

GNOSTICISM AND CREATION IN BUBER'S PHILOSOPHY

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An evaluation of Buber's place in 20th century philosophy needs to be prefaced by several comments on Buber's background and sources, which explain the unique spiritual environment within which he developed. I then wish to discuss one aspect of his teaching, the problem of creation: a theme to which Buber returned a number of times. Research I have done on the sources of Buber's *I and Thou* enables me to shed a new light on this subject.¹ The present discussion will be limited to a comparison of the Biblical account of creation and the Gnostic creation myth, within this context. One ought to note that the creation myth referred to here, which Buber encountered at a certain point, is not only that of Gnosticism *per se*, but sometimes refers to that of Marcion, which was also discussed in the writings of Adolf Harnack, including his book, *The Essence of Christianity*,²

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Translation of her "הגנוסטיקה וחורת הבריאה במשנת מארטין בובר" in "דעת", v. 2-3, p. 229-240. Translated by Jonathan Chipman.

1. See Rivka Horwitz, *Buber's Way to 'I and Thou,' An Historical Analysis and the First Publication of Martin Buber's Lectures "Religion als Gegenwart."* (Heidelberg, 1978)

2. Adolf von Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (Leipzig, 1902). This book was translated into a number of languages, and was highly influential. Leo Baeck wrote his *Das Wesen des Judentums*, Berlin, 1905 (English translation, New York, 1961) in response to this book. In the Hebrew translation of Baeck (Jerusalem, 1968) see E. Simon's Introduction concerning Harnack, p. 19.

but for our purposes no significant distinctive need be drawn between the two. For this generation, the question of creation was not merely a dry, dead question of the past, but the subject of lively intellectual controversy.³ The religious philosophy of Martin Buber is rooted in classical philosophy and in German literature. He received his earliest education in Galicia, where he also encountered the Enlightenment.

While growing up in the home of his grandfather, Solomon Buber, in which he learned both Hebrew and Yiddish, among other languages, he had an opportunity to encounter first-hand the Hasidic *shib'l* (prayer house) and Hasidism generally — that great movement which began developing around the figure of the Baal Shem Tov in the mid-18th century. However, it was only decades later that Buber became a devotee of this movement which he came to view as the greatest spiritual phenomenon created by the Jewish people during its Diaspora. In Hasidism, Buber discovered a mystical religiosity, the simple faith of the simple man, an affirmation of existence and a life of joy and divine service in community, based upon love and attachment to God. As scholars have already pointed out, one must qualify this statement with the point that, while Buber's thought was suffused with Hasidic motifs, he was very far from accepting a Hasidic way of life or Hasidism in its historical sense.

Thus, Buber's philosophy is a rare synthesis of two opposing streams, which usually seem to be remote from one another: German philosophy and Hassidic thought. Through the unique work of this thinker, these became unified. Among the German philosophers, the thought of Kant made the deepest impression upon him.⁴ When he was a youth of fifteen, he had already read the *Prolegomenon to all Future Metaphysics*, from which he learned that space and time are "nothing more than formal conditions of our sensory faculty," and not real properties that adhere to the things in themselves. Later, in his book *Daniel* (1913), Buber explained the concepts of space and time as modes of orientation, which he referred to in *I and Thou* as the "I-It" relationship. That world which is determined by space and time is dominated by causality; in it, phenomena occur according to predetermined laws. This is the world of the natural sciences, which is a rationalistic world.

Buber also agreed with Kant that transcendental truth, "the thing in itself,"

3. See, for example, Buber's comments in "Supplement: Christ, Hasidism, Gnosis," in *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism* (New York, 1960), p. 243.

4. Martin Buber, "Autobiographical Fragments," in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, ed. by P.A. Schilpp and M. Friedman (La Salle, Ind., 1967), P. 12.

cannot be understood by logical means. In the early part of his life, when Buber expressed himself in a more mystical manner, he said that the thing is not subject to knowledge, but only to realization, while later, in his dialogical period, he spoke about truth which is realized in relationship or meeting.

In 1919, Buber started to write a book which was to become his most significant contribution to the philosophy of religion, and which became known by the name *I and Thou*, only in the final stages of its writing. Originally, he referred to it as *Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion*,⁵ hinting that he saw this work in response to that of Kant. In an early oral version of *I and Thou*, which appears in my study, *Buber's Way to 'I and Thou'*, we find several allusions to Kant.⁶

Nineteenth century rationalism, which was largely identical with idealism, made little impression upon Buber. Unlike Kierkegaard or Rosenzweig, he felt no need to wrestle with their thought. He rejected the movement, but felt no need to argue at length and in detail why he did so. He felt a greater connection to Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Ibsen, and like them felt that he had been born in an era of cultural decline. He romantically looked back upon the life of his forefathers in the Land of Israel, and hoped that the Jewish people would, in the future, create an ideal society there.

Buber's attitude to the world was a positive one, which is also expressed in his sympathetic attitude towards utopian socialist movements, particularly to the work of Gustav Landauer, who was a close personal friend. The latter sought the sources of the ideal society, while Buber rejected the philosophy of Marx and Engels. His vision was one of the renewal of the creative forces of the Jewish people in their land. However, he felt that this renewal was impossible without utilizing some of the principles of Hasidism. Among 19th century thinkers, Feuerbach, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard most deeply influenced Buber's thought. Of Feuerbach and Kierkegaard he wrote, "Yes and No to them had become a part of my existence."⁷

He also received a great deal from Nietzsche, particularly in his early years.⁸ Generally speaking, his thought is quite close to that of existential-

5. Horwitz, *ibid.*, p. 163 and n. 22, 23.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 61, 62 and also 109. See p. 268, on which Buber refers to a certain chapter of *I and Thou* by the title "Die religiöse Antinomik."

7. "Afterword: History of the Dialogical Principle," in *Between Man and Man* (New York, 1967), p. 216.

8. Hans Kohn, *Martin Buber*, (Köln, 1961), pp. 40 and 55.

ism, and one can find much common ground between him and Kierkegaard or his own contemporaries, Heidegger, Berdyaev and Jaspers. Perhaps one of the paradoxical signs of this closeness is the severity with which Buber later criticized Kierkegaard and Heidegger, discovering in them gnostic motifs which were to be rejected.

Buber used Western philosophical thought in two ways: on the one hand, as the lowest level of truth, which must be surpassed; on the other hand, as the raw material from which he extracted existentialist thought. Buber was a creative philosopher, who developed and changed his thought throughout his lifetime. There are two principal stages in his development: the earlier mystical stage, and the later dialogical stage. In the earlier stage, Buber related positively not only to mysticism, but to the doctrine of Spinoza,⁹ to Kabbalah and to gnosticism, and it was only when he began working on *I and Thou* and on the development of dialogical thought that he became critical of these teachings. Buber continued to value Hasidism highly but, as Gershom Scholem has pointed out,¹⁰ his interpretation of it changed in his later thought, so as to be appropriate to his general viewpoint. Buber was first and foremost a thinker, not a historian, so that he sought to see the past in light of his own philosophy, in a manner similar to that of Ahad Ha-Am or Nahman Krochmal. Had Buber been a historian, he would have had to describe different philosophical approaches which the Jewish people followed during its long history, and he might have adopted a relativistic approach to the spiritual history of Judaism. But this was not Buber's approach: he saw Jewish history from a definite viewpoint, in terms of which he attempted to describe various manifestations, rejecting those which he could not succeed in integrating into his own. A significant example of this is his approach to Gnosticism.

Starting from his own total rejection of Gnosticism, Buber attempted to show that Hasidism is not tied in any essential way to Kabbalah. He drew a sharp distinction between Hasidism and Kabbalah, despite the fact that study of any Hasidic text reveals the strong connection between the two. In many of his writings, Buber rejected gnostic dualism. He built his own Jewish thought primarily upon Bible, Hasidism and Zionism.

His opposition to Gnosticism began in the 1920's, during the years that he abandoned his earlier mystical approach and adopted the dialogical approach. Buber's attacks were directed not only against Jewish gnosticism,

9. Horwitz, *ibid.*, pp. 236-237.

10. Gershom Scholem, "Martin Buber's Interpretation of Hasidism," in his *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1972), pp. 231-232.

but also against Christian gnosticism and the Marcionian element in Christianity. This "enemy" appeared to him on all sorts of occasions and in all sorts of guises. There were times when he found it in the writings of Kierkegaard¹¹ and at others in Pauline Christianity. The question which arises here is why Buber felt the need to attack this stream in so many of his writings. Why was he so bitterly opposed to it? Why was he not tolerant towards the gnostic myths as he was towards other myths which he read and in which he took interest? Why was this myth different from all the other myths? What was the philosophical basis for this opposition? While it is possible that I do not have a complete answer to all these questions, I can perhaps propose a partial solution.

Before beginning to answer these questions, I would like to attempt a typological description of the gnostic approach to creation, as opposed to the Biblical one.

Gnosticism states that there is one God who is good, and He is the supreme, hidden God. He did not create the world, but the world was created by another, less perfect god, for which reason the world is also imperfect. Since the world is not good, matter and physical existence are seen in a negative light. The soul is a divine, supernal spark, which descends from the heavenly sphere of the good into the world of matter, and while imprisoned in matter it yearns for its source. Thus, the approach to this world and to matter is a pessimistic one, the world being a battle field between physical, material forces and spiritual, divine ones, in which the divine soul wishes to break free of this world and return to its source.

In one place, in connection with Harnack's writings, Buber depicts critically the struggle between the Demiurge or Creator and the Hidden God, saying that the Hidden God redeems the soul from the world and its Creator.¹² This Marcionian approach states that the Creator, that is, the God of the Jews, is righteous but not good. According to this theory, this world is of no importance as a divine creation, and is merely matter and law, over and against it there exists a good, supernal world of spirit and love.

In contrast to these theories, the Biblical doctrine of creation knows of

11. Horwitz, *ibid.*, p. 231. And in Buber's "The Question to the Single One," in *Between Man and Man*, p. 52 and p. 179.

Buber discussed the relation between Kierkegaard and Marcionism, and between him and Gnosticism.

12. "The Faith of Judaism," in *Israel and the World* (New York, 1963), pp. 25-26. See also his article "Prophecy and Apocalypse," in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 12 (1957), pp. 9-21.

only one, unique God who created the world in wisdom. This world is good. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." In the creation story, the Divine voice calls the creation into life every day, and at the end of each day, we hear the confirmation "God saw that it was good." After the creation of man, we even hear that it was "very good." In the Bible, the soul of man is not the antithesis to the body; on the contrary, God created both the body and the soul, and there is no hint in the Bible that one is good and the other evil. The entire world, both spirit and matter, is the Divine creation.

New light is shed on Buber's struggle with gnosticism by a comparative study of his thought on this matter with the teachings of two existentialist thinkers, both contemporaries of Buber, with whom he had contact during the decisive years 1920-22.¹³ These were years during which he sought to abandon his former mystical thinking to pursue a more dialogical path for the realization of this thought. Each of these two thinkers had a decisive influence upon Buber and his path to dialogical thinking. The first one to influence him was a Christian gnostic, who believed in a good God but did not recognize Him as the Creator of the world, and who had a somewhat pessimistic outlook. He could neither see the world as good, nor as being God's world. This thinker saw in the center man and the soul of man in its relationship to God, which was in his eyes an I-Thou relationship. Man is an I over against God, the Thou; he repeated countless times that the God who is a Thou cannot be grasped in the third person. This Christian philosopher recognized as primary the relationship of the lonely man, who prays and confesses to his God. His impressive writings reached Buber quite accidentally, in a quarterly to which he subscribed. Buber was, perhaps, impressed by the concept of "I and Thou" that he found in the writings of this thinker.

During the course of time, again by chance and not as the result of any particular plan, a Jewish existentialist thinker became a friend of Buber's. One Sunday, the 4th of November, 1921, a man came to visit Buber in Heppenheim, in order to study some Hassidic thought with him. There was no reason to suspect that this visit would have far-reaching consequences, because the visitor held preconceived notions against Buber. But something unexpected happened between them, so that the walls of prejudice fell and bonds of love and closeness of a kind almost unknown in Buber's life began to be formed between Buber and his guest.

13. Horwitz, part II, Chapters 2, 3, 5, 6.

The visitor did not know that Buber's thought had reached a point at which he was ready to express himself in terms of I-Thou, and Buber did not know that his visitor had written a book on I-Thou, which reaches its climax in the interpretation of the great love song, the *Song of Songs*, which is interpreted as the love of the soul for its Creator, and the love of man for his fellow. "Love is strong as death" is quoted there. Yet the "I-Thou" doctrine of his guest was rooted in the relationship of the Creator God to a created world. This relationship was referred to by him, in German, as *Er-Es*, or in English as He-It, in the sense of "He said and it became." (Ps. 33:9)¹⁴ With the help of this doctrine of creation, he wished to attack the idealist philosophy, which anchored the world in the human I. He attempted to return to a Medieval or Maimonidean type of philosophy, that is, to that line of thought which grounded the world in God and not in human consciousness. This guest developed a metaphysics of creation, in which he demonstrated that the world is "good" and is the world of God.¹⁵ In his view, scientific knowledge, the laws of nature, the laws of reason and of causality do not turn us away from God and are not opposed to God, but help us to understand God's world. He himself had struggled until he reached this conclusion. In 1913 he had held a relativistic position, accepting both the world and revelation. A friend showed him that his position demanded *two* heavenly forces. He wrote: "had I then founded my dualism of world and revelation on a metaphysical dualism of God and devil, my position would have been defensible. But this I could not do, being hindered by the first verse of the Bible."¹⁶

These two great thinkers — whose names have not yet been associated with the dialogic thought of Buber but which, I hope, will be as a result of the publication of my book — were Ferdinand Ebner and Franz Rosenzweig. The former followed gnosticism, while the latter opposed it. Buber initially accepted the viewpoint of the former, but afterwards went over to that of the latter.

Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) had a profound knowledge of German idealism, which he followed at the beginning of his path, but against which he struggled once he found his own independent path. From 1913 he began developing a philosophy of religious existentialism of great sweep and compass. His book, *The Star of Redemption*, appeared in 1921, and Buber

• 14. *The Star of Redemption* (Boston, 1972), pp. 198-204.

15. *Ibid.* It is worth mentioning that Rosenzweig's thought in the chapter on creation there is not directly based on the Bible, but contains a complex system, which contains both developments within God and creation of "matter from fatter."

16. Franz Rosenzweig, *Briefe*, (Berlin, 1935), p. 72.

read it in December of that same year. An extraordinary friendship developed between Buber and Rosenzweig, during the period that the latter was seriously ill and paralyzed to the extent that he could not move or speak. Despite this, Buber used to visit him regularly. Among the central themes of their discussions were dialogic thought, Jewish thought, the Frankfort Freies Juedisches Lehrhaus, the translation of Judah Halevi's poems into German¹⁷ and, from 1925, the translation of the Bible on which they collaborated.

These projects gave them the opportunity to deal with many basic matters. The former matter, the decisive influence that Rosenzweig had upon the dialogic thinking of Buber, is not well-known. This point is one which I demonstrate at length in my book.

Ferdinand Ebner (1882-1931), a sickly man, died quite young of tuberculosis, and did not have time to develop his philosophical theories. During his lifetime, he only published one book and several articles, but after his death his writings appeared in thousands of pages, in three thick volumes. Ebner was a Catholic and served as a school master in Austria. He was profoundly influenced by Kierkegaard and felt himself to be his successor. He was also close to the path of Pascal, but more than anything else he drew upon the teachings of the New Testament. His thought was deeply aroused by the Gospel According to John, particularly by the well-known opening sentences of that book, and he devoted a great deal of space to them in his book, *Das Wort und die Geistigen Realitäten*.¹⁸

This book was delivered for publication to the quarterly, *Der Brenner*, after the First World War, but due to lack of funds and delay in publication of the book, a third of the book was initially published in 1920 in several issues of the quarterly. Buber, according to his own testimony, read this material in the magazine, to which he subscribed, and ordered a copy of the book. He records that he reread the book when he worked on *I and Thou*.

Concerning this work, Buber writes:¹⁹ "His book showed me, as no other since then, here and there in an almost uncanny nearness, that in this our time men of different kinds of traditions had devoted themselves to the search for the buried treasure."

More critically, he wrote the following:²⁰

17. *Ibid.*, p. 513.

18. Ferdinand Ebner, *Das Wort und die Geistigen Realitäten* (1921) in *Schriften*, I (München, 1963). No English translation. All citations are to the second edition.

19. "The History of the Dialogical Principle," (*Ibid.*, p. 215).

20. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

Ebner proceeds from the experience of the 'solitude of the I,' in that existential sense that it has won in our time: it is for him "nothing original" but the result of the "closing off from the Thou." Starting from here, following the trail of Hamann, but binding the insights more strongly to one another, he penetrates more deeply into the mystery of speech as the ever-new establishment of the relation between the I and the Thou. He acknowledges himself, in a more direct fashion than Kierkegaard, as one who is not able to find the Thou in man. Already in 1917 he had indicated the danger of going under spiritually in the consciousness of this "impossibility." He finds salvation in the thought: "There is only one single Thou and that is just God." To be sure, he also postulates, as does Kierkegaard: "Man shall love not only God but also man." But where it is a question of the authenticity of existence, every other Thou disappears for him before that of God. If he ask here, as with Kierkegaard, about what is finally valid, we stand again before the self-relating individuals who look at the world but are in the last instance acosmic, who love men but are in the last instance ananthropic.

In his own unique way, Ebner substitutes the Gospel of John for the Creation story of Genesis. He interprets "In the beginning was the Word," that God gave man his soul and Speech, "The I and the Thou are the spiritual realities of life."²¹ "God is the true Thou of the true I of man."²² The world is dark, while light enlightened the soul—this is the gnostic foundation of his Christian outlook. According to Ebner, there is only one true religion and one true path: the belief in God who is always Thou! According to him, there is no Thou without an I, and no I without Thou, and Thou is always a matter of Being and of Presence. In Ebner's view, Kierkegaard understood this truth, but he further develops it in the context of Language and the Word. In his view, nature is silent: there is a gap between man and nature, only God and man being capable of speech. I and Thou are primary words in his thought.²³ He writes, "As the relations between man and God must be personal, they can only be explained as relations of I and Thou."²⁴ "God," Ebner explains, "either has personal existence or He does not exist at all."²⁵ There is no God in the third person. The Creation story definitely requires a God in the third person, but to Ebner this is of no theological importance. "We know nothing about the relations between God and the world,"²⁶ he writes. Elsewhere, he writes, "God in the third person is an invention of human imagination... it is anthropomorphism."²⁷ Ebner stresses that animals possess no I, no con-

21. Ebner, p. 85.

22. Ebner, p. 86.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 254 and 187.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 282.

sciousness and no language. Through “the Word” — which for him refers to Jesus Christ — the I exists and he states, in the sense of the Johannine Gospel and of Christianity, that even if heaven and earth were to disappear, the Word or Love would not disappear — they will remain for eternity. Spirit and Love are stronger than matter.

In Ebner’s writings, the situation of man is one of choice between existence with God and existence in the world. The more man involves himself in science, the further he draws himself away from God. This is the “solitude of the I” (*Icheinsamkeit*). “God created man — this means truly nothing else than: He spoke to him. Man was not man so long as he was not addressed by God. He became it through the Word.”²⁸

The Christian significance implicit here — which Buber pushed aside — is completely clear, and it is also quite clear that Ebner had no interest in the creation of matter but only in the creation of the soul of man.

Ebner believes that “man must turn his gaze away from the world,²⁹ because then the world will not disturb his contemplation of God.” Man’s turning towards the world is the great obstacle to the perception of spiritual being.

In my book I demonstrate, on the basis of a philological analysis which I cannot describe here, that the first rough draft of *I and Thou* (a series of lectures entitled *Religion as Presence*, delivered by Buber in January-February 1922 and printed for the first time in my book) is closer to Ebner’s work than is the completed work, in which this connection is less clear. I describe there the development of *I and Thou*, and demonstrate that at a certain stage Buber was closer to Ebner. In Buber’s book, there is a recognizable similarity to Ebner. On this subject, I wish to make two suggestions.

First, that Buber’s struggle against Gnosticism or Marcionism may have been Buber’s struggle with himself or with Ebner. I wish to show that, during the time that Buber was working on *I and Thou*, he accepted Gnostic elements into his own thought, and was sharply criticized for this by Rosenzweig. The second point I wish to establish is that, in the writings which follow *I and Thou*, Buber came closer to Rosenzweig’s anti-gnostic position. He then wrote things of a totally different character from those in *I and Thou*. He sharply criticized Kierkegaard and Harnack, and reached the conclusion

28. *Ibid.*, from Ebner’s Journal, 1916/17, p. 35.

29. *Ibid.*, from his book *Das Wort*, etc., p. 283.

that there is a God “in the third person” and that there is a God who creates the world—ideas which he explicitly rejects in *I and Thou*, where he says that “‘he’ is still a metaphor, while ‘you’ is not.”³⁰

Let us turn to the first point: Buber is close to Ebner in his thesis that one ought always to see God as “Thou,” and that it is impossible to accept Him in the third person.³¹ It is obvious that no religious thinker is going to suggest that God is an object or what is called an “It” (in German, “Es”). However, the rejection of the option of recognizing God in the third person as a “He” may be interpreted as a gnostic step, if we interpret it in terms of a dualism between a strange and distant Creator and an eternal Thou, the God of love and kindness for whom the soul yearns. It was this path which Ebner, and afterwards Buber, followed.

But not only in this: they were in agreement on several other basic matters (which, of course, included things which are found in Ebner and which are also present in Buber’s early writings—but we cannot distinguish between these two): both of them were opposed to the idea of a hidden, awesome God, to that theology which concerns itself with proofs for the existence of God, or with the question of what attributes one may ascribe to Him and what His nature is.

It is clear that this approach, which does not recognize God in the third person, would also be opposed to the world of sephirot of the Kabbalists and their disputes on emanation. Buber sought the living God in whose light we live, but raised doubts about the God of Providence about whom we say in our prayers, “Blessed be He who has mercy on the world . . . He who has mercy on all creatures.” The God whose wisdom the scientist studies in the creation, the God who is extolled in the 104th Psalm, the God about whom Maimonides writes, “If, however, it were supposed that all other beings were non-existent. He alone would still exist.”³²

Buber agrees with Ebner that “In the beginning is the relation,”³³ that is, “the beginning” is not a matter of the creation of the world but the I-Thou relationship of love: this is close to Ebner and his interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, in which the Word, which is the first thing, equals love. I-Thou is the initial state, and the solitude of the “I” is a later stage which comes about through separation from the world. For this purpose, Buber

30. *I and Thou*, p. 161.

31. Horwitz, p. 166-182.

32. *Hilkhot Yesode Hatorah*, 1:3.

33. *I and Thou*, p. 69.

coined a phrase not found in Ebner's writing, I-It (Ich-Es). This is not an original situation, but a state which man reaches as the result of descent and decline during the course of his journey.

Buber also agrees with Ebner that man has two possibilities: either to turn towards God, the eternal Thou (or to the friend or nature as Thou) or to turn towards the It, to the world of objects, science and utilitarian benefits. This posing of alternatives may also have its source in Ebner.

Buber also agrees with Ebner, and this is the central point in our discussion, that there is no connection between God and the world. The world of science, Kant's laws of space and time, are all connected, in Buber's opinion, to the world of I-It,³⁴ and God can never have connection to the It.³⁵ God is the Eternal Thou who can only communicate with another Thou, that is, with the soul of man at a moment of grace.

Thus, for Buber, God is cut off from the world, and is not the God of Creation. In Buber's thought itself there is a deep layer of Gnostic thinking, which it is perhaps more difficult to discover because of the many concealments and the poetic style in which the ideas are expressed. However, in *I and Thou* the world is never called "good," and in the manuscript of *Religion as Presence*, in which there is less censorship, he states that the building of a world of It equals betrayal and alienation from the task incumbent upon us in building a world of Thou. This is a kind of dualistic attempt to counterpoise the two worlds against one another.³⁶ The heart of Ebner's and Buber's objection to God in the third person is probably related to a negative attitude to the modern development of science and technology and an attempt to show that science leads away from God, and love is its antithesis.

Yet it is known that, in the final analysis, Buber had a positive approach to the world, so we must ask how this positive attitude found expression in his philosophy. I found two answers in *I and Thou*, neither one of which is adequate. One is Buber's suggestion in the beginning of the book that I-Thou relationships are possible with a tree which is contemplated by man.³⁷ According to Buber, one may have an I-Thou relation not only with God or with another man, a friend or lover, but also with a tree!

34. M. Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by W. Kaufmann (New York, 1970), p. 161. See also Horwitz, p. 180, 233, 267.

35. *I and Thou*, p. 84.

36. Horwitz, p. 108.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 57 and Horwitz, p. 217 following.

And, as God is present in all I-Thou relations, it follows that he is also indirectly present in man's relation with nature. The possibility that I-Thou relations can exist between man and a tree is deeply in his mind and is expressed by Buber in his book *Daniel*. This clearly does not correspond to Ebner's view. According to *Das Wort und die Geistigen Realities*, such a relationship is impossible, because nature has no language, no I and is mute.

Buber's attempts to compare the I-Thou relations between man and his fellow with the I-Thou relations between man and nature aroused much questioning among his readers. Many of these felt a certain difficulty here, in that these were really two different types of relationship, and they asked many questions on this point.³⁸ Buber repeatedly argued before them that these are the same I-Thou relations. The reason for Buber's persistence on this point seems to me profounder than his readers realized. It is obvious that Buber knew, like them, that there is an immense difference between I-Thou relations among men and I-Thou relations with a tree. But were he to have eliminated the possibility of I-Thou relations with a tree, that is, with nature, then he would have had to utterly concede that I-Thou relationships are possible only with a beloved person or with God, or he would have had to concede that man may only have I-It relations with nature, and his approach would have then been drawn even closer to that of Ebner and to the Gnostic theories. This would have made contact between God and the world even more impossible, while here at least some narrow opening was left.

A second option for the understanding of relations between God and the world is found in the third part of *I and Thou*. He writes there: "Whoever beholds the world in Him stands in His presence."³⁹

In my opinion, this sentence expresses Buber's pantheistic approach, that is, that approach found in the Hasidim of the Baal Shem Tov, which states that the world is within God but God is not in the world, because He is also beyond the world. From this, it follows that Buber saw God as also transcendent, thus hinting that God is not only Thou, but also He. However, this quotation from the third section of *I and Thou* does not change the anthropocentric structure of his thought, which Buber adopted from Ebner. Two options stands before man : to relate to the confronted one, as a Thou, or to relate to him as an object, as an It.

38. *I and Thou*, p. 127.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

As has already been stated, it is impossible for an It to have a relation with God; this path can only lead away from Him.

Buber writes: "Only as an It can it be absorbed into the store of knowledge."⁴⁰ This knowledge enables a man to progress in knowledge of the world, to rule over nature and to conquer it.⁴¹ But to the extent that a man deepens his scientific knowledge, his need for I-Thou relations lessens. At the moment of knowledge a man lives in a world of objects, in a world of he, she and it — but true life is the life of the I-Thou or of the "We." The It, Buber says, is a "phenomenon among phenomena," which may be defined in conceptual terms and may be categorized.

During the period following *I and Thou*, Buber changed his stance. A few years after the publication of this book, he criticized Kierkegaard for not believing in the Creator of the world. Yet this is quite peculiar: did he himself accept this concept? In what way did his approach differ at all from that of Kierkegaard? The truth is that Buber was a creative, dynamic thinker, and the critics did not realize to what extent he had changed his position, and certainly could not have known the reason for this change. As part of the philological research I did, I discovered an extraordinary criticism which Rosenzweig wrote of *I and Thou*. The change in Buber's attitude towards creation may be attributed to Rosenzweig's influence upon him. In a letter written in September 1922, he writes to him:⁴²

In your setting up of the I-It, you give the I-Thou a cripple for an opponent. Truly, this cripple rules the modern world; however, this does not change the fact that it is a cripple. *This* It, you can easily entice. But this is the false It, the product of the great deception in Europe, now less than three hundred years old... The "primary word I-It" certainly cannot be spoken with the whole being. It is simply not a primary word... If, nevertheless, It is quite real, then it must be inscribed in a primary word, which is spoken with the whole being by Him who speaks (i.e., God). From His point of view it is called I-It, but from our viewpoint it is He-It. Should you once say, "He who killeth and reviveth,"⁴³ then you have said this primary word, and said it with your whole being. From this focusing on the I-Thou — which, by the way, you share with Ebner — I think all the rest follows. You, like Ebner, intoxicated by the joy of discovery, throw all the rest (literally) to the dead. *It*, however, is not dead, although death belongs to It; It is created. But because for the I you identify this It with the It of the dead, you *must* then raise everything which you do not want to fall into the valley of the dead, because it is alone, into the realm of the primary word I-Thou, which *must* thus become enormously wide.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

42. Horwitz, p. 227 and p. 254.

43. These words from the *Amidah* prayer were in the Hebrew in the original.

Rosenzweig continues in this uncompromising vein both in this letter, and in a number of other letters which deal with this subject.⁴⁴ He concludes the letter we have quoted with a reference to his own paralytic disease and to his friendship with Buber. He writes: ⁴⁵

Dear Doctor, I am a very unselfish knight of the It, now more than ever. Behind my concealed windows, I am truly *interested* only in I and Thou. But, nevertheless, what will become of I and Thou if it must swallow the whole and the Creator? ... For my and your sake there must be something except — me and you.

There are impressive proofs that Buber reached his friend's opinion. He ceased writing those volumes which were to follow *I and Thou*, which were to have articulated this approach to religious life. In the translation of the Bible into German, which he began in 1925, in partnership with Rosenzweig, they decided to translate the Divine Name with the pronouns — I, Thou, He. Had Buber maintained his earlier viewpoint — that of Ebner — that there is no God in the third person, he could not have agreed to this.⁴⁶ Buber's article attacking Kierkegaard was written, in my opinion, out of a Rosenzweigian approach to creation, that is, the recognition of God as the Creator of the universe, and a positive attitude towards the study of creation — i.e., the natural sciences. Buber attacked Kierkegaard because he wanted neither to publicly criticize Ebner nor to state that he had changed his own view, and this may be the reason why the essay is so strong and clear. He virulently criticizes Kierkegaard for failing to recognize God as Creator, and requiring us to choose between God and the Creation.⁴⁷ He wrote: "God wants us to come to him by means of the *Réginas* he has created and not by renunciation of them." Kierkegaard's God, Buber claims, is not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but the God of the Philosophers. God does not demand of us that we choose between Him and His creation. There could be no Fall that could tear the world away from God. Elsewhere, he portrays the problem concerning Kierkegaard as follows: ⁴⁸

The God of Kierkegaard can only be either a demiurge outgrown by and suffering from his creation, or a saviour who is a stranger to creation, approaching it from without and taking pity on it. *Both are gnostic figures.* (My emphasis — R.H.) Of the three great Christian philosophers of solitude,

44. Horwitz, p. 253-258. There are also indications that they discussed these subjects in person.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 183, 235.

47. "The Question to the Single One," in *Between Man and Man*, p. 54, see pp. 50.-58.

48. "What is Man," in *Between Man and Man*, p. 171.

Augustine, Pascal and Kierkegaard, the first is thoroughly conditioned by gnosticism, the presuppositions of the last touch on it — obviously without his knowing it — and only Pascal has nothing to do with it, perhaps because he comes by way of science and never abandons it.

These sentences, written in the spirit of Franz Rosenzweig, go against what is written in *I and Thou*, in which Buber was not an advocate of friendly relations between science and faith.

Buber's attack upon this point of view is no less clear in an article he wrote in 1928, called "The Faith of Judaism." In this article, he reacts to Harnack and his book *The Essence of Christianity*, which presents a Marcionist approach.⁴⁹ Buber utilizes Rosenzweig's triad categorization of world-time from *The Star of Redemption*: Creation, Revelation and Redemption in his criticism. This triad division is *now*, according to Buber, fundamental to Judaism. Marcionism destroys it in contracting these three times into one. It does not recognize the existence of the God of the World, and it also does not know the necessity of redeeming the entire world, and it also does not know the necessity of redeeming th entire world. In this, Buber goes against the Johannine Gospel, upon which Ebner so deeply relied. He criticizes that position which only knows the world-times, and mistakenly unites Revelation and Redemption into one.

Now that Buber has freed himself of his earlier opinion, he writes⁵⁰ about how, in their opinion, the light which shone in the darkness is at the same time the revelation of God and the redemption of the soul, whereas in reality the world remains shrouded in darkness and receives none of the light. Buber approximates Rosenzweig's opinion, as expressed in *The Star of Redemption*, in explaining to Jews and to Christians that the God of Israel is the God of the world. Like Rosenzweig, he demands a positive attitude to the entire world, which is the world of God. The entire world must recognize Creation, Revelation and Redemption. The Christians should not see the Old Testament merely as a Prologue to the New Testament. God of Israel is the God of the universe. The world is God's world.

The Bible translation upon which the two of them worked during those years is directed not only towards Jews, but towards the Christian world

49. "The Faith of Judaism" (above, note 14), p. 25.

See also *The Star of Redemption*, in which the chapters of the second part are entitled Creation, Revelation, Redemption. These are the central axis of the book.

50. "The Faith of Judaism," pp. 25-26.

as well. Through it, they wished to remove them from the Marcionistic world view and bring them closer to the Hebrew Bible.⁵¹

Buber accepted the view of his friend Rosenzweig, and developed an anti-gnostic approach based upon the Biblical idea of creation. When Buber encountered gnostic ideas, he reacted with particular venom and sharpness, perhaps because he remembered his "sins of youth" and the period during which he himself had followed them, under the influence of Ebner's writings.

51. See Horwitz, p. 184. In a letter of Rosenzweig to Buber, he expresses his concern that, under the influence of Harnack, Christians will become Marcionians. See also Rosenzweig, *Briefe*, p. 544.