CHAPTER 1

MARTIN BUBER'S "NARROW RIDGE" AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES

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THE NARROW RIDGE

Buber wrote a story in 1907 for his second book, *The Legend of the Baal Shem*, called "The New Year Sermon," in which he first used the term "the narrow ridge." A year is like a circle; you go around a narrow ridge with abysses on either side. Later, Buber used the term to denote the narrow ridge between various forms of abstractions, such as freedom vs. discipline, individualism vs. collectivism, or nationalism vs. universalism. It was a way of adhering to the concrete. While Buber was a great scholar, he was also the most concrete person that I have ever known, and he insisted on concreteness in those he talked with. In writing my book *Encounter on the Narrow Ridge*, I wanted to say that the narrow ridge was not just a way of thinking, though it did permeate Buber's thinking too. So here I want to share with you just a few little bits of autobiographical fragments and touch on how they affected his thought and how that way of life and that thought relates to the human sciences.

BUBER'S ENCOUNTER ON THE NARROW RIDGE

Born in Vienna, Buber lived with his parents in a house under which flowed the Danube canal, the sight of which he would enjoy with a

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certainty that nothing could happen to him. Then, in his fourth year of life, his mother suddenly disappeared. No one knew where she went, and young Martin was sent to live with his paternal grandparents, the great Midrash scholar Solomon Buber and his wife, on their estate in Galicia. They never mentioned his mother to him at all, probably because, since they were noble people, they didn't talk to each other about it any more than was necessary. He assumed that she would come back, until one day when he was with a child a few years older than himself, a neighbor child taking care of him. "I can hear to this day her answer: 'No, she will never come back,'" Buber later recounted. "I cherished no doubt the truth of her words; they cleaved to my heart, and every year they cleaved deeper and deeper. After ten years I came to understand it as concerning not only me but all persons and after another ten years I coined the term '*Vergegnung*'—'mismeeting,'" said Buber. When Buber grew up he discovered that his mother had run away to Russia with an army officer, where she lived and had two daughters. Buber's father had remarried with the permission of the rabbi. When Buber was thirty-four his mother came to see him and his wife Paula and the two children, Rafael and Eva. "When I looked into her still astonishingly beautiful eyes," he said, "I heard from somewhere as a word addressed to me '*Vergegnung*'"—'mismeeting.'"

Yet Buber's conclusion to this story is not about mismeeting at all. Rather, he learned from that hour on the balcony about genuine meeting. What always struck me about this story was that Buber did not cling for a lifetime to his mother as Marcel Proust to his mother and Franz Kafka to his father. The heart of what Buber called the "eternal Thou" is existential trust—the readiness to go out again and meet with your whole being, and he did this with remarkable fullness. As Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy points out, when they didn't talk about his mother, young Martin must have felt shamed because to have a mother who is too shameful to talk about is hard for a young child. Often children feel that they have to choose between one parent or the other, and that destroys "the triadic basis of justice" that Barbara Krasner talks about. Buber really held on to both his father who was present and his mother who was absent, and that may be the root of the I and the Thou—the refusal to choose one or the other. He held the tension between the two parents. Buber said that the mystery at the heart of dialogue is the unity of the contraries—the *coincidentia oppositorum*, or coincidence of opposites. They do not just blend into one happy harmony. You hold the tension, and nonetheless you do not simply split apart. He opposed with all his force the polarization as well as the politicization of reality that is so common in our day.

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Here is already a deep key to Buber's whole life and to what became his thought. He seemed to think in dyads, not only I-Thou and I-It but also person and individual, *gnosis* vs. *devotio*, *emunah* vs. *pistis*, being vs. seeming. Yet to turn that into a kind of Manichean dualism, as Walter Kaufmann said in 1978, is to miss entirely what he was doing, namely, holding the tension. Buber was a disciple of Wilhelm Dilthey, the phenomenologist. Buber really meant these dyads as ideal types; he did not mean for us to choose one or the other. That is why it has always been a complete misunderstanding of the I-Thou relationship to imagine that Buber thought it was possible or desirable to have only the I-Thou, or that he saw the I-It as evil in any way. He saw as evil only the refusal to return to the Thou but not the "It" itself—"Without It we cannot live." That's a clue to Buber's whole life; it is a clue to his thought and certainly a clue to the human sciences.

It was Buber's teacher Wilhelm Dilthey who coined the famous distinction between the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften*, commonly translated as the "natural sciences" and the "human studies," or the "human sciences." Actually, the word *geistes* doesn't mean human; it doesn't mean "spiritual" either. In German it is somewhere between the spiritual, the cultural, and the intellectual. People have rightly complained about Dilthey's terminology as an oversimple dichotomy. I myself have long insisted that psychology ought to be considered not only a *Naturwissenschaft* but also a *Geisteswissenschaft*. Buber believed that science itself was based upon the Thou—actual intuitions of Thou, but the elaboration had to do with the It. Buber's contribution is precisely that to him science is not It or Thou but rather, like his philosophy, it is the alternation between the two—the going back and forth.

Buber was kept at home by his grandmother, who believed that the royal road to education was languages. So she had him taught languages, and Buber didn't have to go to school at all until he was ten years old. When he received an honorary doctorate from the Sorbonne he told of a French teacher who taught him salon French, which he disliked so intensely that one day when they were walking by a lake the young child pushed the salon teacher into the lake! Buber went to what can be called a one-room schoolhouse, a gymnasium with a majority of Catholic students and a minority of Jewish students (the Ruthenians had schools of their own). He tells of how the Jewish students had to stand in the midst of a sacral ritual in which no dram of their being could take part while the Christian students and the master said the Trinity.

In the same school, a couple years after he came there—he was about twelve—there was a fall utterly spoiled by rain. When the weather

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was nice they used the recess to stroll around and talk and play games in the courtyard. During this particular fall they had to sit quietly at their desks for a whole recess. Two boys undertook to entertain the others with clownlike games, with clownlike agility. They tried to keep their faces straight so the Master would not discover what they were doing. The boys did not speak to each other about this. After a couple of weeks their games took on an unmistakably sexual character, and the faces of the two boys looked like the faces of the souls tormented in hell, which young Buber's Catholic schoolmates had told him about with the tone of experts.

After that had gone on for a while, the Master called young Martin into his study and said, in the kind considerate voice they knew as invariable, "Tell me what you know about these two boys." "I know nothing!" he screamed. Then in the same kind and considerate voice the Master said, "We know you well; you are a good boy. You will help us." "I wanted to shout, 'Help? Help whom?'" Buber recollected. "Instead of which I was led away weeping as never before in my life and almost unconscious. When I got home the look I remembered on the Master's face was no longer a kind and gentle one but a frightened one. I was kept at home for two weeks; when I returned the bench where the two boys sat was empty and remained empty for the rest of the school year."

With this convulsion of his childhood, says Buber, "I began the long series of experiences that taught me the problematic relation between maxim and situation and the true norm that demands not our obedience but ourselves." By maxim Buber meant the third-person statement, such as, "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise" or "Honesty is the best policy." Maxims mean everyone and no one, but they do not mean *you*. Situation on the other hand, as Buber discovered then, is something unique. It demands a unique response; it is unique itself; it is a unique relationship between you and it. Perhaps for the first time in Buber's life he discovered that he was not just being called upon to be a "good boy." There *was* a maxim here: "A good boy is one that helps us, the masters." And there was a contract, too: "We will reward you for your help by confirming you as a good boy." The masters knew what was happening or they would not have called him in. They just wanted to separate the sheep from the goats. They wanted confirmation by young Martin, which he found he could not give them. He was asked to do something else, and he fell into a stalemate, which is why he went home almost unconscious.

The other thing Buber learned (he *knew* it only much later obviously) was that true norms demand not our obedience but ourselves. What he would call the untrue norm is the one that splits us into an immedi-

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ate part and a rebellious part. This is connected with what I call the "contract"—the confirmation that comes only conditionally, with strings attached; we confirm you insofar as you are a good boy/girl, churchgoer, citizen, soldier, whatever. Such a norm, of course, is from the above down, and the rebellious part is still there, repressed into unawareness, protest, resentment. Even if you are confirmed, somewhere in your being, perhaps not consciously, you know it is not *you* that is being confirmed—it is the "good boy." Like the prodigal son's brother who stayed home and was upset when the father killed the fatted calf for the prodigal son, the "good boy" never allowed the evil urge to take him away and come back. He had just stayed there—the good son. Even if you grew up and went to one or another psychologist or psychoanalyst and they removed your guilt, you still would feel unlovable because of this contract. The true norm is not above us; it faces us as a question—the question of the situation addressed to us to which we respond. God gives the question but nothing of the answer. The answer is human; it can be mistaken. It is a thing of fear and trembling, said Buber in "The Question to the Single One."

This true norm does not imply ethical anarchism. "No responsible person is a stranger to norms," wrote Buber. "But the norm does not exist in the person as a maxim or a habit but only in some layer of your being of which you are perhaps unaware, coming out in unexpected ways in the face of the unique, the unforeseen situation." Buber did not reject command; what he rejected was command as a universal. Franz Rosenzweig, in his famous essay "The Builders," says, "*Gesetz*, the universal law, must be translated into *Gebot*, the personal command." Rosenzweig tells us that we get from Gesetz to Gebot, from the universal law to personal command, by deciding what we can do—*das Tubare*, as he called it. That is not what Buber meant by command at all. To Buber I have to be really the one who is asked—that is *mitzvot*, that is command. He could not accept anything which turned it into a universal, yet he does not mean we can live without law, but the true law is Torah—teaching. It can never be divorced entirely from God's speaking voice. So again we have "the narrow ridge"—something that affected his whole approach. Buber spent a lifetime of work in retelling Hasidic tales and Hasidic teachings; he spent a lifetime translating and interpreting the Hebrew Bible; he read voluminously; he worked extremely hard; yet he refused ever to turn the teaching of the Torah or the life of the Hasidim into fixed rules and universal laws.

Just before World War I, a young man came to see Buber after Buber had had a morning of mystic ecstasy. Buber was friendly and attentive; he answered the questions the young man put. But he failed to guess the

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question the young man did not put. After such a morning of mystic ecstasy, which was customary for him in those days, he was not really present in spirit. Later he learned this was a question of life and death—not that the young man had committed suicide, as some imagine. He was killed at the front, as Buber told me himself, out of despair that did not oppose its own death.

Buber took this as a judgment not just of that moment but of that whole way of life which split the exalted hours from the everyday hours. "What after all does a person who is in despair but comes to see one hope for but a presence which says in spite of all there is meaning," said Buber. Not reality, not philosophy, not wise words, but a presence. That was the judgment on a way of life in which he was not fully present. The result was that Buber gave up a mysticism that was natural for him. In one of the last poems Buber wrote before he died, the voice said, "Come to the other side over this big void," but then another voice said, "No, it's right here where you are." If you contrast Buber's early interpretation of Hasidism in his justly famous "The Life of the Hasidim" (*The Legend of the Baal Shem*), the whole first section is *hitlahavut*, the burning ardor of ecstasy. But ecstasy dropped out of Buber's later interpretation of Hasidism in favor of hallowing the everyday—here where one stands.

What Buber was rejecting, for the rest of his life, was a dualism in which we have a beautiful sphere up there and something else here. That's why he said that we don't have the holy in the world, we have the spirit, by which I think he meant culture, ideas, and ideals. We take it with grim seriousness, but that's all we do. We will not allow it to have any binding claim on our lives. "No amount of hypocritical piety has ever reached this concentrated degree of inauthenticity."

Hasidism teaches that the wretchedness of our lives comes when we are not open to the holy, wrote Buber. "A life that is not open to the holy is not only unworthy of the spirit, it is unworthy of life." Buber does not mean by openness to the holy that we should be saints or superhuman, but, as the Kotzker Rebbe said, "humanly holy"—in the measure of the human, of our own personal, unique responses. Buber is talking about the life of dialogue where everything can be a sign that addresses us; everything can be a messenger of God, as Nachman of Bratzlav put it, that brings you back to your connection with reality outside of yourself and to some possibility of genuine dialogue.

A month before the young man came to see him, Buber was visited by the old Reverend William Hechler, who was one of the first supporters of Zionism. This man he had met on a train in the late 1890s—Buber had shown him what he called pathetic verses he had written on his

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people's awakening, and Reverend Hechler carried these off with him to the Grand Duke of Baden, the uncle of the Kaiser. Later, without Buber's knowledge, Hechler published them in Herzl's famous journal *Die Welt* after supplying it with even more pathetic subtitles, Buber said. Hechler was one of the last people that Herzl saw before he died in 1904, but Buber had lost touch with him. In 1914 Reverend Hechler showed up in Buber's home in Zehlendorf, a suburb of Berlin, and he unfolded a large map, what we would call a histomap. On the basis of his studies of *The Book of Daniel*, he came to tell Buber there would be a "world war." "I never heard the phrase before," Buber said. "I knew it must be something utterly unlike any previous war that would consume history and with it mankind." Reverend Hechler, who was an Anglican priest, was also a tutor in the royal courts of Europe.

Hechler stayed with the Bubers for a while, then Buber walked his guest to the train. When they came to the corner where the black path met the railroad tracks, Reverend Hechler stopped, put his hand on Buber's shoulder and said, "Dear friend! We live in a great time. Tell me: Do you believe in God?" Buber reassured him and put him on the train. But when he got back to that spot, he asked himself, "Did I tell the truth? Do I really believe in the God whom Hechler meant?" He resolved not to leave the spot until an answer came. Then the words came as of themselves: "If to believe in God means to be able to talk *about* him in the third person, then I do *not* believe in God. But if to believe in him means to be able to talk *to* him, then I do believe in God." Then again, "The God who could give Daniel such exact information about the world war is not my God, is not our God. But the God to whom Daniel prayed in his suffering is my God and the God of all" (*PMB*, 3–39; *Meetings*, 17–61).

Does that mean a rejection of rational thought? No. But it is what prevented him from being a theologian. God to Buber was not an "it" of any sort, even with a capital "I," not even an "it" of the nature of person. God cannot be expressed but only addressed. Many people speak *to* God who do not know how to speak about God; many people speak about God but do not speak to God. That is something Buber remained true to for the rest of his life. He firmly refused ever to subsume God under Aristotle's law of noncontradiction.

My old teacher and great philosopher, Charles Hartshorne, used to say to me as he was advising me on my doctoral dissertation, "Buber is no metaphysician." But when he wrote the essay on Buber's metaphysics for *The Library of Living Philosophers* volume that I edited, he began with the sentences, "Buber is no metaphysician. Buber is one of the greatest metaphysicians." Then he proceeded to remake Buber into

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the image of Whitehead, as he said himself. When Buber responded he said, "I read your essay several times; I'm afraid I can only agree with the first of your two statements," namely that he was no metaphysician (*PMB*, 717). Following Whitehead, who goes back to Plato, Hartshorne said you have to choose: either God is absolute and nonrelational or God is relational and not absolute. Buber, in contrast, spoke of God as the Absolute Person who *is* not person but *becomes* one, so to speak, in order to know and be known, to love and be loved by us. He meant this as a paradox, and a paradox does not fit Aristotle's law of noncontradiction. But then Buber never thought that A or not-A sums up our relation with God. He never even thought it summed up our relationship with one another. Nor do I think so, because if we were really identical to each other we would not need to speak, and we were entirely other we could not speak. It is not just that we have something in common, as the marriage counselor thinks. There must be something else, and it is the arrows coming together and the arrows coming apart.

BUBER'S PHILOSOPHY OF DIALOGUE

Buber was a true philosopher. He was not a systematic one, but he was a coherent one. I have studied him carefully over the years, and I do not find any major emphasis on any major contradictions in his thought. "I don't speak *ex cathedra*," Buber said, "If there is a problem I am willing to go into it." But Buber held that the unique could not be subsumed under rational categories (Rome and Rome, 51–53). Nathan Rotenstreich, a philosopher at the Hebrew University in Israel, concluded that when Buber says that in the life of faith the dictionary is put down, he implied that for him dialogue is empty of content. "No, I'm very much concerned with content," Buber replied, "but the content is not a general content." It is again and again a unique content, a situational content (*PMB*, 697). Buber did not reject any sort of morality as a rule of thumb, but anything that gets in between us and the address of the situation. A morality like that he would see as nondialogical. The same is true of any theology that gets between us and our relation to God. Buber took very seriously the actual hearing of the life of and in dialogue. Every symbol of God, whether subtle or crude, is equally untrue because it turns God into an "it," but God allows us to come to him through these symbols, so we may surmise, until, as happens ever again, they swell up and obstruct the road to God by claiming themselves to be the Absolute. As the Zen Buddhists say, "They take the finger pointing at the moon for the moon itself." At that point you absolutize something that is rela-

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tive. That is idolatry. Then comes round the hour of the philosopher who destroys the images that no longer do justice to God in order that the religious person can set out across the darkness to a new meeting with the nameless Meeter (*EG*, 45ff.).

I sent Martin Buber a baccalaureate speech I gave at the University of Vermont in 1961, where I referred to Albert Camus as an atheist. He wrote back and said, "Don't call him an atheist. He is one of those people I speak of in religion and philosophy who destroy the images that no longer do justice to God." In that sense he was a religious person, even though he called himself an atheist. Actually, Albert Camus said to R. W. B. Lewis, "I do not mind being called 'religious' in Buber's sense of the term, an I-Thou relationship." When Camus wrote *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, I. F. Stone, who edited *Dissent*, wrote a long article entitled "Albert Camus—the Life of Dialogue," taking the subtitle from my first book on Buber. Stone concluded his article by saying, "Albert Camus lived the only life worth living, the life of dialogue."

When Buber accepted the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 1953 he was bitterly criticized in Israel and in the Yiddish press in America. For years Buber had refused to speak publically in Germany, saying, "The Germans have become faceless to me." Finally, as the result of German persistence and what he read by Romano Guardini concerning German guilt, he was able to go to Germany. At his lecture in Bonn, attended by the president of the West German government, Theodore Heuss, and many other notables, Buber spoke as no one had yet spoken. He began by telling all those assembled that he could not express his thanks to the German Book Trade for the honor conferred on him without at the same time stating the sense in which he accepted it.

> About a decade ago a considerable number of Germans . . . under the indirect command of the German government and the direct command of its representatives, killed millions of my people in a systematically prepared and executed procedure whose organized cruelty cannot be compared with any previous historical event. I . . . have only in a formal sense a common humanity with those who took part in this action. They have so radically removed themselves from the human sphere, so transposed themselves into a sphere of monstrous inhumanity inaccessible to my conception, that not even hatred, much less an overcoming of hatred, was able to arise in me. And what am I that I could here presume to "forgive"! (*PW*, 232)

But then Buber went on to talk about others who suspected but were afraid to investigate and still others who become martyrs, committed

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suicide, or allowed themselves to be killed rather than take part in what happened. Buber then spoke about genuine dialogue and the possibility of peace and of the fight between the human and the contrahuman. He came because he wanted to fight for the human within each people. Buber opposed the execution of Adolf Eichmann, not only because he did not believe in capital punishment but more importantly that he was afraid that the young people in Germany would take Eichmann's execution as a symbolic evening of the ledger, that they would not live with the guilt of their fathers as he felt they had to do.

Buber's philosophy of the "demarcation line" is an important aspect of his "narrow ridge." We cannot live without doing injustice—no community can, said Buber. Yet every hour anew we have to examine to see that we take on no more guilt for ourselves than we must. Those who say, "We do it for the sake of our children," their children grow up to be tormented or hypocrites.

In "And if Not Now, When?" Buber wrote, "Zion can only be reached *bemishpat*;" with justice (*IW*, 237). We cannot reach a goal by any means except that which is like it. But Buber did not believe in perfection on earth. Not long ago the Russians knocked over the statue of Derzhinski, the head of the original O.G.P.U. In 1918 a Spartacus proponent of the Russian revolution, Derzhinski said he could kill with a clean soul. Buber said, "It is not a question of 'souls' but of responsibility" (*PW*, 119). Buber was not a pacifist. He said you have to truly be in that situation: "No one who counts himself in the ranks of Israel can desire to use force" (*PW*, 145). He was not an absolutist, but he was also not a relativist. This is what the narrow ridge means—the demarcation line which stays close to the concrete situation. Opposed to it is that "realism" that says you cannot meet with the Russians or there is no point in having dialogue with the Arabs.

In 1987–88 I was Senior Fulbright Lecturer at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and was there when the Intafada broke out in December. In January I gave a lecture before a large audience on Buber's Hebrew humanism applied to Jewish/Arab relations. Here, too, Buber walked the narrow ridge, urging Israel to hold its ground yet to establish relations of good neighborliness with the Arabs. Hebrew humanism meant dialogue within the community and between communities. To Buber, "dialogue" in the first instance is the meeting between I and Thou. He remarked that no one had ever understood the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, unless he understood the "thou" as addressed to him or herself. If you turn it into a disguised "it"—"One ought not to do this," instead of "thou"—then it addresses everyone and no one. To be a "thou" it has to be really in that situation. In the very passage where

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Buber says, "No responsible person is a stranger to norms," he also writes, "I know of a man who was struck by the lightning flash of 'Thou shalt not steal' in such a way that he had to turn and do the exact opposite of what he was going to do and bring all the passion he was going to use into what he now had to do" (*BMM*, 114). "I was that man," Buber told me. "It wasn't 'Thou shalt not steal,' it was 'Thou shalt not kill.' I wasn't going to kill anyone, nonetheless that is the command I heard."

It is as Thou that we hear the command, but we hear it as a part of the group or groups to which we belong. I should not say, "My party right or wrong," or "My country right or wrong." Yet, in contrast to Kierkegaard, who set the crowd in opposition to the "Single One," we should really be in groups of people, but nothing should take away our responsibility. We should not be like a lynch mob (i.e., social without direct interhuman relations).

For Buber, the "essential We" went so far that even if he did not do something personally, he felt great pain and guilt, such as the Kibya raids in Israel, when many Arabs were mowed down because they came home after the curfew. Buber had lived through three wars—World War I and the World War II and then the war that marked the foundation of the state of Israel. Buber did not say, as some imagine, that this third war was the most *significant* war for him—as a result of which mishearing they claim that Buber did not take the Holocaust seriously enough. What he said rather was that it was the most *painful*. The reason it was the most painful was that it was connected with the very Zionism that he had helped bring into being. Because of this he had a great sense of grief.

In contrast to the Ten Commandments, the revelation at Mt. Sinai was to a large people who were gathered there, not just to one person. That too was a genuine revelation, yet Buber wrote me, "The mid-point of revelation is the present. The revelation is not Mount Sinai or the burning bush but our present receiving of it." Buber very much wanted the Yishuv, which later became the state of Israel, to continue the covenant, and that is what he wrote to Gandhi, who accused the Jews in Palestine of inhumanly imposing themselves upon the Arabs. Buber admired Gandhi more than any figure in public life, as someone who combined the political and the religious. Nonetheless, Buber wrote Gandhi a public letter, saying, "Do you know what a universal steam roller is? No one could gather together and organize the way you did in South Africa." You can't ask people to be martyrs for political reasons when it can have no possible political effect. But he also said we cannot give up this covenant which places a demand on us. It is not just our right to the land. It is our duty to make real God's Kingship in social life.

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Buber saw three things as connected: the land, the people, and the task. Some people really hated Buber for that because they wanted to be a nation like the other nations. Buber said to Gandhi, "We cannot give up our task on the land." On the other hand, he also said, we can also honor the claim that is ours and know that it is not possible to arbitrate the two claims by having any overarching, universal, or "objective" point of view. But, he concluded, where there is faith and love there can be some reconciliation even in the midst of a tragic contradiction. They love the land, and we love the land. It has not happened so far, yet Buber believed that if the Cold War ended, the situation might change. People no longer talk of a "cold war," and there has been a radical change.

In the Seder service at Passover, the good son asks, "What did the Lord do for *us* when he brought *us* out of Egypt?" The bad son asks, "What did the Lord do for *them* when he brought *them* out of Egypt?" For the good son, it is still present. For the bad son, it is merely a past historical curiosity. "Not our fathers but we here, the living, stand on Mount Sinai to receive the Torah," it says in *Deuteronomy*. Thus the revelation still has to be received individually. Israel as Israel could accept the covenant, but we cannot impose it upon them in the name of some biblical theology.

Paul Mendes-Flohr translated and edited and wrote his helpful comments on Buber's book *A Land of Two Peoples*—the essays and speeches Buber gave on the Jewish-Arab problem from 1916 to 1965. The English edition came out in 1982 (Oxford University Press), but it came out in Hebrew while we were in Jerusalem in 1988. There was a full-page interview with Paul Mendes-Flohr in the *Jerusalem Post*. They asked Mendes-Flohr how Buber would have liked the Gush Emunim, who claim Samaria and Judea for Israel on the basis of the Hebrew Bible. "I don't think he would have liked them," he replied, "first because they have nothing to do with dialogue, and secondly because they are not at all humble."

Buber called the kibbutzim in Israel an experiment that did not fail. Buber pointed to "Jerusalem" instead of "Moscow," because he believed neither in capitalism nor in state socialism but in true communitarian socialism. Everything had become politicized in Israel, Buber complained in 1951. You could not go for an hour without everyone arguing politics. This politicization and polarization again and again stood in the way of true humanity. To call Buber an anarchist or see him as simply opposed to the State is to miss the tension between society and the State, between the social and the political principle that marked Buber's narrow ridge. It is a way of life, and of course it is a hard way.

Reinhold Niebuhr and Buber and I had a three-way correspondence on social justice. Niebuhr always thought Buber was great on the I-Thou

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relationship between persons, but he thought he was totally naive when it came to politics and the nation. Buber said, "I cannot accept the notion that there is one meaning of justice in the interhuman realm and a whole different meaning of justice on a national scale." Honest men lie and compassionate men torture, Buber said, for the sake of justice, or equality, or the kingdom. That is exactly what he could not accept. Buber added, "I cannot know how much justice is possible in a given situation until I go on and my head hits the wall and it hurts, and then I know, oh! this is the limit" (Rome and Rome, 78–80).

In the German universities in the early 1950s Buber gave a lecture called "The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle." In this lecture Buber criticized Hegel, Marx, and Heidegger because he thought they had no real understanding and conception of the eternal. He said that we have lost all absolutes except one in the modern world, and that is "the nation."

> I have no warrant whatever to declare that under all circumstances the interest of the group is to be sacrificed to the moral demand, more particularly as the cruel conflicts of duties and their unreserved decision on the basis of the situation seem to me to belong to the essential existence of a genuine personal ethos.

Buber went on to say that the "evident absence of this inner conflict, the lack of its wounds and scars, is to me uncanny" (*PW*, 217).

Buber was not a systematic philosopher, but he was a genuine and profound philosopher of dialogue. He does belong to the great philosophers and thinkers and spiritual leaders because he had this intuition which illuminates many fields. He was not a saint. But he was in fact someone who lived a life of dialogue.

PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Each of the human sciences is ultimately grounded in a philosophical anthropology. None of the social or psychological sciences in itself deals with the wholeness of the human; for each treats one aspect (e.g., the sociological, the economic, the political, the historical, or the psychological). Yet if they are to be understood as *human* sciences, they must recover their grounding in that human wholeness and uniqueness which is found in the recognition of the varieties of peoples, the types and characters of the human soul, and the stages of human life. Philosophical anthropology tries to grasp human beings in their particularity

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and complexity, their dynamic interrelatedness with others, and the interplay of possibility, freedom, and personal direction. An important advance in philosophical anthropology was the development of "phenomenology" by the German philosophers Wilhelm Dilthey and Edmund Husserl. Dilthey based his thought on the radical difference between the way of knowing of the "*Geisteswissenschaften*" and that of the "*Naturwissenschaften.*" In the former, the knowers cannot be merely detached scientific observers but must also participate themselves; for it is through their participation that they discover both the typical and the unique in the aspects of human life that they are studying. At the same time they must suspend the foregone conclusions and the search for causality that mark the natural scientist in favor of an open attempt to discover what offers itself. Only through this open understanding (*das Verstehen*) can one value the unique that reveals itself in every human phenomenon.

Martin Buber's philosophy of the interhuman—with its twofold human movement of distancing and relating and its twofold human relation of "I-Thou" and "I-It"—has led him, and myself following him, to a more dialogical understanding of the task of the philosophical anthropologist. Philosophical anthropology goes beyond cultural anthropology in that it asks the question not just about human beings but about the human: about our wholeness and uniqueness, about what makes us human. It can only touch on the problem of the human, however, insofar as it recognizes that the philosophical anthropologist himself or herself is a human being and as such is *as subject* and not just as object a part of what he or she seeks to know. To understand the human one must be a participant who only afterward gains the distance from one's subject matter that will enable one to formulate the insights one has attained. Otherwise, one inevitably sees the human being as a sum of parts, some of which are labeled "objective" and hence oriented around the thing known, and some "subjective" and hence oriented around the knower. What is more, one must reject all attempts to reduce the problematic of the human to any single motive or complex of motives or to comprehend the human simply on the analogy of biology or the behavior of animals. Only if as philosophical anthropologist one is a problem to oneself can one understand the human as a problem to itself.

DIALOGUE AND DIALECTIC IN THE HUMAN SCIENCES

What I am pointing to here is an approach, an attitude. It is not a party line. There are people who misunderstand Buber's *Two Types of Faith* as

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if he's saying, "I'm pro-Judaism and against Christianity." He wasn't saying that at all. He was saying there is a dialectic tension between *emunah*, faith of unconditional trust in relationship, and pistis, which is faith with a knowledge content. This same dialectic applies to all Buber's ideal types—I-Thou and I-It, person and individual, being person and seeming person, dialogue and monologue, prophetic and apocalyptic, *devotio* and *gnosis*. To turn them into opposites between which one must choose, as Walter Kaufmann did, is to make Buber a Manichean dualist, and he was the opposite of that. Thus Buber's narrow ridge means *both* dialogue and the dialectic or, put another way, a dialectic between I-Thou and I-It, a dialectic between dialogue and dialectic when dialogue means a genuine meeting with otherness and dialectic means an alternation of positions within one mind with no real otherness present.

When I wrote my doctoral dissertation, I put forward a scale of attitudes toward evil. When I first met Buber, he told me he had met five days previously with T. S. Eliot. I asked Buber, "Don't you find that your opinions differ from Eliot's?" Buber looked at me and said, "When I meet a person I am not concerned with their opinions; I am concerned with the person." I took it as a reproof, and it was. I had turned the two into a dialectical opposition within my own head.

I had a friend who was on the debating team at Harvard and who argued about everything conceivable. After twelve years he said to me, "You know, I have never yet said to anyone that they were right, not even on the smallest point. But sometimes I go away and think, perhaps on this or that small point, they were right after all." I said nothing, but I thought, "Well, that's better than nothing." Then I thought again; no, it isn't better than nothing because meanwhile the other voice has gotten lost. It is just a dialectic in the end and not a dialogue. In real dialogue something else goes on. It cannot mean that we dispense with dialectic. In a curious way we have to have a dialogue with the dialectic. We have to go back and forth.

For some time I have had the notion of writing a book on dialogue and dialectic in the human sciences in which I would like to show this back-and-forth in such fields as psychology and psychotherapy, sociology and anthropology, literature and religion. That to me is an invaluable approach to the human sciences, if you want to call them that, and in the end I think it is more concrete. Human existence necessarily and properly alternates between the immediate and the mediate, the direct and the indirect. As the prefix *dia* suggests, both dialogue and dialectic imply the alternation between two different points of view. In the case of dialogue, this also means real meeting with the unique otherness of an other, whereas in the case of dialectic the alternation may take place

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within the head of a single thinker, and the points of view may remain disembodied and hypothetical.

The tendency of by far the largest and most dominant methodologies in most human sciences today is to begin with dialectic and to examine dialogue as a part of that dialectic. Putting this in Martin Buber's terminology, it means that the mutual knowing of the I-Thou relationship is subsumed under the subject-object knowledge of the I-It relation. A radical reversal of this perspective would not mean any rejection of dialectic, which remains essential to the whole human enterprise of connected thought from one generation to another. What it does mean is a shift in emphasis toward understanding dialogue as the source of knowing and dialectic as an elaboration of that source. "The corrective office of reasoning is incontestable," wrote Buber (PI 53). It can be summoned at any moment to adjust the incongruity between my sense perception and what is common to my neighbors. In the I-It relation, what is received in the I-Thou is elaborated and broken up. Here errors are possible that can be corrected through directly establishing and comparing what is past and passive in the minds of others. But reason, with its gigantic structure of general concepts, cannot replace the smallest perception of something particular and unique, cannot by means of it take part in the grasping of what here and now confronts me.

DIALOGUE AND DIALECTIC IN PHILOSOPHY

Starting with the philosophy of dialogue, we can say that the I-Thou relation is a direct knowing that gives one neither knowledge about the Thou over against the I nor about oneself as an objective entity apart from that relationship. It is, in Buber's words, "the genuinely reciprocal meeting in the fullness of life between one active existence and another." Although this dialogical knowing is direct, it is not entirely unmediated. The directness of the relationship is established not only through the mediation of the senses in the concrete meeting of real living persons, but also through mediation of the word. That means the mediation of those fields of symbolic communication, such as language, music, art, and ritual, which enable human beings ever again to enter into relation with what comes to meet them. The word may be identified with subject-object or I-It knowledge while it remains indirect and symbolic. However, it is itself the channel of expression of I-Thou knowing when it is taken up into real dialogue.

Subject-object or I-It knowledge is ultimately nothing other than the socially objectified and elaborated product of the real meeting which

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takes place between the person and her Thou in the realms of nature, social relations, and art. As such, it provides those ordered categories of thought which are, together with dialogue, primal necessities of human existence. But as such, also, it may be, like the indirect and objective word, the symbol of true dialogue. It is only when the full meaning of the symbolic character of subject-object knowledge is forgotten, or remains undiscovered, as is often the case, that this knowledge ceases to point back toward the reality of direct dialogical knowing and becomes instead an obstruction to it.

In his classic work *I and Thou*, Martin Buber uses Socrates as an illustration of the I which is made real by virtue of sharing in the dialogue between person and person. Yet Socrates is not, for all that, an adequate image of the life of dialogue. Socrates went forth to people, trusted them, met them, never suspended dialogue with them. Yet his emphasis upon dialectic thought often put him in the position of the essentially monological thinker whose dialectic, even when it brings in other people, is little more than a moving forward through the opposition and interaction of different points of view, rather than an interaction between really other persons. Martin Buber's friend, the Jewish existential philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, said that the reason why most philosophical dialogues, including those of Plato, are so tedious is that there is no real other speaker. In a real dialogue the other person has not only ears but a mouth and can say something that will surprise you. That is why real dialogue takes place in time. You cannot know the answer in advance the way Socrates teases the geometrical proposition out of the slave boy in the *Meno*.

In his reply to Robert Maynard Hutchins in the Buber section of *Philosophical Interrogations*, Martin Buber wrote:

> I know of very few men in history to whom I stand in such a relation of both trust and veneration as Socrates. But when it is a matter of using "Socratic questions" as an educational method, I am against it. . . . Socrates overvalued the significance of abstract general concepts in comparison with concrete individual experiences. General concepts are the most important stays and supports, but Socrates treated them as if they were more important than bones—that they are not. . . . Socrates conducts his dialogue by posing questions and proving the answers that he received untenable; these are not real questions; they are moves in a sublime dialectical game that has a goal, the goal of revealing a not-knowing. But when the teacher whom I mean . . . enters into a dialogue with his pupil and in

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> this connection directs a question to him, he asks, as the simple man who is not inclined to dialectic asks, because he wants to know something: that, namely, which this young person before him, and precisely he, knows to report on the subject under discussion a small individual experience, a nuance of experience that is perhaps barely conceptually comprehensible, nothing further, and that is enough. The teacher will awaken in the pupil the need to communicate of himself and the capacity thereto and in this way bring him to greater clarity of existence. But he also learns, himself, through teaching thus; he learns, ever anew, to know concretely the becoming of the human creature that takes place in experiences; he learns what no man ever learns completely, the particular, the individual, the unique. No, certainly no full partnership; but still a characteristic kind of reciprocity, still a real dialogue. (67–68)

This contrast between dialogue and dialectic has much to do with the importance of the spokenness of speech in which the between becomes real in the relationship of two persons or more. When the word really becomes speech, when it is really spoken, it is spoken in the context of relationship, of the meeting with what is other than us, of mutuality. It takes its very meaning from the fact that it is said by one person and heard by another. The hearer adds a different dimension and relationship to the word that is spoken, even as he or she stands on a different ground from the speaker. One must keep in mind, therefore, the genuinely two-sided and dialogical character of the word as the embodiment of the between when it is spoken. The mystery of word and answer that moves *between* human beings is not one of union, harmony, or even complementarity, but of *tension*, for two persons never mean the same thing by the words that they use, and no answer is ever fully satisfactory. The result is that, at each point of the dialogue, understanding and misunderstanding are interwoven. From this tension of understanding and misunderstanding comes the interplay of openness and closedness and expression and reserve that marks every genuine dialogue between person and person. Thus, the mere fact of the *difference* between persons already implies a basic dramatic situation as an inherent component of human existence as such, which drama only reproduces in clearer and heightened form.

It is this recognition of *difference* which explains the polarity, the vis-à-vis *and* the tragic conflict which may arise because "each is as he is." But this is also at the heart of the distinction between dialogue and dialectic, even Socratic dialectic. *Dialogue* recognizes differences and

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never seeks for simple agreement or unanimity. *Dialectic*, in contrast, begins with the categories of "the same" and "the other," but excludes the reality of "the between" and with it the recognition of real otherness as that which can be affirmed even in opposing it. Thus, both the original assumption and the goal of dialectic is a unified point of view. The dialectician's faith in logic as the arbitrator and common denominator not only of his inner reflections but also of the dialogue between person and person is essentially single-voiced, monological, and pseudo-universal. I like to think (and I admit that this is sheer speculation, since aside from Plato's *Dialogues* we have only Aristophanes' *Clouds* and Xenophon's mention of Socrates to go on) that Socrates himself was a very dialogical person, but that Plato, who bewailed in his epistles that he had to write down Socrates' dialogues, was already moving over to dialectic. Aristotle took over from Plato the categories of same and other on which he built his logic and most of the logic that has followed in the Western world. But for Aristotle even the form of dialogue, which Plato cherished enough to reproduce in literary form, albeit replete with characters who seemed to be there mostly to say, "Yes, Socrates," and "No, Socrates," was no longer important!

DIALOGUE AND DIALECTIC IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

The alternation between dialogue and dialectic also applies to social psychology and sociology, as I shall illustrate with some thoughts from my book *The Confirmation of Otherness: In Family, Community, and Society* (Friedman, 1983). We need to be confirmed by others. They make us present, and this, as Martin Buber points out, induces our inmost self-becoming. One of the paradoxes of confirmation is that we are all too often confirmed with strings attached. Another is that we do and must live in a world in which we have both personal uniqueness and social role. Everyone has to play a social role as a basic prerequisite not only to economic livelihood, but also to relations to other people and families in society. Yet we cannot resolve this tension between personal uniqueness and social role by sacrificing personal confirmation; for that results in an anxiety that can only become greater and greater. To stand in this tension is to insist that one's confirmation in society also be in some significant sense a confirmation of oneself as a unique person who does not fit into a social category.

To be confirmed in personal uniqueness is to be confirmed directly. Copyrighted Material That is dialogue. To be confirmed only as a certain social role is to be

confirmed indirectly. That is dialectic. Both are necessary. We cannot altogether dispense with the idea of social role, though we can guard ourselves against taking it as a reality in itself. We must see it, instead, within the interaction between more or less static conceptions of roles and the actual dynamic of our relationship to them. We cannot deny the specialization of labor. Neither can we deny the continual rationalization of that specialization in terms of job descriptions and problems of decision making and authority. This includes the obvious need to call for people not as the unique persons that they are but as abstractions, such as professor, secretary, machinist, crane operator, doctor, or bank clerk.

What we need not accept is that the convenient label and the social role exhaust the reality of the person for the hours during which he works. On the contrary, his own unique relationship to his work is of crucial importance not only for the success or the meaning of the work but for the human reality that here becomes manifest as event. What is more, we can recognize the necessity for a continual critique of abstractions, to make them more and more flexible and more and more in line with the actual situation at any one time. In terms of this critique, it is a part of the task of man and woman alike to reject the unfair burden of always responding to a situation in a catalogued way. This means rejecting the life in which the human has been all but smothered under the weight of technical, social, and bureaucratic abstractions.

DIALOGUE AND DIALECTIC IN PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

Dialogue and dialectic are also central to psychology and psychotherapy. Even the patients' sicknesses are part of their uniqueness, for even their sicknesses tell us of the unique life directions to which they are called. If, instead, therapists make patients into objects to themselves, the therapists will have robbed the patients of part of their human potentiality and growth. This is not a question of choice between scientific generalization and the concrete individual, but of which direction is the primary one. Is the individual regarded as a collection of symptoms to be registered in the categories of a particular school, or are the theories of the school regarded as primarily means of returning again and again to the understanding of the unique person and his or her relationship with his or her therapist?

An increasingly important trend in psychotherapy suggests that the basic direction of movement should be toward concrete persons and

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