

First Part

THE WORLD IS TWOFOLD for man in accordance with his twofold attitude.

The attitude of man is twofold in accordance with the two basic words he can speak.

The basic words are not single words but word pairs.

One basic word is the word pair I-You.

The other basic word is the word pair I-It; but this basic word is not changed when He or She takes the place of It.

Thus the I of man is also twofold.

For the I of the basic word I-You is different from that in the basic word I-It.¹

Basic words do not state something that might exist outside them; by being spoken they establish a mode of existence.²

¹In the first edition the next section began: "Basic words do not signify things but relations." This sentence was omitted by Buber in 1957 and in all subsequent editions.

²*stiften sie einen Bestand*. The locution is most unusual, and *Bestand* in any applicable sense is very rare. Buber intends a contrast with "that might exist" (*was . . . bestünde*).

Basic words are spoken with one's being.¹

When one says You, the I of the word pair I-You is said, too.

When one says It, the I of the word pair I-It is said, too.

The basic word I-You can only be spoken with one's whole being.

The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one's whole being.

There is no I as such but only the I of the basic word I-You and the I of the basic word I-It.

When a man says I, he means one or the other. The I he means is present when he says I. And when he says You or It, the I of one or the other basic word is also present.

Being I and saying I are the same. Saying I and saying one of the two basic words are the same.

Whoever speaks one of the basic words enters into the word and stands in it.

The life of a human being does not exist merely in the sphere of goal-directed verbs. It does not consist merely of activities that have something for their object.

I perceive something. I feel something. I imagine something. I want something. I sense something. I think something. The life of a human being does not consist merely of all this and its like.

All this and its like is the basis of the realm of It.

But the realm of You has another basis.

¹ *Wesen*: see page 46.

Whoever says You does not have something for his object. For wherever there is something there is also another something; every It borders on other Its; It is only by virtue of bordering on others. But where You is said there is no something. You has no borders.

Whoever says You does not have something; he has nothing. But he stands in relation.

We are told that man experiences his world. What does this mean?

Man goes over the surfaces of things and experiences them.⁴ He brings back from them some knowledge of their condition—an experience. He experiences what there is to things.

But it is not experiences alone that bring the world to man.

For what they bring to him is only a world that consists of It and It and It, of He and He and She and She and It.

I experience something.

⁴ *Der Mensch befährt die Fläche der Dinge und erfährt sie.* Both *erfährt* in this sentence and *erfabre* in the preceding paragraph are forms of *erfabren*, the ordinary German equivalent of the verb, to experience. The noun is *Erfahrung*. These words are so common that it has hardly ever occurred to anyone that they are closely related to *fabren*, an equally familiar word that means to drive or go. *Befabren* means to drive over the surface of something. The effect of the German sentence is to make the reader suddenly aware of the possibility that *erfabren* might literally mean finding out by going or driving, or possibly by traveling. But by further linking *erfabren* with *befabren* Buber manages to suggest that experience stays on the surface.

In the original manuscript this point was elaborated further in the sentence immediately following upon this paragraph; but Buber struck it out: "Thus the fisherman gets his catch. But the find is for the diver."

All this is not changed by adding "inner" experiences to the "external" ones, in line with the non-eternal distinction that is born of mankind's craving to take the edge off the mystery of death. Inner things like external things, things among things!

I experience something.

And all this is not changed by adding "mysterious" experiences to "manifest" ones, self-confident in the wisdom that recognizes a secret compartment in things, reserved for the initiated, and holds the key. O mysteriousness without mystery, O piling up of information! It, it, it!

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Those who experience do not participate in the world. For the experience is "in them" and not between them and the world.

The world does not participate in experience. It allows itself to be experienced, but it is not concerned, for it contributes nothing, and nothing happens to it.

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The world as experience belongs to the basic word I-It. The basic word I-You establishes the world of relation.

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Three are the spheres⁵ in which the world of relation arises.

The first: life with nature. Here the relation vibrates in

⁵This locution echoes the Passover Haggadah which contains a famous song in which each stanza begins: One is . . . , Two are . . . , Three are . . . , etc.

the dark and remains below language. The creatures stir across from us, but they are unable to come to us, and the You we say to them sticks to the threshold of language.

The second: life with men. Here the relation is manifest and enters language. We can give and receive the You.

The third: life with spiritual beings. Here the relation is wrapped in a cloud but reveals itself,⁶ it lacks but creates language. We hear no You and yet feel addressed; we answer—creating, thinking, acting: with our being we speak the basic word, unable to say You with our mouth.

But how can we incorporate into the world of the basic word what lies outside language?

In every sphere, through everything that becomes present to us, we gaze toward the train⁷ of the eternal You; in each we perceive a breath of it;⁸ in every You we address the eternal You, in every sphere according to its manner.

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I contemplate a tree.

I can accept it as a picture: a rigid pillar in a flood of light, or splashes of green⁹ traversed by the gentleness of the blue silver ground.

I can feel it as movement: the flowing veins around the sturdy, striving core, the sucking of the roots, the breathing of the leaves, the infinite commerce with earth and air—and the growing itself in its darkness.

I can assign it to a species and observe it as an instance, with an eye to its construction and its way of life.

I can overcome its uniqueness and form so rigorously

⁶*sich offenbarend*. A few lines earlier, *offenbar* was translated as manifest. The adjective, unlike the verb, generally has no religious overtones.

⁷*Saum* means hem or edge, but this is surely an allusion to Isaiah 6:1.

⁸*Wehen*: literally, blowing (of a breeze or wind), wafting.

⁹*das spritzende Gegehn*: the noun is a coinage.