

EXISTENTIAL AND METAPHYSICAL. PERSPECTIVES ON OPPOSITION AND RELATIONS

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Two philosophical ideas occupy positions of fundamental importance in the thought of Martin Buber and Basanta Kumar Mallik. First is the pervading challenge of polarity or opposition in thought and practice, and second is individuals-in-relation as the stuff of reality. Both seek to answer the common predicament of modern man's need to find 'a home in the universe.' Their overall concerns far out measure these ideas, but since they form the fulcrum of their respective worldviews, this paper will examine how they are tackled through different methodologies and in light of civilization-based assumptions stemming from their European-Jewish and Indian backgrounds.

Both philosophers stressed relationship as crucially important in dealing with the modern problems of alienation and conflict. They sought ways to harmonize opposites within their search for personal, societal, and philosophical integration. They perceived relatedness between humans, and between humans and their environment, as having suffered grievous rupture resulting in the condition of 'homelessness.' This state is in urgent need of rectification. So both scholars endeavored to indicate the direction in which a new, satisfying, and stable 'home' for humankind could be re-established. Buber focused on relationship in life as lived, which seemed to have all but disappeared in the Europe he knew, and he rejected arid metaphysical speculation and logical hair-splitting as escapist or trivializing substitutes for real experience. Mallik, while paying due profound respect to 'concrete' lived experience, sought to secure and anchor it in a philosophical framework of certainty. For him, experience and theory are not only bound together but reflect each other. If Buber projects a new home for man in genuine community that is realizable in the present, Mallik sees homecoming in nothing less than a universal cosmic vision, a prize awaiting humanity after repeated trials and discoveries.

Both philosophers distinguish between bound opposites or polarities and disjunctive contradictories. Reconciliation between certain types of opposites

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are essential for individual and community life. Although Buber focused on the problematic of polarity in the context of life as lived, and Mallik tackled the antinomies in their logical and metaphysical forms, they ended up with fairly congruent conclusions about the relevance these ideas have for individual, social, and communal life.

Neither Buber nor Mallik confined the essentially related world to the purely human. Buber came as close as he could to a mutuality of I and Thou with the plant and, of course, with the animal world, whereas Mallik, who gardened at home and philosophized on the ballistics and spaces of the golf course, went further and laid the groundwork for a reciprocity between even the inorganic and the human.

Mysticism played an important role in the lives of both philosophers, but in different ways. Buber's gradual rediscovery of Judaism drew him toward a philosophy of dialogue. Although he subsequently condemned the mystical world as trapped in the I-It, his own 'myst-ification' of the 'Between' — through which the I-Thou achieves an almost sacramental character — is evidence enough of his spiritual bent of mind. If Mallik ever went through a tussle between reason and mysticism, there is no known record. His written works, which started appearing after he reached the age of 60, carve a clear separation between academic philosophy and mysticism, but they do not refute mysticism.

In the philosophical ambience at Oxford where he spent much of his life, he studiously avoided the word "mysticism," which only suggested the irrational and absurd. His book *The Towering Wave* is the only exception. In this literary imaginative work, he played freely with the images and concepts of the *mysterium tremendum* alongside rational argument and debate. In his philosophical studies proper, he cursorily refers to direct, non-discursive knowing or awareness, and also to unitary states of (non)-consciousness.

Furthermore, Mallik did not accept the reality of the pure isolated mystic of Asian tradition as a social phenomenon, a logical possibility or a norm, any more than he accepted the absolutely free and unrelated individual described in the humanist scheme.

Polarity and Opposition

Buber, far from being a conventional metaphysical or analytic philosopher, was rather concerned with life as lived (*Erlebnis*). He has been variously described as an existentialist or personalist,¹ and as a prophet, poet or seer. In his writings certain dualities constitute the very grain and challenge of existence. The most well known is the I-Thou I-It duality, which is central to Buberism, and almost has come to symbolize it. Buber is not the first western philosopher to have conceptualized the importance of the Thou: his eminent predecessors include Søren Kierkegaard, Max Stirner, and Ludwig Feuerbach. However, the polarity of the It and Thou forms the defining profile of the Buberian problematic. Several

commentators point to an almost methodological polarity as an essential mode of Buber's perception of the world. For Friedman, the "paradoxical unity of usually considered irreconcilable opposites" lies at the very heart of Buber's philosophy. As Buber wrote: "... complete relation can be understood only in a bipolar way, only as the *coincidentia oppositorum*, as the coincidence of oppositions of feeling"² Examples, apart from the Buberian theme of the duality of I and Thou, include distance-relation, vortex-structure, and moment-eternity.³ The sets of dualities are not always typologically similar, though they may exhibit overlapping realms, but they do form an interlocking or organic structure of thought in which each has a bearing on the others. Bergmann's analysis goes beyond simple polarity and points to the fundamental unity of the I-Thou: "the duality of I and Thou is not actually duality but rather unity ... the two axes of this unity, the I and the Thou, are merely the two columns spanned by the arch of the *Between*."⁴ Although Buber certainly regarded movement toward unity as characteristic of the Jewish tradition, he insisted that the separate identities of the two persons remain unimpaired.

Architectural metaphors suggest space created out of permanent structures, whereas Buber's I and Thou are in a fluid and dynamic situation. Their individuality is unaffected, but their relationships are in flux. They may from time to time, or perhaps only once, evoke the *Between* amongst themselves, and create, during that period, a larger existential unity. The *Between* is less suggestive of a third permanent 'thing' like an arch, more of an induced plane of communication or relation. Commonly one speaks of friendship, love, or even enmity 'between' two or more individuals, involving emotions, spirit, and instincts. By capitalizing the 'B,' Buber indicates a special mode of encounter, which at the moment or duration of occurrence creates unity between the participants without dissolving their separate identities. Each is transformed into personhood and transcends the ego-centered I of the It world. The encounter in the *Between* cannot be continuous, even when it provides a lifelong basis for relationship. However, it can always be re-evoked. The difference lies more in the nuance. Although the *Between* is also spoken of as 'embracing' the two partners, as a containing medium, Buber more often spoke of taking "a stand in the *Between*," suggesting a positively-willed movement or act of choice.

Rotenstreich sees the *Between* as the anchorage for certainty in Buber's thought. It is outside both individuals, which enables Buber to escape the subjectivism of an introspective approach to reality or certainty.⁵ Immediacy is not simply a psychological or I-centered epistemological state, but touches external reality, the reality of the Thou and the reality of the *Between*, with absolute certainty.

Since thought moves in contraries and oppositions, why should Buber be singled out as a special example of dualistic thinking? Perhaps the answer lies in his presentation of his chosen problems and their solutions always and only in the form of polarity, explicit or implicit. For example, in his long essay on *Images of*

Good and Evil,⁶ Buber's interpretation of the meaning of God's words after Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit is that they have become, "as one of us, to know good and evil;" this signifies their becoming *cognizant of opposites*. This would apply not only to moral situations, but to "adequate awareness of the *opposites inherent in all being within the world*" (emphasis added) and "awareness of the opposites latent in creation,"⁷ from a Biblical point of view. Although the immediate consequence of knowing opposites engenders confusion and suffering within the limitations of the human condition, Buber interprets the ambiguous phrase "as one of us" (as one of the angels? as God himself?) to contain a promise of fuller understanding. Thus, he offers both a problem and an indication of its resolution. This almost sums up Buber's entire enterprise, at least in so far as it is a search for the true meaning of opposition in thought and action. (And in an equivalent sense, it sums up Mallik's enterprise as well.)

Not being a systemic philosopher, Buber does not enunciate a theory of dualism as such. Rather, he rejects certain conventional dualistic philosophies or attitudes which posit disjunctions such as: body and mind, God and Satan, being and becoming, spirit and matter, and animate and inanimate. He deals with polarity through certain inescapably related pairs of dualities which generate tension but not disjunction. Thus, in the case of the I-Thou I-It pair, the I-Thou relation is presented as normatively superior, providing the matrix and focus of development for the individual and the community. The importance of the I-It is not thereby diminished; it remains equally an essential aspect of life and reality, albeit at a more mundane level. The two, in fact, are symbiotically related: the one provides meaning to life, the other sustains it — both are required for successful social and community organization. Indeed, Buber's particular distinction between opposition and polarity and his treatment of the latter give him special title to be described as a philosopher of dualities. He distinguishes between disjunctive 'opposites' and mutually implicative polarities, which are always meaningfully 'bound together.' Any effort to separate the latter is invalid. In their mutual tension, they provide meaning to life. In the context of what he describes as man's religious situation Buber writes:

... his *being there* in the Presence, is characterized by its essential and indissoluble antinomy. The nature of its being determines that this antinomy is indissoluble. He who accepts the thesis and rejects the antithesis does injury to the significance of the situation. He who tries to think out a synthesis destroys the significance of the situation. He who strives to make the antinomy into a relative matter abolishes the significance of the situation. He who wishes to carry through the antinomy other than with his life transgresses the significance of the situation.

The significance of the situation is that it is lived, and nothing but lived continually, ever new, without foresight, without forethought, without prescription, in the totality of its antinomy.⁸

Buber distinguishes the religious antinomy from the philosophical, illustrating the latter through Kant who relativized the opposition between necessity and freedom by assigning them to the phenomenal and noumenal worlds respectively. Through this separation, their reconciliation becomes possible. But in "the reality of standing before God," says Buber, "I cannot escape the paradox that has to be lived by assigning the irreconcilable propositions to two separate realms of validity ... I am compelled to take both to myself, to be lived together, and *in being lived they are one*."⁹ (italics added)

Thus for Buber, the existentialist, the lived antinomy is crucial to his problematique: in being lived as 'one' it renders reconciliation and synthesis void and meaningless. A moral or religious decision made in the contingency of the lived moment, a decision which accords with the mental and moral understanding of the individual, may be felt as stemming from a unified self. In that sense necessity and freedom, or the bearing that any other pair of polarities may have on a life situation, can be experienced in that moment as 'one.' Their particular proportion provides the act with its particular unity. But the freedom is not 'pure' freedom, nor necessarily inexorable, and on examination the felt oneness might well yield a relativized or compromised pair. That examination is not necessarily misconstrued, but being discursive, or as Buber would say, occurring in the world of the It, it cannot capture the integrity of the moment, which stems from the immediacy of relation. Modern man has lost this immediate dimension of experience, and Buber is committed to re-present it as real, possible, and realizable. Modern man, after all, is a sceptic, unable to trust the immediacy of the moment; he is also an analyst, disentangling the threads of necessity and freedom that went into the actual decision. He might also be a reductionist, downgrading the decision and immediacy into various psychological and sociological compulsions.

For Buber, reductionism is symptomatic of the illness of the age in which man reduces every aspect of existence to the objective world of It. Buber attributes the loss of trust in immediacy to the uncertainty arising out of the loss of power to relate; the modern individual substitutes total objectivity or private emotions (today we might add somatic reactions) for relation. But he did not address the relationship between analysis and immediacy in his writings. He presumed that in stressing immediacy he had automatically avoided conventional, dualistic, or subject-object philosophy, and he did not provide grounding for his own system. This unresolved duality (or polarity) between immediacy and its structured description recurs throughout Buber's work.

Mysticism

The polarity of the I-Thou I-It is generally held to be the culmination of Buber's philosophic development, of his gradual turning away from his youthful pursuits of 'mystical union,' which he came to regard as self-closure.¹⁰ Perhaps one may usefully digress at this point into an examination of Buber's beliefs about and criticisms of, mysticism, starting with a crucial incident that Buber later pointed to as the one which propelled his withdrawal from mysticism.¹¹ However, it is more than likely that it represented a climax reached from the mounting tension between two apparently divergent paths.

As is clear from *Ecstatic Confessions*, and from the *Addresses on Judaism*, Buber had abandoned customary religion for direct spiritual experience or *Erlebnis* (inner experience), which may be described as mystical, and need not be associated with, or grounded in, any of the received religions, nor in any religion at all. Buber not only read widely in mysticism, as a young man he was given to experiencing "attacks" of ecstasy that could be brought on by consideration of any familiar object, "which then became unexpectedly mysterious and uncanny, finally lighting a way into the lightning-pierced darkness of the mystery itself."¹² He had no spiritual guide and, as he wrote to Maurice Friedman, he did no regular practice of meditation, nothing "willed" or "pre-meditated;" his experiences were spontaneous.¹³ However, his readings or interactions with persons such as those who joined the New Community in Vienna would have confirmed his own sense of ecstatic unity, oneness with nature, and the totality of the universe.

The decisive moment arose in the wake of Buber's self-perceived failure to respond fully to the unspoken distress of a young visitor. He ascribed this failure to an interrupted state of ecstatic rapture that had clouded his attention. He was seized with remorse when he learned that the young man subsequently died, though not through suicide. He regretted that he had not been more 'present' to the man's problem, to understand if not counsel. This feeling of guilt served as a justification for rejecting mysticism for the rest of his life. He condemned mysticism as encouraging a-sociality, even narcissism and, thenceforth, reworked his ideas on religiosity so as to remain essentially in the realm of the interpersonal, both *vis-à-vis* other persons and *vis-à-vis* God.

According to Indian tradition, meditation does not make the spirit insensitive: on the contrary, a post-meditative state is characterized by keen awareness and percipience, enhanced capacity for sympathy, communication and *ahimsa* or non-violence (to which love is integral).¹ Bliss accompanies awareness, but does not blunt it. From Patanjali's perspective, if Buber had been a master, say, of the *ashtanga*, or eight 'limbs' of yoga, he would have been acutely aware of the other's inner anguish and would not have failed to respond with complete appropriateness to his visitor's condition. So Buber's "turning away" from 'mysticism' after this

encounter was, in fact, a turning away from a particular form or stage of religious ecstasy and the metaphysical label he attached to it.¹¹

Be that as it may, Buber became an articulate critic of the drawbacks of conventional mysticism. In his "Foreword" to *Pointing the Way*, he describes the mystic's life as constituted by two dimensions of being — the 'higher,' in which he experiences only the Self and is unaware of the world, and the 'lower,' from which he constantly seeks 'escape' to the higher.¹⁴ Again, "...the possibility opened that the dialogic of the soul cut itself off from all real communicating with the otherness outside it and degenerated into a self-enjoying of individual meaning, indeed to a *hybris* (sic) of an All-Self that arrogates to itself the self-enclosed unity of the Godhead existing before all creations and emanations."¹⁵ Later, Buber also critiqued Indian philosophy for being dismissive of the real world as illusion, an interpretation of *Vedanta* that was popular at the time, even with several Indian thinkers, including Radhakrishnan and Mallik, though today *maya* is treated more as an epistemological than an ontological position.¹⁶

In Pursuit of Lived Religiosity

Buber's urge for lived religiosity found new expression in his philosophy of dialogue, published as *I and Thou* in 1924. Several scholars locate the roots of his new thinking at a much earlier date, finding evidence for dialogic premonitions in *Daniel* (Chatterjee) or in the addresses on Judaism he gave over a period of several years both before and after the Great War (Shapira). Others, such as Mendes-Flohr, locate this shift in a letter from Buber's friend and mentor, Gustav Landauer, in 1916. Landauer criticized the "asocial orientation of his thought"¹⁶ and set off a process of rethinking evident in a series of writings up until the first draft of *I and Thou* in 1916. Some find the seeds of dialogic thinking, certainly of community, in the Bible, and Buber's spiritual evolution might just have the character of an anabasis in returning to its origins.

Buber's relational grounding of the interpersonal and socio-communal¹⁷ *hic et nunc* also reflects his discomfort with early twentieth-century Europe, where the world of the I-It seemed to overwhelm or extinguish the power of entering into lived relationships between persons and within communities, replacing them with a progressive mutually distancing objectivity, shrinking the ego into pure self-centredness. Again, it had to do with his realization that the ossified traditional forms of religion needed to be superseded by a meaningful spirituality comprehensible to the modern mind.¹⁷ Hence the importance of reclaiming interconnectedness, of restating a dialogic relationship between I and Thou, enabling recognition of and reaching out to the Other's inherent subjectivity, reinterpreting scripture and spirituality. The I-Thou opens the individual both to other humans and to God: indeed, divinity — as redefined in Buber's perspective — is an integral and enabling aspect of any meaningful or 'hallowing' experience. Buber, himself,

speaks of the life of dialogue as not 'one in which you have much to do with men, but one in which you really have to do with those with whom you have to do.'¹⁸ The ideal and complete I-Thou occurs where the relational openness is mutual, but most relational situations are skewed and, in some exceptional cases, such as education and psychotherapy, necessarily asymmetric. Treatment of the other as object characterizes the I-It, be it the same person who till a moment ago was encountered as Thou, or any other person, a He, She, organic or inorganic entity. Hence, the I *experiences* the It whereas it *relates* to the Thou. Buber also refers to both as ways of relating in which the I is only formalistically related to the It, with the object included in the subject's experience as part of his/her being, for a limited purpose and use. In the I-Thou, on the other hand, rather than a subject experiencing another, the subject and the subject share a mutual awareness. "I do not experience the man to whom I say Thou. But I take my stand in relation to him, in the sanctity of the primary word."¹⁹ The Thou, therefore, rules out all possibility of camouflaged egotism or self-interest, and is meant as a complete answer to the narcissistic aesthetes of *fin-de-siecle* Europe.

Conceptions of Possibility, Existence, and Actualization

Buber describes the I-Thou and I-It as primary words, which 'intimate' rather than describe relations. The verb 'intimate' has resonances of 'indicate' and 'allude to,' a pointing to a presence rather than a description of an object or thing. But he goes on to say that "being spoken (the primary words) bring about *existence*."²⁰ The primary words point to the *possibility of relation or experience*, but it can only come about or actualize through the spoken address. Indeed, Buber speaks of the *a priori* of relation as an ever-present possibility for connecting human beings, though it is only realized through acts of dialogue which create relatedness and community. Even the more formal or mechanical societal processes are brought about through means of the spoken word. There cannot be a society of pure possibility, where such primal words are never spoken, but most certainly they can vary in their proportion and power. When the word is withdrawn or altered, existence accordingly changes with it. The word is thus an agent of reification. Mallik by contrast, as we shall presently see, posited an actual *a priori* relatedness of which individuals may be unaware, and a somewhat different conception of possibility, existence, and actualisation.

Buber stipulates that primary words are always spoken from 'being:' the I-Thou from the whole being and the I-It from less than whole being. The It may demand attentiveness, as in the concentration summoned up in the pursuit of scientific knowledge, but no matter how intense, such activity still requires the attention of only part of the personality: the intellect or the mind. The I-It attention may also be obviously casual, as in semi-attentive reading or conversation, in repetitive mundane dealings, or superficial encounters. But the I-Thou is direct,

in the present, demanding the full attention of the individual, the total being of the I in a state of awareness of the entire personality of the Thou — 'body, mind and soul.'

The primary 'words' therefore are better understood as intentional: as 'intentings' in the transitive sense they may or may not find utterance in actual speech. Were the 'spoken' word confined to actual utterance, it would exclude several situations of wordless I-Thou intentional communion, and would certainly be redundant in the case of the I-It. Dr. D.W. Winnicott, the renowned London child therapist, related an incident when he was presented while on holiday with a particularly difficult child. At first, he could not establish communication with the child through his normal repertoire of words, games, and play.²¹ So, in the evening, he took the child by the hand down to the seashore, and in companionable silence and felt communion, the two sat together and watched the sun go down over the waves. This 'relational' event opened the door for trust and rapport between child and therapist, facilitating more explicit interchanges. As Buber wrote, "where unreserve has ruled, even wordlessly, between men, the word of dialogue has happened sacramentally."²²

Three Types of Relation

In *I and Thou*, Buber describes three types of relation, with nature, with men and with spiritual beings or essences. The third category of 'spiritual beings or essences' is somewhat vague and ambiguous: "the relation is clouded, yet discloses itself;" "we perceive no Thou, but feel ourselves addressed ..." According to Friedman, Buber spoke in the context of artistic creation, as a sculptor might see the essence of the form he is about to hew out of a block of marble.²³ Buber expatiates in more detail on the relation with nature, but obviously the inter-human is paradigmatic. Equally important is the relation with the 'Eternal Thou,' which is not mentioned as a separate category, perhaps because apart from the possibility of a direct relation, it is also present in all I-Thou encounters.

Buber described the relationship with nature, when not purely mechanical, as hovering somewhere above the It, but not quite reaching the Thou: "the relation sways in gloom, beneath the level of speech. Creatures live and move over against us, but cannot come to us, and when we address them as Thou, our words cling to the threshold of speech." Special moments may come in this somewhat twilight world of indistinct boundaries, the result of 'both will and grace,' when one clearly meets a Thou in some aspect of nature. Such was his encounter with a linden tree, "bodied over against me." Though he cannot vouch for consciousness in the tree, he declares the relation to be mutual. He encounters "no soul or dyad, but the tree itself" with "its form and structure, its colors and chemical composition, its intercourse with the elements and with the stars."²⁴ This illustrates Buber's emphasis on the particularity of individuals in dialogue, but the reference to the

tree's "intercourse with the stars" uncharacteristically and briefly goes beyond human-nature dialogue to an almost pantheistic intra-natural intercourse, which would have pleased Mallik.

In his postscript to *I and Thou* Buber elucidates that an animal is not like man, clearly split in his nature between two worlds of the I-Thou and I-It, though it possesses "a latent twofoldness," which is why a relation with an animal can be described as one "on the threshold of mutuality."²⁵ Thus he goes beyond the literal interpretation of Genesis that the natural world exists primarily for the use of man. Despite often making use of nature for human advantage, the Hindu, by contrast, sees humanity and nature as part of a continuum. Indian examples of communion with the organic and inorganic world in a field of responsive mutuality, can be found in the life of Ramana Maharishi (1879-1949). Like St. Francis of Assisi, he was reputed to be able to communicate with various birds and animals and significantly relate with the mountain Arunachala.²⁶ This was not underlain by a philosophy of dialogue but of Vedantic Oneness. Mallik's philosophic theory also covered possibilities of relationships between the sentient, organic, and inorganic world, which will be examined below.

The 'Eternal Thou'

At times Buber indicates that the 'Eternal Thou' may be called God or by any other equivalent name. He distinguishes between the religiosity — which he advocates — and received religion, and does not use conventional attributes to describe God. His spiritual world is a hybrid of mysticism and personhood: quite clearly he rejects immanence as an attribute of God, and yet hints that there is no thing or situation in the world where God is not present, and which cannot be 'hallowed' or made sacramental. He does reject the notion of infinity with which he grappled almost throughout his lifetime. Existentially the ideas of finitude or of infinity as a beginningless unending series caused him acute anxiety as an adolescent.²⁷ He found some solace in Kant's *Prolegomena to All Future Metaphysics* in which space and time are shown as *forms* of sensory perception and not as things in themselves. Between the thesis of infinity and the antithesis of the finite "there exists an irresolvable contradiction: an antinomy of cosmological ideas; being itself is not touched by either."²⁸ Buber alternatively spoke of relation between man and the *eternal*, which he differentiated from infinity. The concept of the eternal or the ever-present as opposed to infinity has an existential depth rather than a connotation of endless linear progression. Though by definition without beginning or end, eternity can be interpreted as a seamless totality, a-temporal, without past or future. However the discomfort was not quite overcome: "The threat of infinity remained for Buber ... a lifelong torment but one that proved to be the occasion for, rather than the obstacle to, existential trust."²⁹ It will be interesting to see how Mallik deals with similar problems of finite and infinite.

Buber does not provide a full definition of God apart from the attribute of eternity, but variously refers to Him in different contexts; indeed his whole aim is to provide pointers to experience and not definitions. As he says, God is not so much spoken about as spoken to, as Thou. Does this entail a mutual exchange, or is it an asymmetric relationship as Buber has described in psychotherapeutic or pedagogic situations? There, the ideal therapist or teacher addresses the patient or student as Thou, to enter into an understanding of the other with his or her whole being and to empathize with the other's distress, ignorance, or confusion. The patient or student, on the other hand, cannot respond fully to the therapist's or teacher's presence, circumscribed as he or she is by the limiting effect of pathology or immaturity. Would not the person addressing God be under a similar constraint? Buber makes a case for mutuality, which produces a condition of knowledge and love, but it is not one of equivalence. He states categorically "...we may even say God and Man, like in being are the indissoluble real pair, the two bearers of the primal relation, which from God to man is termed mission and command, from man to God looking and hearing, and between both is termed knowledge and love." In other contexts he affirms that God needs man just as much as man needs God. This suggests a kind of asymmetrical symmetry in the essential duality between man and God, a correlative dependency born of moral reciprocity and mutual need. In the case of the inter-human I-Thou encounters, the *Between* is ontologically an intrinsic aspect of the event: with the I-Eternal Thou. Buber does not mention the *Between* unless one were to formalistically construe it as 'knowledge and love.' If one understands the *Between* to signify God or eternity, then the dialogue with the Eternal Thou by definition is sufficient in itself, but it cannot be symmetrical with the inter-human I-Thou. Indeed, he does not list the I-Eternal Thou as one of the three kinds of relation.

Buber is at pains to differentiate the I-Thou relationship from the purely internalized dialogue between I and the Self: indeed, several paragraphs of the terse aphoristic text of *I and Thou* are devoted to rebutting the mystical thesis of 'annihilation of the self' in the Self, which received such prominent treatment in the testimonies of the Christian monastics in his *Ecstatic Confessions*. He also critiques the implicit existential dualism posited between the reality of the state of mystical union versus the unreality of the 'real' physical world. The I-It is an essential aspect of being in the world in which the other is experienced as object in a mechanical, formal, or utilitarian manner. Subject-object relations are one-sided and involve only part of the individual self, hence not genuine relationships. The It is in a state of 'reflection' to the I: it is contained within the I's experience and is not truly there 'in its own right.' Buber condemns conventional philosophy for being entrapped in the epistemological subject-object relation, which is no relation, and which has had a labile existence between the Scylla of subjective idealism and the Charybdis of positivism. Only between subject and subject can there be true relationship which debars the spectre of solipsism.

Through the I-Thou humans interact meaningfully with other humans, with the divine, and with nature, and such relationships are also the *sine qua non* for building community. The I-It is indispensable for conducting daily affairs, investigating the world of nature, and acquiring knowledge for all situations that require rational measured responses in the interests of security and survival. Although the I-Thou relation is a rare occurrence, and most of the time humans inhabit a world dominated by the I-It, without the presence of I-Thou relations a community lacks direction, depth, and organic unity.

Thus, already in his first statement of the I-Thou, Buber shows the integral interconnectedness between the I-Thou and the I-It. They are opposites, contraries; they cannot occur simultaneously but are mutually implicate. It is possible to employ both in alternating attitudes toward the same person, and it is indeed necessary to do so. He does allow that many relationships are but a confused blending of the two, since, as confused, they do not constitute a third category, but merely fail in their purpose. He focuses on the fundamental characteristics and significance of the I-Thou so as to arrest its decay and disuse in modern life. It is described as the *sine qua non* for the development of human personality, the means of adding magic and depth to inter-human relationships (not merely the conjugal or equivalent ones), essential to the successful functioning of any community. But it is not sufficient in itself and requires its opposite as a complement for successful life organization.

Dualities

To look briefly at some of the other aforementioned dualities: distance and relation exhibit a polarity in that without distance relationship cannot manifest (which is also a rebuttal of mysticism understood as collapsing the identities of separate individual selves), and relation is a desirable requisite for the bridging of distance. However whereas the I-Thou, I-It alternate necessarily in time, distance and relation are held together in a synchronic and spatial polarity. They are, as it happens, a *sine qua non* of the I-Thou, I-It.

Vortex and structure as understanding of the world also have a parallel in the polarity of chaos and direction in relation to individuals and society. As the Greek opposition between chaos and cosmos indicates a disjunctive absence and presence of order, the categories of vortex and structure seem to describe mutually exclusive opposition rather than bound polarity. Buber also uses direction in a more personally meaningful way as an answer to, or a way out of, chaos (which, in Judaism, is the World of Confusion), but to describe chaos as an essential requirement for direction, or both chaos and direction as necessarily related either in time or space is stretching the point. For in the finding of direction chaos is overcome, and ceases to be a continuing term of the pair. Even if it remains a possibly renewable threat, or the overcoming of chaos becomes a

graduated process, or even a never-ending process in the context of telic linear time-oriented religious or secular worldviews, chaos remains a disjunctive opposite and not a polar term like *It to Thou* or *Order to Freedom*. No doubt Buber also referred to the tension between a received or newly-created structure continuously threatened by vortex, but this can hardly be construed as a normative polarity. In the Tantric pair of Shiva Shakti, often iconographically conceptualized as Shakti standing on a recumbent Shiva, there is an explicit interdependency between Shakti as chaotic energy and Shiva as (directional) wisdom. Shakti without Shiva is chaotic and Shiva without Shakti is inert. But this is not an exact equivalent to Buber's concept of vortex and structure.

Time Concepts

With regard to moment and eternity, one has to look carefully at Buber's use of time concepts. On the face of it, as two points of a felt time dimension, charted, so to speak, along the same time axis, this pair again does not qualify for polarity. As shown above, Buber discriminated between infinity and eternity, rejecting the former as associated with the notion of linear time.

He adopted eternity as the forever present. From this viewpoint moments can only be plotted along a continuous graph of infinity, not eternity. Common poetic metaphors speak of 'eternal moments,' moments in which eternity is experienced as timeless presence. But neither poets nor Buber can describe the moment as 'part of eternity,' which would remove the polarity. What Buber aimed to do was to relate the 'moment,' as a temporal or historical situation, to a future a-temporal eternity in some macro-historical universe, or the lived moment to an experienced or fathomable eternity.

Obviously such concepts are fraught with contradictions. History and future eternity may just be considered polar opposites within a particular worldview (the particular features of Judaic exile versus the millennium), but since the relation is diachronic and teleological, and not alternating, it is more disjunctive than polar. An individual's experience of a 'moment of eternity' suggests a-temporal transcendence, and in that sense may be contrasted with the historicity of the moment with which it may alternate: this would conform more closely to Buber's notion of polarity, but was probably not his intention.

This relates to individuals, singly or in relationship, whereas the history-millennium polarity concerns societies. Thus these polarities do not conform exactly to the alternating *I-Thou*, nor do they manifest similar patterns amongst themselves.

Polarity

An important polarity between mysticism and dialogue pervades Buber's thought even after the enunciation of the *I and Thou*, although Buber himself viewed

them as disjunctive opposites. It is undeniable that something very akin to mysticism haunted his dialogic formula till the end, especially his descriptions of the *Between*. Indeed, he specified that he did not deny the actual experience of 'undivided unity' in meditation, but rejected its interpretation as 'primal being' inclusive of the entire universe. He renounced the mystical attitude, in so far as he had accepted it, of denying full reality to the world of normal experience. But the *Between* exemplifies very intensely, the polarity of unity and duality or unity and plurality.

Another prevalent polarity which Buber does not methodically state or resolve and which receives attention from Shapira, is that between life or existence and systemic theory. He actually wrote to Hugo Bergmann in 1919, "I am now working on the general foundations of a philosophical (communal and religio-philosophical) system, to which I intend to devote the next several years."³⁰ (*italics added*) Buber was, in fact, working on his draft of the *I and Thou*, which saw publication five years later. In an essay "On the History of the Dialogical Principle," he mentions that *I and Thou* was intended as the first of a five-volume study which he had briefly outlined in 1916, "but its systematical character estranged me before long" and he abandoned the effort.³¹ Certainly *I and Thou* seems remote from systematic philosophy, though Shapira describes it as an anti-systematic system, by which he perhaps means that though anti-metaphysical it nevertheless contains a coherent web of interrelated concepts.³²

Perhaps the understated metaphysical concept implicit in Buber's worldview lay in attributing to the selected polarities a continuous striving towards unity. The very polarity points to unity, indicating a 'split' in a primally intended unity. "Being is in the state of duality: the duality of yea and nay, as the Chinese formulation expresses it; of good and evil, as the Persian puts it; and of the real and illusory world, as given in the Indian formulation." Buber ascribes to the Jew, whom he includes amongst the Orientals, a special aptitude for experiencing not the "isolated existence of things" but their amalgamation through their common and communal characteristics.³³ In this sense, Buber's preoccupation with opposites and their underlying unity may reflect a Judaic characteristic. But at times he seems to suggest that a perfect unity is unattainable, though the striving is unavoidable. Be that as it may, we know as a matter of history that Buber at first sought to overcome polarity through mystical experience and later through the dialogic process. Opposites are not merely contraries which entail one another, but form a positive organic structure through their mutual complementarity. In a lecture delivered at the age of twenty-two he spoke of "the harmony of opposites" within individuals, a harmony constituted by the joining of forces which lead to a living unity.³⁴ The idea of organic unity was further developed in a review of the work of the artist, Lesser Uri, in which he wrote: "Everything touches upon everything else, awakens and develops every-

thing else..."³⁵ As polarity this phenomenon remained a leitmotif through all the transformations in his thought. It found detailed exposition as in the dialogue between Reinold and Daniel:

And this is your *nearest* danger: descend into the abyss! Realize it! Know its nature, the thousand-named, nameless polarity of all being, between piece and piece of the world, between thing and thing, between image and being, between the world and you, in the very heart of yourself, at all places, with its swinging tensions and its streaming reciprocity. Know the sign of primal being in it. And know that here is your task: to create unity out of your and all duality, to establish unity in the world; not unity of the mixture, such as the secure ones invent, but fulfilled unity out of tension and stream, such as will serve the polar earth — the realized countenance of God illuminated out of tension and stream.³⁶

Elsewhere he points out that the normative pairs good and evil, beautiful and ugly, derive their significance from the dualities, direction and lack of it (vortex), form and formlessness, which lie behind them. "The negative concept is immediately bound to the positive, being the emptiness to its fullness, the chaos to its cosmos." Hence he concludes that good and evil cannot, no more than right and left, above and beneath, be a pair of opposites. In a re-emphasis on his theme of organic unity, and almost echoing a Mallikean position, he says: "Man is not good, man is not evil; he is, in a pre-eminent sense, good and evil together."³⁷

Before leaving Buber's treatment of the subject of dualities one may take note of another of his comments, which leads directly to the thought of Basanta Kumar Mallik:

It is only when reality is turned into logic and A and non-A dare no longer dwell together that we get determinism and indeterminism, a doctrine of predestination and a doctrine of freedom, each excluding the other. *According to the logical conception of truth only one of two contraries may be true, but in the reality of life as one lives it, they are inseparable ... The unity of the contraries is the mystery at the innermost core of the dialogue.*³⁸ (italics added).

Unlike Buber, Basanta Kumar Mallik^v starts with the premise that experience and theory are integrally connected as two aspects of one occurrence, albeit