

near." That this was in fact the kernel of the sermon that he time after time repeated on his "great journey" through the Galician villages, even if in seemingly different settings, was still maintained there in my youth in oral tales. The meaning of the call is clearly this, that man must accomplish the decisive movement *now*, without depending on the idea that his soul still has time to ascend forward to higher life forms; for now the sphere of redemption has drawn close to our world and from now on the important thing is to draw it forthwith to us.

As far as the mystery of the death of the "holy Yehudi" is concerned, I have considered the different reports about it but have favored that in which one can perceive an influence of the "Seer"; I have done this because here the ambivalence, connected with his theurgy, in the relationship of the Lubliner rabbi to his disciple as well as his disciple's personal obedience, undiminished despite all essential opposition, find unsurpassable expression. Moreover, the Mogielnica Rabbi, who is cited in this connection⁹⁵, stood near the Yehudi, to be sure, but never called himself his disciple and remained essentially faithful to the tradition of his grandfather, the Maggid of Kosnitz. The question tied to one of his famous tales, "Has not Pshysha thus been joined to Lublin?"⁹⁶ is therefore misleading. Besides this, for me the most important difference between the two schools is not to be seen in a difference of doctrines but in one of "existence": in Lublin the teacher imposed himself on his disciples, in Pshysha he helped them to become themselves.

He who in the highest and most dispassionate seriousness dares to carry over that controversy between "metaphysics" and "existence" into the problematic of our own world-hour will recognize that all magicizing gnosis means an attempt to flee before the command of our human reality into the darkness above the abyss.

Conclusion

Among the contributions to this book there is one—that of Walter Kaufmann—in which it is stated with all clarity that all my mature works, no matter what field they may be in, ultimately belong to a single sphere because their theme in the final analysis is a single one. Walter Kaufmann circumscribes this unity with the concept of re-

⁹⁵ Schatz-Uffenheimer, p. 432.

⁹⁶ Schatz-Uffenheimer, p. 433.

ligious thought. To that I can certainly agree; only it must not be misunderstood to indicate that what is meant is a thought that starts from a religion. In the early stages of my way I encountered several great thinkers whose thought started from a religion—Pascal, Hamann, Kierkegaard—and I have learned from them, teaching that I can never forget. But my way was fundamentally different from theirs, and it has remained so: it could not be parallel to theirs.

In order to make this clearer I shall cite a few sentences that I wrote in 1923; I also select these quotations because the essay from which they were taken⁹⁷ has never been reprinted in any of my books.⁹⁸ It says there:

As often as religion has appeared once again in history, there was also in it a force that—not in a doubtful manner like the profane forces, but with the appearance of the highest legitimacy—diverted man from God. That it thereby enjoyed a great success was caused for the most part by the fact that it is far more comfortable to have to do with religion than to have to do with God who sends one out of home and fatherland into restless wandering. In addition, religion has all kinds of aesthetic refreshments to offer its adherents, whereas God transforms for man even formation and vision in a sacrifice that is offered, to be sure, by a joyful but not by an enjoying heart. For this reason, at all times the awake spirits have been vigilant and have warned of the diverting force hidden in religion—which is, indeed, only the highest sublimation of the force that manifests itself in all life-spheres in this cruder autonomisation. . . . But either religion is a reality, rather *the* reality, namely the *whole* existence of the real man in the real world of God, an existence that unites all that is partial; or it is a phantom of the covetous human soul, and then it would be right promptly and completely to replace its rituals by art, its commands by ethics, its revelations by science.

If religion is to be understood in the former sense, then I myself might dare to call my thought a religious one: it intends the whole existence of man. But just for this reason it must reject every conception of a complete knowledge (“gnosis” in the most comprehensive sense of the term). In the above chapter “Theology, Mysticism, Metaphysics” and elsewhere I have already said something about this subject, but I shall try once again to clarify it in a concentrated form.

The “complete,” the legitimately religious existence of man, does not stand in a continuity but in the genuine acceptance and mastery of a discontinuity. It is the discontinuity of essentiality and inessen-

⁹⁷ “Religion und Gottesherrschaft” (a review of the book by that name by Leonhard Ragaz, published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* of April 27, 1923).

⁹⁸ Until the publication, after Martin Buber’s death, of Martin Buber, *Nachlese* (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1965), pp. 102–106 (Editor’s note).

tiality that I understand as that of the I-Thou relation and the I-It relation to all being. To deny this discontinuity means to deny the decisive character of existing as man, which means incontestably: being able to stand in the face of Being without subsisting—and that means persevering—in the face of it. This discontinuity cannot be abrogated. But this “not” is a dual one. That a continuity of the I-Thou relation is not attainable in this our life, that it is impossible, indeed, even *to attempt* to attain it, this everyone knows who knows from his own experience what is in question here. In contrast, it is ever again possible to undertake to establish a continuity of the I-It relation: by erecting on the base of this relation a structure of knowledge, a supposedly adequate structure of what can be expressed, and now, so to speak, transmuting this structure into the being within which and with which one has to live. As long as one limits oneself thereby to the “world,” one suffers only the injury to the essentiality of existence that necessarily results: that within which and with which one has to live necessarily becomes objectified in the same measure as the transmutation succeeds. Something entirely different takes place when one undertakes to include God in the structure of knowledge erected on the base of the I-It relation. Gnosis does just this. In so far as it originates in genuine personal ecstasies, it betrays its origin in which it has to do with no object at all, with nothing that could be legitimately made into the object of an assertion. Thereby it not only offends the transcendent but also human existence because it constructs a structure of knowledge which passes from now on as complete, which claims the absolute legitimacy of the transmutation in an allegedly finally valid appeal to the “known” mysterium. That the being into which this structure is here transmuted ultimately signifies the annihilation of lived concreteness, and that means: the abrogation of creation, is conclusive.

In contrast to this, religious thought in the sense in which I have indicated it means the acceptance of human existence in its factual discontinuity;—only we must give the leadership to the I-Thou relation. The I-Thou relation, the grace that appears ever anew in earthly material, does not even grant the appearance of security, and precepts that one merely needs to remember are not to be drawn from it. And yet it can lead: if only, after it has at any time been replaced by the I-It relation, we do not shun its influence: if we remain open to it. This remaining open is the basic presupposition of the “religious” life in the legitimate sense of the term,

i.e., of the existence of man which has become whole. Here too the discontinuity is not overcome; we take it upon us and master it through the realized primacy of the dialogical.

This is, in fact, the theme to which, since I laid hold of it, or rather since it laid hold of me, my work in all spheres has been dedicated. Some of the forms in which it has manifested itself are "postulative"; but its core is an ontological one.

Thus understood, this thought, as I have said, is rightly called religious. But it may not—this too must be reiterated here—be treated as a thought which starts from a religion.

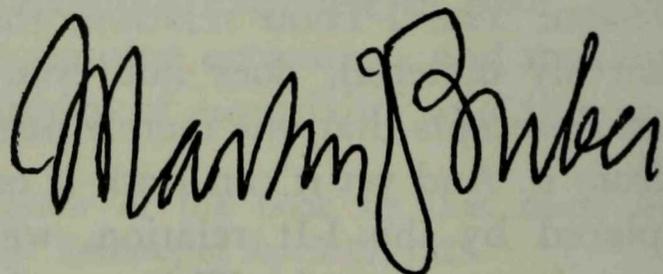
Mordecai Kaplan wrongly ascribes to me the view that "the religious tradition of Judaism is self-sufficient,"⁹⁹ from which it then naturally follows that I am concerned with "a theological anthropology that is grounded on a religious tradition."¹⁰⁰ I have in various places in these Replies as well,¹⁰¹ pointed out that this is not so. As far as the tradition of Judaism is concerned: a few of its great expressions, beginning with the biblical and ending with the Hasidic, together constitute the strongest witness for the primacy of the dialogical that is known to me. Certainly this witness has been the divining-rod that has led me to water; but the water itself could not have been anything other than the experience of faith that fell to my share. Therefore, I have not been able to accept either the Bible or Hasidism as a whole; in one and in the other I had to and I have to distinguish between that which had become evident to me out of my experience as truth and that which had not become evident to me in this manner. Many of my readers, both of "the right" and of "the left," will protest against such a "subjectivism." Those with whom I am in dialogue and whose experience confirms mine know otherwise.*

⁹⁹ Mordecai Kaplan, p. 267.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 267ff.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 690ff.

* Translation by Maurice Friedman

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Martin Buber". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'M' and 'B'.