

# **The philosophy of dialogue and the crisis of communication in Martin Buber's thought**

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This piece of writing proposes an analysis of Martin Buber's thought in order to present his conceptual evolution concerning the dialogical nature of the human being, starting from the first pieces of writing from the pre-dialogical period, before the publication of the volume 'I and Thou' (1923), until the maturity period of the philosophy of dialogue. Another objective of our undertaking is the emphasis of the openings which the philosophy of dialogue suggested by Buber allows towards fields such as ecological ethics, ethics of care, or Internet studies, within the large context of the communication crisis, which Buber designates as the crisis of the sphere of the *between*.

In the investigation of the grounds from which the mature philosophy of dialogue will develop, we analyze the influence that Kant and Nietzsche had on young Buber, the influence of the formal sociology of Georg Simmel, Buber's interest towards mysticism and the way in which this interest develops in the buberian thinking, as well as the relationship that the Jewish philosopher developed during his entire life with Hasidism.

We then analyze the manner in which Buber's conception on the relational nature of the human being is articulated within the mature philosophy of dialogue. In this part of our step, we appeal to different lecturing keys of Buber's conception, offered by the ontology of the sphere of the *between*, by the philosophical anthropology and by the ethical theory developed by Buber during the maturity period of his philosophical thought. Beginning from the background offered by the philosophy of dialogue, we try an exploration of the ethic dimension of the computer mediated communication and of the groups based on this type of communication.

Thus, the first part of our work is based on the early period of buberian thought, with the purpose of creating an image of what represents the premises of the dialogical philosophy. Taking as a starting point Paul Mendes-Flohr's assertion, who thinks that in Buber's thought a transit from pathos to ethos is observed, we analyze the first enunciations of the principle of dialogue, starting from the mystical period, making references to influences that Buber suffered in this period, thus reaching the philosophy of realization.

The stake of the first part of the work is to demonstrate that 'I and Thou', the central point of buberian philosophic thought, is the result of an evolution that contains three stages: the mystical stage, the existentialist stage, and the dialogical stage, stages which are connected by Buber's concern for unity: the unity of the integrality of the Being, the unity of the individual being and the unity between beings.

The first chapter of this part analyses the influence of Kant and Nietzsche on young Buber. Steven T. Katz's affirmation which states that '...Buber's dialogical thought is a variety of neo-Kantian metaphysics', represents the central point of our intercession. Hence, we mention in our analysis, on the one hand, the position that asserts Buber's Kantianism, reflected by the parallel between the fundamental words I-Thou, I-It and the Kantian distinction noumena - phenomena and, on the other hand, the position,

represented by Lawrence Perlman who considers that only a formal analysis of Buber's philosophy can come to conclude the similarity with Kant and that a reference to Buberian thought in its ensemble is needed.

The one who best caught the spirit of Buber's period, Nietzsche, had an overwhelming influence on the Jewish philosopher. We analyze in this part the relation that Buber himself described as a relationship of "possession", emphasizing the influence that Nietzsche exerted on Buber, as well as the criticism that Buber brings to the nietzschean philosophy.

The chapter *Simmel and the formal sociology* has in view the importance of the formal sociology of Georg Simmel in the outline of the buberian concept regarding the interhuman sphere. Simmel's influence on the interhuman, as it is described by Buber, is felt in the extent that it designates an ontological reality, materialized in interaction. Simmel's definition – the society as a series of interactions – inspires Buber with a new perspective on the social reconstruction and puts a decisive mark on the mature philosophy of dialogue.

Further, in the investigation of the premises of Buber's philosophy of dialogue, we refer to a fundamental element in the formation of the Jewish philosopher's thought: the connection with mysticism. We analyze Buber's early conception on mysticism in the background of the influence of the mystic pantheism of the New Community (a circle established by the brothers Heinrich and Julius Hart in 1900 in Berlin) and we follow the manner in which are found within the mature philosophy of dialogue, the marks of this early mysticism: principium individuationis tacitly remains in his epistemology, the categories of his mysticism – the presence, the ineffability, the immediacy, - as well as the concernment for the personal unity and the accomplishment of truth - , although radically reinterpreted, are found in the philosophy from after the publication of the volume 'I and Thou', representing what Buber describes as being the realistic and active mysticism.

It can be said about Buber's philosophical thought that it is a translation in philosophical concepts of the ideas and the grounds of the Hasidic literature. The last part of this chapter studies precisely the buberian approach on Hasidism, from the first analyses that emphasize the mystical ecstasy and the unity of the self, towards the highlighting of the idea of community and of the relation from the maturity period, registered on the axis which Mendes-Flohr describes as the transition from pathos to ethos in Buber's thought. In this part, our step has in view to demonstrate that, as Moshe Idel reveals, Buber's interest towards Hasidism must be conceived as integral part of his philosophic thought. In the analysis of the Hasidism movement Buber is at first interested in the existential aspects, subsequently his interest moving towards a dialogical approach.

Thenceforth, we analyze this point of transit from the pre-dialogical period to the mature philosophy of dialogue, represented by the philosophy of realization. On this line, we refer to the five dialogues which embody the volume: *Daniel: Dialogues on Realization* (1913). This volume marks, within the evolution of buberian thought, the transition from the pantheistical mysticism to a dialogical existential vision of the human being's relationship with God. In this stage, Buber carries on the idea of the essential unity and, at the same time, he estranges from the ecstatic unity, approaching towards the existential unity accomplished by the comprisal of the day-to-day life.

The articulation of the principle of dialogue represents the subject of the most important part of this piece of work, the second part, where we analyze the first formulations proposed by Buber, as well as its evolution within the maturity period of the philosophy of dialogue. In this part, the fundamental notion of buberian thought, the sphere of the *between* represents the catalytic element of the investigation. We analyze in this stage of our step the distinction which substantiates the core of Buber's thought, *I and Thou*, namely the distinction between the fundamental words: I-Thou and I-It.

Another point of the analysis in this chapter centers upon Nathan Rotenstreich's critical position towards Buber's ambivalence in regard to the reflexive attitude, more precisely, upon the observation that the approach suggested by Buber does not only start from immediate facts, but tries to remain in their area, denying the need of explanation, as well as what this process implies: an observer, a conceptual framing, which outruns the facts of the experience, inherent to the I-Thou relation.

The areas of the relation – life with nature, life with the fellow neighbours and life with the spiritual beings - mark a fundamental distinction in the philosophical thought of Buber, extended, in this present work, on one side, on the parallel between Buber's conception regarding the relation with the nature and environmental ethics, and, on the other side, in the chapter that approaches the Buberian esthetical theory.

The chapter *Relation to nature. Buberian environmentalism* begins from Peter Atterton's affirmation who, after the comparative analysis between Buber and Lévinas regarding their conception towards the relation between human being and nature, states that the extension of the authentic relation beyond the human area represents a major point in Buber's thought. His vision about the authentic relation with nature underlines a distinct approach within the field of the environmental ethics, termed by Alvin Lim "buberian environmentalism." Buberian environmentalism differentiates, Lim accounts, from the classical triad (virtue ethics, consequentialism and deontology), which is characterized by a reductionist perspective and proposes a non-reductionist vision which comprises all aspects, including the rational and non-rational mental states of the moral agent, the act itself and the consequences which derive from this act. We analyze Buber's idea on the authentic relation with the nature, relatively to the heideggerian concept of *Ge-stell*, going on towards the large area of ecological ethics where Alvin Lim places also the Buberian perspective.

The next chapter comprises the analysis of buberian esthetical theory and the manner in which this develops within Buber's perspective. Our undertaking from this part coagulates around the idea that the buberian thought on art develops in a close relation with his philosophy of dialogue. Buber conceives the art as the fundamental capacity of meeting the other, rather than having only a symbolic function and hence he surpasses the representational vision on art.

Forward on, our analysis dwells on the fundamental assignment that Buber proposes to himself: the formulation of a philosophical anthropology. The philosophical anthropology proposed by Buber aims to be a critical and revisionist step which emphasizes the fact that it must offer access at the human reality, as reality of a relational being. The idea according to which the human being is a dialogical being, by his essence, strongly marks the buberian philosophical anthropology. Phipil Wheelwright points out a double maneuver materialized by Buber. Firstly, it is the matter of the conception of the human being, not in terms of substance, but of relation; afterwards, it is the matter of the

specification of the type of relation to which this refers to. This position is found on the way of the most relevant attempt to formulate an anthropological theory of the Jewish philosopher, the essay *What is Man?* (1938). The analysis of this essay represents an important stage in our step because of the major part that it has in the outline of the buberian concept on the science of man as a relational being.

We are going further with the analysis of the most important essay that Buber had published after the Second World War, *Distance and relation* (1951), which proposes a reconsideration from a rather epistemological perspective of the social dimension of the human being. This moment points out in the evolution of the buberian anthropological thought a tendency of a more active interpretation of interpersonal relations, Buber having introduced new terms in his anthropological theory, with the purpose of reducing from the ambiguity of the concept of relationship, essential in the development of a new philosophical anthropology.

Thenceforth, Buber's conception concerning the relational nature of the human is analyzed from the perspective of his ethical theory, formulated around two poles: one ethical and the other religious. Buber describes the moral values as an ontological reality discovered in the relation with the Absolute. The meeting with the original voice of "yes" and "no" cannot be replaced by any meeting with oneself, Buber says. We analyze in this turn of our undertaking the connection between ethical and religious dimensions, more precisely the manner in which the philosophical anthropology and the philosophy of religion converge in the outlining of buberian ethics. The fundamental concepts for Buber's ethical theory such as decision, and the concepts implied by it – direction, possibility -, are analyzed by stressing the fact that in the concept of decision the stake of the moral choice for the dialogical human being and the key to understanding good and evil in Buber's thought are found. Starting from the essential idea for Buber's vision, according to which the sense and the ontological fundament of good is God's will, we can identify the problematic aspects of the buberian ethical theory: the foundation of ethics on religion, the contradiction between the claim to the absolute validity that religious ethics offers to the particular moral precepts and the placing of the moral authentic situation in the private area of personal decision, the exaggeration of the unique character of ethical situations, the ambiguity and contradiction regarding the problem of the norms.

The analysis of the ethical theory formulated by Buber emphasizes on one hand, the manner in which the interhuman area is outlined in this background in buberian philosophical thought, and, on the other hand, the problematic aspects of the buberian vision. Starting from this background, we sketch a parallel between Buber's ethical theory and the ethics of care, as it is outlined especially in Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings works, emphasizing the idea that ethics of care can be easily compared and, as some authors consider, even supplemented, in the sense of the argument supplying and of offering new perspectives, by the philosophy of dialogue. The comparison between Buber's approach and the theory of ethics of care is a justified step in the lights of postmodern accent on a new morality, on anti-functionalism and anti-rationalism.

The third part of our work starts from the premise that any study on Martin Buber must recognize the fundamental importance of his belief as a Jew for his philosophical, religious and sociological thinking and dwells on the religious dimension of the buberian religious thought. The principle of dialogue which, in buberian vision, fundaments a

human being's life, cannot be conceived without reference to his relationship with the Absolute. The background of the discussion from this chapter is ensured, on one hand, by the idea of the dialogical nature of the human's life and, on the other hand, by the fact that the religious experience is presented by the Jewish philosopher as having as essential feature - the personal character. Hence, we discuss the essential distinctions for the buberian philosophy between religiosity and religion and religiosity and philosophy, as well as the distinction between two types of faith - *emunah* and *pistis* - represented by Judaism, respectively, by Christianity.

The fourth part proposes a different reading of the philosophy of dialogue, emphasizing, together with the ontological and theological aspect, the social one. Buber adopts a deconstructionist strategy and makes a conceptual criticism justified by the fact that, in his vision, abstract concepts do not offer access to reality, so they need to be tested in the essence of the existential experience to determine if, and to what extent, these are consentaneous to this. Under the influence of Ferdinand Tönnies, Buber believes that sociology does not have to be restricted only to the description of social phenomena, but it also must be engaged into a criticism of the social forms. Our analysis focuses in this part on Buber's conception concerning the alienation that characterizes the life of modern man, conception which brings new perspectives on the term of community as it is represented in the philosophy of dialogue, as well as on the manner in which the communication and the community are restructured within the context of the Internet development.

The first chapter of the fourth part treats Buber's conception concerning the community, conception based on the assumption that the human being is a dialogical being. Strongly influenced by the anarchistic vision of his friend, Gustav Landauer, Buber describes the society as a network of individual communities, decentralized, and opposes it to the state which he conceives as a system of relations based on power and constraint, which represent a threat to human freedom. The buberian concept of community has a strong evasive character, Buber describing the community in terms of openness and less in terms of intimacy. This character, that is owned, as Silberstein specifies, to existentialist notes and to opposition in regard to the structure, allows the opening towards the new forms of community housed by the online world.

We are also analyzing the manner in which Buber presents the characteristic alienation of modern society, as rooted in the fundamental approaches of human interaction, as well as the educational theory, as Buber conceives it, as an education for the community.

In the last part of our piece of work we propose an investigation for which the philosophy of dialogue is integrated as a starting point, as a conceptual criterion and as an ethical background. In the context of the new thematization of communication as relation and of the development of the communicational technology, we propose an analysis, in the background largely established by the philosophy of dialogue, of the communication mediated by computer (CMC) and of groups founded on this type of communication.

The investigation of the concept of community in Martin Buber's thought, with the emphasis on the feature of alienation, represents a good starting point for the analysis of the mediated computer communication and afterwards of the communities which are based on this type of communication and it is justified by the fact that it raises problems and distinguishes nuances that can be valorized in a theory of new study areas, as are the

studies of the Internet. Since Buber is a theoretician of the crisis of communication, we consider that his thought allows the opening towards a critic analysis of communication and online communities.

Our undertaking in this extent of our work starts from the analysis of the computer mediated communication, proposed by Amit Pinchevsky from the perspective of the relational ethics, and aims to emphasize, from the standpoint of buberian philosophy of dialogue, the ethical difficulties that arise at different levels, such as the controllable presence, the suspension of the relation's surprise or the ambiguous identity of the parts involved in online relations. The next chapter, as an expansion of the analysis of computer mediated communication, focuses on the concept of virtual community and tries to highlight the openings that the background of the philosophy of dialogue allows. The approach of the computer mediated communication and of communities based on this type of communication from the perspective of Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue underlines, on one hand, the difficulties that this communication medium rises, the computer mediated communication occurring as a sign of the crisis of the interhuman area, and, on the other hand, the idea that the Internet may represent the possibility of a new communication type. Thus, depending on the way online communities develop, the Internet promises itself as a space where the moral disorder of a world already affected by radical individualism can be outran.

Beyond the analysis of the evolution of the philosophy of dialogue, from the first form developed within the philosophy of realization, up to the period of maturity of the dialogical philosophy, developed at the end of Buber's life, our paper aims to emphasize the character of buberian thought, as a thought which succeeds in paradoxically combining, what we call today deconstruction with the continuous search for absolute values. We mention in this final part of our piece of work S.N. Einsenstadt's analysis of Buber's deconstruction, seen as a thinker who understood the fluidity of modern spirit and who chose it instead of the static consistency characteristic of totalitarianism and contemporary technocratic institutions. The answer Buber gives to postmodern problem, answer that explains the attention that his thought rejoices today, is the paradoxical alternation of society between the rigid borders and the continuous fluidity. The continuous search for values, more than a definitive solution represents for Buber the way of transcending the incertitude that characterizes the contemporary world.

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