

# Martin Buber: *I and Thou*

Outline prepared and written by:

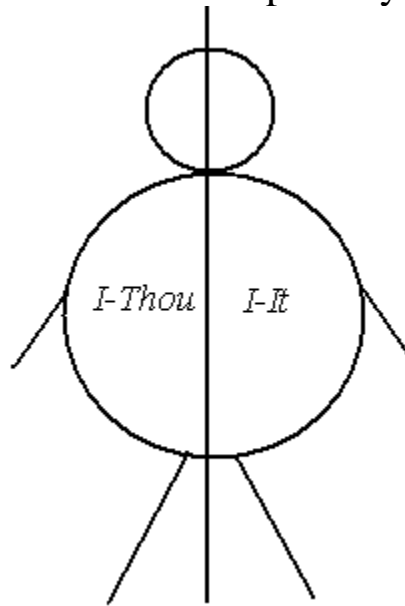
Dr. Jason J. Campbell:  
<http://www.jasonjcampbell.org/blog.php>

Youtube Playlist Link:  
[http://www.youtube.com/view\\_play\\_list?p=1582A305DF85B4A7](http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=1582A305DF85B4A7)

## § 1:

### Two Primary Words of Man:

- Each primary word is a combined word
  - *I-Thou*
  - *I-It* (“it” can be replaced with *He* or *She*).
- Man’s attitude accords with these primary words.

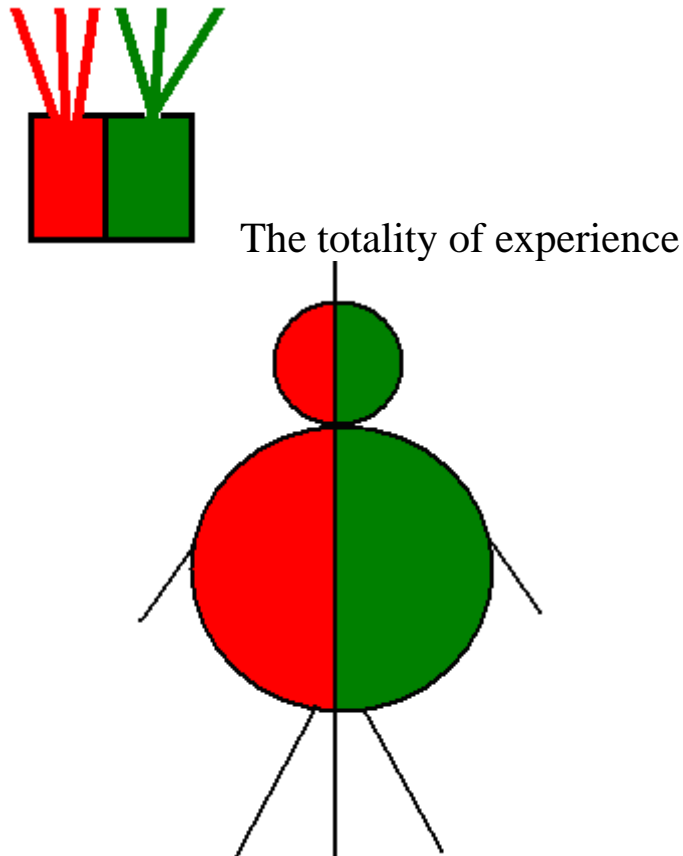


- “The *I* of man is also twofold”<sup>1</sup> : This reference refers to the *I* of the primary word: *I-Thou* and the *I* of the primary word: *I-It*.
  - The nature of the *I* is different for each of the primary words.
- **Primary words intimate relations.**
  - There is a necessary relationship between the *I* and the *Thou*
  - There is a necessary relationship between the *I* and the *It*
  - The *I* can never be spoken of without either the *Thou* or the *It*
  - To speak of the *I* is to speak of the existence of the *I*

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<sup>1</sup> Buber, p. 3.

- **Differentiating the *I-Thou* from the *I-It***
  - *I-Thou*: always spoken with the whole being
  - *I-It*: never spoken with the whole being
- **Two Realms of Existence:**
  - The Realm of *It*:
    - is defined by something
    - is bounded to every other thing: which is a sufficient condition for the existence of things.
    - Since primary words are relational: An utterance of the *I-It* binds human beings to other things.
  - The Realm of *Thou*:
    - Unbound
    - No-thing / Nothing
    - Since primary words are relational: An utterance<sup>2</sup> (utterance as being) of the *I-Thou* relates human beings to no-thing / nothing



Green: *I-It*  
 Red: *I-Thou*

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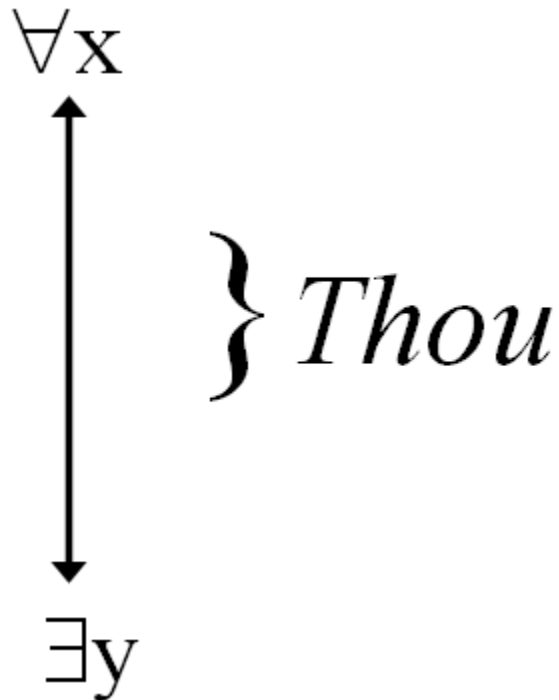
<sup>2</sup> "We speak the primary-word with our being, though we cannot utter *Thou* with our lips" p. 6.

- The world of *It* is bound by connections between *things*, between it-he-she.
- **The distinction then, between inner and outer is utterly false**
  - The distinction between inner and outer is merely apparent
  - Inner is *It*
  - Outer is *It*
  - Since inner is *It* and outer is *It* the inner = outer
- “*The world has no part in the experience. It permits itself to be experienced*”<sup>3</sup>
- **Three Spheres in the World of Relation to *Thou***
  - Our life with nature: loss of speech
  - Our life with men: defined by speech, a transference of the *Thou*
  - Our life with spiritual beings: the condition for the possibility of speech. “We speak the primary word with our being”<sup>4</sup>
    - **Progression of Our Use of Speech:**
      - Our life with spiritual beings: begets speech
      - Our life with other men: use of speech
      - Our life with nature: the loss of speech
- **Three Relations to *Thou***
  - My relation to nature is a relation to *Thou*
  - My relation to other men is a relation to *Thou*
  - My relation to spiritual beings is a relation to *Thou*
- **The Infinite Manifest Finite**
  - Any relation to *Thou*, is a relation to the infinite *Thou*
  - [read quote at bottom of page 6]
  - Explain:
    - $\forall x$  (x) is the *Thou*
    - $\exists y$  (y) is a random instantiation of the *Thou*

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<sup>3</sup> Buber, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Buber, p. 6.



**Two Forms of Thou:**

1. Thou = Each Thou
2. Thou = Infinite Thou

**§ 2:**

**My perception of a tree as (*It*)**

- a. As a Picture:
- b. As a Movement:
- c. As a Species
- d. As an instantiation of Law
- e. As Number
  - i. A-E preserves my *I-It* (object defined) relation to the tree.

**My perception of the tree as (*Thou*)**

- Begins with a consolidation of A-E
- Recognition of its uniformed wholeness
- The tree “**is bodied over against me and has to do with me**”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

\*\*\*\***Relation is mutual**\*\*\*\*

### My relation to the Tree

- Since the primary words refer to necessary **relationships**,
- And since relationships are **mutual**
- Then my relationship with the tree must be a **mutual** relationship
- Recognizing the mutuality of my relationship with the tree is an essential step in recognizing the tree as *Thou*.

### My relation to another Human Being

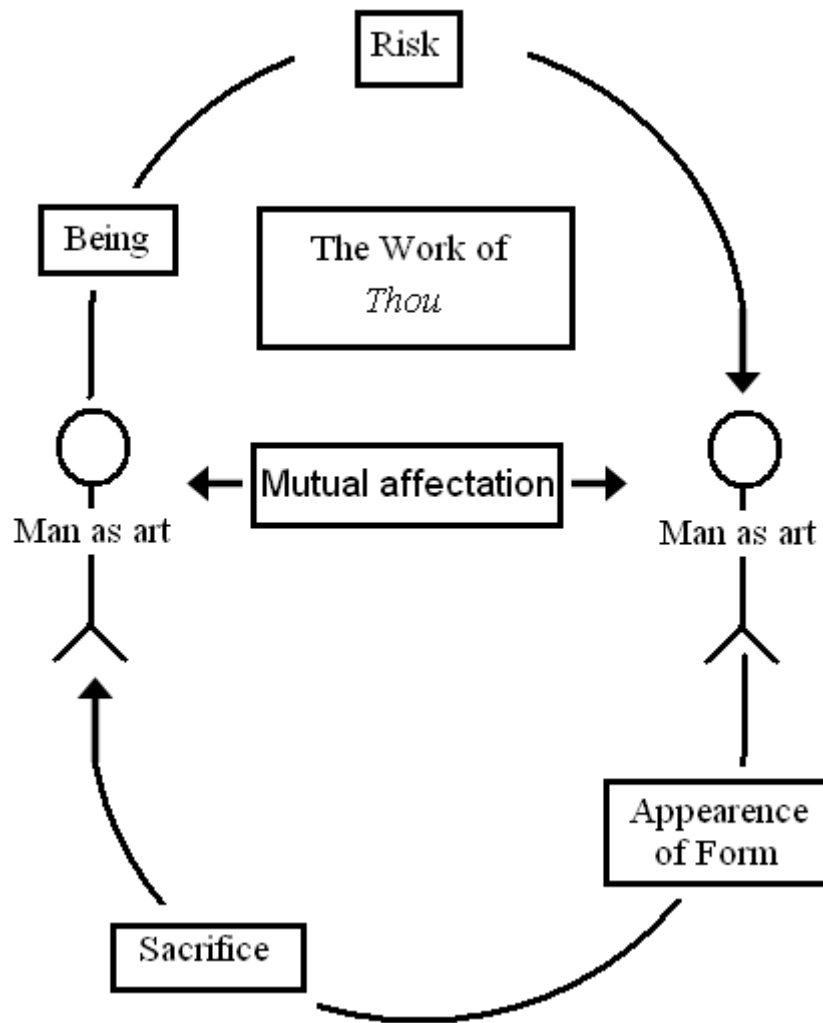
- Human beings are not merely *He* or *She*, i.e., an *It*.
- A man's being is "whole in himself"
- The *Thou* of man is undifferentiated, unbounded
- Differentiation removes one from recognizing the *Thou*
- There is no experience of the man as *Thou*
  - "In the act of experience *Thou* is far away"<sup>6</sup>

### The Eternal Source of Art:

- The actualization of the *Thou* through myself
- Read [p.9-10]

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 9.



**The act of relating to a work of Art:**

**Requires Both:**

1. Sacrifice: we risk obliteration in our sacrifice
2. Risk: We must lose the self to the work of *Thou*
  - a. “He who gives himself to it may withhold nothing of himself”<sup>7</sup>

**There is always a threat of obliteration in my relation to the *Thou***

“If I do not serve it aright it is broken, or it breaks me”<sup>8</sup>

- The “it” seemingly referring to the relationship [**unclear**]

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 10.