

Lecture on Buber given at the Existentialist Society,
Royal Society Theatrette, 8 Latrobe Street, Melbourne
At 8 pm, Tuesday 4/2/2003 By Anastasia Liveriadis

Good Afternoon ladies and gentleman

As we are all aware, humanity has entered a crucial new stage in its development. With environmental degradation and the availability of weapons of mass-destruction we are speeding down the road to self-annihilation unless there is a radical change in our attitude, that is, in the way we see and respond to our world, including our fellow humans. It is for this reason that consideration of ideas of thinkers such as Buber seems timely. I'd like to thank David for inviting me here tonight to share with you my understanding of some of the ideas of this highly acclaimed contemporary thinker.

I must confess that my first encounter with Buber, many years ago, while studying for the Bachelor of Education at Latrobe, left me cold and indifferent. Years later, with a neat proposal for a Master's by Research accepted, my supervisor who was absent during my presentation challenged me with: "O.K. Anna. You want to find out the attitudinal changes, if any, this particular educational program is going to produce to this group of practitioners. Don't you think it'll be more valuable to tell us what these attitudinal changes ought to be, with Buber, for example, as your point of reference?"

Now, the sort of person I am, on my way from A to B, if there is a most difficult path I'm bound to find it. I abandoned my neat research project and embarked on the task of getting to know Buber.

I must admit it wasn't an easy task. Not only because of the bulk of his own written work and the incredible amount of additional literature his

ideas have generated. Just to mention: he is the author of over 1500 items, from poetry, novels, short essays, critiques, commentaries, translations, lectures, speeches, as well as a large number of scholarly philosophical, sociological, anthropological and religious works. He writes primarily in German but also uses several other languages, and most of his work has come to us through translations, not always easy to digest. To complicate matters even further, his heavy linguistic styling, his special use of language, the personal meaning he attaches to words, the lack of specificity and of a systematic and coherent development of his argument, adds to the difficulty of getting to understand Buber.

Of course, one has to admit that many of the concepts he attempts to communicate, are difficult, and not easily communicable in ordinary language. That's why he has to resort to poetry, to allegory, to what some have referred to as '*negative ontology*', leaving the average reader baffled, a reason perhaps why Buber has not become more popular.

However, it must be said that no overview of Buber's work, can do justice to it. Neither can one assess the total impact his work has had and continues to have in many fields of contemporary thinking.

In tonight's session **first** we'll meet briefly Buber, the man. **Secondly**, we'll be introduced to his main thesis which, I'll paraphrase as: the way human beings ought to relate to each other and to their world, a way he refers to as the *encounter*, or *dialogue*.

Martin Buber

was born in Vienna in 1878 and died in 1965, aged 87, in Jerusalem. At the age of three his mother deserted the family home, leaving young Martin insecure and traumatised, a situation that had a great impact in his subsequent development as he himself admits in his book 'Meetings' and

the ‘Autobiographical Fragments’. After the departure of his mother he was raised by his paternal grandparents, both well educated and prominent members of the East European Jewry, in Lemberg (now Lvov) Ukraine (Galicia). In this rural setting Buber was exposed to Hasidism, (Zadik) an experience which left a strong impression on Buber, as he readily admits: “*the Hasidic tradition has grown for me into the supporting ground of my own thinking*”. He attended grammar school, and therefore he was exposed to a broader than the Eastern European Jewish culture and gaining an excellent grounding in the classics.

His university years were spend in cosmopolitan Vienna and also at Berlin, Leipzig and Zurich, studying philosophy and art, and in 1904 gaining his PhD in Vienna. After embracing Zionism, he became editor of the Zionist weekly *Die Welt*, and in 1916 founded *Der Jude*, the central forum for German-reading Jewish intellectuals. He became involved in Jewish adult education, becoming director of a nationwide organisation for Jewish adult education and teacher retraining in Germany. As he was openly opposed to Nazi principles, his public lectures were banned and eventually he migrated in 1938 to Palestine, where he became professor of Social philosophy at Hebrew university in Jerusalem and the first head (1949) of the Teachers Training College for Adult Education.

As mentioned, Buber’s philosophy is centred on the *encounter*, on the *dialogue*, of humans with all other things and beings, particularly with their fellow humans. A deeply religious man, Buber equates religion with interhuman relations and the performance of loving deeds. One can relate to God only through an open and loving relationship to other humans, which to him is “*a real simile of the relation with God*”. The “*religious*” does not belong to a realm different from that of the common and the every-day; every situation is a religious situation. Every action and every relationship

is connected to the rest of existence and is endowed with cosmic significance. The unity of the sacred with the profane, the "*hallowing of the everyday*", a fundamental notion in Hasidic teaching, is of central importance to Buber's view of humanity. He is not longing for another world yonder but is wholeheartedly involved with the here and now, with the concrete, the present world he shares with all other humans.

He does not share in the belief that reason alone can answer all of humanities ills and insists that one has to leave the path to subjective thought, intuition and mystery open. In fact, by presenting to his readers his own existential insights, he is encouraging them to tune into their own existential reality.

I say to him who listens to me: it is your experience. Recollect it, and what you cannot recollect, dare to attain it as experience.

He is also sceptical of the ability of traditional philosophy to shed light on the human condition. Philosophy he reckons: *is grounded in the belief in the all powerfulness of thinking; it totalises the partial*. However he is using the philosophical method as it is the only way to present his views and to arrive at his goal, a goal that can only be grasped existentially. He even disagrees with the title "Philosopher of Dialogue" they have given him, as dialogue can only be understood dialogically, not by the use of philosophical concepts.

Concepts come also under his strong scrutiny, particularly when they are used habitually, in a mindless way, when their original meaning has been lost, and when they are no longer valuable or relevant.

He acknowledges that in the course of human history people live through '*times of revelation*', times of genuine creativity. The words that are spoken during *a people's most creative hour* are, for him, the only ones expressing fundamental truths. Unfortunately, these words and the other symbolic representations of this creative hour, such as culture and ritual,

become ossified and degenerate into meaninglessness. Frequently they are taken up by powerful groups and used to oppress and to control, to compel others to act in a mindless and ritualistic fashion.

Words and symbols that are given prominence and value in a culture have the power to create a predominantly humane or an inhumane society, to lead to a predominantly open or a closed mind, to unite or to divide, to illuminate or obfuscate truth and reality.

He identifies alienation, the feeling of '*homelessness*', the inability of one human being to make contact with another, as one of the most tragic features of present-day society. His mission is to communicate to his readers his understanding of what it is to be essentially '*human*', and what are the ingredients necessary for the creation and the maintenance of a '*human*' world. Having accepted the rightness of his conviction he speaks with authority, with the voice of a prophet, unwilling to enter into any form of dialogue regarding this.

**

It is time then to look at Buber's two foundation words, on which, as it has been said, his entire conceptual and existential edifice rests. These words are in fact two composite words: *I-It* & *I-Thou*, each standing for a specific attitude people adopt in their everyday life. The meaning of these words he clarifies in his seminal book *I and Thou* the inspiration of which came to him as a revelation. *I and Thou* is a deceptively easy book to read, even though one is still unsure about several points after several diligent readings.

As mentioned, *I-It* and *I-Thou* stand for the two fundamental attitudes, which determine the way we perceive and respond to our world. While our attitudes may be many, Buber condenses them into *two*, which to him are *basic or fundamental*, that is, indispensable to human existence.

Let us then look at each one of these attitudes separately. The first is the attitude of *I-It*, of subject-object. It is an objective and procedural attitude that allows us to experience the world and our place in it, to learn, to plan, to manipulate and to use in order to survive and to progress. It is an attitude of distancing with the I over here, and everything and everybody else, the It, over there, to be observed, calculated and used.

In contrast, the *I-Thou* attitude is highly personal, direct and relational. It establishes communion between the I and the rest of creation, including our fellow humans.

The opening sentence in his book I and Thou is: "*To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude*".

These two attitudes which are diametrically different but complementary, are inextricably bonded to each other to form a unified whole. And while one, many a time has played a dominant role in the course of human history, in the long run the bond that exists between the two is capable of reversing the possible imbalances.

Buber is convinced that fundamentally humans are relational beings. All of us, prior to developing awareness of our own independent existence, have a sense of cosmic unity. We feel one with the *`primordial'*, the *`primary'*, the *`eternal'* Thou, "*the a priori of relation*" according to Buber. Thus, "*in the beginning is relation*". What young babies are striving for while in a state of dim awareness, is not to establish independence but to establish contact; to establish relation. Thus, he observes that (baby's) "*hands sketch delicately and dimly in the empty air... disjointed, meaningless sounds still go out persistently into the void*". In other words, the human infant strives to get in touch with the world, to establish relation, to establish connection. When, the searching hands and the woolly teddy-bear give themselves to each other, the teddy-bear is not as yet perceived as

an object but as a symbolic, living presence of the eternal Thou to be loved and cherished.

Gradually, and with increased maturity, the primal unity breaks. The primal relational world gives birth to the emerging individual and to the world, which, as separate entities, face each other. Both, the individual and the world have now become real. Unity has split into duality. The self of the individual, the I, is aware of its distinct and separate existence. Now the individual is "*endowed and entitled to detach the world as a whole from himself and to make it an opposite to himself*". The conscious I recognises self as a subject while the world has become "*an independent opposite*", an object; an It. The duality of subject-object, and the attitude of *I-It* have emerged. However, what has been an original unity with the inborn Thou has not been completely and irretrievably lost. Like the seed of a plant, the relational longing enters a stage of dormancy to remain an ever-present potentiality.

Now the I, distinct and independent from the rest of existence, orient itself to this existence. The *I-It* attitude emerges, an attitude that can never be outgrown, as it is indispensable to human life, ensuring our survival.

"*And in all the seriousness of truth, hear this*", Buber pronounces solemnly, "*without It man cannot live. But he who lives with It alone is not a man*". What he is really saying is that while the *I-It* attitude guarantees our survival, it does not make us what we ought to be in order to regard ourselves truly '*human*'. Having only an *I-It* attitude maintains us at an incomplete stage of development, unable to reaching our human potential and to arrive at realisation. For human life to become realised we have to go beyond the *I-It* attitude, to developing the additional, complementary and counter-balancing attitude of *I-Thou*.

We can go through life having only the *I-It* attitude, without ever going further to develop the attitude of *I-Thou*. However, lurking within

each one of us is the remnant of the `primordial', the `eternal' Thou, in a dormant state to be sure, but creating an innate *longing* for unity and completion. As we go on with our everyday lives, we may experience "*cursory vistas of love, friendship, comradeship, fleeting revelations of the Thou*". After such moments, we may continue to live as if nothing has happened, or may become even more aware and more responsive to this inner longing.

This does not mean that a true *I-Thou* relation will develop as such a relationship can eventuate only "*through grace*". This means that you cannot plan for it; it just happens. What one has to do to increase the likelihood of this happening is to make a conscious decision to cultivate an attitude of *I-Thou*, in other words to perceive and respond to the world and to other humans as a Thou, the main ingredient of which is *love*.

Love is not the feelings of a person towards an object. "*Love is between I and Thou*". Of course feelings are also involved, but love endures changing moods and feelings. Love "*is responsibility of an I for a Thou*".

Ah, what is your love if it is not also responsibility for everything that is effected by its might!

Thus, the *I-Thou* attitude brings love and reverence into our lives. It opens us up to the world, freeing us from predetermined, mechanistic and stereotyped perceptions and responses. With an *I-Thou* attitude we become real, available and present.

A true *I-Thou* relation is an all-consuming state of pure relation, something like a religious, or, to use Maslow's words, a `peak' experience. Such a relation has neither structure nor content. The other, as *Thou*, is not perceived as an aggregate of discrete, disjointed properties, qualities or events occupying space and time, but is grasped in its concrete wholeness

and uniqueness. A true I-Thou relationship is, by its nature, intense, momentary and transient. The person emerges from such an encounter transformed and with an expanded state of consciousness; acutely aware of the wholeness and unity of existence and infused with the enduring and transforming power of love.

Love stretches now beyond the specific *Thou* to encompass the whole of creation including our fellow humans. Thus, as the impact of the *I-Thou* encounter fades and the individual returns to the world of the ordinary and the mundane, he or she is in a better position to take a conscious *I-Thou* stand towards other humans. That means, one is determined to see humans not as objects of observation, use and control but as comrades, as fellow travellers, sharing a common world and a common destiny. Thus, although an *I-Thou* encounter is unpredictable, intense and transient, an *I-Thou* attitude is always present and thus predictable and, furthermore, it makes genuine human to human interaction possible.

Humans, in their everyday life, are in contact with many other humans. Such contact can become "*a personal relation; it can be merely tolerated; it can be neglected; it can be injured*", that is, there are many different ways humans relate to other humans. However, if human life is to be actualised, genuine human to human relations are essential. "*The fundamental fact of human existence is man with man*". And again: "*It is from one man to another that the heavenly bread of self-being is passed*".

For genuine relations one needs a steadfast commitment to see others as fellow humans rather than objects, even if this is not reciprocated. Genuine relations take place at a personal rather than a social level, where people see each other as a whole, a partner a kin and a fellow human, rather than an aggregate of different qualities, an object: "*Only in partnership can my being be perceived as an existing whole*". Person to person contact,

which for Buber is the *'interhuman realm'*, "*... goes far beyond sympathy... to establish an impassable barrier to objectification*".

In genuine human to human relations there is "*acceptance of otherness*" and *'confirming the other'*. As he puts it, each one of us: "*secretly and bashfully watches for a 'Yes' which allows him to be and which can come to him only from another human being*". Confirming the other means accepting and confirming the dynamic wholeness and uniqueness of the other: not only as the person he or she is but also as the person he or she has been created to become and is capable of becoming. Thus, for Buber, "*a society may be termed humane in the measure to which its members confirm one another*". One can be vehemently opposed to another person's point of view yet at the same time can affirm the presence and the uniqueness of this person.

Genuine human to human relationships are growth-full relationships as in genuine contact with others one learns more about self in ways which lead to deeper self-understanding, to commitment and to self-integration. They are humanising relationships as they are nourished by the humanising and *'constructive powers'* of the world: active participation, love, concern, compassion, help, reciprocity, responsibility, fellowship and care. They are liberating relationships as, in the acceptance of otherness and uniqueness, the person feels free to discard the accumulated social and personal constraints and free to develop his or her own unique potential.

Thus, genuine human to human relationships are honest, direct, spontaneous and free from pretensions and ulterior motives. They confirm the uniqueness of the person while at the same time they allow the person to become aware of his or her own defences, biases, misconceptions and prejudices. They allow for the development of personal integration and for moral and responsible action, stemming from one's whole being and delivered without hesitation or internal conflict.

So far we've seen that an individual can live with only an I-It attitude, but if human life is to be actualised the I-Thou attitude is essential. At this stage, Buber introduces an extended concept that of the collective **'WE'**. If we take marriage, one of the most intimate of relationships, as the basic unit of a humane world, we have two people genuinely saying Thou to each other, rather than saying Thou and meaning He or She. Several people joined in community and saying Thou to each other and a collective **'We'** comprise a larger block of a humane world, an organic commonwealth.

An organic commonwealth - and only such commonwealths can join together to form a shapely and articulated race of man - will never build itself up out of individuals but out of smaller and even smaller communities.

This **collective "we"** Buber goes to pains to differentiate from collectivity, as he goes to pains to differentiate between an individual and a person. For this reason I'll spent few more minutes of your time to have a closer look at these two concepts, that of individualism and of collectivity.

Individualism

In his essay 'Distance and Relation', Buber presents two movements as: the twofold principle of human existence: The '*primal setting at a distance*', and the '*entering into relation*'. What he really means is that when we become aware of our separate existence, of our I, 'over here', facing the world 'over there', a distance has been created between ourselves and the world. We then move to take charge of the '*world*', to make it '*my world*', '*my property*', '*my knowledge*', '*my achievement*'. In the process our individuality and our uniqueness develop. Buber sees '*individuality*' and '*uniqueness*' not as ends in themselves, in that they are not synonymous with '*being human*'.

I hold the individual to be neither the starting point nor the goal of the human world.

The individual is not a complete, an actualised human being. The only way he can become whole is by turning to others. "*I become through my relation to the Thou; as I become I, I say Thou*". The individual becomes real, becomes "*a fact of existence in so far as he steps into a living relation with other individuals*".

As individuals we are takers and observers but not participants. We are self-centred outsiders, concerned about our own importance, our mastery, our glory. In isolation, we live in an imaginary, an illusionary world, a life that is an absurdity and a lie. Alienated and frightened, in our attempt to fill the void and to subdue the pain of unreality we double our effort to accumulate and to succeed. This is particularly so when society offers the promise of fulfilment to those who manage to accumulate wealth, prestige and fame.

Thus, "*the modern individualising process (is) finished up as a process of atomisation*". Living in the emptiness and fallacy of independence, the individual becomes even more preoccupied with analysing inner feelings and desires. However, even in this situation, the individual is neither real nor whole but segmented, with one part, the subject, the observer, observing a detached and alien part; an object.

The only escape from this fallacy is the re-establishment of connection with what is set out there and what is seen, so far, as disconnected and alien; particularly connection with fellow humans.

The Collectivity

As the detached and self-centred individual leads an unreal and empty life, the life of the individual who becomes a member of a collective is just as unreal and as incomplete. By joining a collective, such as a union, a

political party, a professional association, individuals may delude themselves that they are no longer alienated and empty, as they silently march side by side to the common tune of the impersonal and mighty "*general will*". However, the loneliness persists. Marching side by side does not place human beings in relation to each other neither makes them aware of the humaneness of each other. More likely they see each other as tools and appendages; useful organs in the service of this "*general will*".

In both democratic and totalitarian societies, the collective dominates most spheres of human life. Social, economic and political institutions conspire to turn the person into a *functionary* while "*the pressure of numbers and the forms of organisation have destroyed any real togetherness*". Most of today's groups tend "*to suppress the personal relation in favour of the collective*". Groups elevate the concept of the '*general*' to the status of the '*real*', thus furnishing their members with new unrealities and illusions. Anonymous structures claim to represent and to speak for all, freeing the individual from making decisions and from accepting responsibility for personal actions. A functionary of the collective, with mindless loyalty and obedience to it, the individual, in the name of duty can abandon humanity for the honour and '*purity*' of a particular ideology advanced by the group.

Powerful groups, under the banner of representing the '*whole*' of their membership, assert and impose on others their power and their '*collective egoism*'. Such groups can maintain dominance over others even though their legitimacy to power is no long valid.

In collectivity one becomes progressively desensitised and the longing for genuine connection deadened. In the midst of the crowd the emptiness becomes overpowered and numbed and the loneliness becomes a collective loneliness. For neither individualism nor collectivity makes human life real and whole:

Individualism understands only a part of man, collectivism understands man only as a part: neither advances to the wholeness of man, to man as a whole.

What then is the alternative to Individualism and Collectivity? Buber has no hesitation in providing the answer. The only way a human being can become liberated from the imaginary and the fictitious is by recognising "*the other in all his otherness as himself, as man, ...*"; when he/she regains "*the directness of personal decision and responsibility*"; when he/she becomes a *genuine person*, sharing in the life of a *genuine community*. Thus, the development of personhood and of genuine community, is the only viable alternative.

After the development of individuality and uniqueness the individual can remain forever in the distancing position or can move towards re-establishing connection, towards becoming a Person. The individual capable of saying 'Thou', of having an I-Thou attitude is a 'person'. However, as we have seen, humans have to live in a twofold world. No one can remain connected forever or in an I-Thou relationship, not only because of its intensity but also because of its transient nature: "*this is the exalted melancholy of our fate, that every 'Thou' in our world must become an 'It'*". Thus, inevitably, "*no man is pure person and no man pure individuality*". The human being whose attitude of I-Thou is more prominent, is more of a person, while the one whose attitude of I-It is more prominent, is more of an individual.

The person is aware of the contradictions of existence; the pull towards and away from union, the pull towards and away from separation; the inner vacillation between the attitudes of I-It and I-Thou and the inner conflicts and tensions created by these contradictory demands of existence.

The person has resolved to accept these contradictions, to live according to the concrete requirements of life, and to be in communion and solidarity with other humans. The person has resolved to have an attitude of openness to every other thing and being, relating to them as potential Thous. This way, while no one can be purely individual or purely person, quantitatively, the person knows of both attitudes and has resolved to maintain them in proper balance.

More specifically, a person is integrated, loving, trusting and caring; active, honest, genuine and involved with life and people; spontaneous, with an open mind and with inner direction and commitment; listening, nurturing, helping.

...if I may say expressly Yes and No to certain phenomena, I'm against individuals and for persons.

Buber has many more things to say about the qualities and characteristics of the person. As mentioned, these qualities develop only through genuine human to human interaction and through participation in a 'genuine community'. 'Genuine community' is defined by Buber as the place of human realisation.

Buber recognises the social nature of human beings and identifies the presence of a "specifically human idiosyncrasy" which, from the very "beginnings" of time, has placed humans within a social context. The evolution of humankind took place within organic communities, formed and reformed on the "basis of functional autonomy, mutual recognition and mutual responsibility". However, the organic forms of community living, which have provided for "direct life of man with man" since the French Revolution, have been taken over by the State. The personal and community responsibility of the organic structures have been replaced by centralised and institutionalised political and economic control. In the

process, human society has lost its most valuable asset; "the life between man and man". In both democratic and totalitarian societies humans have been conditioned or coerced into shedding their personal responsibilities and to obey. Under these conditions,

personal relationships wither; and the very spirit of man hires itself out as a functionary. The personal human being ceases to be the living member of a social body and becomes a cog in the "collective" machine... (and) the degrading social life he leads is causing him to lose the feel of community...

Thus, for Buber, only the rebirth of genuine community can restore the precious contact between humans and bring humanity to its realisation. Genuine community is also the only way that survival of the human race can be assured. The amorphous humanity, unless it "*is built up of living units of relation*", is an aberration. A genuine, "*thoroughly communally disposed community of the human race (is) the primal hope of all history*". Genuine community is "*based on the actual and communal life of big and little groups living and working together and on their mutual relationships*".

Community is the place of communal meaning-making; the place where a common cosmos and a common logos exists, bringing the individual into contact with a larger reality than one's self . Here, the individual is not a detached element but an essential link in the shaping of everyday events. Within a community setting the individual can also learn to see self as a link in the great chain of events that has produced the current generation and the generations to come. In addition, the community provides its members with the opportunity to learn anew the saying, not only of Thou but, of We; a learning which is imperative to the survival of the human species: "*man will not persist in existence if he does not learn anew to persist in it as a genuine We*".

A genuine community is the place where unique and whole persons, capable of saying Thou, interact with other unique and whole persons in day to day living and where

individual beings open themselves to one another, disclose themselves to one another, help one another; where immediacy is established between one human being and another; where the sublime stronghold of the individual is unbolted, and man breaks free to meet other men.

Community is the place "*for the truest and most serious (individual) responsibility and its constant test*". It is here that the person's responsibility is tested, in two ways, as he/she is confronted by two fronts: the outside world to which the just demands of the group have to be articulated, and the world within the group when unjust means are considered to achieve the community's purpose or when the original purpose of the community is misrepresented.

Shapeless crowds can be formed into true communities, not by exclusion and erection of artificial barriers but, by inclusion; by recognition of the common humanity present even in the crude, the greedy and the stingy and by love with its redeeming power. Humanity will be able to overcome the dominating power of the world of It, with its impersonal structures, only through genuine realisation of genuine community. This is not to say that community is a rigid entity existing permanently in space and time. It is not a concept but a living reality and its realisation

cannot occur once and for all times; always it must be the moment's answer to the moment's question and nothing more.

A true community is the place where people can relate to each other in love and concern and where "true deeds", which are always loving deeds take place. Communal life should not be sentimentalised. It is not based on ideas

or feelings. It involves shared toil, mutual aid and support, and it involves suffering and pain. It involves the simple, unsentimental, unexalted existential reality of the lived moment.

People do not have to be constantly together in order to form a community, although they need to have mutual access and to be ready for one another. Also community is not a close and self-contained system where people with similar ideas and temperaments form secret alliances and are protected from "the crowd". It is "genuine living together of man of similar or complementary natures but of different minds" Even with individuals who hold the same views, their views must be constantly "tested and renewed in genuine meeting". Members of a community are neither neutral nor merely tolerant towards each other. People with different ideas come together in solidarity and mutuality and provide a:

living answering for one another..., a living reciprocity..., ...communal recognition of the common reality and communal testing of the common responsibility... Community is the overcoming of otherness in lived unity.

Buber does not have a nostalgic longing for the past which he knows has irrevocably gone. But he makes a strong plea for the rebirth of the spirit of community between humans; for the placement of the relational sphere of human existence to its rightful place; for the building of bridges between the abysses separating human from human and from the world. He calls for the restoration of the dialogical immediacy, through which demarcation lines between the existential reality of the individual person and the existing technological, economic and political realities can be constantly re-established and adjusted.

The development of personhood is, for Buber, inter-woven with the development of community; the basic and most fundamental defence against the dehumanising forces of today's world. It is only persons who can bring back the necessary dialogical immediacy and genuine contact between human beings. It is only persons who can enter into genuine relations. Genuine persons can confirm the uniqueness of others that, for Buber, is the "indispensable minimum of humanity". This is what makes the world of humans a human world.