

these dialogues are continuations of personal dialogues of long standing, like those with Hugo Bergmann and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy; one is directly taken from a "trialogue" of correspondence between Reinhold Niebuhr and me, and Martin Buber and me, itself based on earlier spoken dialogue between the three of us, again, two at a time. Some, like that between William Ernest Hocking and Buber, as both men indicate, attain the height of dialogue without the two ever having met.

In addition to dialectic and dialogue, this Interrogation offers in small compass a systematic examination of Buber's thought in most of its major aspects. This systematic organization grew out of the questions themselves. When I had assembled the questions of the interrogators, the present outline suggested itself to me as the best way in which Professor Buber might respond and in which question and answer together might be presented to the reader.

I. THE PHILOSOPHY OF DIALOGUE

A. Philosophy in General

Walter Kaufmann: My questions are concerned with the relation of your thought to traditional philosophy as we know it from the works of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, and Kant, to give a few examples. Most people would surely agree that it makes sense to ask about Kierkegaard's relation to philosophy of this sort—perhaps also about Nietzsche's relation to it, or Heidegger's. The answer, of course, will be different in each case. I am assuming that this question makes sense when asked about you; and to facilitate an answer, I shall suggest a few specific subquestions.

1. A large part of traditional philosophy was concerned with the analysis of concepts, though this was not the only concern of any great philosopher. Do you attach less value to such analysis than the traditional philosophers named above?

2. Do you feel that your central intentions are closer to those of Amos than to those of Aristotle? Closer to Lao-tzu's than to Hume's? Closer to Hermann Hesse's than to G. E. Moore's?

3. Is it more important to you to bear witness of an experience and to exhort men than to clarify concepts or to develop speculative the-

ories? If so, of what traditional philosophers would you say the same?

4. Are you at all apprehensive that your main concerns might be buried under the weight of appreciations that are too academic and, in one sense of that word, too philosophical?

Buber: The nature, strictly speaking, of the relationship of my thought to "traditional philosophy" seems to me more a theme for my critics than for me. But through answering your subquestions, I believe I can, at any rate, give a few hints.

1. An ever-renewed analysis of basic concepts appears to me, too, a central task of thought because it is the presupposition for an ever-renewed confrontation with reality. Concepts, the grandiose instrument of human orientation, must repeatedly be "clarified"; a final validity can never be accorded them, although each of the great explanations claims for itself the character of final validity, and clearly must claim it. But in all genuine philosophy, analysis is only a gateway, nothing more. To be sure, the great philosophers who have conducted these analyses have held them to be more important than I do, doubtless because they held philosophizing to be more important. I *must* philosophize; there is no other way to my goal, but my goal itself cannot be grasped philosophically.

2. Certainly my "central intentions" are closer to those of Amos than to those of Aristotle, much closer. But for Amos a concept such as "righteousness" is, in fact, nothing at all other than the condensation into words of a command that is to be fulfilled in a given situation; as a concept it does not concern him. And when I have to philosophize (and I must, indeed, do so, as I said), I must learn from Aristotle and not from Amos. It is otherwise with the distinction between Lao-tzu and Hume. Lao-tzu ushers me, far more deeply than Hume, into the problematics of conceptuality; he discloses to me, as Hume does not, the abyss beneath the concepts; he helps me do what Hume will not and cannot do—see through the indispensable logicizing of reality. Note well, I am no disciple of Lao-tzu; I see the reality of being entirely otherwise than he. Indeed, it is at times much easier for me to "accord the right" to Hume than to him. But his speaking and his silence are instructive to me even today for the rational intercourse with that which is beyond concepts.

3. To bear witness to an experience is my basic intention, but I am not primarily concerned with exhorting men; rather, with showing that experience to be one accessible to all in some measure, in some form. In this I do not feel myself far either from the Platonic dialogues or from Descartes' *Discours de la Méthode*.

4. My main concerns could just as easily be buried under the weight of appreciations that are too philosophical as under those that are too historical (in the sense of the history of religions) and even too literary. There are many methods of evading the vision and practice of the life of dialogue through theoretical discussions of the dialogical principle.

Rollo May: To what extent is Buber an existentialist? He is often referred to under that appellation, and his thought has obvious similarities with the philosophy of modern crisis called existentialism, but he frowns on the title. Specifically, what is his relation to Kierkegaard and Heidegger, as well as to the broader cultural movement of existentialism?

Buber: I cannot, of course, be particularly pleased when, instead of paying attention to what I directly have to say, a questioner furnishes me with the label of an "ism" and then wants to know concerning it. But if those be called existentialists who transpose human existence itself into the center of rational contemplation, then one could call me that. Only one thing must not remain unnoticed: everything else may be discussed purely speculatively, but not our own existence. The genuine existentialist must himself "exist." An existentialism that contents itself with theory is a contradiction; existence is not one philosophical theme among others. Here witness is made.

B. Ontology

Helmut Kuhn: 1. Should we not try to broaden the concept of community as based upon the I-Thou relationship into the idea of an all-embracing ontological community?

2. Is it not true that the meeting (*Begegnung*)—that meeting of minds which unseals the depths of personality—takes place within a fixed order and under an unbending law which we know, however imperfectly, as the law of love?

on the basis of such nonsymbolic knowledge the meaning of the symbol could be explained. To this I have to answer that symbolic language, for example, in the arts and in religion, reveals qualities of the encountered word which cannot be grasped in any other way. It is a "confusion of dimensions" if one takes the theological conceptualization of religious symbols as a direct cognitive approach to that which is symbolized by these symbols—as some forms of philosophy of religion and natural theology have tried to do.

Walter Kaufmann: You have often argued that, except for the equation of God with being-itself, "nothing else can be said about God as God which is not symbolic" and that "the symbol participates in the reality of that for which it stands." (1) In what do propositions about God "participate"? In being-itself? Or in the quality which they ascribe to God? In either case, how can we tell whether they do? It is clearly not your point that they must be literally true to "participate." How, then, can we tell the literally false propositions which "participate" from those which do not? And have you any quarrel with the claim that most propositions about God are through and through ambiguous? (2) In what sense does the sacramental wine "participate" in Christ's blood?

Tillich: Kaufmann asks about the meaning of the participation of symbols in what they symbolize. He asks it ontologically and epistemologically. Ontologically speaking, I would answer that symbolic statements about God point to a special quality of the divine life in which it manifests itself to us in an "ecstatic" experience. If such a quality is expressed in a symbolic term like "almighty God," this phrase, which uses finite material, points to something real in that which transcends finitude—the divine. In a similar way, I could answer the question of the symbolic character of the sacramental wine. In its sacramental use (not outside of it as the Roman Church insists) the wine becomes the bearer of the presence of God, insofar as he is manifest in the cross of the Christ. It is not merely a sign for the faithful, reminding them of a past event, but it is a vehicle of the experience of the presence of God here and now.

Symbolic statements about God, his attributes, and his actions are not false or correct, but they are "demonic" or "divine," and in most cases, they are mixed (ambiguous). The criterion is whether their implications are destructive or creative for personality and community. But this criterion cannot be applied from outside in terms of detached observations (though such observations can be made in retrospect); the criterion is effective and experienced in the life-processes which are determined by a particular set of symbols, expressing a particular relation to the ultimate; the dynamics of the history of religion are largely determined by these experiences. The theologian can try to formulate the criterion, and judge in its light and the light of those experiences the validity of religious symbols in religions generally and in his particular religion.

Peter A. Bertocci: The words you favor to indicate the cognitive-ontological relation between man and God are "grasped by," "union," and "participate." Apart from their describing what you believe to be an actual experience, the epistemic monism indicated by such expressions protects against the skepticism which you believe to result from any form of epistemic dualism, in which the experient is in no way identical with what is known. On your view, I take it, in "religious awareness" we are provided with cognitive certainty issuing from union and participation. Yet does not the cognitive assurance thus given initially in your system evaporate in the later contention that none of the ("pointing") symbols can be adequate renderings of the nature of unconditioned being? If no symbolism can possibly do cognitive justice to the Unconditioned, why are the cognitive attributions ("information" or not) you make, on the basis of direct encounter or union, better *in any sense* than those attributions an epistemic dualist would base on reasonable inference? (1) Why is the venture of faith, which we must put in symbols, any more trustworthy than the reasonable probability of an epistemic dualist if no symbol is adequate to render "the point" of immediate awareness which purportedly gives "unconditioned certainty"? (2) Are the judgments about the comparative suitability of different symbols based on any noninferential cognitive relationship?