescent. They leave no content that could be preserved, but their force enters into the creation and into man's knowledge, and the radiation of its force penetrates the ordered world and thaws it again and again. Thus the history of the individual, thus the history of the race.

*

The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude.

He perceives the being that surrounds him, plain things and beings as things; he perceives what happens around him, plain processes and actions as processes, things that consist of qualities and processes that consist of moments, things recorded in terms of spatial coordinates and processes recorded in terms of temporal coordinates, things and processes that are bounded by other things and processes and capable of being measured against and compared with those others—an ordered world, a detached world. This world is somewhat reliable; it has density and duration; its articulation can be surveyed; one can get it out again and again; one recounts it with one's eyes closed and then checks with one's eyes open. There it stands—right next to your skin if you think of it that way, or nestled in your soul if you prefer that: it is your object and remains

that, according to your pleasure—and remains primarily alien both outside and inside you. You perceive it and take it for your "truth";¹ it permits itself to be taken by you, but it does not give itself to you. It is only *about* it that you can come to an understanding with others; although it takes a somewhat different form for everybody, it is prepared to be a common object for you; but you cannot encounter others in it. Without it you cannot remain alive; its reliability preserves you; but if you were to die into it, then you would be buried in nothingness.

Or man encounters being and becoming as what confronts him—always only *one* being and every thing only as a being. What is there reveals itself to him in the occurrence, and what occurs there happens to him as being. Nothing else is present but this one, but this one cosmically.² Measure and comparison have fled. It is up to you how much of the immeasurable becomes reality for you. The encounters do not order themselves to become a world, but each is for you a sign of the world order. They have no association with each other, but every one guarantees your association with the world. The world that appears to you in this way is unreliable, for it appears always new to you, and you cannot take it by its word. It lacks density, for everything in it permeates everything else. It lacks duration, for it comes even when not called and vanishes even when you cling to it. It cannot be surveyed: if you try to make it surveyable, you lose it. It comes—comes-to fetch you—and if it does not reach you or encounter you it vanishes, but it comes again, transformed. It does not stand outside you, it touches your ground; and

¹ *Du nimmst sie wahr, nimmst sie dir zur "Wahrheit" . . .* This is a gloss on the literal meaning of the German verb *wahrnehmen* which is the ordinary word for perceive.

² *aber dies eine welthaft.*

if you say "soul of my soul" you have not said too much. But beware of trying to transpose it into your soul—that way you destroy it. It is your present; you have a present only insofar as you have it;³ and you can make it into an object for you and experience and use it—you must do that again and again—and then you have no present any more. Between you and it there is a reciprocity of giving: you say You to it and give yourself to it; it says You to you and gives itself to you. You cannot come to an understanding *about* it with others; you are lonely with it; but it teaches you to encounter others and to stand your ground in such encounters; and through the grace of its advents and the melancholy of its departures it leads you to that You in which the lines of relation, though parallel, intersect. It does not help you to survive; it only helps you to have intimations of eternity.⁴

The It-world hangs together in space and time.

The You-world does not hang together in space and time.

The individual You *must* become an It when the event of relation has run its course.

The individual It *can* become a You by entering into the event of relation.

These are the two basic privileges of the It-world. They induce man to consider the It-world as the world in which one has to live and also can live comfortably—and that even offers us all sorts of stimulations and excitements, activities and knowledge. In this firm and wholesome chronicle the You-moments appear as queer lyric-dramatic episodes. Their spell may be seductive, but they pull us dangerously to extremes, loosening the well-tried structure, leaving behind more doubt than satisfaction, shaking up our security—altogether uncanny, altogether indistinct.

³In 1957 Buber changed the German word order. Cf. p. 63, note 8.

pensable.⁴ Since one must after all return into "the world," why not stay in it in the first place? Why not call to order that which confronts us and send it home into objectivity? And when one cannot get around saying You, perhaps to one's father, wife, companion—why not say You and mean It? After all, producing the sound "You" with one's vocal cords does not by any means entail speaking the uncanny basic word. Even whispering an amorous You with one's soul is hardly dangerous as long as in all seriousness one means nothing but experiencing and using.

One cannot live in the pure present: it would consume us if care were not taken that it is overcome quickly and thoroughly. But in pure past one can live; in fact, only there can a life be arranged. One only has to fill every moment with experiencing and using, and it ceases to burn.

And in all the seriousness of truth, listen:⁵ without It a human being cannot live. But whoever lives only with that is not human.⁶

⁴Until 1957: dispensable. At first glance it might seem as if Buber had changed his mind. But "dispensable" was obviously meant ironically, like the rest of the passage, and actually was much more consistent with the immediately following sentence. Eventually Buber evidently felt dissatisfied with his sustained irony and decided to bring the reader up short with a sudden show of his real hand. But "indispensable" does not only break the mood; it is flatly contradicted by the following sentences. The first translator of the book took no note of this change—or a great many others—in his "Second Edition." In this case, I think Buber's change is for the worse.

⁵Buber does not say "listen" but *du*. Here "you" would be rather unidiomatic and unnatural, but in German lovers and close friends sometimes use *du* in this way as an expression of intimacy.

⁶Cf. Hillel's words: "If I am not for myself, who will be? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" (Avot I: 14).