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Kenneth Feigenbaum

Kenneth.Feigenbaum@faculty.umgc.edu

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Buber the Radical Egalitarian and Buber and Psychology

Kenneth Feigenbaum
Kenneth.Feigenbaum@faculty.umgc.edu

Preface

My first iteration for this paper was to present Martin Buber in the context of radical politics in Germany and to focus upon his relationship to the anarchist Gustav Landauer. After a brief search, I found too few sources that were easily accessible from here in the United States, so as part of this presentation I situate Buber in the radical politics extant mostly during his time in Germany and in Berlin. I focus here on Buber's psychology but include several intellectual side trips visiting aspects of Buber's philosophy and his politics. I cannot separate them in discussing Buber and psychology. In my research on Buber's psychology, I also have become aware of aspects of Buber and Buberism that are not well known. This includes Buber's aesthetics.

This presentation, thus, is fragmental and based essentially on a series of my notes derived from my readings. It also rests upon my attendance at a *festschrift* for Buber that was given at Temple Emmanuel in Kensington, Maryland. There was a presentation about Buber in Jerusalem at the time of the beginning of the first Arab Israeli war; there was a presentation by my deceased friend, the gifted Rabbi Harold White, on Buber's ethics; and, finally, there was a magnificent discussion of the philosophy of Buber by Sarah Scott of Manhattan College. Sarah authored many articles and gave many presentations on Buber. I am basing this article on such scholars. Please consider it a draft.

Introduction

I was going to begin this presentation by providing the famous parable from the ancient Greek poet Archilochus: "A fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." In doing so I was going to classify Martin Buber as more of a hedgehog than a fox. The normative assumption is that Buber's major theme was one of encounter between a person and another person and also the encounter between the person and his or her conception of God. There can be no doubt that this normative view has some validity. However, recently I had an insight as to how to classify the life and thought of Buber. The term that I wish to employ is that Buber was a Radical Egalitarian.

I believe that this can be discerned by differing aspects of his life, including his theory of translation and his translation of the Torah into German; his marriage to Paula Winkler, a Catholic who later converted to Judaism and whom Buber treated as an intellectual equal; his friendship with the anarchist Gustav Landauer, thus his socialism;

his translation of the Torah into German, as a result making it more accessible; his fascination with Hassidic life; his cultural Zionism drawn from Ahad Ha'am rather than the political Zionism of Herzl; his writings on Utopias; his life in Israel, and his support for a binational State. The normative view will be demonstrated by my presentation of Buber's psychology.

A Short Biography of Martin Buber

It is almost a sacrilege to present a short biography of the life of this multifaceted man. So, I choose not to do so. There are many excellent biographies that one might find on Buber through a Google search. However, I do want to point out that all of them say that he was born into an observant Jewish home except the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which reports that the home was one of an assimilated Jewish family. The Britannica is incorrect.

What I have chosen as a basis to acquaint you with Buber is his memoir which is a presentation from his point of view of a few of the important "fragments" of his life. Presenting a summary of his memoir is more in line with Buber's personal approach and the topic of Buber and Psychology.

Meetings: Autobiographical Fragments was first published in 1967.¹ Some of the reflections were published at an earlier date. Maurice Friedman, his most prominent biographer, tried to get Buber to publish a fragment on his friend Gustav Landauer who had been shot and kicked to death following the fall of the socialist Räterepublik in Munich by the right-wing authoritarian forces. After 40 years Buber still found himself "too emotionally close" to Landauer to write about him. Thus, *Fragments* is an attempt by Buber to present what might be termed the events and our insights that best portrayed his life and thoughts. The book consists of eighteen short vignettes. I have chosen to present eight of them. They are the ones that I believe provide a fair picture of the man Buber and some of what were the greatest influences upon his life and thought.

MY MOTHER

"It cannot be a question here of recounting my personal life (I do not possess the kind of memory necessary for grasping great temporal continuities as such), but solely of rendering an account of some moments that my backward glance (highlights). Let's rise to the surface moments that have exercised a decisive influence on the nature and direction of my thinking."

Buber writes that "The earliest memory which has this character for me stems out of my fourth year of life. About a year before that, the separation of my parents broke up the home of my childhood in Vienna."

This brought him to grandparents on his father's side who lived near Lvov. Buber describes them as being noble people who did not openly discuss personal affairs between themselves, nor did they discuss with him the separation of Buber's parents.

"Here I stood once in my fourth year with a girl several years older, the daughter of a neighbor, to whose care my grandmother had entrusted me. We both leaned on the railing. I cannot remember that I spoke of my mother to my older comrade. But I hear how the big girl said to me: 'No, she will never come back.'

"I know that I remained silent, but I cherished no doubt of the truth of the spoken words. It remained fixed in me from year to year. It cleaved ever more to my heart, but after more than ten years, I had begun to perceive it as something that concerned not only me, but all men. Later I once made up the word "Verging": "mis-meeting" or "mis-encounter" to designate the failure of a real meeting between men and men."

We might ask: is this the urtext of the philosophy of Buber?

MY GRANDMOTHER and GRANDFATHER

I will summarize this vignette. First, Buber describes his grandmother. "My grandmother Adele was one of those Jewish women of a certain period who, in order to create freedom and leisure for their husbands to study the Torah, managed the business with circumspect. She was very competent." Second, Buber describes his grandfather. He reported that this man was 1) an autodidact, 2) a genuine philologist, 3) an editor and collector of Midrashim, a unique mixture of interpretations of the Bible, wise sayings and rich interpretative stories, 4) a leading member of the Jewish community, 5) a large landowner, 6) a corn merchant, and 7) the owner of phosphorite mines.

Buber relates that he, himself, never made a major decision without consulting Adele. "As a fifteen year old she had set up for herself in the storehouse a hiding place in which stood volumes of Schiller's periodical *Die Horen*, Jean Paul's book on education, and other books in German." He adds: "My grandfather was a true philologist, a 'lover of words' but my grandmother's love for the genuine word affected me even more strongly than his because this love was so direct and so devoted."

MY FATHER

Buber writes that "From about the ninth year on, I spent each summer on the estate of my father, and at fourteen I moved from my grandfather's house to my father's townhouse. The influence of my father on my intellectual development was of a different kind from that of my grandparents. It did not derive at all from the mind.

In his youth he had strong intellectual interests that had been raised by his reading of Darwin and Renan's life of Jesus. But very early on devoted his life to agriculture. The relationship of my father to nature was connected with his relationship to the social world. He visited the peasants that farmed on his land and often engaged them in conversations about their family relations." He concludes, "My father was an elemental storyteller of people he had known. What he reported of them was always the simple occurrences without any embroidery, nothing further than the existence of human creatures and what took place between them."

MY SCHOOL

Buber writes that he attended the Franz Joseph Gymnasium. "The language of instruction was Polish, but the atmosphere was that, now appearing almost unhistorical to us, which prevailed or seemed to prevail among the peoples of the Austro-Hungarian empire: mutual tolerance without mutual understanding. The pupils were for the largest part Poles. In addition, there was a Jewish minority."

He goes on: "At 8 o'clock in the morning all of the pupils were assembled. One of the teachers entered and mounted the professor's lecturing desk, above which on the wall rose a large crucifix. The students stood up on the benches and crossed themselves and he recited the Trinity formula, and they prayed aloud together. Until one could sit down we Jews stood silent and unmoving, our eyes glued to the floor. There was not perceptible hatred of the Jews....But the obligatory daily standing in the room resounding with the strange service affected me worse than an act of intolerance could have affected me.....this for eight long years.

"No attempt was ever made to convert any of us Jewish pupils; yet my antipathy to all missionary activity is rooted in that time. Not merely against the Christian mission to the Jews, but against all missionary work among men who have a faith with roots of its own. In vain did Franz Rosenzweig try to win me for the idea of a Jewish mission among the non-Jews." I think that these constituted the roots of Buber's egalitarianism.

PHILOSOPHIES

Buber writes that philosophy twice, in the form of two books, "entrenched directly upon my existence, in my fifteenth and seventeenth year." He read Plato thoroughly, as Greek was Buber's favorite language. He also read Kant's *Prolegomena*. Buber says that the latter work transported him into sublime intoxication imagining the edge of space, and time without a beginning. Buber was also bedazzled by his reading of Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

Buber did not believe that this book, particularly in the concept of eternal return, was primarily a philosophical book; yet it took possession of him, worked on him not in a manner of a gift but “in the manner of an invasion which deprived me of my freedom, and it was a long time until I could liberate myself from it.” In Buber’s reflections upon his early philosophical discussion of time, both Kant and Nietzsche led him to contemplate the nature of time and such questions as: “Are we living in eternity?” and “What is existence?”

VIENNA

In this fragment Buber presented aspects of his university education in both Art History and Psychology. His first year of university education was spent at the University of Vienna. “The lectures of those two semesters, even the significant scholarly ones, did not have a decisive effect on me,” he writes. Buber relates that it was the seminars, the free intercourse between the teacher and students, that most impressed him. “This disclosed to me, more intimately than anything that I had read in a book, the true actuality of the spirit, as a ‘Between.’” Buber was also attracted to the Viennese Burgtheater into which at times, day after day, he rushed up three flights of steps to the top gallery to watch the plays. He was fascinated by the dialogue of the actors.

A LECTURE

Buber spend his third semester at the University of Leipzig. He was twenty years old at this point. “What had the strongest effect on me was hearing Bach’s music, and in truth Bach’s music so sung and played as Bach himself wished it to be played... I cannot even make clear to myself in what way Bach influenced my thinking. The ground-tone of my life was obviously modified in some manner and through that my thinking as well.” Buber, in this fragment also reported about his interests in the socialist thinker Ferdinand Lassalle.

Buber belonged to a Socialist Club and was asked to give a lecture to the club. He gave the lecture, discussing the image of a hero after the model of Carlyle. The talk was well received and after the lecture an old man approached him, one who in his youth had belonged to Lassalle’s most intimate circle. He seized Buber’s hand and cried enthusiastically “Yes! Thus, thus he was!”

“An almost tender feeling came over me; ‘How good it is to be confirmed thus!’ But even at that moment a fright suddenly fell upon me and pierced through my thoughtless joy: ‘No, it is I who have been the confirmer, the confirmer of an idol but not of a man.’”

Gustav Landauer and Radical Politics

Gustav Landauer was a close friend and confidant of Martin Buber until his assassination by counter-revolutionary forces in Munich, on May 2, 1919. Landauer was so emotionally close to Buber that according to Maurice S. Friedman, his biographer, when he asked Buber to write a section about him in the *Fragments* in the mid-fifties, Buber responded that he was emotionally incapacitated to do so and was traumatized by the murder of Landauer. Landauer believed as he did. Buber believed that without a change in the social character of the individual a new type of society could not be created or maintained. Buber arranged for the publication of *Die Revolution*, which was described as a “seminal anarchist philosophy of history.”

Landauer and Erich Muhsam established the Socialist Bund in May 1908. Landauer and Muhsam hoped to inspire the creation of small independent cooperatives and communes as the basis of a new socialist society. Buber was a member of the Bund and participated in the forming of a small commune outside of Berlin which was quite short-lived. Buber’s notion of the kibbutz was modeled after Landauer’s utopian thinking and the direct participation of Buber with the Berlin commune and his early socialistic leanings. Buber, however, did not believe in the revolutionary activities of Landauer as expressed in Landauer's participation in the Bavarian Soviet Republic in 1919. He was not a proponent of the use of violence to bring about change.

Dialogical Psychotherapy

Dialogical Psychotherapy is mainly based on Buber’s philosophy of dialogue and his philosophical anthropology — the study of the wholeness and uniqueness of the human. His position on Dialogical Psychotherapy published in 1966 in his notes stated,

“Here another word about the problematic of the province of psychotherapy. The sicknesses of the soul are sicknesses of relationships. They can only be treated completely if I translate the realm of the patient and add to it the world as well. If the doctor possesses super-human power, he will have to try to heal the relationship itself, to heal in the “between.” The doctor must know that really he ought to do that and only his boundedness limits him to the one side.”

In his classic work *I and Thou*, Buber distinguishes between the “I-Thou” relationship that is direct, mutual, present and open, and the “I-It,” or subject-object relationship in which one relates to the other only indirectly, and non-mutually, knowing and using the other.² Of course, one might ask: What about mutual use? What is essential, however, is not what goes on within the minds of the partners in a relationship but what happens between them (all, believes Buber, are functions of the mind!!).

For this reason, Buber was unalterably opposed to that psychologism that wishes to remove the reality of relationship into the separate psyches of the participants (in what space does it take place except in the individual minds...cyberspace ?!).

“The inmost growth of the self does not take place, as people like to suppose today, through our relationship to ourselves, but through the other and knowing that we are made present by him.” Being made present as a person is the heart of what Buber called confirmation. Confirmation is interhuman, but it is not simply social or interpersonal.

Unless. Since, according to Buber, one is confirmed in one’s uniqueness as the person one can become, one is only seemingly confirmed. The confirmation of the other must include an actual experiencing of the other side of the relationship so that one can imagine quite concretely what another is feeling, thinking, and knowing. This “inclusion” — “imagining the real” — does not abolish the basic distance between oneself and the other. It is rather a bold swinging over into the life of the person one confronts, through which alone I can make the person present in his or her wholeness, unity, and uniqueness.

It is an illusion to think that a genuine relationship can be achieved when two people or groups of people are focused on getting their needs met, even if in the interest of self-discovery, personal wholeness, or spiritual growth (meditation, group therapy, “T groups” are dismissed). Moreover, understanding of another person is extremely limited if the source of it is based upon tests of personality.

Dialogical psychotherapy is a form of therapy that is centered on the genuine meeting between the therapist and his or her client as the healing mode whatever analysis, role playing, or other therapeutic techniques may also enter into it. If the psychoanalyst is seen as an indispensable midwife in bringing up material from the unconscious to the conscious, this is not “healing through meaning.” Only when it is recognized that everything that takes place within therapy — free association, dreams, silence, pain, anguish — takes place within the context of the vital relationship between therapist and patient do we have dialogical psychotherapy. Healing through meeting is essentially a two-sided relationship. What is crucial is not the skill of the therapist *per se* but the genuineness of the relationship. In order to establish such genuineness, the therapist needs to affirm the uniqueness and holism of the client.

One of the elements in dialogical psychotherapy is that of liberating the unconscious state, the UCS. This UCS is not the UCS of Freud. Buber believed that there can be a direct meeting and communication between one unconscious and another. According to the Buberian viewpoint, the unconscious is a state out of which the physical and psychical have not yet evolved and in which the two cannot be distinguished from each other. The UCS is our being itself in its wholeness. Out of it the physical and psychic evolve repeatedly and at every moment.

Thus, the UCS is our primordial being itself out of which the physical and the psychical have not yet evolved and in which the two cannot be distinguished from each other. The UCS is not a phenomenon. It is a dynamic fact that makes itself felt by its effects, effects the psychologists can explore. (Query: Is this viewpoint Kabbalistic?) What is explored in psychiatry is not of the UCS itself but rather of the phenomena that have been dissociated from it. We cannot say anything about the UCS itself; it is never given to us.

We must therefore ask: How similar is this to the UCS of Freud?

According to Maurice Friedman, Buber's biographer, the radical mistake that Freud made was to think that he could posit a region of the mind as UCS and at the same time deal with it as if its "contents" were simply repressed conscious material that could be brought back, without any essential change, into the conscious state. If Buber believed that the above was Freud's position regarding the UCS, I am sure that there would be a consensus of Freudian scholars that Buber was incorrect. I believe that Buber's position stems from his positions regarding the boundaries between humans and the external world which includes "spiritual elements." Buber's "healing through meeting" approach consistently points out the danger of the therapist imprinting his or her viewpoint on the patient.

The Dialogical Approach to Family Therapy

Judith Brown, in an article in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, presented in a clear fashion the importance of the ideas of Martin Buber for the practice of Family Therapy.³ The article focuses upon Buber's ideas about what she terms dialogical process and dialogical knowing. The dialogical process takes place moment by moment between therapist and patient, pointing to dialogical knowledge as a possible outcome. Both the patient and the therapist can comprehend this knowledge. It is a knowledge that is produced by the "in-between" of the relationship.

The dialogical process seeks neither the surety of either/or absolutes nor the obliteration of them. It acknowledges that human experience is characterized by co-existence of multiple realities in dynamic tension. In Family Therapy this would involve a number of relationships between the patient and his or her family and the therapist. Ideally, it would create multiple affirmations in the matrix of the family.

In the practice of a Buberian-oriented Family Therapy, it does not place the dialogical "I-It" in competition with the "I-Thou" relationship.

Buber and Erich Fromm

Erich Fromm was a political activist, psychologist, psychoanalyst, and highly recognized intellectual. His books, the most well-known being *Escape from Freedom*, sold millions of copies worldwide.⁴ Fromm in his doctoral dissertation recognized as Buber did the communitarian aspects of the movement. In 1919 Fromm was involved in the same Jewish educational movement for adults as Buber and Gershom Scholem, a major scholar of Jewish mysticism.

In 1923 Frieda Reichman, who later married and then was divorced from Fromm, opened a therapeutic facility in Heidelberg. The mission was utopian; to create what years later would be called a therapeutic community. Both Frieda and Erich were friends of Buber and as did Buber they conceived of therapy as a close “I and Thou” relationship.

In April 1948, there was a public letter signed by Martin Buber; Leo Baeck, a leader in Reformed Judaism; and Albert Einstein warning about the dangers of the outbreak of Jewish violence against Arabs in Israel. Both Fromm and Buber called for a binational state in Palestine.

Buber and J. L. Moreno

J. L. Moreno is the generally accepted founder of Psychodrama and Sociometrics. Born Jacob Levy in Bucharest, Romania, the son of Sephardic Jewish parents, he studied medicine, mathematics and philosophy at the University of Vienna, becoming an M.D. in 1917. In the early 1900’s he started an improvisational theatre in which the participants spontaneously acted out their conflicts. This early venture was the basis for his Group Psychotherapy approach termed Psychodrama. Moving to the United States, he went to New York; there, he promulgated his approach. From 1939 until 2004 he educated psychotherapists in Sociodrama and worked with patients at St. Elizabeth’s hospital in Washington, D.C.

In a paper titled *J. L. Moreno’s Influence on Martin Buber’s Dialogical Philosophy*, Robert Waldl lays out a case that Buber had read some writings (including Poetry) of Moreno which influenced his “I and Thou” philosophy — including taking over parts, including whole phrases, from Moreno’s early writings.⁵ Areas of duplication include such ideas as:

- 1) living encounter;
- 2) encounter is limited in time;
- 3) healing by encounter;
- 4) the here and now;
- 5) presence and past.

Moreno historically earlier than Buber is purported to have created, then written in one of his poems: “I am not unique: only by encounter / If I am a god or a fool / I am consecrated, healed, freed by encounter.”

Buber denied the influence of Moreno. He may have not been consciously aware of it. As is the case with any person who is an omnivorous reader, one’s ideas attributed to oneself are often the product of the plethora of readings of others.

The Utopian Thinker

In 1949 Buber, while living in Jerusalem, published *Paths in Utopia*.⁶ In this book Buber extends his primary theme of relationships into the political realm. The book provides a history of utopian thinking as seen in the thinking of such personages as Proudhon, Kropotkin, Landauer, Marx and Lenin. He attempts to show how all of the above thinkers and previous utopian communities fall short in their efforts because their political solutions did not primarily address the necessity of “I-Thou” relationships in a community but saw the possibility of creating them as a result of economic and political interventions. In 1949 he believed however, that the creation of a unique Jewish institution, the kibbutz, was the correct road to travel to reach a utopian ending and the establishment of a progeny of the “I and Thou” relationships. Buber’s relationship to the kibbutz movement will not be discussed here.

Buber’s View of Freud and Jung

I wish here to begin with Jung because I believe that Buber’s relationship was more substantial with him than it was with Freud. Buber’s connection to Jung was both intellectual and empathetic.

Without overemphasizing to the point of *reductio ad absurdum* in order to overexplain at a psychological level, it is relevant to note that both Buber and Jung had early traumatic experiences centered around mother abandonment. According to some viewpoints, theories are often built on autobiography. The central piece of Martin Buber’s philosophical belief that healing comes through “I-Thou” contact may be no exception to this. In an autobiographical fragment, as stated earlier he described the devastating effects of feeling abandoned by his mother at a very young age, and then being sent to Poland to stay with his grandparents who were loath to speak about their personal life to him and also about his mother. In Buber’s autobiography titled *Meetings: Autobiographical Fragments* he relates the trauma of his mother literally disappearing from his life and the comment at the age of four by a friend who was a few years older that his mother would never come back.⁷

Buber’s emphases on relationships and the longing for relationships was the major leitmotif post 1923 when he published *I and Thou*.

One idea that he developed was the idea of ‘mis-meeting,’ something he ascribed to his relationship with his mother — the type of experience he understood as a traumatic one, leaving him with longing and a sense of unrequitedness.

Buber did not engage intellectually with Freud as he did with Jung. In 1908 he did visit Freud to ask him to author a book for a series he was editing, but Freud declined to do so. He opposed Freud not as purveyor of a psychological theory but in his role as a philosopher, including enunciating a philosophy of religion dismissing it as being mainly a projection of the father image in *The Future of an Illusion*. Buber did not take well to Freud’s thesis regarding the Mosaic myth in the Torah. Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism* contained two major ideas: that Moses was an Egyptian and that in prehistory males bonded together to kill the father figures of the small groups that they were living in to obtain equality in sexual access to the women in the band.

There is much literature on Freud’s first thesis; many rebuttals, however, make for interesting reading. The second thesis which came from the anthropologist Robertson-Smith is seen as being nonsense in the community of scholars. As for Buber, he said many times he was going to publish a book criticizing Freud, but he never did so.

Buber also felt that Jung went beyond the tenets of science in many of his writings and was not really the empirical scientist that he sometimes pretended to be. Buber and Jung may have crossed paths several times. Jung may have been present at Buber’s lecture to the Psychology Club of Zurich shortly after the publication of *I and Thou*. The title of his talk was “On the Psychologizing of the World.” It was an analysis of the different forms of psychological “isms.”

At this point in time, Buber considered Jung’s method to be one that was not without merit and apparently even preferable to the approach of Freud. In August of 1924 Buber was invited to lecture at the Jungian Eranos Conference in Ascona, Switzerland, and Emma Jung, Carl Jung’s wife, attended Buber’s Amersfoort lecture series in the summer of 1925. Jung attended the conference on education at Heidelberg where Buber delivered the keynote address. In these crossings there seemed to be only peripheral interactions between Buber and Jung. Buber wrote to Hans Trub as late as the 14th of August 1932 that in the past few years he had read a few essays of Jung, which had made a “nearer” impression on him. Buber intended to meet with Jung in the spring of 1933 but never did. The Buber-Jung personal relationship seems to have dissipated after this time. It is quite possible that Buber was becoming aware of Jung’s “volkish” psychology at this time, with its emphasis on the superiority of “Aryan” culture.

In spite of a lack of a personal relationship, however, Buber and Jung engaged intellectually in 1952. The engagement took place as a result of the publication of an essay by Buber in the German magazine *Merkur* on *Religion and Modern Thinking*, which was later published in the *Eclipse of God*.⁸

I do not know the communicative modality by which Jung read this piece by Buber. Buber's criticism of Jung falls into a number of venues, principally his opposition to what he believed was Jung's overemphasis in his writings on the magical and to what he believed Jung's position was regarding Gnosticism. He believed that Jung put forth a Gnostic position.

According to Barbara D. Stephens, an open-minded Jungian analyst, the Buber-Jung disputations were more important than the Freud-Jung letters for the understanding of Jung's position on the nature of spirituality and religion in relation to his psychology.⁹ The article is thirty-five pages in length and far too long for me to completely cover her many cogent arguments. In this presentation I will basically summarize Buber's criticism of Jung and not Jung's position. I plead here to my prejudice regarding Jung for his Lamarckian approach to human universals as exhibited in his belief in universal archetypes.

Martin Buber took Jung seriously. His disputation with Jung, in which Buber quoted Jung's statements in full, indicated his deep familiarity with Jung's writings. The Buber-Jung disputations take us more directly toward vertical and horizontal considerations of the sacred and the role of the psyche's religious function. Vertical considerations of the sacred are those of transcendence, locating the human-divine relationship realm; the horizontal is those of immanence, locating the human-divine relationship in inter or intra-human connection.

According to Buber, Jung conceives of God as a function of the unconscious — not transcendent or external to the self. He calls out Jung for being pseudo-religious because he does not bear witness to an essential personal relation to the one who is experienced or believed in as being absolute. For Jung, Buber claimed that his notion of God “takes place in the darkness of the psychical hinterland of the individual's unconscious, which includes the universal unconscious.” For Jung, individuals create their own individuation out of the interaction of the archetypes embedded in their unconscious.

According to Buber, Jung claimed that his statements were only psychological. Buber argued that this was not true and that they had a religious element to them. Buber considered the Jungian self a pure totality and as such indistinguishable from the divine image and therefore recasting the Jewish and Christian conception of God into being a psychic projection.

Buber's Aesthetics

According to Sarah Scott, by examining the aestheticism in Buber one can show the connection between Buber's aesthetic concerns and his moral concerns.¹⁰

His aesthetic concerns with beauty, wholeness and uniqueness in experience and perception (the gestalt) also bear upon his connection to humanistic psychology and, specifically, to the psychotherapeutic work of Carl Rogers: they share similar principles. Buber's fascination with mysticism may also be described as being at least partially an aesthetic one. Scott claims that Buber scholars often describe a shift in his thought from an early aesthetic or mystical stage to a later ethical stage in his writings.

She notes that Levinas writes that it is not because he is an animist with respect to our relations with the physical world, but because Buber is too much the artist in relations with man. "In calling Buber an artist, Levinas suggests that Buber's dialogic philosophy would lead to mere aesthetic enjoyment of the other, not to moral responses. Leaving this criticism aside, Scott says: Another way of conceiving an aesthetic orientation is to focus on the unique ability of an aesthetic orientation to approach novel particulars and to use standards of taste to adjudicate disagreement. Scott believes that a certain aesthetic orientation may just what is needed for moral response. In his dialogue with his close friend Gustav Landauer over Buber's support of the First World War, this is seen.

For Buber, the development of taste becomes a key to social renewal. In his university studies Buber initially focused upon the study of Art History. After submitting his thesis in philosophy on the Renaissance thinkers Nicholas of Cusa and Jakob Bohme, Buber went to Florence with the intention of completing a habilitation in Art History. Around the same time he became a leader within the Zionist movement and about this time coined the term Jewish renaissance. Buber's Zionism was close to that of Ahad Ha'am, the founder of Cultural Zionism. Buber hoped that Zionism would result in a renaissance that would usher in a new state of being, not merely another nation state. This type of genuine political change rested on cultural change, and cultural change depended on aesthetic development. Buber was interested in the way each person individuates herself as entirely unique by tapping into "genius," such that self-actualization is analogous to the creation of a work of art. His notion of self-actualization was a historical glimmering of the ideas of the Humanistic Psychologists forty-to-sixty years later, thinkers such as Charlotte Buhler, Kurt Goldstein, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers.

Zionism and a Zionist state were necessary for Jewish culture to flourish because Buber argued that diaspora life had "robbed the Jewish people" of "the ability to behold a beautiful landscape and beautiful people." Buber seems to focus on the lack of a nation state in explaining this phenomena rather than just the poverty, the insulation forced upon them, and the supposed prohibitions against art as interpreted by the rabbis. Buber says "Our art is the most beautiful path for our people to ourselves...Jewish art is for us a great educator.

It is a teacher for a long perception of nature and people, a teacher for a living feeling of all that is strong and beautiful...The deepest secrets of our national soul...will become evident in it and shine with the fire of life eternal. We will behold and recognize ourselves.”

Buber was proposing a Jewish *Bildung* to some extent conceived of as an offspring of the German ideal of self cultivation bringing about a harmony between the self and the culture in which it is embedded. Buber strongly believed that fostering creative powers by themselves can turn into human isolation without developing the capacity for communion.

Buber and Gestalt Psychology

Martin Buber was part of the cultural milieu of Berlin and Germany. This milieu consisted of many parts. It included the radical politics of Rosa Luxemburg.... and his close friend Gustav Landauer. It included the cultural *avant garde* of the world of the Expressionists and the Dada Movement and the creation of the Zionist movement, a Utopian community (Neue Gemeinschaft). Embedded in this milieu were the perceptual Gestalt thinkers such as Koffka and Kohler and the Gestalt of Fritz Perls, who founded Gestalt psychotherapy. Intellectual soirees were fashionable and in 1922 Buber most probably met Perls.

One can conceive of affinities between Buber’s dialogical philosophy and psychotherapy to both the perceptual gestalts of Koffka, Kohler, Wertheimer and others and to the Gestalt Psychotherapy of Fritz Perls.

In discussing Gestalt psychotherapy Heyner speaks of the similarity in the process of it and the “I-It” and “I-Thou” of Buber. “The dialogical encompasses both ‘I-Thou’ and ‘I-It’ moments. The ‘I-Thou’ meeting is not an absolute thing-like state or a goal in therapy. The dialogical is an approach of being open to otherness, the uniqueness of the other person, along with a desire to bring myself fully into meeting this other person. It is the willingness, after all my individual efforts, to submit to the between, to recognize that a genuine meeting can only occur through ‘grace.’” “As Martin Buber so poetically states it: The Thou meets me through grace. It is not found by seeking.” Finally, the notion of the here and now and being present in the present is commensurate for both Buber and Gestalt Psychotherapy.

Regarding the relationship between Buber and the perceptual school of Gestalt psychology, there are similarities. Some of the principles of Gestalt psychology are: The idea that the whole is more or different from the sum of its parts and the argument that nature of the part is dependent on the whole in which it is embedded. Translated to human relationships, the individual always needs to be understood in his relationship to others and cannot be understood by focusing on the person himself or herself.

Martin Buber, Carl Rogers, and Humanistic Psychology

As did Buber, Rogers wrote a memoir; Rogers's work was titled *Becoming A Person*. Unlike the case of Buber, I will present a few straight biographical facts about his life mainly because I sense that readers perhaps are not as familiar with Rogers as they are with Buber.

Carl Rogers was born in Oak Park, Illinois in 1902. His father was a civil engineer. His mother, Julia Cushing, was a devout Baptist. He was the fourth of six children. An intellectually gifted child, he was brought up in a strict and religious atmosphere. His childhood personality was that of a shy child.

He matriculated at the University of Wisconsin-Madison as an agriculture major with minors in history and religion. At age 20, after an International Christian conference in China he began to adjust his religious inclinations to being more agnostic and liberal than fundamentalist. After graduating from Wisconsin in 1924, he enrolled at the Union Theological Seminary, which reflected a liberal-social action form of Protestant thought. He left Union in two years and enrolled at Teachers College, Columbia where he received an M.A. and Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology. After graduating from Columbia, he worked as a child psychologist in Rochester. During this period of time, he was influenced by Otto Rank, and the social work educator Jessie Taft. In 1940 he became Professor of Clinical Psychology at Ohio State. At Ohio State he developed many of his ideas regarding client-centered psychotherapy as outlined in his book *Counseling and Psychotherapy*.

In 1945 Rogers set up the Counseling Center at the University of Chicago. He left there to teach at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and to work with psychotic patients at Mendota State Hospital employing his non-directive approach to psychotherapy. Unfortunately, he was not particularly effective there and migrated to California to the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, and eventually he founded the Center for the Studies of the Person.

Rogers developed an extensive theory of the self and the relationship of the self to anxiety. He viewed the person in a phenomenological manner, through their "phenomenal field." Thus, Rogers advocated for an empirical evaluation of psychotherapy. He and his followers have demonstrated that a humanistic approach to conducting therapy and a scientific approach to evaluating therapy need not be incompatible.

He was the leading pioneer in studying the effects of psychotherapy. Rogers was again a pioneer in abandoning the medical model of psychotherapy. He avoided diagnostic categories for his patients.

That implies the nature of the relationship between two people (healer and healer) to be that of a client with the rights and privileges of any client relationship.

I was a client at the Counseling Center in 1958. In order to evaluate the sessions, they were tape-recorded. Additionally, as a result of the client-centered approach, I felt empowered as being a change agent in the process of psychotherapy. The theme of power in a psychotherapeutic relationship turns out to highlight a key criticism of Rogers by Buber in the dialogue between them in 1958.

Rogers believed that the key elements for successful psychotherapy were congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard. The similarities and differences between Rogers and Buber also are the centerpieces of the Buber-Rogers dialogue. What brought about the Buber-Rogers dialogue was the perception that there was a similarity in their thoughts, particularly the “I and Thou” concept of Buber and the Rogerian concept of unconditional positive regard. Other possible similarities were also discerned between Rogers’ Nineteen Propositions and many of Buber’s teachings. Among Rogers’ concepts I will select only a few that appear to be related to Buber’s positions. I will not specifically pinpoint these positions but will assume that anyone even with a brief acquaintance with Buber will recognize them.

The following propositions of Rogers intellectually troll the phenomenological position of Buber:

- 1) All individuals (organisms) exist in a continually changing world of experience (phenomenal field) of which they are the center (Buber tries to move the person into the in-between).
- 2) The organism reacts as an organized whole to this phenomenal field.
- 3) The organism reacts to the field as it is experienced and perceived. This perceptual field is “reality” for the individual.

The Dialogue

On the 13th of March 1956 Leslie Farber, the head of the William Alanson White Institute in Washington, D.C., invited Buber to the United States to give the annual lecture series presented in honor of the namesake of the institute. He asked Buber to give three or four lectures scattered over a three or four week period. In his letter to Buber, he described the approach of the Institute as being in the tradition of interpersonal psychiatry pioneered by Harry Stack Sullivan. This approach was appealing to Buber, and he agreed to give the lectures and several seminars.

On the surface Carl Rogers should have made an ideal dialogue partner for Martin Buber because Roger’s humanistic psychotherapy and Buber’s humanist anthropology converge, at least on paper.

The two trailblazers upheld that people are not learned about because of classroom experiences and their readings *per se* but in meeting with each other. These lectures are published in *Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy*, edited by Judith Buber Agassi.¹¹ The lecture delivered at the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis and Psychology, has the overriding theme of “What can Philosophical Anthropology Contribute to Psychiatry?” It included lectures on “Distance and Relation,” “Elements of the Interhuman,” “What is Common to All,” and “Guilt and Guilt Feelings.” Besides lecturing in D.C. Buber also met with more individuals in seminar form than in lecture form, with invited faculty from the Union Theological Seminary in New York. Paul Tillich was one of the invited guests.

Carl Rogers made an ideal dialogue partner for Martin Buber. The exchange took place on April 18, 1957 at the University of Michigan before four hundred people in a large auditorium. The dialogue was the climax of a three day conference on Buber.

The two trailblazers upheld that people are not primarily learned through books and classroom experience but by meetings constituting excitements, risks, and challenges. And it is in relationships they could possibly actualize human potentials.

With so many areas of agreement between the two, one would expect the dialogue to have proceeded smoothly. However, it took several letters between Buber, Leslie Farber, and Maurice Friedman, who became the moderator of the event and Reverend Dewitt Baldwin, the coordinator of Religious Affairs at Michigan, to finalize the event. The program was not set up to be a conversation between equals. It more resembled an interview by a junior faculty member with a senior faculty member.

Rogers entered the auditorium with a list of questions for Buber; Buber entered empty handed. Rogers began by a query as to how was it possible for Buber to know so much about psychology and human behavior without being formally educated in the field. To the surprise of Rogers, Buber told him that he had studied psychiatry for three semesters with several outstanding personages including Wilhelm Wundt, who is considered the father of scientific psychology, and Eugen Bleuler, the great clinician at the Burghölzli Psychiatric Clinic in Zurich.

Rogers proposed that in his work with patients there were times that an “I-Thou” relationship was established. Whether this was valid for Buber then became the major theme of the encounter. Buber responded to Rogers’ claim that it could not be the same: “He comes for help to you. You don’t come for help to him. You are able more or less to help him. You see him in a manner in which he cannot see you... You are not equals and cannot be.” Rogers responded as follows: “And I do feel that a real sense of equality is established between us.”

Buber responded: “No doubt about it but I am not speaking about your feeling but about a real situation.” Buber also says that “you give him something making him more equal to you but there is still an imbalance.” An example of the non-reciprocity of the relationship would be that the therapist could ask the client about her sex life, but the client could not ask the therapist about hers.

Buber in the debate believed that Rogers, unlike Freudian psychotherapy, came closer to the “I-Thou” relationship through the unconditional self-regard aspects of “It” but psychotherapy is still an “I-It” relationship. The essential asymmetrical power balance obviates an “I-Thou” relationship.

Coda

Upon reflection, it has become clear to me that what I have presented is a paper on Buber and Psychology and not one solely focused on Buber’s psychology. It is pastiche of the life of Buber, some of his ideas related to psychology, psychotherapy, and some selected psychologists. Perhaps, as a result, the reader might have a better understanding of the man, Buber, and at least at an elementary level, his relationships with psychologists and some of his ideas about psychology and psychotherapy.

In writing a check to an organization to combat hunger and in not writing a check for another charitable organization, I have observed that, in a small way, it is I who decides “who shall live and who shall die,” not the God of Jewish Yom Kippur services. I wonder to what degree Buber would agree with this position.

I wish all readers well, or as Buber might have said, *Baruch Hashem*, Thank God.

Notes

¹ Meetings: Autobiographical Fragments. London: Routledge, 1967. First published as part of The Philosophy of Martin Buber. Third Edition published in 2002. DOI: 10.4324/9781315015514.

² Martin Buber, I am Thou, https://archive.org/stream/IAndThou_572/BuberMartin-i-and-thou_djvu.txt

³ Judith Brown (2012), *Theory Practice and Use of Self in the Open Dialogue Approach to Family Therapy: A Simple Complexity or a Complex Simplicity*, 33 (4), 266-282.

⁴ Erich H. Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1941 and other dates.

⁵ Robert Waldl, <https://www.blatner.com/adam/pdntbk/BuberMoreno.html>

⁶ <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/martin-buber-paths-in-utopia-en>

⁷ See Meetings, *ibid*.

⁸ Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation Between Religion and Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, 2015.

⁹ Barbara Stephens, The Martin Buber-Carl Jung Disputations: Protecting the Sacred in the Battle for the Boundaries of Analytical Psychology, *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 2001 Jul, 46(3):455-91. doi: 10.1111/1465-5922.00257.

¹⁰ See, Sarah Scott, *From Genius to Taste: Martin Buber's Aestheticism*, *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 5 (1):110-130 (2017).

¹¹ Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy: Essays, Letters, and Dialogue, ed. by Judith Buber Igassi (1999). Syracuse: Syracuse University Press / The Martin Buber Library, ISBN: 978-0-8156-0596-6.