

**SUBJECT-OBJECT RELATIONSHIP AND INTER SUBJECTIVITY IN THE
EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHICAL PROPOUNDMENT OF MARTIN BUBER: A
PSYCHO-PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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ABSTRACT

Man is naturally selfish and hence very exploitative and possessive. This intrinsic exploitativeness and possessiveness of man which often plays out in man's relationship with the world/things, with fellowmen and finally with God- the eternal Thou is what Martin Buber termed I-It relationship. It is a blinded type of relationship since it is not open to the truth. Consequently, reality is undiscovered in the world of I-It. Invariably, as the I-It relationship is characterized by experience and utility, the question of God is not within sight. The God's question is bracketed within the world of I-It as God can neither be experienced nor exploited. Though I-It is not evil per se, however, to make the I-It a comfortable dwelling place is a serious degradation of the human dignity and a complete insult to the spiritual constituent of man. As I-It relationship is discovered to be dehumanizing, a different mode of relationship that is more acceptable to both the social, psychological and spiritual nature of man is advocated for. This relationship in which reality is approached is Intersubjectivity or what Buber in his characteristic language called I-Thou relationship. This is not an empiriological type of relationship. Rather, I-Thou relationship is ontological by nature. Within the context of I-Thou relationship, a person is regarded as well as considered a human person he is and not a thing or an object to be used. This mutual relationship of I and Thou is a healthy one and is crucial for the realization of one's personhood. The writer in a bid to achieve the desired goal of the study employed the methodological approach of philosophical reflection and appraisal.

Key Words: Subject; Object; Relationship; Experience; Utility; Intersubjectivity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Man is by nature selfish. Hence his earthly existence is intended towards domination of everything, including God, for his own good and betterment. Thence, the life of man is pre-occupied with self-fulfillment. Moreover, the search for self-fulfillment and the cultivation of the self have become the norms of human existence. Nevertheless, the pursuit per se is not evil but the manner in which it is approached is what can corrupt the tendency and turn it to something evil. Consequently, the Contemporary thought pattern is regrettably anti-philosophical and as such sees reason merely as instrumental to scientific research. What is called concrete philosophy describes feelings and experiences and these have invariably become so important and have displaced knowledge. In the situation in which knowledge is replaced with experience,

it is obviously inevitable that people will begin to seek the ultimate experience in the chemically induced experience. This attitude of man plays out in his relationship with the world/things, with his fellowmen and even with God. The manner of man's relationship is ontological crucial since:

... man's essential life is not to be grasped from what unrolls in the individual's inner life...but from the distinctiveness of relation to things and living beings (Buber; 1947, p.24).

Hence, at level of merely exploitative and merely experiential, man is oblivious of reality. Was it not on this ground that Heidegger declared in his *Kant and the problem of Metaphysics* that:

No age has known so much and many different things, about man as ours.... And no age has known less than ours of what man is (Heidegger; 1947, p.219)

Reality cannot open up to the mind whose primary intention and interest is on selfish and exploitative domination of the "other". Reality opens up only in relationship in which the things/world and even fellowmen is allowed to be. This very atmosphere of existence is what I. N. Onwuatuegwu called "mutual influence among the co-existing things" (Onwuatuegwu; 2011, p.107). This is a situation of encounter. This is what Martin Buber in his characteristic language called I-Thou relationship- Intersubjectivity.

Subject-Object relationship

In the world of I-It, reality is approached in an empiriological manner. Relation here reflects an approach to reality from the point of view of utility and experience. The pre-occupation within this ambience is not relation for the sake of relation. From the onset, it is orientated towards utility which is to be exploited and experienced. At the level of I-It, relation is already in the merely utilitarian and merely experiential. Cohen thus emphasizes:

... the world of it, ... involves... using of the world, a draining of the world, a manipulation of the world (Cohen; 1960, p. 46).

In this type of relationship, therefore, one is seized, only to be dominated; to be used or to be manipulated. The "other" in this context can imply things or fellowmen. The "other" becomes a means and not an end. It is a relation that is gain oriented. The I-It relationship is an unhealthy type of relationship. It terminates as soon as the gain in question or the pleasure is no longer tenable. The so called love here is never concerned with the love of the "other" in question, but selfish love emanating from what the "other" can offer. It is an egocentric relationship in which the question of mutuality is implicitly bracketed. Consequently, the idea of fidelity is not in the language or the world of I-It relationship (Onwuatuegwu; 2010, p.16).

I-It relationship is mainly the type of relationship that exists between man and the world/things. However, it can equally happen in man's relationship with a fellow man. In this case, the world is objectified and exploited to the maximum. When it exists between man and man, the "other" becomes a reified thing. In this regard, therefore, the "I" is outside the "It" and the "It" adds

nothing to the experience enjoyed by the "I" in question. The "It" here can only allow itself to be used and experienced. Buber, hence, opines:

The man who experiences, has no part in the world. For it is "in him " and not between him and the world that experiences arise (Buber; 1958, p.5).

In this case, there is no interior bond between I and It. In this type of relationship, a man is capable of experiencing and using. In the process of experiencing and using, an object is fabricated, which exists outside its subject indefinitely but only allows itself simply to be used and experienced. Relation in this regard should not be called relation in the true sense of the word; it is not internalized but a sort of externalism and superficialism. The "other " in I-It relationship becomes a powerless slave under its tyrant master and invariably becomes important only when needed. Within the context of I and It relation, the "I" has no part in "It" for no one can experience what one is a part of or partake of what one is experiencing. Buber succinctly summarises:

The world has no part in the experience... for it does nothing to the experience, and the experience does nothing to it (Buber; 1958, p. 5)

He further explicates:

I do not experience the man to whom I say Thou ... Only when I set out of it do I experience him once more (Buber: 1958, p. 9)

Relationship as regards I-It is merely a kind of enjoying oneself with another. As a result, one forces oneself and becomes present to one's friend(s) only when one wants to gain something from their friends. Moreover, in such a relationship, the victim is at times forced to be present not because the victim worth it, but because he or she is aware or suspects that his or her friend doubts his or her fidelity. The one who doubts the fidelity of his or her friend is not faithful as well but is within the circle of I-It relationship. For this reason, this type of relationship normally breaks up in times of difficulty or at the least provocation.

Meanwhile, experience is what characterizes and constitutes I-It relationship in Buber's philosophy. Once a relationship is measured in terms of experience or utility, such relationship is already within the I-It. This is because "as experienced, the world belongs to the primary word I-It" (Buber; 1958, p. 6). Thus, to experience a friend is tantamount to declaring him or her a means and not an end.

A man in I-It relationship, being a slave of experience, has no knowledge of the whole. Experience is particular in nature. Buber meaningfully alluded to this point when he insists that:

... the primary word of I-It can never be spoken with the whole being (Buber; 1958. P. 3)

Admittedly, in this type of relationship instead, the "other" is merely considered in terms of one's particular need. Consequently, concern here is not holistic but partial. Therefore, the relationship is externalistic and legalistic and, therefore, has never been internalized or interiorised.

I-It is a blind type of relationship

I-It is a complete blind type of relationship. Here, darkness abounds. Darkness in this regard is a result of the excessive desire for possession, experience and utility which characterised the I-It relationship. To encounter reality, therefore, one has "to forsake a world, namely, the world of having and experiencing and using, the world in which God is not found" (Beek & Weiland; 1968, p.70). Consequently, the world's secret is undiscovered in this relationship. It is only the superficial knowledge of the world that is gained by one who experienced it and for whom relationship has become an empiriological matter. Hence:

...the man who seizes the world, experiences it, acts upon it, turns it to his uses, win from it only its superficial secrets- its inner meaning is never disclosed nor revealed. The world will not surrender its truth to violence, but only to the asking in which Thou is spoken (Cohen; 1960, p. 50).

I-It relation is a relationship in which the meaning of life is not reached. It is a complete debasing to the meaningful relationship with man and finally with God. It is a total degradation and an undesirable insult to the mutuality of a genuine relationship. The relationship is not true to itself and as a result becomes problematic as well as meaningless. Sincerity is either foreign or outside the scope of this type of relationship. Invariably, I-It relation lacks the grace that would have necessitates the question of God. This is due to the fact that the world's secret (truth) is not surrendered to I-It relationship and with this lack, it, therefore, becomes problematic and meaningless. Consequently, such a relationship, just like a planet that has missed its orbit, necessarily moves in a breakneck speed to zeroization (nothingness). God can never be possessively possessed. Thus, God becomes an unknown fact in the I-It relationship. Buber, therefore, postulates:

He who is ... possessed by a desire for possession - has no way to God....(Buber; 1958, p. 105).

A man of I-It world, testifies in his measurement of value and experience, that there is goodness but does not and can never attain to that eternal goodness which is God himself, unless there is a "turning". He has only turned his attention and interests to the merely measurable, merely sensible and merely experiential. He has no access to reality. Buber thus maintains:

... for every experience, even the most spiritual, could yield us only it (Buber; 1958, p. 77).

I-It world as the world of the past

For Buber, therefore, to face reality, one must make a "turning " from merely using and experiencing of the world/things and fellowmen to see things and allow them to be as they are. In so doing, one encounters the truth- the reality.

Then again, in the I-It world, only the past is the yardstick for measuring anything at all, including facts. Thereby the present is not known. Evaluation here is in the past. Reflection in this case is backward. Obviously the question of forgiving and forgetting is no where to be found within the domain of I-It (Onwuatuegwu; 2010, p.19). A man in the world of experience and utility is always in the past - he is a man of yesterday. In this context, Buber points:

... in so far as man rests satisfied with the things that he experiences and uses, he lives in the past, and his moment has no present content (Buber; 1958, p. 12).

Nevertheless, Buber does not mean to say here that experience per se is evil. There is no intrinsic evil in experience. However, for one to page oneself and dwell irredeemably in the world of experience is equal to devaluation of oneself to the level of mere brutes. Hence, Buber clearly and distinctly maintains that there is no evil in I-It, but that for one to condemn oneself to it is a complete degradation and an unwarranted insult to the dignity of the human person. Invariably, such situation makes an individual person in question vulnerable to damnation. Buber in this regard simply warns:

The primary word I-It is not evil - as matter is not evil. It is of evil - as matter is, which presumes to have the quality of present being. If a man lets it have mastery, the continually growing world of it over-runs him and robs him of the reality of his own I, fill the incubus over him and the ghost within him whisper to one another the confession of their non-salvation (Buber; 1958, p. 46).

The substitution of I-It relation for I-Thou is not only a mere technical error, it represents a grievous assault on the spiritual constituent of man which transcends the merely experiential and merely measurable. It is only merely inauthentic person that makes I-It a comfortable dwelling place.

Intersubjectivity

is what Martin Buber called I-Thou relationship in his philosophical reflection. I-Thou relationship is a person to person relationship. This is not an empiriological type of relationship. Rather, I-Thou relationship is ontological by nature. Within the context of I-Thou relationship, a person is regarded as well as considered a human person he is and not a thing or an object to be used. This mutual relationship of I and Thou is a healthy one and is crucial for the realization of one's personhood. It is in this relationship that a person becomes conscious of his existence and recognizes himself as an existent being. Buber importantly emphasizes that:

A person makes his appearance by entering into relation with other persons (Buber;1958,p.62).

Man exists as a person only in the community of persons. Hence, man is not only conscious of his being-ness in this relationship with others but he is equally aware of his awareness. In other words, therefore, man acquires his humanness by the singular virtue of sharing in the community of persons. Implicitly, man is man by birth but acquires his humanness by sharing with others. In this direction Cassire defines man as "...that creature who is constantly in search of himself..." (Cassire; 1968, p.6) In the community of I and Thou, a person is considered and regarded as a person he is, an existent being. Thence, within the domain of I-Thou, man becomes an end in himself and not a mere means to an end. Contrary to I-It relation, in I-Thou relationship, a person is not considered an empirical instance of existence but, instead an existent one.

In this approach, it is the question of encounter and not experience or exploitation. "I" meet its "Thou" in an ontological manner, not by seeking but through grace. Thus says Buber:

The Thou meets me through grace - it is not found by seeking.
But my speaking of the primary word to it is an act of my being,
is indeed the act of my being (Buber;1958,p.11).

What matters is the encounter between I and Thou to which feeling is not a constituent of.

The place of feelings in I and Thou relationship

As regards the relationship of I and Thou, feelings have little or no role to play. Feelings in question are always in attendant of the metaphysical and meta-psychical fact of relation. What is crucial then is the revealing of the two to each other which is done in a mutual openness. In this mutual openness, possessiveness and utilitarianism are bracketed. Buber puts it thus:

The revealing by two people of the Thou to one another... This is the metaphysical factor of love which feelings of love are mere accompaniments (Buber;1958,p,46).

By way of explication Buber further writes:

Feelings accompany the metaphysical and metapsychical fact of love, but do not constitute it (Buber;1958,p.14).

Hence, within the I -Thou relationship, emphasis is on meeting and not on experience. In this meeting, "I" mutually interacts and reveals itself to its "Thou".

However, in the relationship of I and Thou, feelings are entertained but these feelings only accompany the metaphysical and meta-psychical factor of love. Even though Buber advocates for universal love, but he does not neglect the fact that one cannot love all human beings with the same degree of emotion and sentiment. Notwithstanding, love is one love, but the feelings that accompany love differ. Therefore, Buber affirms that:

The accompanying feelings can be of greatly different kinds. The feeling of Jesus for the demoniac differs from his feelings for the beloved disciple; but love is one love (Buber;1958,p.14).

The feelings of love varies from one individual person to another. Hence, Buber never denies this fact but just meaningfully and persistently maintains that a true and genuine relationship is only that in which every single man is regarded as a person-the I-Thou relationship.

I-Thou relationship is an encounter and not domination

Obviously, human personality and dignity are respected in I and Thou relational bond. The union per se does not necessarily demand any physical becoming the "other" in order to enter into relational bond with him. What is demanded here is metaphysical oneness. In this case, therefore, the person still retains his or her personality or personhood and respect. The "other" on the other hand still remains the individual person he or she is, retaining his or her own personality and respect as well. Very importantly, one should not in this relationship disregard the feelings of the "other" neither should the "other" disregard the feelings of the one in question. The two individuals need not think alike or behave in the same way. What they need mostly is the understanding of one another and their different idiosyncrasies. Buber thus warns that:

Feelings dwell in man, but man dwells in his love. That is no metaphor, but the actual truth. Love does not cling to the I in suchaway as to have the Thou only for its "content", its object; but love is between I and Thou. The man who does not know this, ..., does not know love; even though he ascribes to it, the feelings have lives through, experiences enjoy, and expresses (Buber;1958,pp.14-15).

One should not seek to dominate the person he or she is in love with, nor trying to reify him or her. Possessiveness may at times creeps in, but it should not be entertained in I and Thou relationship at all.

Experience has nothing to do in I -Thou relationship. I do not experience the one I love, and have taken as my Thou. Neither do I know nor can tell the how and the why of our relationship. I will experience my Thou only when I have disregarded him or her as a person and, therefore, turned him or her into anobject. In this instance, he or she is no longer my Thou since I am already at that particular point in time outside the relation. Here Buber points out that:

I do not experience the man to whom I say Thou. But I take my stand in relation to him, in the sanctity of the primary word. Only when I step out of it do I experience him once more. In the act of experience, Thou is far away (Buber; 1958, p.9).

At this juncture, we come to what one may call I - Thou relational paradox. The paradox here is that I-Thou relationship can at times and is bound to wander into I-It relationship. This is the reason, love at times seems to be at the brink of termination. Once relationship degenerates into I-It, one will no longer be relating to one's Thou with the whole self and in a total openness. Instead, the "other" is turned into an It, a thing to be used and experienced. Moreover, one that is regarded as an It at one time, has equally the ability and possibility of becoming a Thou once again. This points to the instability and the dynamism of relationship. Buber thus affirms:

Every Thou in the world is by its nature fated to become a thing, or continually to re-enter into the condition of things. In objective speech, it would be said that everything in the world, either before or after becoming a thing, is able to appear to an I as its Thou (Buber; 1958, p.17).

Because of this paradox of relationship, a person can regard one man as his or her Thou and at the same time equally regarding another person as an It.

In every individual, there is a natural aptitude for mutual openness and commitment. This is why one does not need to be told that someone loves him or her. One quickly and readily perceives with no difficulty the person that loves one. This natural striving if not well directed and managed, ends up in Selfishness and possessiveness that characterized I-It relationship. This natural tendency to relate indicates that relationship is an age - long characteristic of man. Hence, the exercise of man's ability to enter into I-Thou relationship distinguishes man from other creatures. It is in this sharing of I and Thou that man becomes authentically himself. The natural aptitude for relationship is what Martin Buber calls "the inborn Thou". He then writes:

In the beginning is relation-as category of being, readiness, grasping form, mould for soul; it is the apriori of relation, the inborn Thou (Buber; 1958, p.27).

According to Buber, therefore, this inborn Thou is realized in a mutual and living relationship.

The inborn Thou is realized in the lived relation with that which meets it. The fact that this Thou can be known as what is against over the child, can be taken up in exclusiveness, and finally can be addressed with the primary word, is based on the apriori of relation (Buber; 1958, p.27).

As a result of this, therefore, a mother of a child becomes to her child the first known Thou in the world. But whether a child knows of any Thou before birth, Buber did not envisage.

2. CONCLUSION

The I-It relationship is found wherever there is exploitation, discrimination, selfishness or even hostility and prejudice. It is at the basis of the dehumanization and belittlement of the

personhood of a person. If the I-It relation is dehumanizing, therefore, what approach to human relationship is more acceptable?

In conclusion, it is only the Manichean tradition that makes one limit one's commitment to the secular world alone. For Buber, attention should be directed towards I-Thou relationship. He contends that it is only in this mode of relationship that God can be found and, therefore, the most desired self-realization, self-actualization and self-fulfillment be accomplished. Buber called this state of life "...the realization of all man's desires and implies perfect self-realization" (Buber; 1955, p.212).

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