"All Actual Life Is Encounter" – Martin Buber's Politics of De-Politicization

by

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Abstract

Martin Buber's diagnosis of modern politics points to the disengagement of citizens from direct and personal encounters as a central contributing factor to the increasing politicization afflicting human life. Buber sees meaning situated in actual life with the world, with others, and with God. The living reality is encounter; living truth, hence, cannot be possessed, only actualized in mutual encounter. The importance of Buber's work to political problems lies in his ability to negotiate paradoxes in three cases: between being and becoming, between individualism and collectivism, between personal relationships and the real demands of an existent condition.

In the first case, a radical openness to relation exposes human interlocutors to the surprising mutuality of genuine dialogue, hence allowing them to be changed by the encounter. Existential being is made present through encounter, but in doing so, interlocutors set towards a path to human becoming in dialogue. Social education, the embrace of social spontaneity through mutual encounter, resists the grip of propaganda over interhuman life by challenging and testing the "ready-made truths" often peddled in modern politics.

In the second case, he contends that actual life cannot be found in the individual simply as individual, or the individual who surrenders himself to a collective. Human life,

for Buber, is actualized in partnership. Hence, there is no presentness for the individual or the collective. This alienation leads to a situation where political illusion dominates - where real conflicts that invariably do arise between groups of people are obscured by "political surplus conflicts", conflicts that are exaggerated and possibly fabricated for the sake of politics.

In the third case, people work towards transforming a shared existent condition by providing honest and direct address to persons – to confront the world in its presentness, rather than continuing to live under political illusions. Buber provides us a rebellious spirit who knows he cannot act alone. Buber's rebellious spirit understands that the most effective form action is immediate human togetherness, when genuine address is responded in kind. It is in the direct and immediate encounter, the genuine word between persons, that interhuman trust can weaken the presumed vice grip of distrust on human existence. Once people can dare to trust, they can once again renew actual life – a life of partnership.

Supervisor: Dr. James Tully, (Department of Political Science)

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Chapter 1: Navigating the narrow ridge: Key concepts of Martin Buber's thought

> "I have occasionally described my stand to my friends as the "narrow ridge". I wanted by this to express that I did not rest on the broad upland of a system that includes a series of sure statements about the absolute, but on a narrow rocky ridge between where there is no sureness of expressible knowledge but the certainty of meeting what remains, undisclosed."
>
> - Martin Buber

Martin Buber's philosophical approach can be described as navigating a narrow ridge, refusing rigid dogmatism and perpetual relativism. For him, the choice is not simply between limitless individualism and absolute collectivism. In his renowned work "What is Man?" (1938), he contends that real life cannot be found in the individual or the collective.[1] For Buber, all real life is meeting. This idea emerged very early on in Buber's life; the earliest relationships would leave a lasting impression on his intellectual career. This introductory chapter will, first, highlight the central concepts of Buber's thought through an exploration of the formative events of his early life; second, state the thesis of this project; and third, sketch the chapters and general trajectory this study will take.

1.1. The Origins of a Life of Dialogue: Up to 1923

Mordecai Martin Buber was born in Vienna in 1878. At the age of four, his parents separated. The departure of his mother would leave a lasting impression on Buber. In his "autobiographical fragments" entitled Meetings (1973), he characterizes the absence of his mother from his childhood as *Vergegnung*, mis-meeting.[2] Her

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[1] In Buber's own words from the Foreword to the volume: "This course ("What is Man?") shows in the unfolding of the question about the essence of man, that it is by beginning neither with the individual nor with the collectivity, but only with the reality of the mutual relation between man and man, that this essence can be grasped." Martin Buber, Between Man and Man. Ronald Gregor-Smith trans. (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. x.

[2] The volume was published in 1973, following Buber's passing in 1965, by close friend and part time collaborator Maurice Friedman. Friedman notes in his Introduction to Meetings that some of the fragments

departure would have a profound influence on his thoughts regarding genuine meeting.[3] In contrast, Buber's relationship with his paternal grandmother, Adele Buber, who was charged with the task of educating the young boy in his pre-adolescent years, was a genuine meeting that spawned his love of learning and, more importantly, a love for the genuine word. Buber was educated until the age of ten at his grandparent's home by private tutors, primarily in the humanities, with a distinct emphasis on language; he would eventually be able to speak several languages and read numerous others.[4] As Buber's biographer and friend Maurice Friedman notes, this polygot background was of importance to Buber's work as translator and as a predominantly German author.[5] These early encounters with language, as Buber indicates, would provide an impetus for his life of dialogue.[6] The relationship with his grandmother sowed the seeds for his thoughts on

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in the volume were already written, and, in some cases, already published. Martin Buber, Meetings. Maurice Friedman, ed. (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1973).

[3] In the opening autobiographical fragment, entitled "My Mother", Buber recalls his mother's departure. A four-year old Buber stood alongside a young girl, a neighbour's daughter, on a wooden balcony at his grandparent's house. The young girl, several years older, would bring to light a truth the young boy had already discerned. "No, she will never come back," she said to the young boy. Buber informs his reader that "*Vergegnung*" – mismeeting or misencounter – was a term derived in response to that moment. Twenty years later, another encounter with his mother reinforced the mis-meeting that defined their relationship. "When after another twenty years I again saw my mother, who had come from a distance to visit me, my wife, and my children, I could not gaze into here still astonishingly beautiful eyes without hearing from somewhere the word "*Vergegnung*" as a word spoken to me. I suspect that all I have learned about the genuine meeting in the course of my life had its first origin in that hour on the balcony". Martin Buber, Meetings. pp. 18-19.

[4] "Buber spoke German, Hebrew, Yiddish, Polish, English, French, and Italian and read, in addition to these, Spanish, Latin, Greek, Dutch, and other languages." Martin Friedman, Martin Buber's Life and Work: The Early Years 1878-1923. (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981), p. 8.

[5] "Even in conversation he knew how to express differences of meaning simply and surprisingly, not because he used individual words in unusual senses or coined new words, but because he employed long-familiar turns of speech with especial attentiveness and lent a customary grammatical function a fresh, deeper significance." This is relevant to a discussion regarding Buber's work on genuine meeting in a variety of ways. On a general level, the mastery of language Buber held allowed him encounter and engage with a large number of influential figures in European intellectual life. This is readily evident by looking at the diverse figures he held correspondence with throughout his life. Refer to Nahum N Glatzer and Paul Mendes-Flohr ed., The Letters of Martin Buber: A Life of Dialogue. Richard Winston and et al. trans. (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1991). As a corollary of his proficiency for language, Buber would be able to create "new" meanings or terms to express his ideas regarding genuine encounter. The earlier reference to *Vergegnung* is demonstrative of this. Paul Mendes-Flohr places a great deal of importance to the formulation of the term *das Zwischenmenschliche* (ontology of the between or the interhuman) in Buber's preface to volume authored by his mentor, Georg Simmel. The term *das Zwischenmenschliche*, Mendes-Flohr contends, evolves alongside with Buber's thought. Paul Mendes-Flohr, From Mysticism to Dialogue: Martin Buber's Transformation of German Social Thought. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), p. 31.

[6] "The multiplicity of human languages, their wonderful variety in which the white light of human speech at once fragmented and preserved itself, was already at the time of my boyhood a problem that instructed me

direct and genuine meeting between persons. "To the glance of the child," he writes in regards to Adele, "it was already unmistakable that when she at times addressed someone, she really addressed him. My grandfather was a true philologist, a "lover of the word", by my grandmother's love for the genuine word affected me even more strongly than his: because this love was so directed and devoted."[7] This direct and genuine encounter between persons, interhuman relationship, would become central to Buber's ideas on dialogical engagement.

At the age of fourteen, Buber moved into the home of his father and stepmother. Carl Buber's influence on his son, as the latter describes, "did not derive at all from the mind".[8] The time spent with his grandparents helped Buber encounter a world of words – a life of humanist learning. His father would help him learn about a relationship with nature and its importance to social relationships between human beings. When Martin Buber recalls his father's interaction with a herd of horses, he emphasizes how these encounters were "wholly unsentimental and wholly unromantic"[9], in other words, genuine human contact with nature. "In a special way," Buber writes, "the relationship of my father to nature was connected with his relationship to the realm that one customarily designates as the social."[10] Carl Buber, according to his son, took part in the life of all people involved in the maintenance of the family estate.[11] A young Buber learned that a genuine relationship to nature is not necessarily exclusive of relationships between people. In fact, as Buber expresses in I and Thou, relationships with persons,

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anew. In instructing me it also again and again disquieted me." The paradoxical condition of human language, what Buber describes as "the tension between what was heard by the one and what was heard by the other", is the problem that had a deep influence on him, one that issued him into a life of "ever clearer insight". Buber, Meetings, p. 21.

[7] Buber, Meetings, p. 20.

[8] Buber, Meetings, p. 22.

[9] Buber, Meetings, p. 22.

[10] Buber, Meetings, p. 22-23.

[11] "How he took part in the life of all people who in one or another manner were dependent on him: the labourers attached to the estate…how he troubled about the family relationships, about the upbringing of children and schooling, about the sickness and aging of all the people – all that was not derived from any principles. It was solicitude not in the ordinary, but in the personal sense, in the sense of active responsible contact that could rise here to full reciprocity." Buber, Meetings, p. 23.

nature, and spirit are related.[12] This would influence his latter thoughts on social education, as an existential task unfolding through dialogical encounter. His thoughts on dialogue, hence, are not simply romantic or based on mere sentiment. A direct encounter between persons requires a confrontation of circumstance in addition to a turn toward the other. An appeal to boundless abstraction, such as valuating forms and ideas over the actual life of the interhuman, would be romantic, because this approach satisfies individualized interests while neglecting the affirmative role of dialogue in the life between persons. The direct encounters with nature that young Buber's direct encounters experienced on his father's estate would influence his intellectual pursuits.

Buber's intellectual life, however, did not progress without difficulty. In the years leading up to the First World War, he was seduced by the *zeitgeist* of his generation and became swept up by the initial enthusiasm for the conflict. This is characterized as his supposed "a-social" stage, where he temporarily lost his way in regards to his thoughts about dialogical encounter.

1.2. Kriegsbuber and World War I: The emergence of I and Thou

Buber refers to the First World War as a "decisive turning-point" because it marked a break from his so-called "pre-dialogical thought" as well as the beginnings of I-Thou philosophy. Buber was part of an intellectual tumult that influenced the European intelligentsia during the late 19th and early 20th century.[13] The tumult was defined by a revolt against increasingly rational and secularized structures and ideas, the by-products of a rapidly industrializing world. As a young intellectual, Buber was involved in the intellectual life of this generation. As Jewish scholar Paul Mendes-Flohr notes, much of Buber's activity in this pre-dialogical period, prior to the dialogical thought initiated in I and Thou (1923), could be characterized as "a-social".

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[12] Martin Buber, I and Thou. Walter Kaufmann, trans. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), pp. 56-57.

[13] Jewish historian, Laurence Silberstein provides an extensive summation and analysis of Buber's involvement in the Viennese Fin de Siècle. Laurence J. Silberstein, Martin Buber's Social and Religious Thought. (New York: New York University Press, 1989), pp. 18-42.

> "Indeed, prior to his affirmation of the realm of the interpersonal, Buber's intellectual and spiritual focus was singularly a-social. In his pre-dialogical period, his central concern was the crisis of *Kultur*, the decline of spiritual and aesthetic sensibilities wrought by industrial, urban *Zivilisation*. Such a "romantic discontent" with modernity had been shared by many intellectuals since the rise of capitalist society."[14]

Although this period of young Buber's intellectual development was 'a-social' and somewhat romantic, his later thought remained very much a response to the expansion of a bureaucratized, coldly rational, and deeply impersonal technological world. But in place of "romantic discontent", the narrow ridge would define Buber's thought; he comes to encounter the paradoxes and contradictions that arise through interhuman meeting in life. Rather than pursuing a regeneration of *Kultur*, as his young self had, Buber – from I and Thou onwards – pursues a regeneration of community through interhuman engagement.[15] It was a young Buber's atavistic yearnings for *Kulturpolitik* that lead him to romanticize the First World War.

An obsession with individuation motivated a young Buber to embrace the First World War as an unparalleled opportunity for self-actualization. Buber's friend Gustav Landauer – a prominent social anarchist – was outraged by this development. He labeled him, *Kriegsbuber* or war-Buber, in the course of writing a vitriolic response to this troubling development in his friend's writings. In the first volume of his three-volume Buber biography, Maurice Friedman notes that Buber had to live through "some of the most active and terrible years of his life", including the death of his close friend Landauer, in order to undergo his "conversion".[16] "The real turning point in Buber's life," Friedman writes, "that led to ever-greater soberness and concreteness in walking the "narrow ridge" was the First World War."[17] A young Buber was intoxicated with the

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[14] Paul Mendes-Flohr, From Mysticism , p. 15.

[15] Mendes-Flohr explains that Buber's generation approached conventional bourgeois life with great scepticism, seeking a regeneration of *Kultur*. "Thus, Buber's early Zionism, which envisioned the redemption of the Jew to lie in a "renaissance" of the Jewish spirit and "primordial" sensibilities, is perhaps best understood as a species of *Kulturpolitik*." Paul Mendes-Flohr, From Mysticism , p. 15.

[16] Friedman, Martin Buber's Life and Work, p. 201.

[17] Friedman, Martin Buber's Life and Work, p. 202.

possibilities of the war – namely its ostensible ability to galvanize the vital energy of the German people towards the building of a true national community. As the stalemated war produced death at an alarming rate, this inescapable degradation of human life made him reevaluate his initial stance. Both Friedman and Mendes-Flohr credit Landauer's confrontation of *Kriegsbuber* as highly influential for Buber's eventual "awakening" from an asocial slumber. This proved pivotal to the development of I and Thou and his dialogical thought in the time period following the war.

I and Thou, published in 1923, is widely regarded as Buber's magnum opus and the central work of his I-Thou philosophy. In it, he establishes the central concepts of his dialogical thought: I-It and I-Thou, the basic words spoken by human beings in addressing others and the world.

> "The human being to whom I say You (Thou) I do not experience. But I stand in relation to him, in the sacred basic word. Only when I step out of this do I experience him again. Experience is remoteness from You (Thou)...For You (Thou) is more than It knows. You (Thou) does more, and more happens to it, than It knows. No description reaches this far: here is the cradle of actual life."[18]

In this work, he posits the basis of his thought: all actual life is encounter. Buber, as Friedman points out, does not prioritize the I-Thou over the I-It.[19] I-Thou relationships cannot exist without the It-world, the world of experience. But those who are immersed in the It-world remain ontologically incomplete without genuine encounter. As Buber characterizes in the above quotation, direct and immediate encounter is the cradle of actual life.

In his work following I and Thou, Buber would continue to think about the direct encounter between persons. Buber speaks of interhuman encounter not as being exclusive of relationships with nature or God. Encounters with nature and spirit are integral to mutual relationships between persons. Without the spontaneity of genuine

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[18] Buber, I and Thou, p. 60.

[19] Friedman, Martin Buber's Life and Work, p. 331.

encounter, persons are left in the realm of seeming, of appearance and perception. In this realm of appearance, persons cannot approach others with their whole being, but merely as derivatives of stereotypical forms. Social spontaneity is integral to genuine dialogue because the persons entering into relation can do so with their whole being and allow themselves to be changed by the relationship, hence, initiating a transformation of a shared existent condition. The "meeting" of individuals who hold steadfastly onto appearance cannot be considered genuine interhuman encounter, because by maintaining facades, neither interlocutor can be transformed by the relationship. It is through human becoming that people come to address and transform a shared existent condition. When interlocutors can dare to trust each other or trust in the possibility of direct and personal mutuality, the transformative possibility of dialogue is actualized. This is a point that will be explored at length in Chapter 3 of this study. Trust, as Buber argues in "Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace", is most integral to mutual relationships between persons.[20] Consequently, the inability to carry on in genuine dialogue withers the bonds between people, leaving individuals alienated from each other, and diminishing the grounds for community. Without interhuman trust, Buber contends that individuals gravitate towards grand collectivities protected by sovereign authority, which, it is presumed, secures the grounds upon which individual interests can be pursued.

1.3. Individuals and Persons: Buber's response to political theory and modern state sovereignty

Dialogue, for Buber, is not the same as sliding into a "debating society". For him, dialogue is not simply an exchange of rhetoric or ideas. If dialogue were merely the parry and thrust of polemics, then it would be an instrument of I-It rationality. Buber's I-Thou philosophy is often misrepresented as being "mystical", a position that is rejected by Buber in a 1957 Afterword for second edition of I and Thou.[21] Although the I-Thou relationship is central to his conception of dialogue, Buber does not place genuine

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[20] Martin Buber, "Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace", Pointing the Way. Maurice Friedman trans., ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), pp. 238-239.

[21] "The clear and firm structure of the I-You (I-Thou) relationship, familiar to anyone with a candid heart and the courage to stake it, is not mystical." Buber, "Afterword", I and Thou, p. 177.

dialogue as a realm transcendent of the It-world. Although he is sometimes regarded as a Jewish mystic, his work on dialogue places the possibility for redemption within the life between people – the actual life with world, human beings, and spirit. Human beings cannot genuinely exist as monads locked in monological contestations. According to Buber, dialogue completes the relationships between people. At the end of a dialogue between Buber and psychologist Carl Rogers, the former expresses an aversion to the term 'individual'.

> "An individual is just a certain uniqueness of a human being. And it can develop just by developing with uniqueness...he may become more and more an individual without becoming more and more human...the individual is just this uniqueness; being able to be developed thus and thus. But a person, I would say, is an individual living really with the world. And *with* the world, I don't mean *in* the world - just in *real contact*, in real reciprocity with the world in all points in which the world can meet man. I don't say only with man, because sometimes we meet the world in other shapes than in that of man. But this is what I would call a person and if I may say expressly Yes and No to certain phenomena, I'm *against* individuals and *for* persons."[22]

Buber does not advocate the dissolution of the person into a collective identity. Collectives function in the same way as individuation, namely upon a logic of radical exclusivity, a radical distinction between *us* or *I* contra *them* - or according to Carl Schmitt, between friend and enemy. Buber is at odds with this logic, which, as he notes throughout his work, is faulty presumes it presumes a limitless distrust between human beings to be an innate quality within individuals. Chapter 4 will provide a more in depth look at Buber's response to Schmitt's political theory.

As a consequence of this presumption that distrust between individuals is somehow innate, the necessity for political order is imposed upon human life by sovereign power. Political order, hence, is assumed to be the product of an effective exercise of sovereign power, which legitimated by the tacit compliance of individual citizens to sovereign decision. This is a presumption most clearly present in Schmitt and

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[22] Martin Buber, "Appendix", The Knowledge of Man: Selected Essays. Maurice Friedman and Ronald Gregor-Smith, trans. (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 1996), p. 174.

Hobbes, a point that will be substantiated in a later chapter. Schmitt argues that this sovereign monopoly over the decision is integral to protecting and securing not only the particular political grouping, i.e. Nation, but allowing the regime to retains its distinctly political character.[23] Buber calls this consolidation of power in the hands of the state, 'political surplus', intimating that this surplus exacerbates the dominance of the political principle over actual life. He points to the process of individuation in modern politics as a contributor to the growing dominance of the political principle.

Individuation is reinforced by political theories that elevate the state as the central and supreme protector of individual rights and liberty. Although Max Weber is a thinker attuned to the antimonies present in political life, the pre-eminence of individual liberty within his thought concedes, to some extent, to the need for a dominant political principle. For Weber, the highest political existence human individuals can hope for is to be protected by state power and be left to enjoy individual liberty; politics is to be left to those who have a calling for it. Chapter 2 will further explore this question. In contrast to liberal theories, Buber does not situate freedom within the individual. Human freedom, according to Buber in I and Thou, is actualized when a person turns to another in a spirit of open mutuality; it is an encounter with fate and with the spontaneity of interhuman encounter. In I and Thou, he contends that the spontaneity of encounter actualizes human freedom.[24] This spontaneous mutuality between persons in dialogue tests It-world representations and resists slavery to It-world causality. It-world causality is represented by increasingly impersonal forms of political order can be excessively rational, such as modern bureaucratic structures, or radically irrational, such as the totalitarian mass. Buber calls for a revival of personal and immediate human encounters, to recover freedom from the illusory appearances of It-world causality.

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[23] Carl Schmitt, Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty. George Schwab, trans. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 13.

[24] Buber, I and Thou, p. 102.

The direct and honest encounter between persons, as Buber explains in "Elements of the Interhuman" (1957), is an oscillation between being and seeming.[25] Seeming, of course, is the realm of simple appearance. The direct and honest encounter between persons is based on interhuman trust. Without trust, state power is imbalanced vis á vis the power of persons to encounter each other and to present circumstances. Without genuine dialogue, individuals come to believe in the political illusions, rather than confront the situation in its presentness.

Having explored the early years of Buber's intellectual development, up to 1923, and touched upon the basic concepts of his dialogical thought, let us now focus on Buber's concept of presentness. As we will see, presentness is integral to direct and immediate encounters with the world and with others.

1.4. Presentness and Teleology: "Time is not a sentence that hangs over our heads"

Presentness, within Buber's thought, is a central concept, encompassing the actual being of interlocutors in relationship as well as the actuality of an existent human condition that they share. Buber, who enjoyed reading ancient Greek philosophical texts while under his grandparents' tutelage, grapples with the existential categories of being and becoming. This is most clearly represented in his work on Heracleitus, most notably the essay "What is Common to All" (1958). The present discussion, however, will abstain from venturing into a tangential discussion of Heracleitus. Rather, it will focus on Buber's notion of presentness and explore the insights he imparts about political engagement.

Presentness is the space where being encounters becoming. Let us depart from the terms being and becoming, and return to Buber's language, namely I-It and I-Thou – although I-It and "being" are not interchangeable, much like how I-Thou cannot be equivocated with "becoming". Buber contends that no idea, regardless of how iridescent

[25] Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman", The Knowledge of Man, pp. 62-78.

or perfectible it may seem, can come to being in a realm outside of the It-world or actualized without the work of interhuman relationship. I-Thou, hence, has no substance without I-It. I-It, conversely, descends into nothingness or empty nihilism without I-Thou. Therefore, presentness is indicative of Buber's narrow ridge. It is an encounter between the known world – the ordered representations of I-It existence, and the unknown future – the spontaneity that arises in genuine encounter. The lines of the relationship between I-It and I-Thou are not clearly drawn or easily definable, neither can be compartmentalized as object.

Presentness, in one very important aspect, relates to what Heracleitus calls the world of the waking. According to Buber, Heracleitus posits the waking world in contrast to a world of illusion, a world of simple appearance. The world of illusion is a world common to one – namely for the one who accepts appearance as reality. The world of the waking, in contrast, is a world common to all – at least those not under the seductive spell of illusion. Let us depart from Heracleitus' terms and explore Buber's thoughts on this. Within the body of the essay, Buber reveals why he is specifically reading Heracleitus.

> "To man as man belongs the ever renewed event of the entrance of meaning into the living word. Heracleitus demands of the human person that he preserve this occurrence in life in such a way that it can legitimately take part in the reality of the common logos, in a genuine service of meaning. Out of such persons alone can circles be formed that follow the logos. These are they who genuinely think with one another because they genuinely talk to one another. All men, according to Heracleitus, have an essential share in self-knowledge and sensible thinking."[26]

From his reading of Heracleitus, he concludes that what is common to all is not a homogeneous common sense, but rather a space for interhuman encounter, actualized through the living word – the word that arises in life between persons., According to Buber in his autobiographical fragment "The Two Boys", universal norms are neither unproblematic nor particularly applicable when confronted with the contingencies of life.

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[26] Buber, "What is Common to All", The Knowledge of Man, p. 94.

> "The long series of experiences that taught me to understand the problematic relationship between maxim and situation, and thereby disclosed to me the nature of the true norm that commands not our obedience but ourselves, had begun with this convulsion of my childhood."[27]

Having learned early in his life about the general futility of universal norms in addressing a world in flux, his intellectual work embraced, rather than refuted, spontaneity and its role in human life.

Rigid teleology, as Buber intimates in I and Thou, entrenches enslavement to the I-It realm and justifies an individual perception of others as Its, instruments employable towards the fulfilment of an end, namely the set telos. This conception of time, for Buber, confuses doom with salvation. Historicist accounts – especially accounts pre-occupied with the 'end of history' - attempt to rationalize the unknown, bringing it into a systematic logic or dialectic and destroying the possibility of genuine spontaneity. The rationalization of unknown events as part of a dialectical movement claims to *know* what the precise end will be, and that each event that arises attesting to a contrary fate can be assimilated into the progressive move towards the end.

Teleological thought, hence, has a limited conception of spontaneity between human beings, since encounters are instrumental and stringently purposive to the fulfilment of a greater end. Human lives, therefore, have value only in pursuit of telos, the pursuit of an end or "timeless" cause. In this context, time is a sentence that hangs over the head of man, where he subscribes to the logic of a teleological movement to the detriment of interhuman trust. This is a point that will be explored in Chapter 3 of this study. But returning to the current discussion, time – as conceived by these teleological accounts – is merely the distance separating the mortal realm from an immortal realm of pure form, keeping man from "true" being.

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[27] "The long series of experiences that taught me to understand the problematic relationship between maxim and situation, and thereby disclosed to me the nature of the true norm that commands not our obedience but ourselves, had begun with this convulsion of my childhood." Buber, Meetings, p. 26.

Far from being a mystic, i.e. submitting that genuine being lies transcendent of an ephemeral world, Buber contends that man's situatedness in the world provides the impetus for genuine existence; worldliness is the basis for genuine existence. In his recollections regarding his initial philosophical influences, Buber remembers how the problem of time tormented him in his youth.

> "I was irresistibly driven to want to grasp the total world process as actual, and that meant to understand it, "time", either as beginning and ending or as without beginning and end. At each attempt to accept them as reality, both proved equally absurd. If I wanted to take the matter seriously...I had to transpose myself either to the beginning of time or to the end of time."[28]

As a fourteen year old, Buber would come across a book that helped him with this problem of time. Buber credits Kant's *Promelgena* as a pivotal influence on his thoughts about time. "Kant's present to me at that time," he writes, "was philosophical freedom."[29] Time, as a young Buber realized, is "ours" and not dictated by forces transcendent of human existence. Through his revelation that time was not a sentence hanging over the head of humanity, Buber would develop his thought in response to conceptions of rigid teleology. And, in some ways, I-Thou philosophy – concerned with the "concrete" encounters between persons within the world – is a philosophy that grapples with the problem of space. Direct interhuman encounters unfold within a space between persons. In the context of "What is Common to All", that space is characterized as the waking world. But when read in relation to I and Thou, an individual who neglects Thou lives in an It-world plagued by dissimulation. Hence, I-It relationships are illusory without the possibility of I-Thou. Hence, the central aspect of Buber's account of actual life is that interhuman action and thought, done in concert with others, opens up space for transformation - of a shared existent condition and personal existence. Hopelessness is a domain reserved for those who indulge in capitulation, those who admit that, "this is the way things will always be" and passively accepts an abysmal fate. Hope, in Buber's estimation, does not come from a world beyond or from a transcendental will. Hope is in the realm between persons, in the encounter between I and Thou.

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[28] Buber, Meetings, p. 28.

[29] Buber, Meetings, p. 29.

1.5. Statement of Thesis and Outline of Chapters

This introductory chapter has tried to introduce several of the concepts central to Martin Buber's thought; concepts that can inform the way we approach political thought. This section will be divided into three sections. Section 1.5.1 will provide a summary of the concepts explored in this chapter, placing it in context to Buber's response to modern political theory. Section 1.5.2 will state the thesis of this project. And, section 1.5.3 will outline the proceeding chapters.

1.5.1. Summary

The years he spent with his grandparents inspired Buber to think about direct and genuine encounters between people; all real life, he would come to realize, is meeting. Buber places an emphasis on the immediacy of interhuman encounter in response to the crude individualism and collectivism that often dominates modern politics. Through the revival of immediate and personal relationships, Buber envisions a renewal of communal bonds between people. In Paths in Utopia (1945)[30], he contends that the growing alienation and personal distrust within modern life forces people into 'great collectives'. "The personal human being," Buber writes, "ceases to be the living member of a social body and becomes a cog in the "collective" machine."[31] The seemingly insoluble distrust between persons provides the grounds upon which a centralization of political power occurs, and, as Buber argues, jeopardizing the possibility for genuine community.[32] This

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[30] In the Foreword to the volume, Buber notes that it was completed in 1945, published in Hebrew the following year, and published in English in 1949. Martin Buber. Paths in Utopia. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

[31] Buber, Paths in Utopia, p. 132.

[32] "The little society in which he was embedded cannot help him; only the great collectives, so he thinks, can do that, and he is all too willing to let himself be deprived of personal responsibility: he only wants to obey." Buber, Paths in Utopia, p. 132.

grand centralization of power within sovereign states or global spheres of hegemony is described by Buber as part of the dominance of the political principle. The growing politicization of the social realm, wherein social associations mirror political power structures, i.e. accumulating power at the "top", subverts the transformative potential of direct and immediate interhuman relationships. Buber continually responds to the dominance of the political principle; it is a common theme throughout his work regarding politics.[33] And as this study will demonstrate, it is his response to the 'political principle' that provides useful insights to political thought.

The consolidation of political power is done ostensibly in order to protect the political collective and secure the conditions under which individual liberty may exist. Buber is concerned how the abstract ideas of collectivity – "Nation" or "People" – facilitate individual alienation from direct and genuine encounters. The central problem of an abstract collectivity is its claim to the absolute. In response to this, Buber posits a conception of community that is attuned to spontaneity and the changing conditions of human life.

> "Community should not be made into a principle; it, too, should always satisfy a situation rather than an abstraction. The realization of community, like the realization of any idea, cannot occur once and for all time: always it must be the moment's answer to the moment's question, and nothing more."[34]

Kriegsbuber, in his enthusiasm for the First World War, appealed to a revival of national passions and the re-emergence of national community. He soon realized that community was not an ideal or principle, brought forth by a singular and dramatic event. Genuine community is built upon the interpersonal relationships between its members.[35]

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[33] "We are threatened by a danger greater than all the previous ones: the danger of a gigantic centralization of power covering the whole planet and devouring all free community. Everything depends on not handing the work of planetary management over to the political principle." Buber, Paths in Utopia, pp. 132-33.

[34] Buber, Paths in Utopia, pp. 134.

[35] "In the interests of its vital meaning, therefore, the idea of community must be guarded against all contamination by sentimentality or emotionalism. Community is never a mere attitude of the mind, and if it is *feeling* it is an inner disposition that is felt. Community is the inner disposition of constitution of a life in common, which knows and embraces in itself hard "calculation", adverse "chance", the sudden access of "anxiety". It is community of tribulation and only because of that community of spirit; community of toil and only because of that community of salvation." Buber, Paths in Utopia, p. 134.

The work of community is a continuous process, aligned to the true substance of community life. For Buber, true community and genuine encounter do not drive towards an abstract telos. Genuine encounter and community responds to the changing conditions of human life, in order to cultivate and strengthen the bonds of trust between persons. In "What is Common to All", Buber locates the life of man in the waking world, the actual life between persons. Individuals who turn to grand collectivities for security and stability destroy the possibility for interhuman trust. Collectivities absolve individuals of the "demand of an hour" and shape them into obedient and passive beings that provide tacit consent to the dominance of the political principle.

The political principle assumes the state to be a timeless good, an assumption that justifies a mass consolidation of political power within the hands of a sovereign authority. The security and stability of the mass collective also theoretically reinforces the conditions under which individual liberty can flourish. However, a contradiction arises – at times, individual liberty may have to be violated in order to secure the collective. When alienated from each other, citizens believe that they can only trust in the state for their collective security. However, the sovereign believes it must not trust its citizens, for threats to security lie outside and within its own borders. The modern state, hence, operates under the assumption of necessary distrust. Procedures, mechanisms, laws, and structures are constructed to act as objective arbiters of disputes between citizens and between citizen and state. They are in place to buffer the "inherent" distrust between people. According to Buber, these developments entrench an existential mistrust – which undermines the confidence in human existence.[36] The implications of this development are severe. If people cannot trust themselves in responding to the changing circumstances of human life, that responsibility falls to mechanisms designed to govern, to protect, and - most disconcertingly - to provide political "education" for individual subjects.

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[36] "The existential mistrust is indeed no longer, like the old kind, a mistrust of my fellow-man. It is rather the destruction of confidence in existence in general. That we can no longer carry on a genuine dialogue from one camp to the other is the severest symptom of sickness of present-day man." Buber, "Hope for the Hour", Pointing the Way, p. 224.

> "It belongs to the nature of the collective, to be sure, that it accepts and employs each of its members as this particular individual, constituted and endowed in this particular way. But it cannot recognize anyone in his own being, and therefore independently of his usefulness for the collective. Modern man, in so far as he has surrendered direct and personal mutuality with his fellows, can only exchange an illusory confirmation for the one that is lost."[37]

Buber contends that the surrender of actual life to political mechanisms withers away the possibility of trust between people integral to a truly vibrant and dynamic society. Without interhuman trust, Buber adds, individuals indulge in the illusory confirmation of their being provided by collectivities and neglect the direct and personal mutuality between persons, the site of genuine existential confirmation. Therefore, present within Buber's dialogical thought is an engagement with the problem of modernity. He provides an eloquent account of this problem in relation to the question of man, in his account of philosophical anthropology, "What is Man?"

> "Man is no longer able to master the world which he himself has brought about: it is becoming stronger than he is, it is winning free of him, it confronts him in an almost elemental independence, and he no longer knows the word which could subdue and render harmless the golem he has created."[38]

The modern world, created by the free faculties of the individual subject, has now become capable of enslaving its creators. If human beings live simply for utility and for individuated freedom while ignoring the possibility of genuine relationship, the 'golem' called the modern world will only grow stronger. An absorption into the interests of the individual leads to a decline of trust between people, as Buber points out in his speech "Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace" (1953). "This lack of trust in Being, this incapacity for unreserved intercourse with the other, points to an innermost sickness of the sense of existence."[39] The grand collectivities embody the abstract dreams peddled individual citizens. Coincidentally, the sovereign reinforces his grip on power by appealing to fear of 'violent death' shared by his citizens. The Idea of a Nation or a People – at times

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[37] Buber, "Hope for the Hour", Pointing the Way, p. 225.

[38] Buber, "What is Man?", Between Man and Man, p. 187.

[39] Buber, "Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace", Pointing the Way, p. 238.

held to be the "end all and be all" of modern politics – provides the rationale behind individual consent to the dominance of the political principle and, in the process, legitimates the surplus of political power wielded by sovereign authority.

1.5.2. Thesis Statement

This project intends to recover Buber's significance to modern political problems and political theories. The dominance of the political principle – the increasing politicization of human life – is not simply the product of political machinations; instead, the inability for direct and honest dialogue tacitly justifies the 'political surplus' possessed by sovereign authority. At the heart of this analysis will be an exploration of the reasons why people have become alienated from engaging directly in dialogue, engaging directly in full factuality the world they share, and why the possibility of genuine dialogue is such a rare occurrence. By reading Buber's dialogical thought in the context of modern political problems, this study hopes to explicate the possibilities for genuine dialogue in the shadow of modernity. The following chapters are concerned with Buber's theory of dialogic engagement and its implications for a "genuinely" democratic political life.

Buber interacted with and influenced a diverse range of topics; psychoanalysis, anthropology, theology, environmental ethics, and feminism to name a few. Although these are interesting topics, this study will not delve into any of these topics with any depth, since they are tangential to the main focus of this study. The focus of this study is to examine how Buber's dialogical thought engages with the problems posed to humanity by modern political thought.

1.5.3. Outline of Chapters

Chapter Two of this study will relate Buber's critique of modern individualism to his insights regarding politics. Buber perceives a dangerous parallel between

collectivism and individualism; both are built upon abstractions and foster a neglect of the actual life between people. The chapter will briefly deal with Max Weber's theorizations about democracy and liberal individualism. Buber contends that a revival of genuine communities, not a reliance on individual initiative can revive a truly public life. The inability to approach the world in actuality, Buber argues, exacerbates the dominance of politicization over human life.

Chapter Three will explore the exclusion of genuine dialogue by various features of modern politics. Buber laments the decline of actual life in modern politics primarily because it entails a decline in dialogical engagement. Actual life is not merely a pursuit of power or holding stubbornly onto truth-objects. Actual life unfolds through encounter. In the course of this chapter, Hans-Georg Gadamer's objections to dialectical truth will help to clarify Buber's critique of teleological thought. Buber contends that mutual trust is integral to lived truth – truth brought into being through immediate encounters with others. However, as the chapter will explicate, critics of I-Thou relationships poses objections to this "radical openness". This chapter will provide Buber's, as well as Gadamer's, responses to such criticisms. In the end, the radical openness to relation, for Buber and Gadamer, are integral to human becoming, hence integral to the transformative potential of dialogue.

Chapter Four will engage with Buber's objections to the domination of the 'political principle' on human life. The 'political principle' posits that the modern state tries to displace any space for dialogue by defining the lives of its subjects as contingent on its pre-eminent place of power. Buber posits that social spontaneity provides space for dialogue, while a dominant political principle leaves space only for monologue. This chapter will explicate Buber's response to Carl Schmitt's account of sovereignty. Buber's contention is that Schmitt responds to an illusory situation, coloured by a dominant political principle, which assumes that human distrust is innate and requires political power to buffer the negative affects. As this chapter will show, this presumption leads to the totalitarian state, the most concentrated expression of impersonal political power. Buber concludes that it is only the human voice is willing to speak courageously

to the mass, to the crowd, seeks to revive the personal immediacy between people. It is in speaking the genuine word, I-Thou, that the illusions of It-world causality can be challenged.

As a concluding note to this introductory chapter, the hazards of political disengagement are clear. The unthinking mass is only a product of alienation, of an inability to directly address fellow people. Mutual distrust results from the valuation of the individual as the basic element of modern politics. If genuine relationships are relegated to a peripheral place, dismissed as "naïve" and impractical, the arrogance of the sovereign individual grows unabated. The task of persons in addressing politics, for Buber, is engagement – the address of fellow persons as human beings, reviving the possibility of genuine relationships between people, and approaching the world in its actuality, freed from the grip of political illusion.

Chapter 2: Contra Individuation and Collectivism: Buber's concept of community

2.1. Introduction

> "Today host upon host of men have everywhere sunk into the slavery of collectives, and each collective is the supreme authority for its own slaves...this is true, not only for the totalitarian countries, but also for the parties and party-like groups in so-called democracies. (1939)"[40]

A politics built upon individual freedoms can justify the monopolization of political power by the state as necessary, since the state claims to secure the right for its citizens to legitimately exist as individuals. The 'political' demands of a state take precedent over social relationships. And as a result, the majority of human beings come to accept politics as a phenomenon detached from the everyday, something that requires the expertise of professionals and the unique qualities of leadership. Martin Buber contends that the everyday, including the direct and personal encounters between persons, should not be precluded from an adequate understanding of politics. He contends that genuine relationships between persons arise through direct and mutual encounters and it is these interhuman encounters that allow people to respond to the changing conditions of an actual world. In his estimation, a dominant political principle – the presumption that the modern state must possess a surplus of political power to legislate and act on behalf of individual citizens – effaces social spontaneity and, by extension, narrows the space for genuine dialogical relationships. This chapter will explore Buber's objections to the pre-eminent place of the individual subject in modern political thought. The first part will relate Buber's ideas about I-Thou and I-It to his response to the modern knowing subject. An immersion into the It-world, he warns, leads to a hazardous neglect of direct and mutual interhuman relationships.

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[40] Buber, "The Education of Character", Between Man and Man, p. 131.

The second part of this chapter will relate Buber's discussions regarding I-It and I-Thou to the practice of representative democracy. First, he believes a politics that reduces citizens to a part of a voting modality effaces the immediacy between persons and, by proxy, undermines the grounds for direct and mutual relationships. Although this portion of the study will touch upon Weber's thoughts on democracy, it will refrain from expanding into a larger discussion about his work. Second, the definition of community as the nation-state or the Nation – something very central to plebiscitary democracy – is, according to Buber, detrimental to the development of genuine communities. A collective founded upon an abstract cause, such as the Nation or the People, effaces the immediacy of genuine relationships. Buber, hence, perceives a hazardous parallel between collectivism and individualism; both are built upon abstractions, foster individual and collective myopia, and neglect the actual life between people.

In short, the convergence of these two phenomena prioritizes a collective Cause or individual interests over direct and mutual relationships. Rather than engaging the world in its presentness, a dominant political principle enables individuals to indulge in an illusory confirmation of being, through the righteousness of the collective Cause, or the defense of an abstract Freedom. Hence, as this chapter will articulate, Buber believes that collectivism and individualism are built upon existential distrust. A collective distrust in human capacities to address the changing existent conditions of humanity entrenches the dominant political principle in society – in the context of the modern state this means that the state protects the grand collective, and, at the same time, secures the Freedom enjoyed by individuals. Buber's point, however, is that in the absence of interhuman trust, individual liberty may only be illusory. Freedom, for Buber, is not a reified object, a universal program, or a theorem. Freedom comes about through the spontaneous quality I-Thou relationships.[41] And, as this chapter will illustrate, direct and mutual encounters is the site where human life meets freedom. And it is through the work of dialogue that political freedom is actualized in human life.

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[41] "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, fate…looks like grace itself." Buber, I and Thou, p. 102.

2.2. Buber contra modern individualism and collectivism: Dialogical engagement and the need for presentness

2.2.1. The rejection of false absolutes and radical individuation

> "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 at home to what is most personal."[42]

Buber posits that genuine community can arise from the encounters between people. The above quote from I and Thou demonstrates how Buber chooses neither the nation-state nor the sovereign individual as a site for genuine engagement and creativity. If "mass politics" is derived from appeals to feeling and sentimentality, it fails to address the concrete being between people. Feelings are what occur "in them", conducive to a longing for abstract "good" rather than facilitating response to the existent condition shared with others. Deeply affected by the immediate and unsentimental relationships his father had with nature and with his social peers, Buber contends that actual life between people cannot come from mere feeling alone. To reiterate, his work following the First World War and the first edition of I and Thou (1923) reflects a turn away from a previous belief that atavistic or neo-romantic sources of "unity" could spawn genuine communities. In short, atavistic dreams allow individuals to engage in a false self-confirmation through the pursuit of a return to an idyllic past or the fulfillment of a teleological movement towards a utopian future. It is this neglect of presentness that raises concerns for Buber. Once again, it would be erroneous to simply label Buber a "mystic". His concern, as is clarified in his work time and time again, is with the actual life between people; a turn to abstract causes, he notes, would be patently hazardous to the interhuman encounters.

> False absolutes rule over the soul, which is no longer able to put them to flight through the image of the true. Everywhere, over the whole surface of the

[42] Buber, I and Thou, p. 94.

> human world – in the East and in the West, from the left and from the right, they pierce the unhindered through the level of the ethical and demand of you "the sacrifice."[43]

In regimes such as the former Soviet Union and the United States – the two "camps" in the Cold War, which Buber addresses directly and indirectly in his later work, such as his address in 1952 at Carnegie Hall entitled "Hope for this Hour", false absolutes often found and unite a grand collective of individuals.[44] If individuals subscribe to the "truths" inherent within these false absolutes, the central relationship would be one between individuals and the state, and, as Buber intimates in the above quotation, such a "relationship" would neither be mutual or affirmative. In other words, a dominant political principle reigning over human lives may overwhelm the immediate and spontaneous encounters between people, hence narrowing the space for genuine dialogue and, by extension, the space for genuine action. Buber's own approach, which he characterizes as navigating a narrow ridge, is a rejection of false absolutes and a radical relativism, a nihilistic belief that meaning lies in living "for oneself". Buber's central criticism of Sartre, for example, is that the latter places man (as individual) as a divine figure who replaces Nietzsche's deceased God.[45] Let us not go into a tangential discussion about Sartre and Buber on theistic and philosophy questions. Rather, let us return to Buber's critique of individualism and its relevance to his ideas about political engagement in the next section.

2.2.2. It-world causality and the modern knowing subject – Buber on the epistemological foundations of the modern individual

Martin Buber postulates that a person encounters the world with a two-fold attitude. This attitude is in accordance with the basic words one can speak: I-Thou and I-It. When one says I-It, one remains in the world of experience; and when one says I-

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[43] Buber, "On the Suspension of the Ethical", Eclipse of God. (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 1998), pp. 119-20.

[44] Buber, "Hope for this Hour", Pointing the Way, pp. 220-229.

[45] Martin Buber. "Religion and Modern Thinking", Eclipse of God, pp. 65-70.

Thou, one enters into the world of relation.[46] There are three spheres in which relations arise: life with nature, life with human beings, and life with spiritual beings.[47] Actual life is in encounter with other beings. Buber, however, does not demonize the It-world. For Buber, the basic relation of man to the It-world leads towards the "preservation, alleviation, and equipment of human life"[48]. He understands the necessity of the It-world, but warns against immersing oneself exclusively into realm of the It-world. Those who immerse themselves in the It-world, who see others as objects and believe that others reciprocate this sentiment in kind, become, in Buber's words, "more and more an individual without becoming more and more human."[49] Actual human life is in encounter; and without presentness, individuals remain incomplete beings.

The I of I-It, or the 'experiencing I', is necessary, because man must experience the world in order to address Thou. This 'experiencing I' cannot be regarded as evil, because without it man cannot be sustained in life. The danger of It-world experience is individual immersion into It-world causality, approaching the world and others for instrumental use and experience. But, it should be pointed out that Buber does not advocate a purely spiritual existence either. As Friedman correctly points out, the I-Thou is not an unqualified good, since its lack of measure, continuity, and order threatens actual human life.[50] In other words, I-Thou does not and cannot remove man permanently from the world of experience, but simply helps actualize his life in it. Buber does not believe that mystical detachment from the known world can confirm human existence.[51] Hence, an absolute valuation of either the I-It or the I-Thou to the preclusion of the other may lead towards isolation and a noetic state of incompleteness. Although

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[46] Buber, I and Thou, p. 53.

[47] Buber, I and Thou, pp. 56-57.

[48] "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…" Buber, I and Thou, p. 88.

[49] Buber, "Appendix", The Knowledge of Man, p. 174.

[50] Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue. (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 60

[51] This is why Buber, in "What is Common to All", objects to the prioritization of an individualized "dream world" in Hindu and Taoist traditions above the common "waking" world and refutes Aldous Huxley's claim that a mesculin trance allows an individual to transcend selfhood and ephemeral world. Buber, "What is Common to All", The Knowledge of Man, pp. 81-85, 89-92.

the I of I-It and the I of I-Thou are different, both are necessary to an actual life between persons.

The differentiation Buber makes between these two 'I's can be provided further explication. The 'severed I' is the individual immersed in experience or purely spiritual contemplation and the 'engaged I' is the person open to relationship with others and the world. The 'severed I' is burdened with conceit; specifically the belief the individual can confirm itself in monologue. In contrast, the 'engaged I' has no such conceit; while open to I-Thou relationships, this 'I' embraces an invariable return to the It-world of experience, changed by the mutual encounter. The 'severed I' precludes either the realm of experience or the realm of spirit in favour of the other and, hence, keep human beings as individuals by neglecting or obscuring the potential for relationship.

The particular uniqueness of interlocutors engaged in dialogue is not absorbed into a single unity through I-Thou relationship. Rather, as Buber notes, uniqueness is affirmed through relationship.[52] In stepping into dialogical relationship, one is not immersed into a unity. The relationship is a passing encounter that changes the way participants live in the world, i.e., destabilizing a stagnant habit of using and applying experience for purely instrumental ends. Hence, the 'severed I' is different from the 'experiencing I'. They are not one in the same. The 'experiencing I' is necessary, because man must experience the world in order to provide for his life. However, the 'experiencing I' can stagnate into a 'severed I', and be left without the possibility of I-Thou relationship. The I of I-It and the I of I-Thou have the potential to become engaged with experience and spirit or severed from relationship when immersed solely in its respective realm. Therefore, the 'severed I' is the individual lost in causality. The

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[52] "What the genuine saying of 'Thou' to the other in the reality of the common existence basically means – namely, the affirmation of the primally deep otherness of the other, the affirmation of his otherness which is accepted and loved by me…" Buber, "What is Common to All", The Knowledge of Man, p. 86. Maurice Friedman provides some elucidation to Buber's argument. "I-Thou is the world of relation and togetherness, each of the members of the relation really remains himself, and that means really different from the other." Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue. (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 61.

'engaged I' acknowledges the necessity of experience and relationship, helping to develop mutual personhood between interlocutors of dialogue.

An immersion into the It-world is predicated on an epistemological valuation of the individual, or modern sovereign subject. Buber, as Friedman indicates, attempts to undercut this epistemological move with his "I-Thou philosophy".[53] "The I-Thou relation is a direct knowing which gives one neither knowledge about the Thou over and against one nor about oneself as an objective entity apart from this relationship," Friedman writes.[54] But the modern knowing subject, attributable to the Descartes' abstraction of the subject into an isolated consciousness and Kant's epistemology, is monological, insofar as it removes reality into the knowing subject.[55] The self-determining individual prominent in modern liberalism is an elaboration on this epistemological move. Hence, the categorical basis of Kant's epistemology is what Buber is responding to when he contends that It-world experience is "in them".

In the essay "What is Man?"(1938), Buber's articulation of his philosophical anthology, he writes, "Man is comprehended only in the world, the world is not comprehended in him."[56] He posits that experience taken simply as the production and use of It-world conceptual knowledge leads to the immersion of the knowing subject into It-world causality. This is a point he makes in I and Thou. An act of knowledge that is genuine is active between people engaged in relationship.[57] This does not mean that Buber precludes any space for experience. It is when such experiences are ossified and locked into It-world conceptual knowledge by the modern knowing subject do they

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[53] Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue. (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 163.

[54] Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue, pp. 165 – 66.

[55] "Buber avoids the pitfalls of the idealist who removes reality into the knowing subject, of Descartes who abstracts the subject into isolated consciousness, and of Kant who asserts that we cannot know reality but only the categories of our thought." Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue, pp. 163-64.

[56] Buber, "What is Man?", Between Man and Man, p. 151.

[57] Buber, I and Thou, p. 91.

become dangerous and encroach upon the possibility of the I-Thou.[58] Hence, the epistemological foundation of the modern subject brings the world into the individual, and consequently, the individual believes itself to be essential and relations with others and the world as extraneous to the task of freedom – since the task of freedom, for the individual enslaved to the It-world, is expressed within the self-determining individual. Freedom, however, is not a given good or something transferable between state and citizen. In his essay "Education" (1925), published in his volume Between Man and Man, he writes, "It is the nature of freedom to provide the place, but not the foundation as well, on which true life is raised."[59] Freedom, according to Buber, is only an empty abstraction without genuine interhuman relationships. For Buber, freedom cannot be disjoined from the actual life between persons; without the possibility of genuine encounter, it remains an abstract object that merely appeases the individual soul.

2.2.3. I-Thou relationship and freedom with the modern context

Buber, by relating the possibility of politics to interhuman relationships, contends that freedom is not disjoined from the work of dialogue. In the modern context, John Stuart Mill's purported quip that a citizen is free only every few years may be an apt description of the relationship between freedom and politics in representative democracies. If politics could at best be a duty to vote every five years or a burden for elected officials to carry out on behalf of free citizens, how does "freedom" apply to the political life of citizens? Freedom, as Hannah Arendt contended, has been separated from politics in the modern age.[60] Mutual openness allows beings that share in existence to make present the persons they turn to in direct encounter. Without this turn to the

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[58] "It is only when the symbolic character of subject-object knowledge is forgotten or remains undiscovered (as is often the case) that his 'knowledge' ceases to point back toward the reality of direct dialogical knowing and becomes instead an obstruction to it." Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue, p. 166.

[59] Buber, "Education", Between Man and Man, p. 107.

[60] "Here freedom is not even the non-political aim of politics, but a marginal phenomenon – which somehow forms the boundary government should not overstep unless *life itself and its immediate interests and necessities are at stake.* Thus not only we, who have reasons of our own to distrust politics for the sake of freedom, but the entire modern age has separated freedom and politics." Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom?", The Portable Hannah Arendt. Peter Baehr, ed. (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 444.

other – most basic to dialogical thought[61], beings are left without presentness, unconfirmed in existence and left as objects to be experienced – and possibly used. Buber would add that the pursuit of material and immaterial interests as *individuals* is not freedom, but rather, slavery to the It-world. Because, to reiterate, leaving people simply as individuals – immersed in solipsistic affirmation vis á vis objects in the world – separates them from presentness, which, according to Buber's philosophical anthropology, arises only in the essential relation between people. "It is through this making present that we grasp another as a self, that is, as a being whose distance from him and whose particular experience I can make present," Maurice Friedman explains.[62] Individuals immersed in It-world experiences are left without presentness, and, according to Buber, left as incomplete beings. In the midst of It-world causality, the world and others, left existentially incomplete in the absence of presentness, may be employed as tools for the exercise and enhancement of individual self-determination. If freedom is held up as an abstract collective value, it merely facilitates individual pursuits of happiness, rather than being the substance of genuine interhuman encounters. This point will be explored in further detail in a later chapter, in a discussion about this point in Hobbes. But, let us return to the discussion at hand.

Buber's main criticism of a politics which posits freedom in the abstract, i.e., disjoining it from the ontological presentness actualized in interhuman encounter, is that it facilitates mass immersion into It-world causality, obstructing a personal and essential relationship with presentness and emboldening the It-world to grow beyond human capabilities – namely the capability to control it. Maurice Friedman provides a cogent account of this in his book Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue:

> "Only I-Thou gives meaning to the world of It, for I-Thou is an end which is not reached in time but is there from the start, originating and carrying-through. The

[61] "The basic movement off the life of dialogue is the turning towards the other…you look at someone and address him you turn to him, of course with body, but also in the requisite measure with the soul, in that you direct your attention to him." Buber, "Dialogue," Between Man and Man, p. 25.

[62] Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber and the Eternal. (New York: Human Sciences Press, Inc., 1986), p. 55.

> free man's will and attainment of his goal need not be united by a means, for in I-Thou the means and end are one."[63]

I-Thou, however, is not a mystical moment of foundation for an ossified state of affairs. I-Thou does not create an atemporal formation that demands human deformation. I-Thou is a spontaneous and fleeting relation between people that is independent of causality and is a living relation most central to life – a relation that allows persons to make present a world shared through genuine encounters. This relation is most fundamental to a truly democratic society, because it connects freedom to the existential work of interlocutors engaged in direct and mutual encounters. In modern liberal democracies, freedom is often perceived as a given right; hence it is an objective good rather than the work of relation. Accordingly, liberal democracy makes a participatory political life, apart from the minimum act of voting, which the individual has the option to opt-out of[64], extraneous to a consumption of freedom. Freedom is not to be celebrated as an eternal good or deified object. For Buber, political freedom is actualized through the direct and immediate togetherness of people, in response to a changing existent condition. Regrettably, as Arendt alludes to, political freedom is often reduced simply to a right to vote – leaving the ballot as the central means to political "action". What Buber articulates is a rather radical view of democracy, which calls for a re-thinking of what freedom entails within the modern context.

As the next section will demonstrate, Buber places an emphasis on direct and immediate relationships within genuine communities, precisely because a dominant political principle facilitates individual immersion into collective causes. In short, Buber believes the dominance of the political principle fosters a reliance on modern institutions and those who lead them for political action, rendering relationships within and between communities "apolitical". A conception of politics limited to the machinations of the state and those who lead it is parochial and myopic. Once again, this point will be explored in

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[63] Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue, p. 67.

[64] "The dogma of running down offers you only one choice as you face its game: to observe the rules or drop out." Buber, I and Thou, p. 106.

further depth in a later chapter. In responding to the dominance of the political principle over the mass of humanity, Buber stands firmly against this growing disempowerment of citizens in modern politics.

2.3. Making Present Democracy: Collectivism and its relationship to the dominant political principle

> "In the face of the leveling, inescapable rule of bureaucracy, which first brought the modern concept of the 'citizen of the state' into being, the ballot slip is the only instrument of power which is at all capable of giving the people who are subject to bureaucratic rule a minimal right of co-determination in the affairs of the community for which they are obliged to give their lives."[65]

Max Weber provides an apt description of modern liberal democracy and its rationale. Weber, who perceives the increase of rational and bureaucratic mechanisms over the whole of society as being inescapable[66], appreciates representative politics as the best possible way for civilians to participate in politics, for the reason that the individual citizen can select and displace political leaders, strengthening the civil relationship between citizen and state as well as reinforcing the unity of the nation-state itself. Like Buber, Weber is concerned about the increasingly repressive authority rational and bureaucratic structures exert over the lives of human beings; hence, both thinkers have some common ground.[67] The responses each provide to the problem, however, reveal the divergences between the two. Before delving any further into Buber's response to the problem, let us take a brief look at Weber's ideas about the place of the self-determining individual in modern politics,

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[65] Weber, "Suffrage and Democracy in Germany", Weber: Political Writings. Lassman, Peter and Ronald Speirs, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 105-06.

[66] "Bureaucracy is, however, distinguished from other historical bearers of the modern, rational way of order life by the fact of its far greater *inescapability*." Weber, "Parliament and Government in Germany", in Weber: Political Writings, p. 156.

[67] Friedman notes that Weber and Buber were personal friends in the time leading up to and during the First World War, adding that they were especially close during the years 1916-1918. Although Friedman does not continue to explicate the details of this friendship, it is safe to assume that the association between the two was facilitated by a common acquaintance, Georg Simmel – Buber's teacher and mentor, as well as a friend and frequent collaborator of Weber's. An uneasiness about the increasing influence of technology over human lives can be seen as a common theme in the work of many of Buber's contemporaries. Friedman, Martin Buber's Life and Work, p. 232.

and its relevance to the present discussion about democracy. This brief look at Weber will help substantiate Buber's objections to individualism and collectivism, as well as providing further explication for Buber's response to the political principle. Hence, section 2.3 will use specific insights in Weber's work to clarify concepts put forth by Buber.

2.3.1. A Nation of Masters – Weber's democratic theory

In "Suffrage and Democracy in Germany", an article Weber wrote in 1917 advocating the democratization of a post-war Germany, he admits that the direct participation of the masses in political affairs would be unfeasible. However, Weber adds, the participation of citizens in free and equal elections is integral to holding off the glacial advance of bureaucratization. "There are two choices," he writes, "either the mass of citizens is left without freedom or rights in a bureaucratic, 'authoritarian state'…or citizens are integrated into the state by making them its *co-rulers*. A *nation of masters* (*Herrenvolk*) – and only such a nation can and may engage in 'world politics' – has *no* choice in this matter."[68] As mentioned previously in this chapter, the political duties of a citizen, within the modern state, are primarily expressed through the casting of a ballot, the important symbolic gesture of being co-rulers of the nation-state. Weber contends that equal voting rights mean that individuals are recognized "purely and simply *as a citizen*" – counterbalancing the inevitable inequalities that arise in society.[69] Equal 'numbers suffrage', he adds, expresses the political unity of a nation.[70] Hence, he raises the central relationship between citizen and state – namely that the latter provides the

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[68] Weber, "Suffrage and Democracy in Germany", Weber: Political Writings, p. 129.

[69] "Its intended meaning and purpose (*Sinn*) is to create a certain counterbalance to the social *inequalities* which are *neither* rooted in natural differences nor created by natural qualities but are produced, rather, by social conditions…and above all, inevitably, by the purse." Weber, "Suffrage and Democracy in Germany", Weber: Political Writings, p. 103.

[70] "This expresses the political unity of the nation (*Staatsvolk)* rather than the dividing lines separating the various spheres of life." Weber, "Suffrage and Democracy in Germany," Weber: Political Writings, p. 103.

grounds for individual liberty: physical security and stable society.[71] The unity of the larger community, i.e. nation-state, provides the grounds upon which individual freedom can flourish.[72] The primary site for individual initiative, at least for those with a calling for it, is the competitive struggle for positions of leadership.[73]

The mass of people, Weber notes, cannot institute a 'rule by the street' through equal suffrage under responsible leadership.[74] The majority of citizens, hence, should be lead by exceptional and responsible individuals, who rise to positions of leadership through free contestations. Weber's ideas about leadership are explored at length in his famous article, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics" (1919), wherein he explains his ethic of conviction and responsibility.[75] Despite these two ethics, he concedes that leaders must not be constrained by ordinary ethical norms – since they are responsible for responding appropriately to changing political conditions.[76] They are responsible for the best interests of the nation-state they lead.

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[71] "Considered purely in terms of national politics, however, the positive argument for equal suffrage consists in the fact that it is closely related to the equality of certain *fates* which the modern state as such creates. People are 'equal' before death. They are approximately equal in the most elementary requirements of physical existence...the modern state offers all its citizens in a truly lasting and undoubted way: sheer physical security and the minimum for subsistence, but also the battlefield on which to die." Weber, "Suffrage and Democracy in Germany," Weber: Political Writings, p. 103.

[72] Wolfgang Mommsen, a noted Weber scholar, provides a serviceable description of his project, "Weber adhered to the fundamental principles of liberalism which hold sacrosanct the dignity of the individual and aspire to see society organized in such a way that all individuals may preserve a maximum of free initiative." Wolfgang Mommsen, "Rationalization and Myth in Weber's Thought", The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 27.

[73] "Weber viewed the existence of a highly pluralistic social structure as an essential element of a liberal order, one which would permit a maximum of free space where political parties, groups and interest organizations could freely contest their particular ideal or material interests." Mommsen, "Rationalization and Myth in Weber's Thought", The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber, p. 29.

[74] "*Only* the orderly *leadership* of the masses by responsible politicians is at all capable of breaking *unregulated* rule by the street and leadership by chance demagogues." Weber, "Suffrage and Democracy in Germany," Weber: Political Writings p. 125.

[75] Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics", Weber: Political Writings pp. 359-69.

[76] "No ethics in the world can get round the fact that the achievement of 'good' ends is in many cases tied to the necessity of employing morally suspect or at least morally dangerous means, and that one must reckon with the possibility or even likelihood of evil side-effects. Nor can any ethic in the world determine when and to what extent the ethically good end 'sanctifies' the ethically dangerous means and side-effects." The implication is that the leader cannot rely on conventional ethical norms in making political decisions, for that would work to the detriment of the nation-state. Weber very much follows Machiavelli's call for bold sureness in leadership, referring to Machiavelli's stories in his *Florentine Histories* where one of his heroes

The work of politics, according to Weber, is left to those who have a calling for it – those who possess uncommon gifts for leadership and who can inspire confidence among citizens.[77] In the absence of responsible leadership, Weber contends bureaucratization would overwhelm human society, leading to the rise of authoritarian or technocratic regimes. And Weber, in keeping with Kant's "obey and argue as much as you want" dictum, proposes that citizens obey rulers who are bearers of legitimate force, in order to secure the grounds upon which individual initiative can flourish.[78] Hence, the primary political role of citizens is to provide legitimation for leadership, leaving the activity of politics to be done by the responsible politician. The select individuals who achieve power occupy the primary role in politics.

2.3.2. Community and Leadership: An imbalanced reliance on individual initiative

As noted earlier in this chapter, the dominance of state power over immediate interhuman relationships stems from a parochial definition of politics in the modern context. Buber focuses on the essentiality of relation – namely to man and to the world – in order to suggest that modern institutions cannot be relied upon to actualize human existence; that task, as Buber notes, is done through direct and immediate encounters. Weber contends that a politics of 'socialism without parliament' would lead to *passive democratization.*[79] However, Buber, unlike his close friend Gustav Landauer, does not fit the label of an anarchist-socialist. Although he advocates a more balanced relationship between the political principle and social spontaneity, he certainly does not call for the

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praised "those citizens who placed the greatness of their native city above the salvation of their souls." Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics", Weber: Political Writings p. 360, 363.

[77] Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics", Weber: Political Writings p. 318.

[78] "All organized rule which demands continuous administration requires on the one hand that human action should rest on a disposition to obey those rulers (Herren) who claim to be the bearers of legitimate force, and on the other that, thanks to his obedience, the latter should have at their command the material resources necessary to exercise physical force if circumstances should demand it." Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics", Weber: Political Writings, p. 313.

[79] Weber, "Parliament and Government in Germany", Weber: Political Writings, p. 222.

abolition of political institutions. As noted earlier, Buber, after his *Kriegsbuber* phase, abandons atavism and does not call for a return to innocent origins or an idyllic past; such yearnings would undermine presentness. Indeed, he acknowledges that institutions have an important role to play in human lives, as long as institutionalization does not dominate the social sphere, where direct and personal encounters can unfold.[80] In short, the socialist elements in Buber's thought cannot be equated with anarchism.[81] Although he shares with Weber a concern about the proliferation of bureaucratic structures, Buber is also concerned about the rise of a society reliant upon the exceptional achievements of select individuals to thaw the glacial hold of 'disenchantment'.

> "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 position, common causality, which hitherto was never able to disturb the spiritual conception of the cosmos, grows into an oppressive and crushing doom."[82]

The free contestation for power, in Weber's mind, preserves individual freedom; insofar as it allows individual citizens to be co-rulers through free elections and provides the opportunity for exceptional individuals - those who have a vocation for politics - to rise above 'everyday existence' and affect the fate of their nation-state.[83] Those without a calling for politics and who lack the distinctive charismatic and extraordinary qualities of leadership are better done to "cultivate plain and simple brotherliness with other individuals, and, for the rest, to have work soberly at their daily tasks".[84] Although Buber,

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[80] Buber, I and Thou, pp. 93-95.

[81] In Paths in Utopia, Buber provides analyses of Kroptokin and Bakunin – two prominent thinkers aligned to anarcho-syndicalism. Near the end of the book, Buber provides his readers a clear position. "Just as I do not believe in Marx's "gestation" of the new form, so I do not believe either in Bakunin's virgin-birth from the womb of Revolution. But I do believe in the meeting of idea and fate in the creative hour." Buber, Paths in Utopia, p. 138.

[82] Buber, I and Thou, p. 101.

[83] "The professional politician can have a sense of rising above everyday existence, even in what is formally a modest position, through knowing that he exercises influence on people, shares power over them, but above all from the knowledge that holds in his hands some vital strand of historically important events." Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics", Weber: Political Writings, p. 352.

[84] Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics," Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics", Weber: Political Writings, p. 369.

to a degree, shares Weber's desire stave off the growth of 'disenchantment', he would contend that situating political liberty exclusively to the actions of individuals, whether exemplary or plebeian, entrenches the grip of the political principle over the whole of a society. A major defect of modern politics lies in the readiness of individuals to allow themselves to be represented – hence shirking a personal responsibility for addressing a common existent condition in direct mutuality with fellow beings.[85] By absolving themselves of this personal responsibility for life and world, individuals passively allow the accumulation of political power in the hands of leadership, who ostensibly wield it in the best interests of the collectivity.[86]

In Buber's "Society and the State", this imbalance of power between state and citizen is described as 'political surplus'. It is justified by the state's claim that such a surplus is necessary for responding to internal and external crises, hence protecting the very existence of the grand collective to which individuals belong.[87] This problem will be explored at length in Chapter 4. This accumulation of power in the hands of a central – or sovereign – authority exacerbate a disengagement of citizens from political and social life, leaving the task of engaging an existential (human) condition to those individuals most 'qualified' to be politicians. Hence, an increasingly parochial definition of politics contributes to the dominance of the political principle over society.

In short, Buber objects to this imbalanced reliance on individual leadership. For him, the role of citizens must be something more than legitimating leaders and allowing them to act on behalf of the populace. Rather than allowing themselves to be represented by leaders, Buber calls on citizens to take an active role in political life, to engage in dialogue with members within and outside of their communities.

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[85] "Because of their absorption by the collective, something important and irreplaceable is lost to them – personal responsibility for life and the world. These young people, it is true, do not yet realize their blind devotion to the collective, e.g. to a party, was not a genuine act of their personal life; they do not realize that it sprang, rather, from the fear of being left, in this age of confusion, to rely on themselves…" Buber, "The Education of Character", Between Man and Man, pp. 136-37.

[86] Buber, Paths in Utopia, p. 133.

[87] Buber, "Society and the State", Pointing the Way, p. 174.

2.3.3. The dominant political principle and the decline of interhuman trust

While Weber believes that political action is the product of responsible political leadership – i.e. a leader can inspire those within a political organization or fellow citizens within a nation-state to follow the direction he provides, Buber regards simple immediacy and togetherness as the most effective form of action.[88] If belonging to a nation-state were to be the only form of "community", representative democracy would be left as a lone method for citizen participation, insofar as it politically unifies the collectivity while providing an outlet for individual initiative. However, it is readily evident that Buber's work believes these grand collective of individuals deprive human persons of the direct and personal relationships.[89] A nation itself is not community or a Commonwealth[90], until it is a "community of communities".[91] By responding to the pitfalls of collectivism, Buber is also positing a critique of modern individualism.

> "If individualism understands only a part of man, collectivism understands man as a part: neither advances to the wholeness of man, to man as a whole. Individualism sees mean only in relation to himself, but collectivism does not see man at all, it sees only "society"."[92]

By returning to Buber's concept of the narrow ridge, we can understand the philosophical insight he conveys in this quotation. Since human confirmation cannot be done via objects external to human relationships, neither individualism nor collectivism

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[88] "Simple immediacy, writes Buber, is the most effective form of action. More powerful and more holy than all writing is the presence of a man who is simply and directly there. Productivity is only true existence when it takes root in the immediacy of a lived life." Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue, p. 51.

[89] "In the monstrous confusion of modern life, only thinly disguised by the reliable functioning of the economic and State-apparatus, the individual clings desperately to the collectivity. The little society in which he was embedded cannot help him; only the great collectivities, so he thinks, can do that, and he is all too willing to let himself be deprived of personal responsibility: he only wants to obey." Buber, Paths in Utopia, p. 132.

[90] Buber, Paths in Utopia, pp. 136-37.

[91] Buber, Paths in Utopia, p. 136.

[92] Buber, "What is Man?", Between Man and Man, p. 237.

provides spaces for direct and human encounters to affect an understanding of the human world. Hence, in the absence of genuine and direct interhuman encounters, individualism and collectivism provide false ontological confirmation, leaving individuals to find meaning in grand and abstract causes. And as touched upon earlier in this chapter, the individual existing simply as an individual deprives itself and others of presentness, remaining ontologically incomplete as objects employable for abstract causes or individual gratification.

> "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."[93]

There is no presentness for the individual who deforms itself to accommodate a world of objects. "Only in partnership," Buber writes, "can any being be perceived as an existing whole."[94] Hence, to define oneself as part of a collectivity, i.e. Nation or Party or Cause, is a nominal affirmation of self-being and a neglect of a being-with-others that makes present and actualize the life between human beings and the world.

Although Weber's ideas about representative democracy attempt to preserve individual freedom against the oncoming crush of rational structures, he reinforces the assumption that distrust between individuals is the norm. And where trust is possible, which according to Weber is in "simple and plain brotherliness", it is assumed such relationships must be clinically separated from the properly 'political' business conducted by a qualified individual or qualified group of individuals. The political role of citizens is either done by casting a ballot or participating in political parties. The first is done to re-affirm "co-rulership" and reinforce a collective trust in the idea of the Nation by entrusting leader(s) to represent the interests of the people. And in the second case, members of a political party or organization place trust in the cause or aim that the collective is dedicated

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[93] Buber, I and Thou. p. 103.

[94] Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman", The Knowledge of Man, p. 65.

to. In both circumstances, interhuman trust stands extraneous to the crucial matter of institutional trust – commitment and allegiance to the respective collectivity. For Weber, if institutional trust, especially the trust in leadership, breaks down, society itself would collapse; hence, social, or what Buber calls interhuman, trust would not be possible. In short, for Weber, interhuman trust is contingent on the proper functioning of institutions, specifically its ability to provide order and stability.

This prioritization of institutional trust over interhuman trust is central to Buber's objections about a dominant political principle. Although the charismatic basis for leadership that Weber presents is more akin to Moses than Hitler[95], a leader is responsible to the people primarily through his responsibility to the collective cause.[96] Even though his insights about the calamitous pitfalls of vanity – enjoying "power for its own sake"[97] – would find a sympathetic ear in Buber, Weber's contentions render interhuman trust inconsequential. "Trust" is invested in the leader and the administrative structure that affords leadership the opportunity to lead when working towards a galvanizing cause or idea. A responsible politician of conviction must be, in a very simple sense of the word, a hero – a heroic political prophet who provides vision and direction for the nation-state.[98] And if trust is defined via a relationship to cause and to the state that claims to pursue it, the possibility of interhuman trust, integral to genuine encounter, is subverted by the dominant political principle. Without the possibility of interhuman trust, as Buber alludes to in "Hope for this Hour", the world is divided into camps in order to sustain politics to the detriment of actual life between people.

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[95] "Sociology as Max Weber understood it enabled him to make a distinction in kind between the charisma of Moses than that of Hitler." Buber, "Religion and Modern Thinking", Eclipse of God, p. 78.

[96] "Simply to feel passion, however genuinely, is not sufficient to make a politician unless, in the form of service to a 'cause', *responsibility* for that cause becomes the decisive lode-star of all action." Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics", Weber: Political Writings, p. 353.

[97] Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics", Weber: Political Writings, p. 354.

[98] Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics", Weber: Political Writings, p. 369.

2.3.4. Real Conflict and Political Illusion: Buber's call for a politics of de-politicization

In 1925, Buber became an active member of the German chapter of *Brith Shalom* (The Peace Association), which means literally, the Covenant of Peace, an organization dedicated to cultivating mutual relations between Arabs and Jews in Palestine.[99] Buber would later play an integral role in the League for Jewish-Arab Rapprochement and Cooperation, and headed the creation of an associated party, *Ichud* (Union), established in August of 1942.[100] Buber's vision for Arab-Jewish relations in the Middle East was the creation of a bi-national state, consisting of direct relationships between Jewish and Arab communities. This vision, however, was not shared by the majority of Jewish Israelis who believed the central aim was simply the defense and security of the Jewish "homeland" from the supposedly imminent Arab threats. Buber, as it turned out, was tragically prescient in his warnings about the aggressive political tactics adopted by the Israeli government, most clearly expressed in his debates with David Ben-Gurion, who eventually would be named the first Prime Minister of the state of Israel.[101] Ben-Gurion and other political leaders, as Jewish historian Laurence Silberstein notes, "elevated the

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[99] From a 1925 document produced by the group, it states its object. "The object of the Association is to arrive at an understanding between Jews and Arabs as to the form of their mutual social relations in Palestine on the basis of absolute political equality of two culturally autonomous peoples, and to determine the lines of their co-operation for the development of their country." And as Mendes-Flohr notes, the bi-national state the group had in mind, at least at this stage, "was a *modus vivendi*" between Zionism and Palestinian Arab nationalism within the existing political framework of the 1920 British Mandate (which, in short, established the goal of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, elaborating upon the 1917 Balfour Declaration that initially set out this aim). Hence, according to Mendes-Flohr, "Birth Shalom envisioned as the most reasonable solution to the problem of Palestine a constitutional agreement whereby Jews and Arabs would enjoy political and civil parity within the unitary framework of the Mandate." Martin Buber, "Brith Shalom", A Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs. Paul Mendes-Flohr, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 72-75.

[100] In the program of the *Ichud* published on September 3, 1942, which Buber composed along with his colleagues Robert Weltsch and Judah L. Magnes, once again asserts the need for co-operation between Jewish and Arab peoples. Article 2 of the program states: "The Association Union (Ichud) therefore regards a Union between the Jewish and Arab peoples as essential for the upbuilding of Palestine and for cooperation between the Jewish world and the Arab world in all branches of life – social, economic, cultural, political – thus making for the revival of the whole Semitic world." Buber, "The Ichud", A Land of Two Peoples, p. 148-49.

[101] This debate between the two regarding the composition of a Jewish state is expressed clearly in an article entitled, "A Majority or Many? A Postscript to a Speech". In the article, Buber explicitly disagrees with Ben-Gurion's proposal for creating a Jewish majority in Palestine and politically justifying the creation of a Jewish state on those grounds. Buber, "A Majority or Many? A Postscript to a Speech", A Land of Two Peoples, p. 164-68.

nation and the state to the level of ultimate value".[102] In contrast, Buber did not see the bi-national state as an absolute solution; rather, it would create the conditions for dialogue, wherein the Jewish and Arab peoples could come to together to address problems and challenges – whether economic, cultural, political, or social.[103] Hence, in regards to the question of Palestine and the future of the Arab and Jewish peoples in the region, Buber called on the people of each nation to take an active part in the creation of a bi-national state, rather than allow political leaders, consumed by political illusion to dictate the future of the region. Alas, Buber's call was, and has largely been, ignored, and the region, since the creation of the state of Israel in 1947, has been beset with political unrest, violence, and a growing distrust between the two peoples.[104]

As early as 1921, Buber believed the grounds for cooperation had to be cultivated through "intensive and systematic cultivation".[105] What Buber meant by intensive and systematic cultivation was not the simple imposition of formula and program on the Jewish and Arab communities. Rather, he saw that the framework of a bi-national state, cultivated through Arab-Jewish rapprochement, would create the possibility for trust between the two peoples. The actualization of this trust, however, was not a task left to politicians, scholars, or bureaucrats; trust would be actualized through the participation of communities and its members in addressing common interests, such as economic interests. Rather than simply consenting to decisions and programs formulated by politicians such as Ben-Gurion, providing such political ends "the absolute form of unambiguous moral imperatives"[106], Buber, through his involvement in *Ichud*, actively tried to cultivate social and political relations between the two peoples; but such attempts

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[102] Silberstein, Martin Buber's Social and Religious Thought, p. 255.

[103] For example, in "A Majority of Many", he contends that a "commonality of interests" would be beneficial in cultivating trust between Arabs and Jews. "The separate national economic systems should be replaced, as much as good economic allows, by one shared countrywide system, in whose success both nations are interested and whose shared development may well create mutual trust, that in turn will lead to far-reaching agreements." Buber, "A Majority or Many? A Postscript to a Speech", A Land of Two Peoples, p. 168.

[104] This is reflected by the most recent Middle East crisis involving Hezbollah, a militia within Lebanon, and Israel in July and August of 2006.

[105] "In this land, whose population is both sparse and scattered, there is room both for us and for its present inhabitants, especially if we adopt intensive and systematic methods of cultivation." Buber, "A Proposed Resolution on the Arab Question", A Land of Two Peoples, p. 61.

[106] Buber, "A Majority or Many? A Postscript to a Speech", A Land of Two Peoples, p. 165.

failed largely because the 'majority' of Arabs and Jews did not believe cooperation was possible. This is rather reflective of the political distrust that existed between the peoples, which painted the other side as threat or enemy.

The creation of the state of Israel, built upon a series of unilateral actions that neither acknowledged nor considered the claims of the Arab population, only reinforced a Palestinian Arab view of Jews "as invaders bent upon dispossessing the Arab masses".[107] Therefore, politicians such as Ben-Gurion, in their "realist" approach to the situation in Palestine, willingly took on the stereotypes Arabs inscribed onto Jews, considered the Arab population within and around Palestine to be threats to the newly created Jewish state, and took political steps towards militarizing the new state.[108] Although Buber reluctantly embraced the new Jewish state, he insisted that the Jews' historical re-entry into their homeland "took place through a false gateway"[109]. For Buber, without the possibility of trust and its subsequent cultivation through dialogue between peoples of the two nations, there would be no lasting peace for the new Jewish state or its neighbours. These views, as Silberstein notes, often lead Buber into direct confrontation with Israeli government leaders.[110] And as Buber points out in a January 1962 speech, "whoever considers war to be inevitable collaborates, willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, in bringing about war," directly addressing the readiness of most Jews to accept the political illusions fed them by government and its leadership.[111]

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[107] Silberstein details some of these myopic actions on the part of the Jews, i.e., buying up land from wealthy land owners rather than negotiating with Palestinian Arabs about potentially common economic interests. Silberstein, Martin Buber's Social and Religious Thought, p. 255

[108] In his May 1958 address to the American Friends of the Ichud, Buber recounts an event from the "unhappy partition of Palestine" that is particularly chilling. "It happened one day, however, that outside of all regular conduct of the war, a band of armed Jews fell on an Arab village and destroyed it." In a footnote, Mendes-Flohr provides some further context. "On 9 April 1948, during the siege of Jerusalem, a combined force of Irgun and he Stern Gang attacked Deir Yasin, an Arab village commanding the road to Jerusalem, reportedly killing 254 of its inhabitants – men, women, and children." Buber, "Israel and the Command of the Spirit", A Land of Two Peoples, p. 292, 293, n. 4.

[109] In the May 1958 address, Buber affirms the factual reality of the State of Israel, but warns that without Jewish-Arab rapprochement, the unrest between the two would only persist. He says during the address, "There can be no peace between Jews and Arabs that is only a cessation of war; there can only be a peace of genuine cooperation." Buber, "Israel and the Command of the Spirit", A Land of Two Peoples, p. 293.

[110] Silberstein, Martin Buber's Social and Religious Thought, p. 262, 328, n. 53.

[111] Buber, "We Must Grant the Arabs Truly Equal Rights", A Land of Two Peoples, p. 299.

Buber challenges the idea that the task of a citizen is to legitimate the current regime - through ballot, party participation, or activism, and tacitly consent to the actions undertaken by leaders – "Argue as much as you want and about whatever you like, but obey!"[112] This reasoned capitulation, argues Buber, leads humanity towards illusions and away from the actual life between persons. For Buber, political surplus, afforded by tacit consent, exacerbates political illusions by fostering and addressing phantom threats rather than confronting the actual problems that threaten the life of the interhuman. Let us turn our attention to an article by written Buber in May 1946 concerning the escalating tensions between Arabs and Jewish Israelis in order to explore this point. In the course of the article, Buber wonders why the emerging conflict had been framed as a zero-sum political game. Although real conflicts do arise between groups of people, these conflicts, according to Buber, can be resolved "within the domain of life itself', a domain between persons not dominated by the political principle.[113] However, in modern politics, the 'other side' is assumed to absolutely untrustworthy until proven otherwise, entrenching the myth that conflict between groups are necessarily irreconcilable, the ineluctable divide between victor and defeated.[114] The assumption is that conflict and contestation is necessary for a regime to retain its distinctively political character.[115] This imbalanced need to sustain politics for the sake of politics generates illusory threats by exaggerating real conflict to grotesque proportions. In his short article, "A Tragic Conflict?" (1946), Buber writes, "The politics of a group produces within its members a sense of conflict with proportions much

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[112] Kant, "What is Enlightenment?", Kant: Political Writings. Hans S. Reiss, ed., H.B. Nisbet, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, 1991), p. 59.

[113] Martin Buber, "A Tragic Conflict?" A Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs. Paul Mendes-Flohr, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 187.

[114] "Politics, seeking to retain its domination of life, has an interest in treating the interests of the various groups as if they were irreconcilable. But since this in fact is not so, politics has to make it so." Buber, "A Tragic Conflict?" A Land of Two Peoples, p. 187.

[115] "The essence of all politics…is *conflict, the recruitment of allies and a voluntary following.*" Weber, "Parliament and Government in Germany", Weber: Political Writings, p. 173. To reiterate, Weber contends that political struggle is the crucible in which the modern politician is forged, sustaining individual initiative in the face of growing authoritarian and bureaucratic regimes. "But the given palaestra for the modern politician is parliamentary conflict and the fight for party in the country, and there is nothing of equal value which can replace such struggle – least of all competition for promotion…where the leader *achieves* power in the state." Weber, "Parliament and Government in Germany", Weber: Political Writings, pp. 173-74.

greater than those of the real conflict, and accords it a different, seemingly absolute, character."[116]

In short, Buber acknowledged the real and central conflict between Arabs and Jews, namely, the necessity for both peoples to live together in the land known as Palestine, and contended that the existence of a Jewish state could not be secured without cooperation with the Palestinian Arabs. The political leaders of the Israel, however, held steadfast to the conventional political line: Arab peoples surrounding Israel are assumed to be threats and enemies, whose potential aggression must deterred by the accumulation of Jewish military and political might. As it turns out, Buber and those who shared his view of a bi-national Palestinian state provided a warning that tragically went unheeded.

As will be explored with greater depth in Chapter 4, the perpetual possibility of threat justifies the accumulation of political surplus, ostensibly to deal with 'exceptional situations' and crises. But returning to the current discussion, Buber is not calling for an absolute annihilation of politics. He reminds his readers that institutions are not to be demonized, for they can be appropriated in an effort to release life from the grasp of the political principle.[117] What he calls for is a "politics of de-politicization", a call for people to see through the illusions peddled by propaganda.[118] He concludes the piece by inverting the logic of the political principle, calling on Jews and Arabs to advise their leaders to abandon a continual political game, which repeatedly introduces political surplus conflict, and allow the people of each group to engage with the other in direct and mutual encounter, allowing "the force of truth in their hearts" to set them off down a path towards compromise.[119] Buber does not call for a *Herrenvolk*. He is calling for communities to

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[116] Buber, "A Tragic Conflict?" A Land of Two Peoples, p. 187.

[117] Buber, "A Tragic Conflict?" A Land of Two Peoples, p. 188.

[118] "What we must do is to launch a politics of de-politicization. We must do political work in order to induce a cure of the present sick relation between life and politics. We must fight against the excessive growth of politics, must fight it from within, from a position with politics' own domain." Buber, "A Tragic Conflict?" A Land of Two Peoples, p. 188.

[119] "It is the hope that within those powers are individuals, individuals of influence and responsibility, who see as we do that the hegemony of politics leads to destruction, and like us are dedicated to preventing it. It is to them that we turn when we insist that life be given its due. The destiny of this country and this people,

come forth and challenge its enslavement to the political principle, freeing people from the grip of illusory fear that justifies mutual distrust. Hence, Buber ultimately calls on people to dare to trust in humanity and trust the capacity of human beings for dialogical relationship – calling on them to confront the reality of conflict instead of accepting the shadowy illusions presented to them.

2.4. Conclusion

In recounting the general trajectory of this chapter, we can see a series of concepts connecting the modern knowing subject to a virulent mutual distrust that fuels the dominance of the political principle over the actual life of human beings. Individuals feel and experience a sense of modern alienation that compels them into mass collectivities in search of larger meaning. Hence, the indiscriminate grip of the political principle over the whole of human life, according to Buber, is attributable to this inability to turn to fellows in a genuine spirit of openness and trust. Without direct and immediate encounter, people become more inclined to turn to the political principle rather than make present the actual life between persons. Through what he calls 'a politics of de-politicization', Buber envisions a resistance of indiscriminate politicization through a renewal of direct and personal relationships. The best way to combat the 'political surplus' is to have citizens, who tacitly consented to its accumulation, question and destabilize the surplus. The participatory action of people, through cultivating immediate togetherness with those ostensibly 'on the other side', revives the possibility of mutual trust and diminishes the mutual distrust fostered and exploited by the political principle. Therefore, citizens cannot simply assume that their leaders are "enlightened and (have) no fear of phantoms"[120], because it is often the politicians themselves who evolve illusory threats in order to galvanize citizens and consolidate their own influence. As Buber says in "Genuine

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and the destiny of countries and peoples in general, today depends on the force of truth in their hearts. The hope we pin on them and on their tie with us will help us find the strength and the direction for our next steps." Buber, "A Tragic Conflict?" A Land of Two Peoples, p. 189.

[120] "But only a ruler who is himself enlightened and has no fear of phantoms, yet who likewise has at hand a well-disciplined and numerous army to guarantee public security, may say what no republic would day to say: *Argue as much as you like, but obey!*" Kant, "What is Enlightenment?", Kant: Political Writings, p. 59.

Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace", in the absence of interhuman trust, diplomats and politicians no longer partake in human conversation; rather, they are compelled by the demands of politics to address the faceless public, pandering to parochial fears in order to sustain a false unity, the collectivity or 'camp'.[121]

The grip of indiscriminate politicization over the whole of life is attributable to the breakdown of interhuman trust, as well as the overpowering affect of political propaganda over the social education of dialogical encounters. As Buber notes in his introduction of Paths in Utopia, "the vision of 'what should be'...is yet inseparable from a critical and fundamental relationship to the existing condition of humanity."[122] This relationship to existent human conditions cannot be defined by truths external to the relationship. Normative truth-objects turn persons away from direct and frank dialogue, pointing them towards an illusory monologue. The task of dialogue is to engage the actual conditions of life – making present the world and approaching it in a spirit of openness and mutuality. In the shadow of a towering political principle, trust and dialogue are obscured by the supposedly "real" demands of politics, demands that reduce persons into being simply individuals living in a collective. People are free only insofar as they can obey. Hence, Buber's call for a politics of de-politicization is a call on human beings to renew the task of interhuman thought by turning to direct dialogical encounters. It is in dialogue that a critical relationship to existent human conditions can come to being and loosen the grip of illusion on actual life.

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[121] "The debates between statesmen which the radio conveys to us no longer have anything in common with a human conversation: the diplomats do not address one another but the faceless public." Buber, "Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace", Pointing the Way, p. 237.

[122] Buber, Paths in Utopia, p. 7.

Chapter 3: Truth and Relation: The transformative potential of I-Thou relationship

3.1. Introduction

> "The real and fundamental nature of a question: namely to make things indeterminate. Questions always bring out the undetermined possibilities of a thing...To understand the questionableness of something is already to be questioning."[123]

In the central expression of his philosophical anthropology, "What is Man?", Martin Buber contends that man can actualize the wholeness of his being by actualizing through genuine encounter.[124] The individual who stakes "his self as an *object* of knowledge" remains an incomplete being, for he perceives others as objects. For Buber, the 'surprising mutuality'[125] that arises between persons engaged in dialogue to engage a shared condition in a spirit of openness and immediacy. Genuine dialogue does not unfold according to universally applicable laws; the uniquely indeterminate substance of the encounter actualizes the life "between man and man". In I-Thou relationship, as Buber notes in I and Thou, the participants of a dialogue do not experience each other as objects, but actualize the life they share.[126] As Gadamer notes, a disengaged belief in absolute normative truths leads one to perceive experience as an objective end rather than a process.[127] When truth is conceived as a universalizable object, it closes off the space

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[123] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method: Second, Revised Edition. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, trans. (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003), p. 375.

[124] "So long as you "have" yourself, have yourself as an object, your experience of man is only as of a thing among things, the wholeness which is to be grasped is not yet "there"; only when you *are*, and nothing else but that, is the wholeness there, and able to be grasped." Buber, "What is Man?", Between Man and Man, p. 148.

[125] "Dialogue in my sense implies the necessity of the unforeseen, and its basic element, the surprising mutuality," Buber wrote in a letter to Swiss psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger. Martin Buber, "Martin Buber to Ludwig Binswanger: Jerusalem, May 14, 1962", The Letters of Martin Buber: A Life of Dialogue, p. 647.

[126] Buber, I and Thou, p. 56.

[127] Gadamer comments that Bacon's real achievement is that the latter "undertakes a comprehensive examination of the prejudices that hold the human mind captive and lead it away from the *true* knowledge of things". Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 375, henceforth referred to as TM. Gadamer's comment on the Aristotlean image of the "fleeing army": "The whole fleeing army under unified control is an image of

for dialogical engagement. This is a shared concern for Martin Buber and Hans-Georg Gadamer. "It is clear that the *experience of the Thou* must be special because the Thou is not an object but is in relationship with us."[128] Relation must be affirmative rather than reductive. "Real experience is what thereby man becomes aware of his finiteness". In relation, the man recognizes his limitations. As a finite being, it is man's relation with others that complete him. Buber explains this in "Distance and Relation".

> "Human life and humanity come into being in genuine meetings. There man learns that he is not limited by man, cast upon his own finitude, partialness, need of completion, but his own relation to truth is heightened by the other's relation to the same truth – different in accordance with his individuation, and destined to take seed and grow differently."[129]

Hence, for human beings to become ontologically complete, the possibility for interhuman trust is actualized and developed between persons. Without trust, individuals become constantly preoccupied with the 'risk' of engaging others, turning to ostensibly universal truths for self-actualization and meaning.

This chapter will continue to explore Buber's response to the dominant political principle, focusing on the affect absolute truths have on presentness. Gadamer – especially his thoughts on radical openness and 'historically effected consciousness' – will help clarify the concepts expressed in Buber's work. This chapter will be divided into two parts. Sections 3.2 and 3.3 will explore the relation between spontaneity and lived truth. For Buber, a truth that is disengaged from a lived reality, existing as an absolute, is hazardous to the actual life between persons. Section 3.4 will look at some objections neo-Kantian philosopher Axel Honneth presents to I-Thou relationships.

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science. The image is intended to show how science – i.e., universal truth – is possible, considering that it must not depend on the contingency of observations, but be valid in a really universal way". (TM 352) He culminates this examination by state that: "If we regard experience in terms of its result, we have ignored the fact that experience is a process". (TM 353) This is indeed a strict indictment of any idea that true knowledge is in someway detached from the unfolding of experience. Once again, slavery to the It-world is only possible if knowledge – truth – is approached as a reified object, a *telos*. In doing this, experience is reduced to being instrumental to path to a transcendental end.

[128] Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 358.

[129] Buber, "Distance and Relation", The Knowledge of Man, p. 59.

Although Honneth's specific criticisms are directed at Gadamer, many of these objections are relevant to Buber's dialogical thought as well. Hence, the section will explicate the response Buber and Gadamer provides to Honneth's criticisms.

3.2. Historically Effected Consciousness

> "To acknowledge what is does not just mean to recognize what is at this moment, but to have insight into the limited degree to which the future is still open to expectation and planning or, even more fundamentally, to have the insight that all the expectation and planning of finite beings is finite and limited."[130]

The modern state, as it is conceived, is designed to ward off the unpredictable, the supposedly cruel whim of contingency. But in so doing, "truths" are established to regulate interactions between citizens and maintain order. In this case, each citizen stands in political relation only to the state that acts as the guarantor and protector of truth, while relationships with others are relegated to the peripheral, i.e., strictly social or private.[131] What Buber is at issue with is not so much the modern state itself – institutions do have a role[132] – but rather the teleological thinking that arises from a rigid conception of truth obscures the integral place of dialogical engagement in human life. In doing so, truth-objects, such as the Nation or the People, act as false absolutes. These false absolutes, as Chapter 2 showed, justify the accumulation of political surplus by sovereign authority in order to respond to crises or threats. But without thoughtful engagement through dialogue, can citizens decipher whether a conflict or problem is real or illusory? The critical relationship to an existing human condition informs and educates, turning

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[130] Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 357.

[131] In I and Thou, Buber intimates that the "severed I" – i.e., monological individual – becomes immersed in It-world causality of public or personal life. Buber, I and Thou, p. 94.

[132] "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." Buber, I and Thou, p. 94.

those engaged in dialogue to confront and solve real conflict, rather than accepting the inevitability of illusory conflicts and the 'necessity' of political surplus.

Relationship is where man gains insight about the limitedness of human ordering. Buber would contend that an unquestioned adherence or acceptance of immutable truths closes off the space for testing, i.e., the testing of truths in dialogical encounters with others. Hence, as Buber reminds us, the interhuman immediacy that arises through genuine dialogue can be the most effective form of action. The individual who subscribes to the unquestioned validity of truth-objects remains obedient to those truths, unless he encounters a person who tests and questions those assumptions. Thus, for Buber, an unyielding belief in false absolutes reinforces individualism, further alienating individuals from other beings. And, as Gadamer points out, this stubborn attachment to absolute truth can be related to a fascination with its ostensible timelessness, neglecting how 'truth' is situated within time.

> "Every experience worthy of the name thwarts an expectation. Thus the historical nature of man essentially implies a fundamental negativity that emerges in the relation between experience and insight."[133]

Let us expand on what Gadamer states in this short excerpt. Knowledge is not absolute within a historical perspective. The 'historically effected consciousness' puts into question so-called immutable. If one merely collects, stores, and regiments experience, one does not attain insight. Gadamer, in reference to 'fundamental negativity', contends that insight comes from testing knowledge via a radical openness to new experience.[134] A question certainly arises about this radical openness: is this not a dialectical pursuit of ultimate truth? Gadamer appears to respond to such claims by contending that any pursuit of absolute knowledge, first, robs itself of any element of

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[133] Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 356.

[134] "{...}the experienced person proves to be, on the contrary, someone who is radically undogmatic; who, because of the many experiences he has had and the knowledge he has drawn from them, is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them." Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 355.

historicity[135] and, second, is a primarily a monological pursuit of self- knowledge.[136] The key distinction between dialogical and dialectical thought is that the former acknowledges the indeterminacy of future encounter[137], while the latter claims to know in advance the telos of its movement.[138]

> "The most important events in history of that embodied possibility of man are the occasionally occurring beginnings of new epochs, determined by forces previously invisible and unregarded. Each age is, of course, a continuation of the preceding one, but a continuation can be confirmation and it can be refutation."[139]

This quotation reinforces Buber's belief that It-world causality, based on false absolutes and directed towards a cause or telos, neglects the spontaneity inherent within human life. As he notes, the progression of one age to another does not necessarily mean the values and truths of one age holds true for the next.[140] The 'critical and fundamental

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[135] "In its methodology modern science thus simply proceeds further toward a goal that experience has striven after. Experience is valid only if it is confirmed; hence its dignity depends on its being in principle repeatable. But this means that by its very nature, experience abolishes its history and thus itself." Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 346.

[136] "For him (Hegel), it is necessary of course, that conscious experience should lead to self-knowledge that no longer has anything other than or alien to itself. For him the consummation of experience is "science", the certainty of itself in knowledge. Hence his criterion of experience is self-knowledge. That is why the dialectic of experience must end in that overcoming of experience which is attained in absolute knowledge – i.e., in the complete identity of consciousness and object. We can now understand why applying Hegel's dialectic to history, insofar as he regarded it as part of the absolute self-consciousness of philosophy, does not do justice to hermeneutical consciousness." Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 355.

[137] "Experience teaches us to acknowledge the real." Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 357. To reiterate, this is an acknowledgement of the limitedness of 'planning reason'. Planning reason can only occur if one believes in an end, towards which reason structures present action in an effort to fulfill said end. This is, of course, the slavery to It-world causality that Buber warns against, because immersion into the It-world turns away from actual life.

[138] Gadamer give further clarification about his opposition to the Hegelian dialectic: "To elaborate the totality of the determinations of thought, which was the aim of Hegel's logic, is as it were the attempt to comprehend within the great monologue of modern 'method' the continuum of meaning that is realized in every particular instance of dialogue {…} Hegel's dialectic is a monologue of thinking that tries to carry out in advance what matures little by little in every genuine dialogue". Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 369. Simply put, the "continuum of meaning" is an ontological affirmation – such as the affirmation between persons in dialogue. Hegel, according to Gadamer, eliminates any need for dialogue by establishing the absolute, i.e., "totality of the determinations of thought", as the goal of and path to self-affirmation.

[139] Buber, "God and the Spirit of Man", Eclipse of God, p. 129.

[140] An example of this is the ideas and preconceptions applied to minorities, such as black slavery, that are dispelled and challenged by later epochs. Although once believed to be a god-given right, and justified as a

relationship to the existing condition of humanity' involves a testing of values inherited from an earlier epoch – which then may be refuted or re-affirmed. The assumption that normative truths are immutable renders direct encounter with a present existent condition irrelevant and extraneous to a "possession" of truth. This stubborn grip on truth also entails an atavistic yearning for the past, sustained by a virulent longing for "eternal" values. In an actualized existent condition, people can test inherited truths and allow truth to be lived between man and man rather than reified and worshiped as object.

Gadamer provides a similar account when he writes, "There is no such thing…as a point outside history from which the identity of a problem can be conceived within the vicissitudes of the history of attempts to solve it."[141] Integral to teleology is the belief that the end-point (telos) gives meaning to the whole of experience. Thus, if one subscribes to as disembodied telos as if it is absolute, immanent experience becomes merely instrumental to It-world causality. If absolute truth lies beyond the ephemeral contingencies of immanent experience, experience would be structured as a movement towards telos. Human action, in this sense, is rationally structured to fulfill an end.[142] The predestined and inevitable nature of causality neglects the integral relationship between spontaneity and actual life, because contingency can only destabilize the path to monological actualization. For Buber, life is actualized in relation, in spaces of possibility; if experience is confirmed in by a disembodied truth, one could exist in contemplation about absolute truth without thoughtfully engaging a lived reality.

An individual lost in It-world causality, however, cannot acknowledge the limit of self-knowledge or of individualized contemplation. For the individual lost in It-world causality, the focus is the future, specifically the telos that evidently provides existence its absolute meaning. Without the truth-object of the telos, the individual immersed in

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value entitled to all, following generations would think critically about the grotesque contradictions of living in a free and democratic nation that justifies indentured labour.

[141] Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 375.

[142] The totalizing scope of It-world causality is a product of belief in a perfect mastery of the world, i.e. structuring, by man. Buber makes reference to the scientific ordering of the natural world in IT. "The unlimited sway of causality in the It-world, which is of fundamental importance for the scientific ordering of nature…" Buber, I and Thou, p. 100.

the It-world succumbs to an abysmal nihilism. Historicity, in this case, is merely the gradual "running down" towards telos.[143] Buber contends that the "dogma of a gradual running down represents man's abdication in the face of the proliferating It-world".[144] Hence, modern man "trusts" in the structures of the It-world and distrusts his own abilities in addressing the world.[145] Without the possibility of interhuman trust, which Buber sees as the possibility of I-Thou relationships in I and Thou, there can be no direct mutual encounters between persons. It is the unfolding of dialogue that interhuman trust comes to being and can be developed. As alluded to in an earlier chapter, political propaganda entrenches the mutual distrust between people and leaves them to only trust the Truths they are peddled. Buber warns that such a situation immerses individuals deeper into It-world causality, leaving them isolated from I-Thou relationships, and exacerbates the dominance of the political principle over human life.

3.3. The problem of propaganda and the need for education

For Buber, an individual lost in It-world causality remains ontologically incomplete and sees itself functional to the achievement of telos, namely that its experiences should reinforce a truth greater than itself. Simply put, these teleological pursuits amplify an individual need for affirmation. But alas, these teleological pursuits provide only self-affirmation that confirms the individual's place as an object among a collective of objects. In short, truth is held to be the telos that unifies existence. If truth becomes absolute – without the 'fundamental negativity' that springs forth from questioning, it is simply a reified object of It-world causality. Jewish scholar David Barzilai provides an apt description of this, "Buber's notion of "unity" is not of a concept that originates from the innate tendency of reason for complete and systematic

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[143] "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, which involves unlimited causality." Buber, I and Thou, p. 106.

[144] Buber, I and Thou, p. 107.

[145] He points out three specific realms of the It-world in "What is Man?" that has contributed to the paralysis and failure of the human soul: the realm of technique, the realm of the economic, and the realm of the political. Buber, "What is Man?", Between Man and Man, p. 187.

knowledge, but is a fundamental characteristic of the human being as such."[146] Buber's notion of unity does not strive towards universal consensus, a situation where disagreements do not exist. Rather, it is a unity based upon the actual ontological substance of humanity. If we turn to his "Elements of the Interhuman" (1957), it is apparent that universal consensus is only possible as an illusion, an appearance absent of any actual substance.

> "The chief presupposition for the rise of genuine dialogue is that each should regard his partner as the very one he is...Perhaps from time to time I must offer strict opposition to his view about the subject of our conversation. But I must accept this person, the personal bearer of a conviction, in his definite being out of which his conviction has grown – even though I must try to show, bit by bit, the wrongness of this very conviction...I confirm him who is opposed to me as him who is over against me...If I thus give to the other who confronts me his legitimate standing as a man with whom I am ready to enter into dialogue, then I may trust him and suppose him to be also ready to deal with me as his partner."[147]

While truth-objects produced by propaganda requires uniform belief or adherence, Buber's conception of unity emphasizes that interlocutors in relationship acknowledge the actual being of others. It is in the immediate togetherness between persons that unity, as a 'characteristic of the human being', can be perceived. Once again, all actual life is encounter and political propaganda attempts to provide existential meaning without genuine encounter. When Buber writes, in the above excerpt, about the "wrongness" of this conviction, he does not imply that one ought to displace an ostensibly false belief with a "correct" one. Rather, even if the participants of an encounter begin at a position of disagreement regarding the content of the discussion, the task of dialogue is to affirm the present being of the parties involved in the dialogue and to test beliefs or truth claims brought into the dialogue.[148] Therefore, the "wrongness of this conviction" referred by Buber represents a stubborn grip on absolute and indisputable truth, which obstructs the

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[146] David Barzilai, "Homo Dialogicus – Martin Buber's Existential Phenomenology of the Human", *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* (1998), vol. 8, pp. 53-66, 54.

[147] Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman", The Knowledge of Man, pp. 69-70.

[148] "We have become aware that it is with the other as with ourselves, and that what rules over us both is not truth of recognition but the truth-of-existence and the existence-of-truth of the Present Being. In this way we have become able to *acknowledge*." Buber, "Education", Between Man and Man, p. 117.

potential for dialogue to transform those who participate in the encounter. Those with a stubborn grip on immutable truth are unable to respond to changing existent human conditions. This stubborn hold onto truth, the need to believe in the absolute righteousness of one's cause vis á vis another's falsity, deepens the effect politicization has on human life. As Buber notes in "Hope for this Hour", this state of affairs fosters a deep distrust between individuals, leaving them ready to believe in and reinforce the political principle.

> "Man is more than ever inclined to see his own principle in its own original purity and the opposing one in its present deterioration...He is convinced that his side is in order, the other side is fundamentally out of order, that he is concerned with the recognition and realization of the right, his opponent with the masking of his selfish interest."[149]

Buber, once again, broaches the problem of the individualism in this quotation. However, this time it is a relationship of individualism to "pure truth" that disturbs him. By noting that mutual distrust animates contrarian polemics, he also elucidates a correlation between truth-objects and a dominant political principle. As explored in Chapter 2, mutual distrust is fuelled by a belief that conflict is politically inevitable and limitless between groups of people, something Buber calls the political surplus conflict. The political definition of 'right' and 'wrong' is described as a 'vicious cycle', acting as a self-fulfilling prophecy that entrenches and feeds the political principle.[150] Even though such individuals believe they lay claim to a pure truth, believing it to be absolute, Buber simply reminds them that "man, in that he is man, cannot be entirely without sin, and the same is true of a nation in that it is a nation."[151]

An example in Buber's own work provides some elucidation to this point. In light of Tel Aviv being bombarded by Egyptian airplanes in October 1948, hours after the

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[149] Buber, "Hope for This Hour", p. 221.

[150] "Are not those to whom you turn themselves the representatives of political powers, the representatives of vast political groups whose leaders, even if unwittingly, play the same political game, the game of constantly introducing political surplus conflict? How can they be expected to break the vicious cycle?" Buber, "A Tragic Conflict", A Land of Two Peoples, pp. 188-89.

[151] Buber, "Instead of Polemics", A Land of Two Peoples, p. 270.

proclamation establishing the State of Israel, he wrote an article entitled "Let Us Make an End to Falsities!" to debunk self-righteous claims that Israel was an innocent victim of Arab aggression.[152] Buber, to put it simply, did not believe that the Arabs could be classified as being "completely in the wrong" or that the Jewish Israelis could lay claim to pure righteousness. The point he makes here is that humanity cannot hang abysmally to the false belief that it can claim purity in life, a reflection of his idea of the 'narrow ridge'. A noted scholar of Buber's thought, Maurice Friedman, provides an apt characterization of the 'narrow ridge'.

> "Buber's 'narrow ridge' is no 'happy middle', which ignores the reality of paradox and contradiction in order to escape from the suffering they produce. It is rather a paradoxical unity of what one usually understands only as alternatives – I and Thou...dependence and freedom...good and evil, unity and duality."[153]

As this section has illustrated, genuine dialogue entails an acknowledgement of this paradoxical unity in actual life. The radical openness advocated in Gadamer's work reflects this existential respect for contradictions inherent within life. Buber makes this point explicit in his responses to the Jewish Israeli-Arab conflict; he warns that truths which claim to be irrefutable often leads human beings deeper into the grasps of political illusion. For example, in "Let Us Make an End to Falsities!", he challenges the idea that either the Arabs or the Israelis have a timeless claim to the holy land.[154] The point is quite direct: a return to a point in the past is impossible and neither side can make a pure or absolute claim to the land. Buber rejects these atavistic yearnings, choosing rather to point out the historical context of the region, that both Israelis and Arabs have built communities of their own in the region. This reflects the fundamental and critical relationship with an existent human condition advocated by Buber, as well as Gadamer's 'historically affect consciousness'. And as illustrated above, such a relationship cannot be actualized anachronistically. Hence, by turning to others and the world in a spirit of

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[152] Buber, "Let Us Make an End to Falsities", A Land of Two Peoples, pp. 226-228.

[153] Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue, p. 3.

[154] "Two thousand years ago there lived in this land a people that did great things, and when this people was scattered over the world it maintained its inner bond with it. In our era, however, another people has lived in this same land..." Buber, "Let Us Make an End to Falsities", A Land of Two Peoples, pp. 226-27.

radical openness, a person must leave behind atavistic yearnings for an idealized past, let go of absolute truth, and live truth through the spontaneous and genuine relationship between I and Thou.

Truth, if held as an immutable object, serves the immersed logic of It-world causality. In doing so, such a conception of truth subverts the primacy of relation and facilitates a monological pursuit of illusory ontological confirmation. Thoughtful engagement entails the act of questioning, of testing existing knowledge. If knowledge remains static and claims to be absolute, it degenerates into rigid dogma. Such dogma relegates I-Thou relationships to a place of peripheral importance. Once truth becomes immutable, the dictates of monologue become reified and left unquestioned. For one lost in It-world causality, actualization lies neither in relation to the world nor to others, but achievable only through adherence to dogmatic truth. But for Buber, truth is brought to being through relation with others. Truth cannot be possessed, mastered, or known absolutely by man. It is in relation where he becomes aware of his finiteness and the limitedness of his own reason and discovers the folly of absolute knowledge.

3.4. The Limits of Dialogue? – Trust and Dialogue

> "To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were."[155]

In the above quotation, Gadamer contends that dialogical understanding fundamentally entails a transformation of those within the encounter. Buber adds that genuine dialogue actualizes the life between persons; the transformative potential of dialogue, hence, shatters individual immersion in It-world causality and usher beings into the actual life of encounter. However, neo-Kantian philosopher and theorist Axel Honneth[156] exposes two apparent weaknesses of this radical openness. The first is a lack

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[155] Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 379.

[156] Axel Honneth, "On the destructive power of the third", *Philosophy & Social Criticism* (2000), vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 5 –21.

of universal normativity in such openness. The second is the "expanding distance"[157] between potential partners of dialogue. Both of these criticisms are, quite naturally, related problems.[158] Although these criticisms are specifically directed at Gadamer's third level of inter-subjectivity, the claims Honneth makes about dialogical thought are also relevant to Buber's I-Thou philosophy. This section will explicate the response Buber and Gadamer offers to these critiques. Buber's response is not directed to Honneth specifically, but rather to the larger critique the latter presents in regard to I-Thou relationship. For Buber, universal norms efface the 'surprising mutuality' that arises between persons in encounter. Without social spontaneity, individuals believe they can achieve self-actualization via given moral norms, and, hence, neglecting the possibility of I-Thou relationships.

Honneth believes Gadamer's third "level" of inter-subjectivity, and by proxy, Buber's I-Thou, lacks moral normativity. In his article, he explains: "With expanding distance between interaction partners, the possibility diminishes of viewing openness towards the claims of the other as the morally appropriate behaviour."[159] The radical openness posited by I-Thou dialogical thought puts normative truths into question, and, in Honneth's estimation, this poses a problem. Honneth contends that there is a need for generalized normative truths, because without such truths, human behaviour is less likely to be moral. Such conditions, in Honneth's mind, leads to moral relativity and leaves man in a potentially dangerous and chaotic moral vacuum. As is noted in the earlier section, Buber believes that turning to an other in a spirit of openness and mutuality includes an ontological confirmation of being. This does not mean Buber has no conception of normativity. For him, genuine norms arise in direct and immediate encounters. However, the problem Honneth poses is whether interhuman trust can exist without general norms present to constrain potentially malicious actions. In effect, the problem he poses is whether trust can exist without being enforced by normative rules.

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[157] Honneth, p. 20.

[158] "As soon as we leave this confined field and move in the direction of more distant forms of communication, the ideal unity of morality and authentic experience – which still possessed suggestive plausibility in that limited field – breaks down." Honneth, p. 20.

[159] Honneth, p. 20.

And without normativity, do I-Thou relationships open its interlocutors up to the risk of harm? The "risk" of openness is too steep of a price in Honneth's estimation. He contends that this risk can be circumvented through "reciprocal reference to general norms or values"?[160] Of course, the use of generalized representations is one of the initial steps in understanding the world and others, something that Gadamer notes as his second "level"[161] of inter-subjective relations. However, limiting all human relationships to this second level detaches people from direct and immediate encounters, which according to Buber are integral to ontological confirmation and allowing personal character to develop through dialogical engagement.

This is a point that Buber explores in his work on social education and community. Norms that act as maxims or dictums often hinder interhuman trust. In "Education of Character" (1939), Buber contends that norms, within the modern context, are collective aspirations fixed and translated into the language of objective claims.[162] The production of these truth-objects, as intimated earlier in this chapter, is part of the affect political propaganda has over actual life. Once again, Buber does not call for the dissolution of norms. He contends that genuine norms can be tested through human encounters; untested maxims and dictums stagnate the development of personal character.

> "All this does not mean that the great character is beyond the acceptance of norms...but the command inherent in a genuine norm never becomes a maxim and the fulfillment of it never a habit. Any command that a great character takes to himself in the course of his development does not act as part of his consciousness or as material for building up his exercises, but remains latent in a basic layer of his substance until it reveals itself to him in a concrete way."[163]

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[160] Honneth, p. 18.

[161] "A second way in which the Thou is experienced and understood is that the Thou is acknowledged as a person, but despite this acknowledgement the understanding of the Thou is still a form of self-relatedness." Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 359.

[162] "In our age values and norms are not permitted to be anything but the expressions of the life of a group which translates its own needs into the language of objective claims, until at last the group itself, for example a nation, is raised to an absolute value – and moreover to the only value."[162] Buber, "The Education of Character", Between Man and Man, p. 129.

[163] Buber, "The Education of Character", Between Man and Man, p. 135.

In the context of this piece, Buber contends that the development of personal character cannot be detached from the work of dialogue, insofar that people of character cannot exist merely as individuals.[164] Buber's contention is that any genuine norm "reveals itself" to a great character in encountering the world and others in presentness. Hence, without direct and immediate encounter, the world and others remain ontologically incomplete, leaving individuals to turn to maxims and false absolutes posing as norms, rather than actualizing them through a critical relationship to an existent human condition. The "risk" of a radical openness to world and others is an embrace of the spontaneity that actualizes life between people. In a world of maxims and general normativity, individuals exist simply as individuals who "confirm" their being through adherence to accepted norms. Buber and Gadamer see radical openness as integral to dialogical engagement, because it exposes interlocutors to spontaneity, allowing the relationship to transform those involved rather than merely reinforce individuation.

Several problems arise from a stagnant adherence to generalized norms. First, generalized moral norms facilitate man's retraction from actual life. If, as Honneth intimates, one should reciprocally refer to generalized norms, adherence to these norms may become habitual or individuated. These truths, accessible outside of encounter, could, hence, facilitate individuation. Second, this individuation represents a closed relationship to truth. Simply put, if truth is represented in unproblematic terms, i.e. generally accepted, it has a limited conception of paradox and contradiction within the context of human life. Although Honneth characterizes such truths as "commonly shared norms", in what sense are they held in common?[165] At first glance, a concept such as common norms appears to evoke a sense of communality, a world where consensus and understanding are products of morality. But this approach is rooted in a faulty presumption, namely that everyone can subscribe to a homogenized worldview. Hence, returning to an earlier point, unity cannot be imposed upon actual life. But, as noted earlier in this chapter, Buber believes unity is fulfilled through making present an existent

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[164] "Genuine education of character is genuine education for community." Buber, "The Education of Character", Between Man and Man, p. 138.

[165] Honneth, p. 18.

human condition through dialogue. In his estimation, truth is lived between persons and cannot be imposed by sources external to interhuman relationships. Generalized norms, however, require that individuals validate its maxims as truth – truth that exists *a priori* of interhuman relationships. But as Gadamer illustrates, insight comes from engagement with others who perceive the world differently – not merely reinforcing prior knowledge. Gadamer provides an apt description of imposition is in Truth and Method: "One claims to know the other's claim from his point of view and even to understand the other better than the other understands himself."[166]

If truth is conceived as being universally valid, it becomes a tool of power to be exerted *over* men. This leads us to the third problem of generalized norms. The above quote from Gadamer illustrates that the price of general moral norms is more egregious than any so-called "risk" involved in dialogical openness. Without dialogical engagement, truths intended to secure human freedom merely negate it. "It is an illusion to see another person as a tool that can be absolutely known and used."[167] If responsibility is defined by norms and the authority entrusted to enforce them, this manifests a breakdown of interhuman interaction. For Buber, generalized norms and maxims absolve a personal responsibility for entering direct and immediate encounters with the world and with others. Although these individuals see devotion to truth as fulfilling proper duty, Buber argues that such devotion merely shirks personal responsibility.[168] With the absence of direct and personal responsibility to others, there can be no possibility for interhuman trust. To reiterate, "trust" would solely be invested in the generalized norms. For Honneth, responsibility is derived only in relation to generalized norms, for they provide the moral basis for a good society.

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[166] Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 359.

[167] Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 359.

[168] "Thus they do not yet realize that their devotion was fed on the unconscious desire to have responsibility removed from them by an authority in which they believe or want to believe. They do no yet realize that his devotion was an escape." "Genuine education of character is genuine education for community." Buber, "The Education of Character", Between Man and Man, p. 138.

One could ask again: what is wrong with this? With the "expanding distance between interaction partners"[169], is it not prudent to have generalized norms that prefigure intimate encounters that, as Honneth intimates, may never occur? According to Honneth, I-Thou relationships are limited to the sphere of "close social relations"[170]. Honneth implies that radical openness is insufficient and, for that matter, inefficient for approaching others from great distances. Buber, indeed, readily admits that his conception of dialogue is based on direct and personal relationships. In "Distance and Relation", Buber writes, "Distance provides the human situation; relation provides man's becoming in that situation."[171] He approaches this distance between persons as part of the human condition, part of the It-world in which we share. The radical openness to experience and relationship, however, provides people with the opportunity for becoming through encounter. He contends that "inclusion" based on collective adherence to maxims denies interlocutors of actual life. For Buber, inclusion is not a normative category fulfilled by a collective adherence to norms and maxims. His approach of inclusion does not appeal to an abstract conception of humanity as a universal category. He provides some clarification on his conception of inclusion. He writes, "Inclusion…is the extension of one's own concreteness, the fulfillment of the actual situation of life, the complete presence of the reality in which one participates."[172]

Honneth's contention that a generalized and "impartial third" other is necessary to continually and reciprocally correct the other parties involved in relationship reinforces the logic of the political principle.[173] This need to close off the distance between interlocutors with an appeal to universal norms runs parallel to the political principle – which claims that sovereign authority can act as 'objective' arbiter of disputes between its citizens. Honneth's need for an "impartial third" – whether in the form of legal or moral norms – responds to an evidently innate distrust that exists between people.

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[169] Honneth. p. 20.

[170] Honneth, p. 20.

[171] Buber, "Distance and Relation", The Knowledge of Man, p. 54.

[172] Buber, "Education", Between Man and Man, p. 115.

[173] "Even in very close personal relations, every conceivable concept of morality, of 'moral' affront or appropriateness, is owed precisely to the reference…to an impartial third." Honneth, p. 19.

According to Buber, the potential for genuine dialogue is effaced by such an assumption of mutual distrust.

The absolute conviction and belief that one's "side" is truth leads one to be closed off from the other, to perceive the other with scepticism. Scepticism aspires to know the other's claim better than the other does. One looks through the other's claim rather than listening to it, tries to unmask rather than understand. Although Buber contends that by setting man at a distance relation can occur[174], the distance he seeks is not one of existential scepticism. As he states in "Hope for this Hour", the progressive decline of dialogue corresponds to the growth in universal distrust.[175] An unyielding belief in universalized norms is built upon universal distrust. In this sense, norms and generalized principles are present to mitigate an assumed general mistrust. In a beautiful excerpt from his 1952 speech, Buber passionately makes the case for human trust:

> "Man is not to be seen through, but to be perceived ever more completely in his openness and his hiddenness and in relation of the two to each other. We wish to trust him, not blindly but clear-sightedly. We wish to perceive his manifoldness and his wholeness, his proper character, without any preconceptions about this or that background, and with the intention of accepting, accrediting and confirming him to the extent that his perception will allow."[176]

Buber, in this excerpt, makes an implicit response to a criticism that charges radical openness with leading towards blind naïveté rather than engagement. Blind trust is not conducive to dialogue, for it does not require thoughtful response, i.e. testing the claim of the other. There is a personal responsibility in genuine encounter to listen, but also to respond to the other's claim. Submission is not personal responsibility. Dialogue is a partnership that requires active participation, not passive submission; it requires thoughtful engagement, not unwavering adherence. Honneth's claim that openness

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[174] "Man, as man, sets man at a distance and makes him independent; he lets the life of man like himself go on round about him; and so he, and he alone, is able to enter into relation, in his own individual status, with those like himself." Buber, "Distance and Relation", The Knowledge of Man, p. 57.

[175] Buber, "Hope for this Hour" Pointing the Way, p. 225.

[176] Buber, "Hope for this Hour" Pointing the Way, p. 227.

entails risk is, to a degree, correct. The risk, however, is the risk of failed meeting. An encounter can be fulfilled if a partner in dialogue enters into the relationship free of stratagems or preconceptions. But if an encounter is riddled with prejudice and distrust, it is, as Buber describes in his autobiographical fragments, *Vergegnung* – "mismeeting" or "miscounter": the failure of a real meeting between people[177]. Alas, the majority of encounters in modern life are *Vergegnung*, precisely because of a lack of trust, an unwillingness to be open and honest with others. Distrust harboured by the individual is attributable to a stubborn adherence to moral norms: a return to the tranquility of solitude, ignoring the claim of the other, and confirming existing or "inherited" norms as inviolable truth. But as Gadamer notes, dialogue does not involve merely asserting one's view or confirming one's truth. Confirmation is not a rote reification of one's view or of the morality one subscribes to; rather, it is achieved by being mutually transformed by the relationship. Genuine confirmation occurs only in mutuality with others, in trust and understanding.[178]

3.5. Conclusion: The possibility of Genuine Dialogue

Theorists of deliberative democracy, in the past three decades, have tried to bring what they see as deliberation or dialogue into modern liberalism. Without delving too extensively into these discussions, I will turn to an article by Darren R. Walhof[179] to help explicate the key differences between Gadamer and Buber's approaches to dialogical thought and liberal deliberative democracy. Walhof provides the following insight about deliberative democracy:

> "Theorists of deliberative democracy simultaneously demand too much and expect too little: they demand too much from citizens in terms of the attitudes and dispositions required for deliberation, but they expect too little in terms of

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[177] Buber, Meetings, p. 18.

[178] "Man wishes to be confirmed by man as he who is, and there is genuine confirmation only in mutuality." Buber, "Hope for this Hour", Pointing the Way, p. 225.

[179] Walhof, "Bring the Deliberative Back In: Gadamer on Conversation and Understanding", *Contemporary Political Theory* (2005), 4, pp. 154-174.

> its results, content with accommodation or mutual respect rather than seeking understanding or transformation."[180]

Walhof appears to contend that deliberative democracy is too limiting because it operates under the presumptions of the liberal state. The individual citizen is the basic element of deliberative democracy, which is not in of itself the problem. The problem is that the process demands the individual formulate, present, and argue a position. Rather than being a struggle for power, it is a struggle for recognition. "Having made such a case in public, however, these individuals find (that) they must stick to these arguments to maintain integrity, despite their misgivings," writes Walhof.[181] In doing this, the citizen is couched with the task of becoming amateur experts, a variant of a professional bureaucrat, in order to be heard in deliberation. When Walhof says this demands too much from citizens, he appears to imply that it demarcates an exclusion of many citizens from the process.

But even if, as John Dryzek contends, the primary criterion for "authentic deliberation is that it induces non-coercive reflection by citizens on their preferences", understanding arises only within the self through reflection, yet it neither transforms the relationships between people or the subjectivity of the interlocutors.[182] Hence, to put it simply, deliberative democracy attempts to maximize legitimacy, to patch up the "democratic gap", rather than addressing the core problems behind liberal democracy, such as its inability to address the crisis of meaning in society or to provide interhuman relationship for human beings. In general, the process of deliberative democracy, although an admirable attempt at bringing the deliberative "back in", merely permits individual citizens to engage in mutual legislation, hence, reinforcing the methods of the modern state. But maybe even more clearly, it accepts and reinforces the thought forms of modernity, i.e. the modern state is integral to human existence, deliberation exists to further legitimate this 'political principle', while providing spaces for individuals to exercise self-determination and tacitly legitimating the political surplus wielded by

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[180] Walhof, p. 155.

[181] Walhof, p. 159.

[182] Walhof, p. 159.

sovereign authority. Although the process facilitates citizen participation, this type of participation has negligible differences from plebiscites, as people primarily deal with institutional channels, while neglecting the interpersonal relationships integral to actual life.

As this chapter has shown, Martin Buber believes the problems that afflict modern politics are rooted in an individual incapacity for interhuman relationship. And as the trajectory of this chapter has shown, this incapacity is often facilitated by an assumption that Truth exists outside of genuine encounters. He contends that truth cannot be simply possessed by individuals and proliferated by modern collectivities.[183] Once the particular interests of a group are "legitimately" extrapolated to occupy the place of truth, truth itself becomes politicized, acting as a truth-object employable for crude pursuits of power or misguided ideological crusades. "Human truth," Buber writes, is bound up with the responsibility of the person."[184] This responsibility of the person is to engage the world and others, living truth by standing its test in actual life.[185] When Buber writes about the importance of social education in "Society and the State", he contends that human truth is not ready-made; truth, much like life, is actualized only in partnership. Those who engage in social education and refute a static unity seek to transform the body politic by responding to the demands of a changing world.[186] Actual communities and societies are transformed by the work of dialogue rather than stagnate under the weight of rhetoric.

> "All great civilization has been in a certain measure a Civilization of Dialogue. The life substance of them all was not, as one customarily thinks, the presence

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[183] "The political theory of modern collectivisms was easily able to assume power over the principle which lay ready, and to proclaim what corresponded to the (real and supposed) life interests of a group as its legitimate interests of a group as its legitimate and unappealable truth." Buber, "The Question to the Single One", Between Man and Man, p. 96.

[184] Buber, "The Question to the Single One", Between Man and Man, p. 96.

[185] "Man find the truth to be true only when he stands its test." Buber, "The Question to the Single One", Between Man and Man, p. 96.

[186] "Today the great characters are still "enemies of the people," they who love their society, yet wish not only to preserve it but to raise it to a higher level. To-morrow they will be the architects of a new unity of mankind." Buber, "The Education of Character", Between Man and Man, p. 138.

> of significant individuals, but their genuine intercourse with one another. Individuation was only the presupposition for the unfolding of dialogical life."[187]

The life of a great civilization is the product of partnership rather than of individual greatness; of genuine and thoughtful intercourse rather than unyielding adherence; of openness to relationship rather than mutual distrust; and of dialogue rather than monologue. Buber laments the decline of public life in modern politics because it entails a decline in dialogical engagement. It is by embracing the spontaneity of human relation and interhuman trust, and with it the unfolding of genuine dialogue, can a great polity arise. Because actual life is not merely a pursuit of power or holding stubbornly onto truth-objects; actual life unfolds through encounter.

[187] Buber, "Hope for this Hour" Pointing the Way, p. 224.

Chapter 4: Human distrust and decline of genuine dialogue: Buber's response to the political principle

4.1. Introduction

Martin Buber contends that the proliferation of the political principle, specifically into the realm of social relationships, leads humanity down a perilous road towards political illusion. Political thinkers who define the political on the basis of a distinction between friend and enemy perpetuate political illusion, which assumes mutual human distrust to be absolute. It is this distrust that intensifies a domination of the 'social principle' by the 'political principle'. Buber, however, does not advocate a complete "de-politicization" of human life. His work attempts to recover an actual life of dialogue between human beings from a carnivorous political principle. However, Hobbes' contention is that the state establishes the grounds for society by maintaining order and establishing the relative internal peace necessary for civilization. But the diminishment of, what Buber calls, 'social spontaneity' leaves the state, rather than its citizens, as the sole determinant of human existence.

The dominance of the 'political principle' in modern politics correlates to an increasing disengagement of citizens from interhuman relationships. This chapter will explore the detrimental affects of the political principle on human life – namely that it creates a situation where the individual has value mainly in relation to a political collective. The first section of this chapter will be a brief look at Thomas Hobbes' theory of sovereignty, to establish the assumptions upon which, as the second section will show, Carl Schmitt elaborates upon. The latter part of this chapter will deal with Schmitt's political thought and his ideas regarding absolute sovereignty. Schmitt's definition of sovereignty leads invariably to a politicization of the whole of society. As Buber warns in Paths in Utopia (1949), the indiscriminate politicization of society proves to be a troubling development for the actual life between persons. This chapter concludes that a

general disengagement from actual life illustrates how human distrust is entrenched within modern political theory. It is this inability for direct and honest address that contributes to the strength of the political principle. And as the latter part of this chapter illustrates, the prioritization of the "political" in Schmitt's thought over other "non-political" considerations produced calamitous results, i.e. totalitarianism.

4.2 – Society and the State: Human trust under the shadow of absolute sovereignty

Human relationships, for Hobbes, can only exist legitimately within the normal conditions created by sovereign authority. The necessity of the state is based on an assumption that distrust is rampant and insoluble.[188] Without assurance that others will not betray him, man cannot freely enter into contract with his fellows. The laws and structures of the modern state are constructed, through the common consent of its constituents, to alleviate this innate distrust between men.[189] The relation between ruler and subject operates on the assumption that the subject trusts the sovereign, because the sovereign secures the normal conditions under which the individual subject can be free and secure from potential external and internal threats.[190]

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[188] "And because the condition of Man…is a condition of Warre of every one against every one; in which case every one is governed by his own Reason; and there is nothing he can make use of, that may not be a help unto him, in preserving his life against his enemyes; It followeth, that in such a condition, every man has a Right to every thing; even to one anothers body. And therefore, as long as this naturall Right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man, (how strong or wise soever he be,) of living out the time, which Nature ordinarily alloweth men to live." Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan. C.B. MacPherson, ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 190.

[189] "The final cause, end, or designe of men (who naturally love Liberty, and Dominion over others) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves (in which we see them live in Common-wealths) is the foresight of their own preservation and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of Warre which is necessarily consequent (as hath been shown) to the natural passions of men, when there is no visible power to keep them in awe and tie them by fear of punishment to the performance of their covenants and observation of those laws of nature…" Hobbes, Leviathan, p. 223.

[190] "For by this Authoritie, given him by every particular man in the Common-wealth, he hath the us of so much Power and Strength conferred on him, that by terror thereof, he is inabled to forme the wills of them all, to Peace at home, and mutual ayd against their enemies abroad." Hobbes, Leviathan, p. 227-28.

The individual, under such conditions, engages in the task of seeing-through and unmasking others. Living under the shadow of political illusions, composed of grandiose, exaggerated, and, at times, phantom threats, individuals attempt to expose the questionable allegiance of those who express dissent or are existentially incompatible to the homogenous unity of a group. Laurence Silberstein notes the influence of Nietzsche on Buber's thought, which is reflected in latter's attempts at revealing the sources of alienation within modern humanity.[191] However, as Silberstein points out, although Buber chose a path divergent from Nietzsche's, the influence of the latter is readily evident the former's work.[192] Buber notes that challenging spirits, those who respond to the actual conditions of life, help a civilization towards change. But they are often categorized as internal threats. This 'sport' of seeing-through, as Buber calls it, is the site where the individual can indulge in a confirmation of itself vis à vis the object he is unmasking.[193] This sport of self-confirmation withers away the "immediacy of togetherness" between people, leading them to retract into a crude individualism.[194] Buber would contend that this presumption of distrust draws one back only into oneself, neglecting I-Thou relation integral to human relationships.[195]

> "Life is not lived by my playing the enigmatic game on a board by myself, but by my being placed in the presence of a being with whom I have agreed on no rules for the game and with whom no rules can be agreed on."[196]

For Buber, unbridled suspicion and scepticism "strengthen what gives rise to suspicion, and even create new reasons for it".[197] The distrust between people is

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[191] Silberstein, Martin Buber's Social and Religious Thought, p. 31.

[192] "Although never abandoning the Nietzschean task of unmasking the sources of human alienation, Buber chose a path that sharply diverged from Nietzsche's. From the turn of the century, Buber's writings reflect a powerful yearning to transcend alienation. Increasingly, he struggled to formulate categories and concepts through which to articulate a nonalienated interpretation of the individual's relationship to the universe, to ultimate reality, and to self." Silberstein, Martin Buber's Social and Religious Thought, p. 31.

[193] Buber, "Hope for this Hour," Pointing the Way, p. 224.

[194] Buber, "Hope for this Hour," Pointing the Way, p. 224.

[195] In "Hope for this Hour", Buber contends that the need for confirmation (or recognition) exists for modern man. However, he seeks confirmation in two 'false ways'. These two false ways, according to Buber, is confirmation by oneself or confirmation within a collective to which he belongs. Buber, "Hope for this Hour", Pointing the Way, p. 225.

[196] Buber, "What is Man?", Between Man and Man, p. 197.

exacerbated when they fail to acknowledge the demand of the hour, of the moment in which they live, in short, when they live solely for individual contentment. Those who disengage seek life in an illusory peace. "War has not produced this crisis," Buber writes, "It is, rather, the crisis of man which has brought forth the total war and the unreal peace which followed."[198] This crisis of man is the proliferation of distrust, an inability to genuinely engage or relate with others. Distrust, hence, is the ground that breeds the disengaged individual.

At the end of "Society and the State", Buber contends that thoughtful engagement is the primary means to resist the effects of propaganda. He presents social education as a means to destabilize the dominance of the political principle.[199] Buber places social education as an "exact reverse" of propaganda, which seeks to 'suggest' a ready-made will to members of society.[200] "Social education," he writes, "seeks to arouse and develop in the minds of its pupils the spontaneity of fellowships…with the development of personal existence and personal thought."[201] The danger of propaganda, as Buber notes, is that it proliferates a belief that the will of the sovereign is derived from the "innermost being" of citizens.[202] Propaganda help individuals to internalize "ready-made truths" as if they are immutable, and, hence, help cultivate the passive and consenting citizen integral to a dominant political principle. Propaganda facilitates an impersonal connection to 'truths', while social education, as Buber sees it, allows for personal engagement by allowing human beings to share in the presentness of a shared existent condition.

In his essay "Instead of Polemics", Buber calls on his fellows to confront the problems that face their contemporary hour, "We must take upon ourselves repeatedly

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[197] Buber, "We Must Grant the Arabs Truly Equal Rights", A Land of Two Peoples, p. 298.

[198] Buber, "Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace", from Pointing the Way, p. 236.

[199] Buber, "Society and the State", Pointing the Way, p. 176.

[200] Buber, "Society and the State", Pointing the Way, p. 176.

[201] Buber, "Society and the State", Pointing the Way, p. 176.

[202] "…to implant in their minds the notion that such a will (ready-made will) derives from their own, their innermost being." Buber, "Society and the State", Pointing the Way, p. 176.

and continuously the hardest task: responding to both demands at the same time, the demand of the moment and the demand of truth".[203] Actual life cannot be detached from the genuine relations. The 'social principle', as stated above, is animated by 'social spontaneity', which brings forth the creative potential of human relations. In Hobbes, the sovereign, as legitimate representative of the will of the multitude, becomes the single decision-maker or the Great Definer.

In the Introduction to Leviathan, Hobbes refers to the state as an "Artificiall Man", and in which "Sovereignty is an Artificiall *Soul*, as giving life and person to the whole body".[204] Men authorize the sovereign to act on their behalf, because when each and every man acts without restraint , as he does in the state of nature, he pursues personal interest to the detriment of others. The multitude cannot define a common interest, since in the natural state it is nothing but a chaotic mass of particular interests ceaselessly in conflict. The sovereign, instituted as representative of the state, acts on behalf of citizens. Indeed, the sovereign brings the state to life, because without the sovereign, as Quentin Skinner points out, the state 'is but a word'.[205] Buber, however, contends that the 'political' cannot be equated to the actual life between man and man. The dominant political principle subordinates society to the state. Since men harbour an innate distrust for each other, the assumption is that without the state there can be no society.

For Buber, the spontaneity of social engagement helps to produce a genuine transformation of society; allowing human fellows to respond to varying contemporary conditions rather than react to *a priori* doctrinal truths. As intimated in Chapter 3, any universal dictums regarding human action have force only if agents thoughtlessly submit to them. An individual who submits unconditionally is also one who imposes universal dictums, i.e., morality, onto human reality. Buber contends that thoughtful and engaged

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[203] Buber, "Instead of Polemics", A Land of Two Peoples, p. 271.

[204] Hobbes, Leviathan, p. 81.

[205] Quentin Skinner, "The purely artificial person of the state", Visions of Politics: Hobbes and Civil Science. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 177- 208, 177.

human activity creates the world anew. Rather than indulge in the "empty abstractions" peddled in the name of the political, he implores human beings to engage actual life through dialogue.[206]

4.3. Norm and Exception: The Limits of Genuine Dialogue and Community?

The ostensible need for the sovereign to provide meaning and security for human society exacerbates the domination of the 'political principle'. A dominant 'political principle' justifies an accumulation of 'political surplus' in the hands of the sovereign.[207] Political surplus is justified on the grounds of "external and internal instability, from the latent crisis between the nations and within every nation, which may at any moment become an active crisis requiring more immediate and far-reaching measures".[208] Buber contends that these latent crises entrench the dominance of the political principle. Since such crises further threaten the existence of both the state and its citizens, they are often manipulated and inflated to benefit the interests of sovereign power, namely expanding its influence. In this section, we will further explore this point by explicating Buber's response to Carl Schmitt's conception of the political.

Carl Schmitt begins his book Political Theology with a devastatingly concise definition of sovereignty: "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception".[209] Schmitt goes on to elaborate that the definition of sovereignty "must therefore be associated with a borderline case and not with routine".[210] For him, state sovereignty is not simply a

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[206] "The represented will not be bound with their representatives in empty abstractions, through the phraseology of a party program...but concretely, through common activity and common experience." Martin Buber, "Comments on the Idea of Community", A Believing Humanism: My Testament, 1902-1965. Maurice Friedman, ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), p. 92.

[207] "All forms of government have this in common: each possesses more power than is required by the given conditions: in fact, this excess in the capacity for making dispositions is actually what we understand by 'political power' [...] I call it the 'political surplus'. Buber, "Society and the State", Pointing the Way, p. 174.

[208] Buber, "Society and the State", Pointing the Way, p. 174.

[209] Schmitt, Political Theology, p. 5.

[210] Schmitt, Political Theology, p. 5.

monopoly over violence or coercion, but rather a monopoly to decide.[211] What does this "monopoly to decide" really entail? In its most intense form, sovereign decision is an existential decision – one regarding life and death, by deciding on the grounds for society. Schmitt's definition of sovereignty places the sovereign state in a dominant place above society; namely that the sovereign decision defines the limit-conditions of society. While the latter can only exist under legal norms, the former is freed from all normative ties.[212] "The rule," Schmitt writes, "proves nothing; the exception proves everything: It confirms not only the rule but also its existence, which derives only from the exception."[213]

For Schmitt, a threat to the state is a threat to the political. Without the sovereign decision, i.e. one regarding friend and enemy, the state cannot exist; hence the political does not exist.[214] Schmitt, possessing an extraordinarily sharp intellect, clearly states the grounds for the modern state. The ever-present possibility of threat provides the state its raison d'être. He clearly draws the limit-conditions of the politics, namely the borders under the aegis of sovereign authority. The 'political surplus' possessed by the modern state is justified in light of these ever-present threats. It is wielded to defend the state, but also to resist the emergence of a de-politicization; a 'disenchanted' condition where individuals live in a world devoid of meaning.

Schmitt's account of sovereignty poses a problem similar to one implicit within Hobbes: what are the conditions for society? The limit-conditions of society for Schmitt are defined by the sovereign's extra-ordinary preparedness to transgress those limits. Hence, as he articulates in Political Theology, a conception of legality that derives its authority solely from existing legal norms, a position Schmitt identifies with his

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[211] Schmitt, Political Theology, p. 13.

[212] "The exception reveals most clearly the essence of the state's authority. The decision parts here from the legal norm, and (to formulate it paradoxically) authority proves that to produce law it need not be based on law". Schmitt, Political Theology, p. 13.

[213] Schmitt, Political Theology, p. 15.

[214] "The concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political." Schmitt, The Concept of the Political. George Schwab, trans. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 19.

contemporary Hans Kelsen, disregards the transgressive act of the decision.[215] "The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology", writes Schmitt.[216] The transgression of norms, done through a sovereign decision about the exception, is by definition an irrational act, an act that destroys both the normative limits and the norms. The legal norms cannot legislate for the decision to transgress its own limits, because that would be a move incongruent with the rational principles upon which norms are founded. The sovereign decision, hence, must be one "transcendent" of the existing legal order, made with authority not bound by norms, i.e. comparable to a miracle from above. Hence, order does not come organically from associational ties. Schmitt's criticism of associational theory attests to this. According to him, these theories have no conception of sovereignty; they presuppose the existence of normal conditions for associative interaction without confronting the limit-conditions that ground them in a concrete situation.[217]

So the question can be posed to Buber: does dialogical thought operate solely within normal conditions? At the heart of this question is ultimately a question regarding the antimony between dialogical thought and the violence of the modern world. The problem of violence is not conjured away in Buber's thought. Living in the It-world, the potential for violence is part of the unforeseen.[218] The work of dialogue involves a courageous turn to another, knowing full well the stakes involved in doing so. In his essay "The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle", Buber formulates a response to Schmitt – although never explicitly mentioning his name.[219] He reiterates

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[215] "Kelsen solved the problem of the concept of sovereignty by negating it. The result of his deduction is that "the concept of sovereignty must be radically repressed." Schmitt, Political Theology, p. 21.

[216] At the start of the third chapter of Political Theology, Schmitt argues that all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts, because of their systematic structure. In short, he appears to be contending that the theological concepts that the Enlightenment tried to do away with the 'irrational' concepts of sovereignty, such as the exception, or, in other words, to banish the miracle from the world. Schmitt, Political Theology, p. 36.

[217] Schmitt, Political Theology, p. 25.

[218] "Good can be maximized not through the rejection or conquest of evil but only through the transformation of evil, the use of its energy and passion in the service of good." Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue, p. 15.

[219] "Already at the beginning of our historical period we saw teachers of the law appear who, obedient to this trait of the times, defined the concept of the political so that everything disposed itself within it according to the criterion 'friend-enemy', in which the concept of enemy includes 'the possibility of physical killing.'

that the state draws it cumulative monopoly over political power "on drawing profit from a...latent exceptional condition"[220]. This exceptional condition, however, cultivates the collective fear and anxiety of a group of individuals, exacerbating the mutual distrust between people. Unable to turn to each other in a spirit of openness and mutuality, fragmented individuals look to the Leviathan, the mortal God, or the sovereign-miracle for redemption. Such a turn towards the political illusion facilitate the domination of the political principle.

> "Many states decree the division of mankind into friends who deserve to live and enemies who deserve to die, and the political principle sees to it that what is decreed penetrates the hearts...of men."[221]

In I and Thou, Buber contends, "Nothing can doom man but the belief in doom..."[222] Those who subscribe to the essentiality of enmity only deepen the crisis of trust between people. This breakdown of interhuman trust alienates people from "presentness"[223]; allowing the crisis of man, a failure to trust and speak genuinely, to reach critical extremes. Once one sees no other way, when the illusory becomes reality; there is no option other than capitulation, allowing one to be dominated ostensibly for one's own good.[224] As noted in Chapter 3, I-Thou relationship provides the space for personal transformation, as well as addressing and transforming the It-world. For Buber, the creative engagement that unfolds in the realm of the dialogue challenges stagnant It-world conceptions. It is through genuine dialogue that the limits of It-world causality are confronted and transformed.

The practice of state has conveniently followed their advice." Buber, "The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle", Pointing the Way, p. 216.

[220] Buber, "The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle", Pointing the Way, p. 216.

[221] Buber, "The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle", Pointing the Way, p. 216.

[222] Buber, I and Thou, p. 107.

[223] "Ideas and values cannot become presentness for us, and every experience, even the most spiritual, can yield us only an It." Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue, p. 70.

[224] "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 slavery of the It-world." Buber, I and Thou, p. 107.

4.4. The Leader: Indiscriminate politicization and the rise of totalitarianism

By theorizing about limits, Schmitt presupposes the dominance of the political principle by equating the political to the pre-eminence of the state.[225] As a leading jurist in Weimar Germany, a staunch critic of liberalism, and eventually a prominent intellectual figure of Nazi Germany, Schmitt transgresses Hobbes by contending that society on a whole must be politicized by the sovereign decision on the exception. In doing this, Schmitt pares the antinomical relationship between society and the state present in Weber's thought down to a single concern: sovereignty. In facing the world in its factuality, people think about the paradoxical nature of human existence and see the world with a degree of complexity. Buber's 'narrow ridge' – an approach that rejects homogenous unity or a radical relativism – shares affinities with Weber's antinomical thought. While Buber calls on all those share in an existent human condition to consider the paradoxes that arise in actual life, Schmitt's account reserves this ability to grasp complexity to the sovereign, who alone is able to decide on the exception and, by extension, who possesses the ability to decide on matters of life and death. Through this move, he perverts Weber's account of ethics in pursuit of a homogenized collective.[226] While Weber sees the relationship between responsibility and conviction as an antinomy, Schmitt believes that a leader of pure conviction can bring into being a pure *Volk*.[227] Whereas Weber carved a sphere for social relationships separate of politics[228], albeit subordinate to the dominant political principle, Schmitt advocates total politicization of society in anticipation of internal and external threats. According to David Dyzenhaus, Schmitt sees politics as "a matter of elite determination with the aim of eliminating all

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[225] "What characterizes an exception is principally unlimited authority, which means the suspension of the entire existing order. In such a situation, it is clear that the state remains, whereas law recedes. [...] The existence of the state is undoubted proof of its superiority over the validity of the legal norm." Schmitt, Political Theology, p. 12.

[226] Legal theorist David Dyzenhaus provides a brief, yet incisive, account of this in his book. David Dyzenhaus, Legality and Legitimacy: Carl Schmitt, Hans Kelsen and Hermann Heller in Weimar. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 14-15.

[227] "And, according to Schmitt, the idea of the *Volk* has substance only when it is understood to refer to an utterly homogenous group." Dyzenhaus, Legality and Legitimacy, p. 14.

[228] Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics," Weber: Political Writings, p. 369.

internal enemies", and believes that the glory of politics is cultivated in "the utter homogeneity of the nation state ready to do battle with other nation states".[229]

In his "The Question to the Single One" (1936), Buber provides a response to Schmitt. He critiques Schmitt's indiscriminate definition of 'enemy', noting that the so-called 'inner foe' or 'rebel' works towards transforming and changing the society that he is a part of, to be differentiated from the 'external foe', who has no interest in preserving, much less transforming, society.[230] Buber contends that order cannot be imposed upon a society, once and for all. For him, order is cultivated throughout the history of a commonwealth by the living persons of dialogue who constitute it.

> "This striving, this wrestling for the realization of true order – wrestling between ideas, plans, outlines of true order – wrestling between ideas, plans, outlines of true order that are so different, but also a wrestling that is simultaneously common to all, not known, not be expressed – constitutes the political structure's dynamic of order."[231]

Hence, according to Buber, Schmitt's equation of politics to a "homogeneous dynamic of order" is deeply erroneous, because it precludes the transformative concrete relationships between man and man, while leaving the fate of a society to sovereignty's ability to bring about a "judgment of God"[232]. Not surprisingly, Buber notes in the Foreword to Between Man and Man that "The Question to the Single One" attacks the life-basis of totalitarianism.[233] In "People and Leader" (1942), Buber directly addresses the horrors of Nazi Germany. Writing in response to Hitler's contention that "leader and

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[229] Dyzenhaus, Legality and Legitimacy, p. 95.

[230] Buber, "The Question to the Single One", Between Man and Man, p. 87.

[231] Buber, "The Question to the Single One", Between Man and Man, p. 88.

[232] When addressing the "possibility of physical killing" central to Schmitt's thesis, Buber contends that Schmitt transposes the classic duel situation onto public life. The conflict between two sides, as in the duel, is absolute, a conflict that must end in the destruction of the other. But the point Buber makes is very interesting. "Every classic duel is a masked "judgment of God". In each there is an aftermath of the belief that men can bring about a judgment of God. That is what Schmitt, carrying it over to the relations of people to another, calls the specifically political." Buber, "The Question to the Single One", Between Man and Man, p. 86.

[233] However, he adds, "the fact it could be published with impunity (in 1936) is certainly to be explained from its not having been understood by the appropriate authorities". Buber, "Foreword", Between Man and Man, p. xi.

idea are one", Buber exposes the hideous cost demanded by the dream of unified homogeneity, fully cognizant of the fate of the Jewish people.

> "The leader alone knows the goal, but there is no goal. The leader embodies the idea, but there is no idea. The 'superior race' decides, and those who include themselves in it decide who belongs to it – provided that they are in power...'There is always', according to Hitler, 'only the fight of the racially inferior lower stratum against the ruling higher race.'"[234]

Dyzenhaus insists that any worthwhile scholarship on Schmitt's political theory should seriously address the latter's anti-Semitic views.[235] He contends that Schmitt's conception of the political, intimately related to the apparent need for internal homogeneity, contributed to the radical exclusion of Jews from Germany society.[236] This need for homogeneity, for a unified *Volk*, legitimates the sovereign decider, who evidently guards against internal and external threats through his ability to decide on the exception. The sovereign decider, hence, unites the *Volk* in preparation for triumph in the conflict-duel; triumph is assumed to confirm that the "judgment of God" was destined to be theirs, willed into being by sovereign authority.

In "People and Leader", Buber laments the rise of Hitler and Mussolini to power – the rise of the man who thinks he has become God. Once the leader believes that he is "becoming God", his position is contingent upon the production of docile and uneducated followers, rather than critical and "enlightened" subjects. "Successful leading without teaching," he writes, "comes near to destroying all that makes human life seem worth living."[237] If the role of citizens is merely to follow – legitimating the authority of the sovereign through capitulation, they are simply instrumental to the power of the "successful leader" or master demagogue. Rather than facilitating the

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[234] Buber, "People and Leader", Pointing the Way, p. 159.

[235] In order to debunk Schmitt apologists, Dyzenhaus explicates Schmitt's anti-Semitic views. He concludes that any honest and serious scholarship about Schmitt's work views must deal frankly and fully with the latter's anti-Semitism. Dyzenhaus, Legality and Legitimacy, pp. 98-101.

[236] Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction is tied to his idea of substantive homogeneity, and was produced in a context where, as Schwab recognizes, these ideas had to end in the Jews being excluded from German society in some radical way. Dyzenhaus, Legality and Legitimacy, p. 101.

[237] Buber, "People and Leader", Pointing the Way (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 149.

space for education or enlightenment, as Kant believes his "enlightened sovereign" does, a leader merely successful in the obtaining and sustaining power for power's sake provides only propaganda, in order to retrench and strengthen his sovereign grip on political surplus. The "successful" leader creates an environment advantageous to his exercise of sovereignty. And in the case of the sovereign decision on the exception, these conditions are emergencies and threats, exaggerated by propaganda or utterly fabricated, coming from internal and external sources.[238]

4.5. Illusion and Actuality: Buber's call for a critical relationship with existent conditions

Totalitarianism constructs a radically insecure condition, where the sovereign, and the sovereign alone, can ostensibly assure order and security. Simply put, such an environment leaves individuals to radically distrust individuals and groups within society, as being potentially threatening to political order. Under such conditions, people approach each other with suspicion, with the intention of seeing-through the intentions and exposing potential threats to the established order. As Buber notes in "Education and World-View" (1935), education allows people to approach the world in its actuality, to allow them to distinguish between appearance and reality.[239] Individuals left simply as individuals become alienated from fellow beings and unable to engage the world in its presentness, as the grip of political illusion grows stronger.

Let us revisit two points made in sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.4 above. First, Buber believes that the simple immediacy of togetherness is the most effective form of action. And second, he posits this form of action, which unfolds through direct and immediate relationships, helps destabilize political illusions reinforced by state propaganda, because

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[238] Evelyn Cobley, in her interesting study about the relationship between postmodernism and totalitarianism, outlines how Hitler gained totalitarian control through the simulation of threats, i.e., the threat of Communism and the compromised allegiance of Jews to the German Reich, combined with a manipulation of legal precedents,, i.e., 1923 Ebert decree on 'emergency situations', gain the upper hand on the 'apparent' crises. Evelyn Cobley, Temptations of Faust: The Logic of Fascism and Postmodern Archaeologies of Modernity. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 206-09.

[239] Buber, "Education and World-View", Pointing the Way, p. 105.

immediacy makes present the world in its actuality. As we recall from his stirring article "A Tragic Conflict?" (1946), people must come to understand and deal with the real conflicts that arise between groups, rather than be frightened into inaction, trusting political mechanisms more willingly than interhuman immediacy, and allow exaggerated illusory conflicts to consume life.

Buber considers Schmitt's transposition of the classic duel situation onto political conflict to be indicative of, what he calls, "political surplus conflict". If an 'enemy', including 'inner foes', needs to be annihilated for the sake of assured peace and security, spaces for meeting and human contact in society would become radically politicized. These politicized spaces, indicative of the growing grip of the political principle over society, are not places conducive to social education and meeting. On the contrary, they are simulated public spaces; designed to reinforce political illusions, galvanize individuals in support of the state's Cause, and strengthen the grip sovereign authority has over society.[240] The mass political rallies of Nazi Germany are examples of these simulated public spaces. "The totalitarian mass marks not only the end of personal life, it is also the end of the life of a people," writes Buber.[241] Buber contends that these simulated public spaces destroy any possibility for social spontaneity between persons by stimulating and manipulating an individuated emotional attachment to Nation and People. Social spontaneity, as we recall, is integral to the transformative encounters between people. Hence, left alienated from fellow human beings, isolated from human contact and meeting, individuals are forced to find a false confirmation in the collective, i.e. homogenous unity, largely manufactured by political propaganda in order to unify and galvanize a group in opposition to common enemies.

In "Community and Environment", Buber makes the following point.

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[240] Evelyn Cobley reads Arendt's work as presenting fascist totalitarianism not as a return to traditional despotism, but an attack on those traditional forms. She cites that traditional authority rested on the power of landed gentry; hence lines of power were present and an integral part to traditional despotism. But the point Arendt makes is that the very destruction of these traditional forms facilitated Hitler's simulation of public space, hence controlling the channels of oppression and quashing the channels for resistance. Cobley, Temptations of Faust, pp. 226-27.

[241] Buber, "People and Leader", Pointing the Way, p. 155.

> "The secret longing of man for a life in reciprocal mutual confirmation must be developed through education, but the external conditions it needs in order to finds its fulfillment must also be created. The architects must be set the task of also building for human contact, building surroundings that invite meeting and centres that shape meeting."[242]

For Buber, simulated public spaces are not simply the result of political machinations, but are a consequence of the tacit and explicit compliance of citizens to sovereign authority. If we recall section 2.4 above, Buber contends that any normative valuation of "what should be" should not be detached from a critical and fundamental relationship to the existing condition of humanity.[243] Through this contention, Buber makes two points. First, the "architecture" of spaces conducive to human meeting cannot be left to political forces external to immediate human relationship; and second, the building of spaces for human meeting are built upon the critical relationship to a shared existent condition. As demonstrated above, the spaces for social education cannot be left simply to sovereign authority, which may manipulate such spaces in an effort to reinforce its own grip on power. Buber notes that those bound to the body politic and aware of the personal responsibility for human address should strive to make the "crowd no longer a crowd".[244] "Even if he has to speak to the crowd he seeks the person, for a people can find its truth only through persons, through persons standing their test," writes Buber.[245] This courageous turn toward other persons is fundamental to the creation of public spaces. If the simulated public space is the crowd or totalitarian mass, the genuine space for human meeting comes to being through the courageous personal address – working to revive personhood in the midst of the crowd. And, as noted in Chapter 3, although this address at times may end in mis-meeting and the failure of dialogue, the price of silent capitulation is far more calamitous.

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[242] Buber, "Community and Environment", A Believing Humanism, p. 95.

[243] Buber, Paths in Utopia, p. 7.

[244] Buber, "The Question to the Single One", Between Man and Man, pp. 74-75.

[245] Buber, "The Question to the Single One", Between Man and Man, pp. 75-76.

At the beginning of his 1953 address entitled "Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace", he shares his thoughts about the Holocaust. In the course of his reflections about the German people, he expresses reverence and love for those who stood up and spoke out against the horrendous crimes.

> "There appears before me...some who have become as familiar to me by sight, action, and voice as if they were friends, those who refused to carry out the orders and suffered death or put themselves to death, and those who learned what was taking place and opposed it and were put to death, or those who learned what was taking place and because they could do nothing to stop it killed themselves. I see these men very near before me in that especial intimacy which binds us at times to the dead and to them alone."[246]

In the course of the address, Buber reiterates that a human voice addressing others in a spirit of mutual trust moves the life of humanity towards transformation.[247] A great and lasting peace, in his estimation, cannot be achieved in ignorance of human relationship.

Peace is not achieved through the imposition of sovereign authority over a group or many groups of people. The sovereign, accepted by Hobbes and Schmitt as the central guarantor of internal peace and stability, provides only an illusory peace. The purgation of an internal 'political surplus conflict', accomplished through the consolidation of political power, including emergency powers, claims to pacify the innate and limitless enmity between men. But, the assumption that man is innately evil is itself an illusory conflict, one that pits man against his own humanity.[248] In the Third Reich, the sovereign power, in the person of the *Führer*, creates a homogenous and unified populace through the force of its executive will, secures peace for the polity by purging and annihilating internal foes, as it seeks victory over external enemies, i.e. external 'evils', in pursuit of global peace for the Aryan race. Dreams of 'great peace'

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[246] Buber, "Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace", Pointing the Way, p. 233.

[247] "This voice must be listened to, it must be answered and led out of the lonely monologue into the awakening dialogue of the peoples. Peoples must engage in talk with one another through their truly human men if the great peace is to appear and the devastated life of the earth renew itself." Buber, "Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace", Pointing the Way, p. 235.

[248] "In Schmitt's view all "genuine" political theories presuppose that man is 'evil'..." Buber, "The Question to the Single One", Between Man and Man, p. 89.

have been based upon a similar fascination with sovereign power, hinging on a dominant political principle.

Buber writes, "The great peace is something essentially different from the absence of war."[249] The great peace is not *Pax Romana* or its contemporary variant, *Pax Americana*. The proliferation of imperium does not lead to peace; it only prepares the way for future conflicts that drive humankind closer to the brink of annihilation. It is only through the cultivation of trust between peoples that humanity can take on the difficult task of engaging the world in its presentness – revealing paradoxes and contradictions that demand genuine human thought – instead of indulging in visions of an illusory peace.

4.6. Conclusion

Buber begins the Afterword to Between Man and Man with the following quote:

> "In all ages it has undoubtedly been glimpsed that the reciprocal essential relationship between two beings signifies a primal opportunity of being, and one, in fact, that enters into the phenomenon that man exists. And it has also ever again been glimpsed that just through the fact that he enters into essential reciprocity, man becomes revealed as man; indeed, that only with this and through this does he attain to that valid participation in being that is reserved for him; thus, that the saying of Thou by the I stands in the origin of all...human becoming."[250]

Buber indicates that the dominance of the political principle effaces the possibility for human becoming, deprives persons of those creative and transformative encounters integral to actual life. Buber's thought, however, does not dissolve the antimony between state and society. Well aware of the necessity of the It-world, he does not seek to do away with the political principle. He wishes to free social spontaneity from the dominant grip of politicization. Schmitt's definition of sovereignty, however, does away

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[249] Buber, "Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace", from Pointing the Way, p. 235.

[250] Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle", Between Man and Man, p. 249.

with the possibilities of social engagement and community.[251] Schmitt envisions a wholesale politicization of society. In this politicized society, individuals are accepted as "friend" if they legitimate sovereign authority, adhere to sovereign decisions, and reinforce the homogenous composition of the polity. Others who question the decisions of the sovereign or are, by virtue of their ethnicity or beliefs, repugnant to the sensibilities of the homogenous unity are considered 'inner foes' to be excised. Life, through engaged and participatory activity, is foreign to Schmitt's definition of absolute sovereignty, since order is supreme above all.

In a brief article entitled "Abstract and Concrete" (1953), Buber responds to criticisms that his address to Carnegie Hall entitled, "Hope for this Hour" dealt with an "abstract philosophical" question rather than a "concrete political" one.[252] He rebuts these criticisms by contending that his work appeals directly to the genuine concrete – the actual life of actual persons, which has become "smeared over and crusted with the varnish of political fictiousness".[253] Of course, this response is reflective of Buber's approach to modern political thought. In returning to a point explored in Chapter 2, abstractions are the result of indiscriminate politicization, often used to unite and galvanize a group of citizens, whose tacit consent to a collective cause also legitimates the political surplus wielded by sovereign authority. And within the text of "Abstract and Concrete", Buber once again calls for a thoughtful response to crisis – in his context, the Cold War – rather than merely reinforcing political mechanisms.[254] He believes that transformation of the situation starts with those who will "begin to speak with one another – not as pawns on a chessboard but as themselves, partakers of human reality"[255].

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[251] Buber, Paths in Utopia, p. 40.

[252] "Among the statement that have reached my ears concerning my Carnegie Hall address, were some critical ones that have caused me to reflect. Almost all of them had the same import: I dealt with the 'cold' world war as an 'abstract philosophical' question instead of a 'concrete political' one…" Buber, "Abstract and Concrete", Pointing the Way, p. 230.

[253] Buber, "Abstract and Concrete", Pointing the Way, p. 230.

[254] "It is up to those on both sides who have not yet fallen into the total politicization to reflect on themselves, and in so doing reflect in wholly unphilosophical concreteness on existence." Buber, "Abstract and Concrete", Pointing the Way, p. 231.

[255] Buber, "Abstract and Concrete", Pointing the Way, p. 231.

As this chapter showed, thinkers who reinforce the dominance of the political over society, such as Schmitt, are dealing in abstractions. In spite of Schmitt's rhetorical fixation on concrete situations, namely the conditions which the sovereign exception addresses, his thought relies on the almost otherworldly ability of the sovereign formulate the decision on exceptions – in response to grotesquely exaggerated political conflicts. Buber defiantly envisions human decision as a work of dialogue unfolding between persons. The act of decision is made on the most elemental existent level, a response to a human voice, responding to the address of a fellow, and responding to existent conditions.[256] Decision, hence, is not simply a singular "miraculous" ordinance of a sovereign. Schmitt's conception of the "political" sharpens the sovereign decision into a decision regarding life and death. If individuals continually delegate a personal responsibility for response, the crisis of man is pushed to the verge of total annihilation – where human beings become fodder for a totalizing process of politicization.

[256] "Harkening to the human voice, where it speaks forth unfalsified, and replying to it, this above all is needed today. The busy noise of the hour must no longer drown out the *vox humana*, the essence of the human which has become a voice. This voice must not only be listened to, it must be answered and led out of the lonely monologue into the awakening dialogue of the peoples." Buber, "Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace", Pointing the Way, p. 235.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1. Intellectual Context: Philosophical Influences and Contemporary Affinities of Martin Buber's thought

Buber's emphasis on social education and social spontaneity owes a debt to "life philosophers" such as Kierkegaard[257], as well as aspects of Enlightenment thought, namely Kant's critical project - although Buber's account of social education, a fundamental and critical relationship with existent conditions, does not subscribe to Kant's moral philosophy, as illustrated in Chapter 3. Unlike Kant's epistemological valuation of the modern knowing subject, Buber attempts to revive a fundamental and critical relationship with existent human conditions through dialogical relationships – as is pointed out in section 2.2.2. Rather than removing reality into the individual subject, Buber contends that human subjectivity is incomplete without an apprehension of the essential situatedness of humankind in the world. Hence, the most lucid statement of his philosophical anthropology, "What is Man?"(1938), addresses the question which Kant evidently neglects – the question regarding the wholeness of man.[258] Buber, in the course of the article, contends that man becomes whole not in virtue of a relation to himself but only in virtue of a relation to another self.[259] Hence, in the absence of direct and immediate human encounter, man is left ontologically incomplete. And without the surprising mutuality that arises between people in dialogue, there is no possibility of human becoming. And, as noted frequently throughout this study, the absence of human becoming leaves individuals alienated from actual life.

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[257] This is an influence most evident in "The Question to the Single One".

[258] "The *wholeness* of man does not enter into this anthropology. It is as if Kant in his actual philosophizing had had qualms about settling the question which he formulated as the fundamental one." He continues later on in the piece to make clear that Kant, at least in his thoughts about anthropology neglects the question of man. Buber, "What is Man?", Between Man and Man, p. 142, 144.

[259] "This other self may be just as limited and conditioned as he is; in being together the unlimited and the unconditioned is experienced." Buber, "What is Man?", Between Man and Man, p. 199.

This state of ontological alienation, as this study has contended, is related to the dominating political principle; wherein the state requires a monopoly over the power to decide, monopoly over the legitimate use of violence, and the exclusive ability to dictate the form and, in the case of totalitarianism, the content of public spaces – the sites for human meeting. The dominating political principle threatens to overwhelm the creative potential of dialogue. And in the case of Carl Schmitt, the sovereign power to decide is instrumental for creating a "strong" and homogenous political group by defining the limit-conditions of the state as well as defining the existential limit-conditions of its subjects, i.e. the decision over life and death. When Buber speaks of the dominant political principle, he broaches the idea of biopolitics. The increasing politicization of society operates on an assumption: politics, for it to sustain its distinctively political character, is equated with the existence of human beings. This assumption links existential being to the machinations of the political state, expressed most potently in the sovereign decision on the exception in times of crises. Rather merely facilitating the preservation, alleviation, and functioning of human life, the modern state establishes itself as Life. Buber alludes to this point in "The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle".

> "If man has 'his being only therein' in what he owes the state, if he has 'his entire value' 'only through the state,' then logically he himself is the tribute he owes to 'Caesar.'...This (political) principle no longer confronts the individual and places a demand on him...it permeates his soul and conquers his will."[260]

When Buber articulates a "politics of de-politicization", as indicated in section 2.3.4, he is dealing with the paradoxical relationship between actual life and politics, between I-Thou and I-It. It is in the I-It realm that human action has any substance, because human beings invariably exist in the It-world. However, an indiscriminate politicization of all aspects of human life enslaves human beings to the processes of It-world causality. If people come to define their existence through an internalized political principle, i.e. defining subjectivity as a function or role 'I' plays in the larger political process, the life of individual subjects is derived solely from their relation to political

[260] Buber, "The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle", Pointing the Way, p. 213.

machinations. In "Abstract and Concrete" (1953), Buber clearly defines the cost of capitulating to the process of politicization.

> "Enmeshed in the political machinery, we cannot possibly penetrate to the factual. Enclosed in the sphere of the exclusively political, we can find no means to relieve the present situation; its 'natural end' is the technically perfect suicide of the human race."[261]

The stakes of human capitulation to indiscriminate politicization are indeed dire. As illustrated in section 2.3.2 above, the virulent grip of politicization is strengthened by the readiness of individuals to allow themselves to be represented and displace a personal responsibility for relationship with the world. As he intimates in I and Thou (1923), this enslavement to politicization is not the unavoidable fate of humanity for those who acknowledge and enter into I-Thou relationships. Hence, the political machinery he refers to in the above quotation is founded upon the capitulation of abysmal individuals who concede that "this is the way things must be", entrenching political illusion as the highest expression of reality, and equating his own existential being to that of the political.

5.2. Synopsis

Buber's diagnosis of modern politics points to the disengagement of citizens from direct and personal encounters as a central contributing factor to the increasing politicization afflicting human life. If we retrace the trajectory of this project, we find this to be a common theme through the preceding chapters.

Buber sees meaning situated in actual life with the world, with others, and with God. The living reality is encounter; living truth, hence, cannot be possessed, only strived towards in mutual encounter. This was evident through the course of Chapter 3. The importance of Buber's work to political problems lies in his ability to navigate the narrow ridge in three cases: between being and becoming, individualism and

[261] Buber, "Abstract and Concrete", Pointing the Way, p. 230.

collectivism, between personal relationships and the real demands of an existent condition.

In the first case, the radical openness to relation – as explored in Chapter 3 – exposes human interlocutors to the surprising mutuality of genuine dialogue, hence allowing them to be changed by the encounter. As illustrated in section 3.3, existential being is made present through encounter, but in doing so, interlocutors set along a path towards human becoming. As noted in section 4.2, social education, the embrace of social spontaneity through mutual encounter, resists the grip of propaganda over interhuman life by challenging and testing the "ready-made truths" often peddled in modern politics.

In the second case, he contends that actual life cannot be found in the individual simply as individual, or the individual who surrenders himself to a collective. As pointed out in section 2.3.3, human life, for Buber, is actualized in partnership. Hence, there is no presentness for the individual or the collective. As we conclude in section 2.4, this alienation from the actual life between persons leads to a situation where political illusion dominates - where the real conflicts that invariably do arise between groups of people are obscured by "political surplus conflicts", conflicts that are exaggerated and possibly fabricated for the sake of politics.

And in the third case, it is only by addressing the persons within a crowd can people make the 'crowd no longer a crowd', and initiate a movement away from political illusion into the realm of actual life – the life between man and man. And as noted in section 4.5 above, people work towards transforming a shared existent condition by providing honest and direct address to persons – to make present the world, rather than continuing to live under political illusions. Buber provides us a rebellious spirit who knows he cannot act alone, regardless of his ostensibly exceptional talents. This rebellious spirit also understands that he cannot live in the realm of spirit alone. Buber's rebellious spirit understands that the most effective form action is immediate human togetherness, when genuine address is responded in kind. And as pointed out in section

1.1, it is in the direct and immediate encounter, the genuine word between persons, that interhuman trust can weaken the presumed vice grip of distrust on human existence. Once people can dare to trust, they can once again renew actual life – a life of partnership.

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