

Vivian Milroy

I-Thou—On not reading Martin Buber

In the past few years I have been conducting some action research projects on relationships - which might seem to be labouring the obvious, since all life is really an action research on relationships - but I have, I hope, been doing my research with my eyes and options a little more open. In talking about the quality of relationships, I frequently quoted Martin Buber's "I-Thou" concept. I found it extremely useful to explain that aspect of a relationship that is both a part of and separate from the two individuals. However, I had never actually **read** Buber. I was quite open about this and one day someone during the course of a workshop offered to lend me Buber's "I and Thou". I felt I didn't need to read him - I'd already accepted and understood his main premise - but it would perhaps look better if I **had**. So I did. And now I am not nearly so clear about his message.

"I and Thou" was first translated into English in 1937 by Ronald Gregor Smith. It was obviously a difficult undertaking and Buber asked for more than 200 corrections at the proof stage. His second English translator, in 1950, was Walter Kaufman, who only took on the job after claiming that Buber was untranslatable. He has nevertheless produced an extremely workmanlike version of Buber's complex and convoluted, not to say multi-dimensional, thinking.

As I already knew, Buber describes and emphasizes the importance of human relationship, the ideal form of which he calls "I-You" in contrast to the "I-It" relationship. (Kaufman uses I-You rather than I-Thou. He points out that the use of "thou" in English has an archaic ring about it and has none of the close familiar intimacy of the German "du" which can be used just by itself as a term of endearment.) The I-It relationship has to do with using and experiencing: the I-You with a kind of passive awareness of the other, of the self, and of the relational bond between the two.

*Every actual relationship to another being in the world is exclusive
Its You is freed and steps forth to confront us in its uniqueness.
It fills the firmament - not as if there were nothing else, but every-
thing else lives in **its** light. As long as the presence of the relationship
endures, this world wideness cannot be infringed. But as soon
as a You becomes an It, the world wideness of relationship appears
as an injustice against the world, and its exclusiveness as an exclusion
of the universe.*

Buber is however not rejecting the It-world. It too has a place.

There are the two basic privileges of the It-World. They induce man to consider the It-world as the world in which one has to live and also can live comfortably and that even offers us all sorts of stimulation and excitements, activities and knowledge. In this firm and wholesome chronicle the You-moments appear as queer lyric-dramatic episodes. Their spell may be seductive, but they pull us dangerously to extremes, loosening the well-trying structure, leaving behind more doubt than satisfaction, shaking up our security - altogether uncanny, altogether indispensable. Since one must after all return into "the world", why not stay in it in the first place? ...without It a human being cannot live. But whoever lives only with that is not human.

Each state is therefore necessary. And Buber keeps a balance between the two states. He is very much against the Eastern concept of selflessness, nothingness, immersion in a void. He sees the mystical path as mistaken, as a separation from ordinary life. He is concerned with reality.

We, however, are resolved to tend with holy care the holy treasure of our actuality that has been given to us for this life and perhaps for no other life that might be closer to the truth.

In the lived actuality there is no unity of being. Actuality is to be found only in effective activity; strength and depth of the former only in that of the latter. "Inner" actuality, too, is only where there is reciprocal activity. The strongest and deepest actuality is to be found where everything enters into activity - the whole human being, without reserve, and in all-embracing god; the unified I and the boundless You.

The unified I . . . the unification of the soul occurs in lived actuality - the concentration of all the forces into the core, the decisive moment of man. But unlike that immersion, this does not entail ignoring the actual person. Immersion wants to preserve only what is "pure", essential, and enduring, while stripping away everything else; the concentration of which I speak does not consider our instinct as too impure, the essential as too peripheral, or our emotions as too fleeting - everything must be included and integrated. What is wanted is not the abstract itself but the whole, undiminished man. This concentration aims at and is actuality.

But spread over this experience of actuality is the immanent web of relationship. It is this that elevates and emphasizes and clarifies the You of the individual and the You of the universe.

The purpose of relation is the relation itself - touching the You. For as soon as we touch a You, we are touched by a breath of eternal life.

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

And although Buber rejects the path of the mystic, his sense of reality seems to me to be essentially mystical.

Spirit is not in the I but between I and You. It is not like the blood that circulates in you but like the air in which you breathe. Man lives in the spirit when he is able to respond to his You. He is able to do that when he enters into the relation with his whole being. It is solely by virtue of his power to relate that man is able to live in the spirit.

The paradox is that this mystical You will at the same time operate on the You to return it to the It-world.

*But it is here that the fate of the relational event rears up most powerfully. The more powerful the response, the more powerfully it ties down the You and as by a spell binds it into an object. Only silence towards the You, the silence of **all** tongues, the taciturn waiting in the unformed, undifferentiated, pre-linguistic word leaves the You free and stands together with it in reserve where the spirit does not manifest itself but is. All response binds the You into the It-world. That is the melancholy of man and that is his greatness. For thus knowledge, thus works, thus images and example come into being among the living.*

But whatever has thus been changed into It and frozen into a thing among things is still endowed with the meaning and the destiny to change back ever again.

Eastern philosophy says that ultimately all is unity - all is one. Buber on the other hand sees life as a continual flux or alternation from unity to separateness. From You to It, from ego to person. And this flux is at once separate from and a part of one's reality. This flux is the alternating energy field which is made up of relational bonds - from self to self, from self to other, from other to self. This is how I understand Buber's I-thou concept.

What Buber is describing here seems very like agape - the love that is beyond eros. Here he speaks of eros.

. . .who in the passion of erotic fulfilment are so carried away by the miracle of the embrace that all knowledge of I and You drowns in the feeling of a unity that neither exists nor can exist. What the ecstatic calls unification is the rapturous dynamics of the relationship; not a unity that is coming to be at this moment in world time, fusing our I and You, but the dynamics of the relationship itself.

And here, in contrast, he talks of agape and I will now be silent and let Buber have the last word.

Feelings one "has"; love occurs. Feelings dwell in man, man dwells in his love. This is no metaphor but actuality: love does not cling to an I, as if the You were merely its "content" or object; it is between I and You. Whoever does not know this, know this with his being, does not know love, even if he should ascribe to it the feelings that he lives through, experiences, and expresses. Love is a cosmic force. For those who stand in it and behold in it, men emerge from their entanglement in busy-ness; and the good and the evil, the clever and the foolish, the beautiful and the ugly, one after another become actual and a You for them; that is, liberated, emerging into unique confrontation. Exclusiveness comes into being miraculously again and again - and now one can act, help, heal, educate, raise, redeem. Love is responsibility of an I for a You : in this consists what cannot consist in any feeling - the equality of all lovers, from the smallest to the greatest.

That then is Buber - or what I now understand to be some of his ideas - but what about me? Am I different now that I am a little more in touch with the real Buber? Do I need to have read him? I certainly enjoyed reading him. To meet and listen and relate to a thinker as original and perceptive as Buber is always exciting - even if it is only via the printed page. But I do not feel I am changed. Ten years ago when I first read Fritz Perls, I was completely changed. I saw the world differently: I experienced myself differently. Is it because I am failing fully to understand or respond to Buber? Or because I am already there? Or because I feel that Buber is subtly putting down body experience and elevating the mental experience? Is it just another mind trip, a playing with mental concepts at the expense of the here-and-now gut experience?

And yet . . . and yet . . . when he writes "the purpose of relation is the relation itself - touching the You " and "as soon as we touch a You we are touched by a breath of eternal life", I feel this as a warm glow in my belly and a lifting in my chest and the same "aha" sense of recognition and delight as when I recall Blake's lines.

*He who binds to himself a joy
Doth the winged life destroy
But he who kisses the joy as it flies,
Lives in eternity's sunrise.*

This all resonates with the Zen doctrine of non-attachment, letting go; with Castaneda's learning of "not doing"; with Christ's teaching that those who lose the world will gain the world. And this feels good. So, yes, it was good that I actually read him, even though a part of me already knew where he was going. So I am back to my holy mountain story (Self & Society, Vol. E1 No.6 page 161). By reading Buber I have learned that I did not need to read him, but I am glad to have made his acquaintance.

Chris Nicolson

Educating Craftsmen - Entrepreneurs self, business and society

1. INTRODUCTION: COLLEGE AND COMMUNITY

For the past two years, City University Business School (CUBS) and the Clerkenwell Workshops* have been exchanging non-monetary resources. Thus several members of the Workshops have offered their business problems 'for sale', and graduate students of management have 'bought' these problems off them. In the summer of 1979, a particular student set up an experimental 'Business Advisory Service', among the Workshops, to test the water. Specifically, in exchange for the offer of information and advice to the craftsman entrepreneurs, he was to gain knowledge of their particular needs. In the light of this knowledge, he would be in a position to recommend appropriate educational activities.

In effect, Chris Nicolou got involved with some 25 craftsman entrepreneurs in and around the Clerkenwell Workshops. While offering them information and short courses, particularly in book-keeping, he developed some valuable insights into their developmental requirements. These have implications, not only for the education of craftsman entrepreneurs, but for students of business and management as a whole.