

Second Part

HOWEVER THE HISTORY of the individual and that of the human race may diverge in other respects, they agree in this at least: both signify a progressive increase of the It-world.

Regarding the history of the race this is often doubted. People point out that successive cultures begin with a primitive stage that is colored differently but always has essentially the same structure, involving a small world of objects; and thus it is the life of each individual culture and not that of the race that is held to correspond to the life of the individual.¹ But if we disregard those cultures that seem to be isolated, we find that those that are under the historical influence of others take over their It-world at a certain stage that is not so early but precedes the great age—sometimes by immediately accepting it from a culture that is still contemporary, as did the Greeks from the Egyptians; at other times indirectly from a past culture, as Occidental Christendom accepted the Greek It-world. They enlarge their It-world not only through their own experience but also by accepting alien influences, and it is

¹An allusion to Oswald Spengler whose *Decline of the West* had just appeared and was widely debated.

only then that the It-world which has grown in this way experiences its crucial expansion which involves discovery. (Let us ignore for the moment the overwhelming share in this development of the vision and deeds of the You-world.) Generally, the It-world of every culture is therefore more comprehensive than that of its predecessors, and in spite of some stoppages and apparent regressions the progressive increase of the It-world is clearly discernible in history. It is not essential in this connection whether the "world" of a culture should be characterized more as finite or whether we should attribute to it so-called infinity or, more correctly speaking, non-finitude: a "finite" world may very well contain more components, things, and processes than an "infinite" one. It should also be noted that we must compare not only the extent of their knowledge of nature but also that of their social differentiation and their technical achievements because both expand the world of objects.

The basic relation of man to the It-world includes experience, which constitutes this world ever again, and use, which leads it toward its multifarious purpose—the preservation, alleviation, and equipment of human life. With the extent of the It-world the capacity for experiencing and using it must also increase. To be sure, the individual can replace direct experience more and more with indirect experience, the "acquisition of information"; and he can abbreviate use more and more until it becomes specialized "utilization": a continual improvement of capacity from generation to generation is nevertheless indispensable. This is what is usually meant when people speak of a progressive development of the life of the spirit. This certainly involves the real linguistic sin against the spirit; for this "life of the spirit" is usually the obstacle that keeps man from living in the spirit, and at best it is only the

matter that has to be mastered and formed before it can be incorporated. The obstacle: for the improvement of the capacity for experience and use generally involves a decrease in man's power to relate—that power which alone can enable man to live in the spirit.



Spirit in its human manifestation is man's response to his You. Man speaks in many tongues—tongues of language, of art, of action—but the spirit is one; it is response to the You that appears from the mystery and addresses us from the mystery. Spirit is word. And even as verbal speech may first become word in the brain of man and then become sound in his throat, although both are merely refractions of the true event because in truth language does not reside in man but man stands in language and speaks out of it—so it is with all words, all spirit. Spirit is not in the I but between I and You. It is not like the blood that circulates in you but like the air in which you breathe. Man lives in the spirit when he is able to respond to his You. He is able to do that when he enters into this relation with his whole being. It is solely by virtue of his power to relate that man is able to live in the spirit.

But it is here that the fate² of the relational event rears up most powerfully. The more powerful the response, the more powerfully it ties down the You and as by a spell binds it into an object. Only silence toward the You, the silence of *all* tongues, the taciturn waiting in the unformed, undifferentiated, prelinguistic word leaves the You free and stands together with it in reserve where the spirit does not manifest itself but is. All response binds the You into the It-world. That is the melancholy of man, and

² *Schicksal*.

that is his greatness. For thus knowledge, thus works, thus image and example come into being among the living.

But whatever has thus been changed into It and frozen into a thing among things is still endowed with the meaning and the destiny³ to change back ever again. Ever again—that was the intention in that hour of the spirit when it bestowed itself upon man and begot the response in him—the object shall catch fire and become present, returning to the element from which it issued, to be beheld and lived by men as present.

The fulfillment of this meaning and this destiny is frustrated by the man who has become reconciled to the It-world as something that is to be experienced and used and who holds down what is tied into it instead of freeing it, who observes it instead of heeding it,⁴ and instead of receiving it utilizes it.

Knowledge: as he beholds what confronts him, its being is disclosed to the knower. What he beheld as present he will have to comprehend as an object, compare with objects, assign a place in an order of objects, and describe and analyze objectively; only as an It can it be absorbed into the store of knowledge. But in the act of beholding it was no thing among things, no event among events; it was present exclusively. It is not in the law that is afterward derived from the appearance but in the appearance itself that the being communicates itself. That we think the universal is merely an unreeling of the skeinlike event that was beheld in the particular, in a confrontation. And now it is locked into the It-form of conceptual knowledge. Whoever unlocks it and beholds it again as present, fulfills the meaning

³ *Bestimmung*.

⁴ *statt ihm zuzublicken*: in German one can *zubören* (listen; literally: hear to) but hardly *zublicken*. The point here is not to observe a direct object but to respond to a You.

of that act of knowledge as something that is actual and active between men. But knowledge can also be pursued by stating: "so that is how matters stand; that is the name of the thing; that is how it is constituted; that is where it belongs." What has become an It is then taken as an It, experienced and used as an It, employed along with other things for the project of finding one's way in the world, and eventually for the project of "conquering" the world.

Art, too: as he beholds what confronts him, the form discloses itself to the artist. He conjures it into an image. The image does not stand in a world of gods but in this great world of men. Of course, it is "there" even when no human eye afflicts it; but it sleeps. The Chinese poet relates that men did not want to hear the song that he was playing on his flute of jade; then he played it to the gods, and they inclined their ears; and ever since men, too, have listened to the song—and thus he went from the gods to those with whom the image cannot dispense. As in a dream it looks for the encounter with man in order that he may undo the spell and embrace the form for a timeless moment. And there he comes and experiences what there is to be experienced: that is how it is made, or this is what it expresses, or its qualities are such and such, and on top of all that perhaps also how it might rate.

Not that scientific and aesthetic understanding is not necessary—but it should do its work faithfully and immerse itself and disappear in that truth of the relation which surpasses understanding and embraces what is understandable.

And thirdly: that which towers above the spirit of knowledge and the spirit of art because here evanescent, corporeal man need not banish himself into the enduring matter but outlasts it and rises, himself an image, on the starry sky of the spirit, as the music of his living speech

roars around him—pure action, the act that is not arbitrary. Here the You appeared to man out of a deeper mystery, addressed him out of the dark, and he responded with his life. Here the word has become life, and this life, whether it fulfilled the law or broke the law—both are required on occasion lest the spirit die on earth—is teaching. Thus it stands before posterity in order to teach it, not what is and not what ought to be, but how one lives in the spirit, in the countenance⁵ of the You. And that means: it stands ready to become a You for them at any time, opening up the You-world; no, it does not stand ready, it always comes toward them and touches them. But they, having become uneager and inept for such living intercourse that opens up a world, are well informed; they have imprisoned the person in history, and his speech in a library; they have codified the fulfillment or the breach, it does not matter which; nor are they stingy with reverence and even adoration, adequately mixed with some psychology, as is only proper for modern man. O lonely countenance, starlike in the dark; O living finger upon an insensitive forehead; O steps whose echo is fading away!



The improvement of the ability to experience and use generally involves a decrease in man's power to relate.

The man who samples the spirit as if it were spirits⁶—what is he to do with the beings that live around him?

Standing under the basic word of separation which keeps apart I and It, he has divided his life with his fellow men into two neatly defined districts: institutions and feelings. It-district and I-district.

⁵ *Angesicht*: the word recurs often in this book. It sounds much more elevated than *Gesicht* (face).

⁶ *der den Geist sich zum Genussmittel präparierte*.

Institutions are what is "out there" where for all kinds of purposes one spends time, where one works, negotiates, influences, undertakes, competes, organizes, administers, officiates, preaches; the halfway orderly and on the whole coherent structure where, with the manifold participation of human heads and human limbs, the round of affairs runs its course.

Feelings are what is "in here" where one lives and recovers from the institutions. Here the spectrum of the emotions swings before the interested eye; here one enjoys one's inclination and one's hatred, pleasure and, if it is not too bad, pain. Here one is at home and relaxes in one's rocking chair.

Institutions comprise a complicated forum; feelings, a boudoir that at least provides a good deal of diversity.

This separation, to be sure, is continually endangered, as our sportive feelings break into the most objective institutions; but with a little good will it can always be restored.

A dependable separation is most difficult in the areas of our so-called personal life. In marriage, for example, it is not always so simple to attain; but time works wonders. In the areas of so-called public life it is eminently successful: consider, for example, how in the age of political parties, but also of groups and "movements" that claim to be above parties, heaven-storming congresses alternate flawlessly with the day-to-day operations that crawl along on the ground, whether mechanized and evenly or organically and slovenly.

But the severed *It* of institutions is a golem,⁷ and the severed *I* of feelings is a fluttering soul-bird.⁸ Neither knows the human being; one only the instance and the other one only the "object." Neither knows person or community. Neither knows the present: these, however

⁷Buber's gloss, March 1937: "an animated clod without a soul."

⁸*Ibid.*: An allusion to the "mythical notion of the soul as a bird."

modern, know only the rigid past, that which is finished, while those, however persistent, know only the fleeting moment, that which is not yet. Neither has access to actual life. Institutions yield no public life; feelings, no personal life.

That institutions yield no public life is felt by more and more human beings, to their sorrow: this is the source of the distress and search of our age. That feelings yield no personal life has been recognized by few so far; for they seem to be the home of what is most personal. And once one has learnt, like modern man, to become greatly preoccupied with one's own feelings, even despair over their unreality will not easily open one's eyes; after all, such despair is also a feeling and quite interesting.

Those who suffer because institutions yield no public life have thought of a remedy: feelings are to loosen up or thaw or explode the institutions, as if they could be renewed by feelings, by introducing the "freedom of feelings." When the automatized state yokes together totally uncongenial citizens without creating or promoting any fellowship, it is supposed to be replaced by a loving community. And this loving community is supposed to come into being when people come together, prompted by free, exuberant feeling, and want to live together. But that is not how things are. True community does not come into being because people have feelings for each other (though that is required, too), but rather on two accounts: all of them have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to a single living center, and they have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to one another. The second event has its source in the first but is not immediately given with it. A living reciprocal relationship includes feelings but is not derived from them. A community is built upon a living, reciprocal relationship, but the builder is the living, active center.

Even institutions of so-called personal life cannot be reformed by a free feeling (although this is also required). Marriage can never be renewed except by that which is always the source of all true marriage: that two human beings reveal the You to one another. It is of this that the You that is I for neither of them builds a marriage. This is the metaphysical and metapsychical fact of love which is merely accompanied by feelings of love. Whoever wishes to renew a marriage on another basis is not essentially different from those who want to abolish it: both declare that they no longer know the fact. Indeed, take the much discussed eroticism of our age and subtract everything that is really egocentric⁹—in other words, every relationship in which one is not at all present to the other,¹ but each uses the other only for self-enjoyment—what would remain?

True public and true personal life are two forms of association. For them to originate and endure, feelings are required as a changing content, and institutions are required as a constant form; but even the combination of both still does not create human life which is created only by a third element: the central presence of the You, or rather, to speak more truthfully, the central You that is received in the present.



The basic word I-It does not come from evil—any more than matter comes from evil.² It comes from evil—like matter that presumes to be that which has being.³ When

⁹ *was Ichbezogenheit ist.*

¹ *worin eins dem andern gar nicht gegenwärtig, von ihm gar nicht vergegenwärtigt wird.*

² The phrase harks back to Matthew 5:37.

³ *das Seiende zu sein.*

man lets it have its way, the relentlessly growing It-world grows over him like weeds, his own I loses its actuality, until the incubus over him and the phantom inside him exchange the whispered confession of their need for redemption.



—But isn't the communal life of modern man bound to be submerged in the It-world? Consider the two chambers of this life, the economy and the state: are they even thinkable in their present dimensions and ramifications, except on the basis of a superior renunciation of all "immediacy"—and even an inexorably resolute repudiation of any "alien" authority that does not itself have its source in this area? And if the I that experiences and uses holds sway here—in the economy, the I that uses goods and services; in politics, the I that uses opinions and aspirations—is it not precisely to this absolute dominion that we owe the extensive and firm structure of the great "objective" fabrics in these two spheres? Doesn't the form-giving greatness of leading statesmen and businessmen depend on their way of seeing the human beings with whom they have to deal not as carriers of an inexperienceable You but rather as centers of services and aspirations that have to be calculated and employed according to their specific capacities? Wouldn't their world come crashing down upon them if they refused to add up He + He + He to get an It, and tried instead to determine the sum of You and You and You, which can never be anything else than You? What would this come to if not an exchange of form-giving mastery for a puttering diletantism, and of lucid, powerful reason for murky enthusiasm? And when we turn our eyes

from the leaders to the led and consider the fashion of modern work and possession, don't we find that modern developments have expunged almost every trace of a life in which human beings confront each other and have meaningful relationships? It would be absurd to try to reverse this development; and if one could bring off this absurdity, the tremendous precision instrument of this civilization would be destroyed at the same time, although this alone makes life possible for the tremendously increased numbers of humanity.

—Speaker, you speak too late. But a moment ago you might have believed your own speech; now this is no longer possible. For an instant ago you saw no less than I that the state is no longer led: the stokers still pile up coal, but the leaders merely *seem* to rule the racing engines. And in this instant while you speak, you can hear as well as I how the machinery of the economy is beginning to hum in an unwonted manner; the overseers give you a superior smile, but death lurks in their hearts. They tell you that they have adjusted the apparatus to modern conditions; but you notice that henceforth they can only adjust themselves to the apparatus, as long as that permits it. Their spokesmen instruct you that the economy is taking over the heritage of the state; you know that there is nothing to be inherited but the despotism of the proliferating It under which the I, more and more impotent, is still dreaming that it is in command.

Man's communal life cannot dispense any more than he himself with the It-world—over which the presence of the You floats like the spirit over the face of the waters. Man's will to profit and will to power are natural and legitimate as long as they are tied to the will to human relations and carried by it. There is no evil drive until the drive detaches itself from our being; the drive that is wedded to and

determined by our being⁴ is the plasma of communal life, while the detached drive spells its disintegration. The economy as the house of the will to profit and the state as the house of the will to power⁵ participate in life as long as they participate in the spirit. If they abjure the spirit, they abjure life. To be sure, life takes its time about settling the score, and for quite a while one may still think that one sees a form move where for a long time a mere mechanism has been whirring. Introducing some sort of immediacy at this point is surely futile. Loosening the framework of the economy or the state cannot make up for the fact that neither stands any longer under the supremacy of the You-saying spirit, and stirring up the periphery cannot replace the living relationship to the center. The structures of communal human life derive their life from the fullness of the relational force that permeates their members, and they derive their embodied form from the saturation of this force by the spirit. The statesman or businessman who serves the spirit is no dilettante. He knows well that he cannot simply confront the people with whom he has to deal as so many carriers of the You, without undoing his own work. Nevertheless he ventures to do this, not simply but up to the limit suggested to him by the spirit; and the spirit does suggest a limit to him, and the venture that would have exploded a severed structure succeeds where the presence of the You floats above. He does not become a babbling enthusiast; he serves the truth which, though supra-rational, does not disown reason but holds it in her lap. What he does in communal life is no different from what is done in personal life by a man who knows that he

⁴being, both times: *Wesen*; "our" is not in the original.

⁵*das Gebäude des Machtwillens*. Buber speaks of *Nutzwillen* and *Machtwillen* and does not employ the phrase used more often by Nietzsche: *Wille zur Macht*.

cannot actualize the You in some pure fashion but who nevertheless bears witness of it daily to the It, defining the limit every day anew, according to the right and measure of that day—discovering the limit anew. Neither work nor possessions can be redeemed on their own but only by starting from the spirit. It is only from the presence of the spirit that significance and joy can flow into all work, and reverence and the strength to sacrifice into all possessions, not to the brim but *quantum satis*—and that all that is worked and possessed, though it remains attached to the It-world, can nevertheless be transfigured to the point where it confronts us and represents the You. There is no back-behind-it; there is, even at the moment of the most profound need—indeed, only then—a previously unsuspected beyond-it.

Whether it is the state that regulates the economy or the economy that directs the state is unimportant as long as both are unchanged. Whether the institutions of the state become freer and those of the economy juster, that is important, but not for the question concerning actual life that is being posed here; for they cannot become free and just on their own. What is decisive is whether the spirit—the You-saying, responding spirit—remains alive and actual; whether what remains of it in communal human life continues to be subjected to the state and the economy or whether it becomes independently active; whether what abides of it in individual human life incorporates itself again in communal life. But that certainly cannot be accomplished by dividing communal life into independent realms that also include “the life of the spirit.” That would merely mean that the regions immersed in the It-world would be abandoned forever to this despotism, while the spirit would lose all actuality. For the spirit in itself can never act independently upon life; that it can do only in

the world—with its force which penetrates and transforms the It-world. The spirit is truly “at home with itself”⁶ when it can confront the world that is opened up to it, give itself to the world, and redeem it and, through the world, also itself. But the spirituality that represents the spirit nowadays is so scattered, weakened, degenerate, and full of contradictions that it could not possibly do this until it had first returned to the essence of the spirit: being able to say You.



In the It-world causality holds unlimited sway. Every event that is either perceivable by the senses and “physical” or discovered or found in introspection and “psychological” is considered to be of necessity caused and a cause. Those events which may be regarded as purposive form no exception insofar as they also belong in the continuum of the It-world: this continuum tolerates a teleology, but only as a reversal that is worked into one part of causality without diminishing its complete continuity.

The unlimited sway of causality in the It-world, which is of fundamental importance for the scientific ordering of nature, is not felt to be oppressive by the man who is not confined to the It-world but free to step out of it again and again into the world of relation. Here I and You confront each other freely in a reciprocity that is not involved in or tainted by any causality; here man finds guaranteed the freedom of his being and of being.⁷ Only those who know relation and who know of the presence of the You have the capacity for decision. Whoever makes a decision is free

⁶ “*bei sich*”: this locution and its application to the spirit are Hegelian. Cf. *an sich* (in itself) above, where it is contrasted with *an der Welt* (in the world).

⁷ *die Freiheit seines und des Wesens*.

because he has stepped before the countenance.

The fiery matter of all my capacity to will surging intractably,⁸ everything possible for me revolving primavally,⁹ intertwined and seemingly inseparable, the alluring glances of potentialities flaring up from every corner, the universe as a temptation, and I, born in an instant, both hands into the fire, deep into it, where the one that intends me is hidden, my deed, seized: now! And immediately the menace of the abyss is subdued; no longer a coreless multiplicity at play in the iridescent equality of its claims; but only two are left alongside each other, the other and the one, delusion and task.¹ But now the actualization commences within me. Having decided cannot mean that the one is done while the other remains lying there,² an extinguished mass, filling my soul, layer upon layer, with its dross. Only he that funnels all the force of the other into the doing of the one, absorbing into the actualization of what was chosen the undiminished passion of what was not chosen, only he that "serves God with the evil impulse," decides—and decides what happens. Once one has understood this, one also knows that precisely this deserves to be called righteous: that which is set right, toward which a man directs himself and for which he decides;³ and if there were a devil he would not be the one who decided against God but he that in all eternity did not decide.

The man to whom freedom is guaranteed does not feel oppressed by causality. He knows that his mortal life is by its very nature an oscillation between You and It, and he senses the meaning of this. It suffices him that again and

⁸*unbändig*. Until 1957: *ungeheuer* (tremendously).

⁹*vorwelthaft kreisend*.

¹*Auftrag*.

²*gelagert* (lying there) was inserted in 1957.

³*... das Gerechte zu nennen ist, das Gerichtete, wozu einer sich richtet und entscheidet*.

again he may set foot on the threshold of the sanctuary in which he could never tarry. Indeed, having to leave it again and again is for him an intimate part of the meaning and destiny of this life. There, on the threshold, the response, the spirit is kindled in him again and again; here, in the unholy and indigent land the spark has to prove itself. What is here called necessity cannot frighten it; for there he recognized true necessity: fate.

Fate and freedom are promised to each other. Fate is encountered only by him that actualizes freedom. That I discovered the deed that intends me, that, this movement of my freedom, reveals the mystery to me. But this, too, that I cannot accomplish it the way I intended it, this resistance also reveals the mystery to me. He that forgets all being caused as he decides from the depths, he that puts aside possessions and cloak and steps bare before the countenance—this free human being encounters fate as the counter-image of his freedom. It is not his limit but his completion; freedom and fate embrace each other to form meaning; and given meaning, fate—with its eyes, hitherto severe, suddenly full of light—looks like grace itself.

No, the man who returns into the It-world, carrying the spark, does not feel oppressed by causal necessity. And in healthy ages, confidence flows to all the people from the men of the spirit; to all of them, even the most obtuse, the encounter, the presence has happened somehow, if only in the dimension of nature, impulse, and twilight; all of them have somewhere felt the You; and now the spirit interprets this guarantee to them.

But in sick ages it happens that the It-world, no longer irrigated and fertilized by the living currents of the You-world, severed and stagnant, becomes a gigantic swamp phantom and overpowers man. As he accommodates himself to a world of objects that no longer achieve any presence for him, he succumbs to it. Then common causality

grows into an oppressive and crushing doom.⁴

Every great culture that embraces more than one people rests upon some original encounter, an event at the source when a response was made to a You, an essential act of the spirit. Reinforced by the energy of subsequent generations that points in the same direction, this creates a distinctive conception of the cosmos in the spirit; only thus does a human cosmos⁵ become possible again and again; only now can man again and again build houses of worship and human houses in a distinctive conception of space and from a confident soul—and fill vibrant time with new hymns and songs and give the human community itself a form. But only as long as he possesses this essential act in his own life, acting and suffering, only as long as he himself enters into the relation is he free and thus creative. When a culture is no longer centered in a living and continually renewed relational process, it freezes into the It-world which is broken only intermittently by the eruptive, glowing deeds of solitary spirits. From that point on, common causality, which hitherto was never able to disturb the spiritual conception of the cosmos, grows into an oppressive and crushing doom. Wise, masterful fate which, as long as it was attuned to the abundance of meaning in the cosmos, held sway over all causality, has become transformed into demonic absurdity⁶ and has collapsed into causality. The same karma that appeared to earlier generations⁷ as a beneficial dispensation—for our deeds⁸ in this life raise us into higher spheres in the next—now is seen

⁴*Verhängnis*. "Doom" is used here only to render this word.

⁵*Kosmos des Menschen*. Before 1957: *Kosmos, gefasste Welt, heimische, haushafte Welt. Weltbehausung des Menschen*: cosmos, conceived world, homelike, houselike world, the world as man's dwellingplace . . .

⁶*zur sinnwidrigen Dämonie*.

⁷Buber's gloss, March 1937: in pre-Buddhistic India as opposed to Buddhistic India.

⁸Since 1957: our successes. This change weakens the contrast.

as tyranny; for the deeds of a former life of which we are unconscious have imprisoned us in a dungeon from which we cannot escape in this life. Where the meaningful law of a heaven used to arch, with the spindle of necessity hanging from its bright vault, the meaningless, tyrannical power of the planets now holds sway. It used to be merely a matter of entering *Dike*, the heavenly "path" that aimed to be ours, too, and one could live with a free heart in the total measure of destiny. Now we feel, whatever we do, the compulsion of *heimarmene*,⁹ a stranger to spirit who bends every neck with the entire burden of the dead mass of the world. The craving for redemption grows by leaps and bounds and remains unsatisfied in the end, in spite of all kinds of experiments, until it is finally assuaged by one who teaches men how to escape from the wheel of rebirth, or by one who saves the souls enslaved by the powers into the freedom of the children of God. Such accomplishments issue from a new encounter that becomes substantial, a new response of one human being to his You, an event that comes to determine fate. The repercussions of such a central essential act may include the supersession of one culture by another that is devoted to this ray, but it is also possible for a culture to be thus renewed.

The sickness of our age is unlike that of any other and yet belongs with the sicknesses of all. The history of cultures is not a stadium of eons in which one runner after another must cover the same circle of death, cheerfully and unconsciously. A nameless path leads through their ascensions and declines. It is not a path of progress and development. It is a descent through the spirals of the spiritual underworld but could also be called an ascent to the innermost, subtlest, most intricate turn that knows no Beyond and even less any Backward but only the unheard of re-

⁹A Greek word for fate, used by Plato, *Phaedo* 115a and *Gorgias* 512e.

turn¹—the breakthrough. Shall we have to follow this path all the way to the end, to the test of the final darkness? But where there is danger what saves grows, too.²

The biologicistic and the historiosophical orientations of this age, which made so much of their differences, have combined to produce a faith in doom that is more obdurate and anxious than any such faith has ever been. It is no longer the power of karma nor the power of the stars that rules man's lot ineluctably; many different forces claim this dominion, but upon closer examination it appears that most of our contemporaries believe in a medley of forces, as the late Romans believed in a medley of gods. The nature of these claims facilitates such a faith. Whether it is the "law of life"—a universal struggle in which everybody must either join the fight or renounce life—or the "psychological law" according to which innate drives³ constitute the entire human soul; or the "social law" of an inevitable social process that is merely accompanied by will and consciousness; or the "cultural law" of an unalterably uniform genesis and decline of historical forms; or whatever variations there may be: the point is always that man is yoked into an inescapable process that he cannot resist, though he may be deluded enough to try. From the compulsion of the stars the ancient mysteries offered liberation; from the compulsion of karma, the Brahmanic sacrifice, accompanied by insight. Both were preparations for salvation. But the medley idol does not tolerate any faith in liberation. It is considered foolish to imagine any freedom; one is supposed to have nothing but the choice between reso-

¹See pp. 35ff.

²A Quotation from Hölderlin's poem "Patmos," which begins: *Nah ist / Und schwer zu fassen der Gott. / Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst / Das Rettende auch.* "Near is and hard to grasp the god. But where there is danger what saves grows, too."

³*eingebornen Gebrauchstrieben.*

lute and hopelessly rebellious slavery. Although all these laws are frequently associated with long discussions of teleological development and organic evolution, all of them are based on the obsession with some running down,⁴ which involves unlimited causality. The dogma of a gradual running down represents man's abdication in the face of the proliferating It-world. Here the name of fate is misused: fate is no bell that has been jammed down over man; nobody encounters it, except those who started out from freedom. But the dogma of some running down leaves no room for freedom or for its most real revelation whose tranquil strength changes the countenance of the earth: returning. The dogma does not know the human being who overcomes the universal struggle by returning; who tears the web of drives, by returning; who rises above the spell of his class by returning; who by returning stirs up, rejuvenates, and changes the secure historical forms. The dogma of running down offers you only one choice as you face its game: to observe the rules or drop out. But he that returns knocks over the men on the board. The dogma will at most permit you to carry out conditionality

⁴*Ablauf*: *laufen* means running, and the prefix *ab*, like the Latin *de*, means down. *Ablauf* can mean running off, drainage, as well as lapse (of time) or expiration. When Schiller's Tell says, *Fort musst du, deine Uhr ist abgelaufen*—words often quoted—he means: You have to go, your clock's run down—or, a little less literally: You have to die, your time is up. That *Ablauf* often suggests expiration, termination, and running down is undeniable; whether Buber meant to emphasize these associations and whether he was thinking of entropy and the gradual running down of the mechanistic universe is less clear. "Process"—the term used in the first translation of the book—is misleading because such so-called process philosophies as Bergson's and Whitehead's are not mechanistic but stress freedom and creativity. (A few lines above, where we have "an inevitable social process," Buber uses the German *Prozess*.) Buber clearly associates *Ablauf* with "unlimited causality," with the "proliferating It-world," with the denial of freedom, *and with doom*.

with your life and to "remain free" in your soul. But he that returns considers this freedom the most ignominious slavery.

Nothing can doom man but the belief in doom, for this prevents the movement of return.

The belief in doom is a delusion from the start. The scheme of running down is appropriate only for ordering that which is nothing-but-having-become, the severed world-event, objecthood⁵ as history. The presence of the You, that which is born of association, is not accessible to this approach, which does not know the actuality of spirit; and this scheme is not valid for spirit. Divination based on objecthood is valid only for those who do not know presentness.⁶ Whoever is overpowered by the It-world must consider the dogma of an ineluctable running down as a truth that creates a clearing in the jungle. In truth, this dogma only leads him deeper into the slavery of the It-world. But the world of the You is not locked up. Whoever proceeds toward it, concentrating his whole being, with his power to relate resurrected, beholds his freedom. And to gain freedom from the belief in unfreedom is to gain freedom.



One gains power over an incubus by addressing it by its real name. Similarly, the It-world that but now seemed to dwarf man's small strength with its uncanny power has to yield to anyone who recognizes its true nature: the particularization and alienation⁷ of that out of whose abundance, welling up close by, every earthly You emerges to con-

⁵ *Gegenständlichkeit.*

⁶ *Gegenwärtigkeit.*

⁷ *Versonderung und Verfremdung.*

front us—that which appeared to us at times as great and terrible as the mother goddess, but nevertheless always motherly.

—But how can we muster the strength to address the incubus by his right name as long as a ghost lurks inside us—the I that has been robbed of its actuality? How can the buried power to relate be resurrected in a being in which a vigorous ghost appears hourly to stamp down the debris under which this power lies? How is a being to collect itself as long as the mania of his detached I-hood⁸ chases it ceaselessly around an empty circle? How is anyone to behold his freedom if caprice⁹ is his dwellingplace?

—Even as freedom and fate belong together, caprice belongs with doom. But freedom and fate are promised to each other and embrace each other to constitute meaning; caprice and doom, the spook of the soul and the nightmare of the world, get along with each other, living next door and avoiding each other, without connection and friction, at home in meaninglessness—until in one instant eye meets eye, madly, and the confession erupts from both that they are unredeemed. How much intellectual eloquence and artistry is used today to prevent or at least conceal this occurrence!

Free is the man that wills without caprice. He believes in the actual, which is to say: he believes in the real¹ association of the real duality, I and You. He believes in destiny² and also that it needs him. It does not lead him, it waits for him. He must proceed toward it without knowing where it waits for him. He must go forth with his whole being: that he knows. It will not turn out the way his resolve

⁸ *Ichheit.*

⁹ *Willkür.*

¹ *reale.*

² *die Bestimmung.*

intended it; but what wants to come will come only if he resolves to do that which he can will. He must sacrifice his little will, which is unfree and ruled by things and drives, to his great will that moves away from being determined to find destiny.³ Now he no longer interferes, nor does he merely allow things to happen. He listens to that which grows, to the way of Being in the world,⁴ not in order to be carried along by it but rather in order to actualize it in the manner in which it, needing him, wants to be actualized by him—with human spirit and human deed, with human life and human death. He believes, I said; but this implies: he encounters.

The capricious man does not believe and encounter. He does not know association; he only knows the feverish world out there and his feverish desire to use it. We only have to give use an ancient, classical name, and it walks among the gods. When he says You, he means: You, my ability to use! And what he calls his destiny is merely an embellishment of and a sanction for his ability to use. In truth he has no destiny but is merely determined by things and drives, feels autocratic, and is capricious. He has no great will and tries to pass off caprice in its place. For sacrifice he lacks all capacity, however much he may talk of it, and you may recognize it by noting that he never becomes concrete. He constantly interferes, in order "to let it happen." How, he says to you, could one fail to assist destiny? How could one not employ all feasible means required for such an end? That is also how he sees those who are free; he cannot see them differently. But the free man does not have an end here and then fetch the means from there; he has only one thing: always only his resolve

³*vom Bestimmtsein weg und auf die Bestimmung zu.*

⁴*Er lauscht dem aus sich Werdenden, dem Weg des Wesens in der Welt.* In German, the fourfold alliteration recalls Richard Wagner.

to proceed toward his destiny. Having made this resolve, he will renew it at every fork in the road; and he would sooner believe that he was not really alive than he would believe that the resolve of the great will was insufficient and required the support of means. He believes; he encounters. But the unbelieving marrow of the capricious man cannot perceive anything but unbelief and caprice, positing ends and devising means. His world is devoid of sacrifice and grace, encounter and present, but shot through with ends and means: it could not be different and its name is doom. For all his autocratic bearing, he is inextricably entangled in unreality; and he becomes aware of this whenever he recollects his own condition. Therefore he takes pains to use the best part of his mind to prevent or at least obscure such recollection.⁵

But if this recollection of one's falling off,⁶ of the deactualized and the actual I, were permitted to reach down to the roots that man calls despair and from which self-destruction and rebirth grow, this would be the beginning of the return.



The Brahmana of the hundred paths relates that the gods and the demons were once engaged in a contest. Then the demons said: "To whom shall we offer our sacrifices?" They placed all offerings in their own mouths. But the

⁵ *Besinnung* can also mean consciousness or reflection; *sich besinnen* can mean to recollect or remember; and *zur Besinnung kommen*, to recover one's senses. Overtones of this last meaning are present here. This passage and the next paragraph invite comparison with Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death* and—like much of *Icb und Du*—with Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

⁶ *das Abgefallensein*: literally, the state of having fallen off or away; *abfallen* can also suggest defection and apostasy. Cf. "O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there" (*Hamlet*, Act I, scene 5, line 47).

gods placed the offerings in one another's mouth. Then Prajapati, the primal spirit, bestowed himself upon the gods.



—One can understand how the It-world, left to itself, untouched and unthawed by the emergence of any You, should become alienated and turn into an incubus; but how does it happen that, as you say, the I of man is deactualized? Whether it lives in relation or outside it, the I remains assured of itself in its self-consciousness, which is a strong thread of gold on which the changing states are strung. Whether I say, "I see you" or "I see the tree," seeing may not be equally actual in both cases, but the I is equally actual in both.

—Let us examine, let us examine ourselves to see whether this is so. The linguistic form proves nothing. After all, many a spoken You really means an It to which one merely says You from habit, thoughtlessly. And many a spoken It really means a You whose presence one may remember with one's whole being, although one is far away. Similarly, there are innumerable occasions when I is only an indispensable pronoun, only a necessary abbreviation for "This one there who is speaking." But self-consciousness? If one sentence truly intends the You of a relation and the other one the It of an experience, and if the I in both sentences is thus intended in truth, do both sentences issue from the same self-consciousness?

The I of the basic word I-You is different from that of the basic word I-It.

The I of the basic word I-It appears as an ego⁷ and

⁷ *Eigenwesen*, literally own-being or self-being, is a highly unusual word. In the first English version of the book it has been rendered as "individuality" although Buber had expressly protested on seeing page proofs that this bothered him a great deal ("*stört mich doch sehr*"): "But I cannot

becomes conscious of itself as a subject (of experience and use).

The I of the basic word I-You appears as a person and becomes conscious of itself as subjectivity (without any dependent genitive).⁸

Egos appear by setting themselves apart from other egos.

Persons appear by entering into relation to other persons.

One is the spiritual form of natural differentiation, the other that of natural association.

The purpose of setting oneself apart is to experience and use, and the purpose of that is "living"—which means dying one human life long.

The purpose of relation is the relation itself—touching

think of anything better. In French there is the word *égotiste* (cf. Stendhal) which comes close to what I mean; but the English *egotist* unfortunately means *Egoist*, and that is something else. Would it perhaps be possible to say: the egotical being??" Except for the last three words, the comment was written in German, and in a covering letter, dated March 8, 1937, Buber devoted another whole paragraph to this problem.

He insisted that he had nothing against individualities and added: "*Eigenwesen*, on the other hand, refers to a man's relation to himself. I do hope that you will find it possible after all to translate it differently, perhaps by moving in the direction suggested in the enclosure."

"Ego" works perfectly in all the many passages in which Buber speaks of *Eigenwesen*, including the paragraph after the next one in which "egotist," for example, would not do at all. The only serious objection that comes to mind is that those who read Freud or subsequent psychoanalytic literature in English may have irrelevant and distracting associations with the word "ego." But this objection loses all force when we recall that the term Freud himself used was *Ich* (cf. *Das Ich und das Es*)—the very same word that Buber uses constantly in *Ich und Du* in an altogether difference sense. Buber's *Ich* is closer to ordinary usage than Freud's; and "ego" in the following pages is closer to ordinary English usage than is the Freudian "ego."

⁸I.e., without any "of" clause like that in the preceding parenthesis; also without any object.

the You. For as soon as we touch a You, we are touched by a breath of eternal life.⁹

Whoever stands in relation, participates in an actuality; that is, in a being that is neither merely a part of him nor merely outside him. All actuality is an activity in which I participate without being able to appropriate it. Where there is no participation, there is no actuality. Where there is self-appropriation, there is no actuality. The more directly the You is touched, the more perfect is the participation.

The I is actual through its participation in actuality. The more perfect the participation is, the more actual the I becomes.

But the I that steps out of the event of the relation into detachment and the self-consciousness accompanying that, does not lose its actuality. Participation remains in it as a living potentiality. To use words that originally refer to the highest relation but may also be applied to all others: the seed remains in him. This is the realm of subjectivity in which the I apprehends simultaneously its association and its detachment. Genuine subjectivity can be understood only dynamically, as the vibration of the I in its lonely truth. This is also the place where the desire for ever higher and more unconditional relation and for perfect participation in being arises and keeps rising. In subjectivity the spiritual substance of the person matures.

The person becomes conscious of himself as participating in being, as being-with, and thus as a being. The ego becomes conscious of himself as being this way and not that. The person says, "I am"; the ego says, "That is how I am." "Know thyself" means to the person: know yourself as being. To the ego it means: know your being-that-

⁹Until 1957: of the You, that is, of eternal life.

way. By setting himself apart from others, the ego moves away from being.

This does not mean that the person "gives up" his being-that-way, his being different; only, this is not the decisive perspective but merely the necessary and meaningful form of being. The ego, on the other hand, wallows in his being-that-way—or rather for the most part in the fiction of his being-that-way—a fiction that he has devised for himself. For at bottom self-knowledge usually means to him the fabrication of an effective apparition of the self that has the power to deceive him ever more thoroughly; and through the contemplation and veneration of this apparition one seeks the semblance of knowledge of one's own being-that-way, while actual knowledge of it would lead one to self-destruction—or rebirth.

The person beholds his self; the ego occupies himself with his *My*: my manner, my race, my works, my genius.

The ego does not participate in any actuality nor does he gain any. He sets himself apart from everything else and tries to possess as much as possible by means of experience and use. That is *his* dynamics: setting himself apart and taking possession—and the object is always *It*, that which is not actual. He knows himself as a subject, but this subject can appropriate as much as it wants to, it will never gain any substance: it remains like a point, functional, that which experiences, that which uses, nothing more. All of its extensive and multifarious being-that-way, all of its eager "individuality" cannot help it to gain any substance.

There are not two kinds of human beings, but there are two poles of humanity.

No human being is pure person, and none is pure ego; none is entirely actual, none entirely lacking in actuality. Each lives in a twofold *I*. But some men are so person-oriented that one may call them persons, while others are

so ego-oriented that one may call them egos. Between these and those true history takes place.

The more a human being, the more humanity is dominated by the ego, the more does the I fall prey to inactuality. In such ages the person in the human being and in humanity comes to lead a subterranean, hidden, as it were invalid existence—until it is summoned.



How much of a person a man is depends on how strong the I of the basic word I-You is in the human duality of his I.

The way he says I—what he means when he says I—decides where a man belongs and where he goes. The word "I" is the true shibboleth of humanity.

Listen to it!

How dissonant the I of the ego¹ sounds! When it issues from tragic lips, tense with some self-contradiction that they try to hold back, it can move us to great pity. When it issues from chaotic lips that savagely, heedlessly, unconsciously represent contradiction, it can make us shudder. When the lips are vain and smooth, it sounds embarrassing or disgusting.

Those who pronounce the severed I, wallowing in the capital letter, uncover the shame of the world spirit that has been debased to mere spirituality.

But how beautiful and legitimate the vivid and emphatic I of Socrates sounds! It is the I of infinite conversation, and the air of conversation is present on all its ways, even before his judges, even in the final hour in prison. This I lived in that relation to man which is embodied in conversation. It believed in the actuality of men and went out

¹*des Eigenmenschen.*

toward them. Thus it stood together with them in actuality and is never severed from it. Even solitude cannot spell forsakenness, and when the human world falls silent for him, he hears his *daimonion* say You.

How beautiful and legitimate the full I of Goethe sounds! It is the I of pure intercourse with nature. Nature yields to it and speaks ceaselessly with it; she reveals her mysteries to it and yet does not betray her mystery. It believes in her and says to the rose: "So it is You"—and at once shares the same actuality with the rose. Hence, when it returns to itself, the spirit of actuality stays with it; the vision of the sun clings to the blessed eye that recalls its own likeness to the sun, and the friendship of the elements accompanies man into the calm of dying and rebirth.²

Thus the "adequate, true, and pure" I-saying of the representatives of association, the Socratic and the Goethean persons, resounds through the ages.

And to anticipate and choose an image from the realm of unconditional relation: how powerful, even overpowering, is Jesus' I-saying, and how legitimate to the point of being a matter of course! For it is the I of the unconditional relation in which man calls his You "Father" in such a way that he himself becomes nothing but a son. Whenever he says I, he can only mean the I of the holy basic word that has become unconditional for him. If detachment ever touches him, it is surpassed by association, and it is from this that he speaks to others. In vain you seek to reduce this

²Buber alludes to three Goethe poems: "Blessed eye" echoes *Faust*, line 11300, the song of Lynceus. Then, one of Goethe's late *Xenien* (1823: Book III): "Were not the eye so like the sun, / It never could behold the sun: / If the god's own power did not lie in us, / How could that which is godlike delight us?" And the final stanza of "Blessed Yearning" in Goethe's *Divan*: "And until you have possessed / dying and rebirth, / you are but a sullen guest / on the gloomy earth."

I to something that derives its power from itself, nor can you limit this You to anything that dwells in us. Both would once again deactualize the actual, the present relation. I and You remain; everyone can speak the You and then becomes I; everyone can say Father and then becomes son; actuality abides.



—But what if a man's mission requires him to know only his association with his cause and no real relation to any You, no present encounter with any You, so that everything around him becomes It and subservient to his cause? How about the I-saying of Napoleon? Wasn't that legitimate? Is this phenomenon of experiencing and using no person?

—Indeed, this master of the³ age evidently did not know the dimension of the You. The matter has been put well: all being was for him *valore*.⁴ Gently, he compared the followers who denied him after his fall with Peter; but there was nobody whom *he* could have denied, for there was nobody whom he recognized as a being. He was the demonic You for the millions and did not respond; to "You" he responded by saying: It; he responded fictitiously on the personal level—responding only in his own sphere, that of his cause, and only with his deeds. This is the elementary historical barrier at which the basic word of association loses its reality, the character of reciprocity: the demonic You for whom nobody can become a You. This third type, in addition to the person and the ego, to the free and the arbitrary man—not between them—oc-

³Buber in March 1937 protested against "his age," insisted on "*the* age," and added that it was our age, too.

⁴Value. But the Italian word can also mean worth, courage, fitness.

curs in fateful eminence in fateful times: ardently, everything flames toward him while he himself stands in a cold fire; a thousand relations reach out toward him but none issues from him. He participates in no actuality, but others participate immeasurably in him as in an actuality.

To be sure, he views the beings around him as so many machines capable of different achievements that have to be calculated and used for the cause. But that is also how he views himself (only he can never cease experimenting to determine his own capacities, and yet never experiences their limits). He treats himself, too, as an It.

Thus his I-saying is not vitally emphatic, not full. Much less does it feign these qualities (like the I-saying of the modern ego).⁵ He does not even speak of himself, he merely speaks "on his own behalf." The I spoken and written by him is the required subject of the sentences that convey his statements and orders—no more and no less. It lacks subjectivity; neither does it have a self-consciousness that is preoccupied with being-that-way; and least of all does it have any delusions about its own appearance. "I am the clock that exists and does not know itself": thus he himself formulated his fatefulness, the actuality of this phenomenon and the inactuality of this I, after he had been separated from his cause;⁶ for it was only then that he could, and had to, think and speak of himself and recollect his I which appeared only then. What appears is not mere subject; neither does it reach subjectivity: the magic spell broken, but unredeemed, it finds expression in the terrible word, as legitimate as it is illegitimate: "The universe contemplates Us!" In the end it sinks back into mystery.

Who, after such a step and such a fall,⁷ would dare to

⁵ *Eigenmenschen.*

⁶ *aus seiner Sache.*

⁷ *Untergang.*

claim that this man understood his tremendous, monstrous⁸ mission—or that he misunderstood it? What is certain is that the age for which the demonic man who lives without a present has become master and model will misunderstand him. It fails to see that what holds sway here is destiny and accomplishment, not the lust for and delight in power.⁹ It goes into ecstasies over the commanding brow and has no inkling of the signs inscribed upon this forehead like digits upon the face of a clock. One tries studiously to imitate the way he looked at others, without any understanding of his need and necessitation, and one mistakes the objective severity of this I for fermenting self-awareness. The word "I" remains the shibboleth of humanity. Napoleon spoke it without the power to relate, but he did speak it as the I of an accomplishment.¹ Those who exert themselves to copy this, merely betray the hopelessness of their own self-contradiction.



—What is that: self-contradiction?

—When man does not test the *a priori* of relation in the world, working out and actualizing the innate You in what he encounters, it turns inside. Then it unfolds through the unnatural, impossible object, the I—which is to say that it unfolds where there is no room for it to unfold. Thus the confrontation within the self comes into being, and this cannot be relation, presence, the current of reciprocity, but only self-contradiction. Some men may try to interpret this as a relation, perhaps one that is religious, in order to extricate themselves from the horror of their *Doppelgänger*:

⁸ *ungebeure, ungebeuerliche.*

⁹ *Schickung und Vollzug, nicht Machtbrunst und Machtgenuss.*

¹ *als das Ich eines Vollzugs.*

they are bound to keep rediscovering the deception of any such interpretation. Here is the edge of life. What is unfulfilled has here escaped into the mad delusion of some fulfillment; now it gropes around in the labyrinth and gets lost ever more profoundly.



At times when man is overcome by the horror of the alienation between I and world, it occurs to him that something might be done. Imagine that at some dreadful midnight you lie there, tormented by a waking dream:² the bulwarks have crumbled and the abysses scream, and you realize in the midst of this agony that life is still there and I must merely get through to it—but how? how? Thus feels man in the hours when he collects himself:³ overcome by horror, pondering, without direction. And yet he may know the right direction, deep down in the unloved knowledge of the depths—the direction of return that leads through sacrifice. But he rejects this knowledge; what is “mystical” cannot endure the artificial midnight sun.⁴ He summons thought in which he places, quite rightly, much confidence: thought is supposed to fix everything. After all, it is the lofty art of thought that it can paint a reliable and practically credible picture of the world. Thus man says to his thought: “Look at the dreadful shape that lies over there with those cruel eyes—is she not the

²Buber in March 1937: “one really dreams; i.e., one is under the spell of a dream although one is awake.”

³*in den Stunden der Besinnung.*

⁴*der elektrischen Sonne.* Buber's gloss, March 1937, in German except for the last six words: “regarding the ‘electric sun’: it is midnight; the man told about here had lit the strong electric light on the ceiling, this small sun, as a defense against the torment of the waking dream; but it is at the same time a symbol for the ‘thought’ he invokes. Hence perhaps: cannot resist the sunlike electric lamp.”

one with whom I played long ago? Do you remember how she used to laugh at me with these eyes and how good they were then? And now look at my wretched I—I'll admit it to you: it is empty, and whatever I put into myself, experience as well as use, does not penetrate to this cavern. Won't you fix things between her and me so that she relents and I get well again?" And thought, ever obliging and skillful, paints with its accustomed speed a series—nay, two series of pictures on the right and the left wall. Here is (or rather: happens, for the world pictures of thought are reliable motion pictures) the universe. From the whirl of the stars emerges the small earth, from the teeming on earth emerges small man, and now history carries him forth through the ages, to persevere in rebuilding the anthills of the cultures that crumble under its steps. Beneath this series of pictures is written: "One and all." On the other wall happens the soul. A female figure spins the orbits of all stars and the life of all creatures and the whole of world history; all is spun with a single thread and is no longer called stars and creatures and world but feelings and representations or even living experiences and states of the soul. And beneath this series of pictures is written: "One and all."

Henceforth, when man is for once overcome by the horror of alienation and the world fills him with anxiety, he looks up (right or left, as the case may be) and sees a picture. Then he sees that the I is contained in the world, and that there really is no I, and thus the world cannot harm the I, and he calms down; or he sees that the world is contained in the I, and that there really is no world, and thus the world cannot harm the I, and he calms down. And when man is overcome again by the horror of alienation and the I fills him with anxiety, he looks up and sees a picture; and whichever he sees, it does not matter, either

the empty I is stuffed full of world or it is submerged in the flood of the world, and he calms down.

But the moment will come, and it is near, when man, overcome by horror, looks up and in a flash sees both pictures at once. And he is seized by a deeper horror.