

will and grace

**meditations on the dialogical
philosophy of martin buber**

hune margulies

will and grace

TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

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TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy's (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity – youth identity in particular – the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some “touchy-feely” educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.

If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* seeks to produce – literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.

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in gratitude

*to yankl the son of meir and hannah margulies.
to livshe the daughter of eugenia and benjamin zaltsman.
my parents. my teachers. my refuge.
may their memory be a blessing.*

*to amos, hadas and isaiah. my children.
amazing ways to love and to celebrate life.*

*to meir margalit (margulies). my brother. my teacher. my role model.
even though he refuses roles. for he just is.*

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through tireless friendship and wise effort.*

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for undertaking this project to bring my martin buber insights to the
reading community.*

*a hasidic teaching asks that if we find a person that has fallen inside
a ditch, we should not lower down a ladder for him to climb up.
we should go down ourselves and climb up together with him. to
sharanrani hemady, my best friend, who by will and grace practices
this heart of love and compassion for me.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| preface: on will and grace | xiii |
| chapter 1. introduction: <i>will and grace: meditations on the philosophy of martin buber</i> in search of lost between | 1 |
| chapter 2. god is the between of i and thou: notes and thoughts on the principles of dialogical ecology | 5 |
| chapter 3. on dialogical philosophy and zen buddhism | 21 |
| chapter 4. on zen's paradoxical spirituality | 29 |
| chapter 5. what is god? between texts and mogra trees | 35 |
| chapter 6. on the creation of the world | 53 |
| chapter 7. on the uses of the word "god" | 59 |
| chapter 8. meditations on the relationship between poetry and prayer | 63 |
| chapter 9. on the biblical sabbath as radical i-thou dialogue | 73 |
| chapter 10. a dialogue with the tao te-ching and some talmudic thoughts | 81 |
| chapter 11. on the sense of place and placelessness | 87 |
| chapter 12. on the meaning of namaskar: a dialogical understanding | 89 |
| chapter 13. notes and thoughts on libertarian socialism, capitalism and the transformation of labor | 91 |
| chapter 14. three dialogical thoughts on love, art and the bodddhisatvah | 111 |
| chapter 15. on relationship and salvation | 115 |
| chapter 16. on the season of the birth of the son of man | 121 |
| chapter 17. on temples and gardens: a meditation on sacred places | 127 |
| chapter 18. form is content, content is form: between rituals and sacraments: on buddha, spinoza and the existence of god | 133 |
| chapter 19. on the logical paradox of religious circularity: a dialogical commentary | 139 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| chapter 20. a thought on religions and sexuality | 141 |
| chapter 21. on the meaning of here and now | 143 |
| chapter 22. some dialogical digressions into the nature of being | 147 |
| chapter 23. notes on teresa and juan | 153 |
| chapter 24. notes on spinoza and weil | 157 |
| chapter 25. dialogue as the alternative between mysticism and dualism: the tasks of the i and thou | 159 |
| chapter 26. on desire, attachments and freedom | 165 |
| chapter 27. on the false continuum i-me-mine: a dialogical alternative | 169 |
| chapter 28. of bibles and prophets | 171 |
| chapter 29. my monologue of two with mr. buddha, moses of the desert and friends, in two parts: a poem | 173 |
| chapter 30. a meditation on prayer and on god's petitional seekers | 181 |
| chapter 31. a dialogue with a poem by st. thomas aquinas | 185 |
| chapter 32. on holocaust remembrance day: a meditation and a theology | 187 |
| chapter 33. on interbeing, language and boundaries | 191 |
| chapter 34. on dialogue and silence | 195 |
| chapter 35. a dialogical meditation on the subject of death with an introduction and three parts | 199 |
| chapter 36. on service and awakening | 215 |
| chapter 37. on three types of spiritualities and on the ways of spiritual errors | 219 |
| chapter 38. on suffering and sacrifices | 223 |
| chapter 39. spinoza and the intellectual dialogue with god-nature | 227 |
| chapter 40. religion as whole-being social transformation: moses, jesus and buddha | 233 |
| chapter 41. moses of the desert: teacher-poet | 239 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| chapter 42. a prologue to a conversation on dialogue, mysticism and sainthood | 243 |
| chapter 43. dialogical meditations of time and space | 247 |
| chapter 44. a koan on dialogue: a dialogue about koans between futilities and encounters | 251 |
| chapter 45. a brief critique of institutional religion: the cases of jesus, buddha and the sufis | 255 |
| chapter 46. on the gods of laughter: a funny conclusion | 259 |
| chapter 47. a brief dialogical commentary on psychotherapy and awakening | 261 |
| chapter 48. on regrets and dialogues | 265 |
| chapter 49. on rebbe nahman's narrow bridges | 269 |
| chapter 50. what pessoá the poet told me today about dialogue and presence | 273 |
| chapter 51. dialogical thoughts on a hasidic teaching | 275 |
| chapter 52. a dialogical thought about prophecy | 279 |
| chapter 53. on the 50th anniversary of martin buber's death | 283 |
| chapter 54. a brief meditation for rosh hashana | 285 |
| chapter 55. on prophetic monotheism | 287 |
| chapter 56. notes on dialogue and religious anarchism | 291 |
| chapter 57. on gods, humans, buber and the books of good | 301 |
| chapter 58. peace as teacher: on free will and the case for radical pacifism | 305 |
| chapter 59. on the messianic project: redemption, dialogue and the buddha of compassion | 311 |
| chapter 60. borges on buber; hammarskjöld on buber: and a poem | 317 |
| chapter 61. in search of lost between: on pilgrimage | 319 |
| chapter 62. buddha nature and the dialogical community | 325 |
| chapter 63. campbell and god as metaphor: buber and god as encounter | 327 |
| chapter 64. on abraham the father; on isaac the son | 329 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| chapter 65. on buber's tree, merton's snow, and watt's potatoes | 333 |
| chapter 66. a conversation on the poetic life: dialogue, mysticism and the ways of the world | 337 |
| chapter 67. on space and dialogue | 343 |
| chapter 68. on faith and reason | 345 |
| chapter 69. an ending poem on the birth of a baby and a note on my parents and old yiddish poets | 347 |
| chapter 70. conclusion: on the future of dialogue | 349 |

PREFACE

on will and grace

martin buber spoke of the human condition as characterized by a dialogue between will and grace.

the poet philosopher baruch spinoza said that if we could ask an arrow flying toward a target, it would probably reply that it is his will to move from point A to point B. in other words: the flying arrow is not aware of the causes for which his actions are an effect. therefore spinoza argued that there is no free will, as our deeds and our emotions are determined by causes and effects. but once we understand the laws of the ultimate cause, god-nature, this understanding will give us peace and freedom from suffering.

arthur shopenhauer argued for a modified version of spinoza's determinism. he said that we are free to choose what we will, but we are not free to will what we will. that is to say: few things in life we can freely choose. we do not choose our births and our deaths, our bodies with all their needs and limitations, the effects of time, the ecological context. all has been predetermined, but we still must make choices within the framework of those limits and constraints.

the poet-therapist viktor frankl said that between input and reaction, there is a small window that remains open, and from this almost imperceptible space, we are still able to make a free choice. and it is that choice we make that confirms our human essence.

this is the dialogical essence of the issue of will: whether we are free or predetermined, nothing can prevent us from saying thou to the freedom, or to the predetermination. it is our thou-response to our lives on earth, as-is, that we must seek to practice. we say thou to life and thou to death. we say thou to our bodies with all their needs and limitations, and we say thou to the effects of time and to the ecological context.

therefore grace is nothing other than our will to say thou, and our freedom to say it again. grace is not a state of being that descends from heavens, grace is a deed we do. the deeds of grace are our abundant and incessant will to say thou to the neighbor and to all beings.

PREFACE

we endure for ever and we vanish in a second, and we are sacred beings not despite, but because of this. we endure for just one second and we vanish for ever, but we are children of eternity in the between of the i and the thou.

nothing in life is more fragile than our will to say thou. nothing in our lives is grace other than our deeds of thou. we will to stand in the hollowed spaces of the between of i and thou, and at that sacred moment we are holding the embrace of this amazing grace.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

will and grace: meditations on the philosophy of martin buber
in search of lost between

this book is a poetic reading of the dialogical philosophy of martin buber.

in this book i seek to apply buberian principles to an analysis of various issues in our personal and social lives. my attempt is to translate buber's insights in terms of human deeds. the results of these meditations are the witnesses to my lifelong work. but these pages are not an academic study in the strict sense. these are thoughts and notes of my dialogue with the text of the writings of martin buber. my meditations in this book are not a literal description of buber's philosophy, for buber would never have approved of taking his words in any way other than in dialogue. buber wrote in-dialogue with the reader, and i read buber in the poetic philosophy of his words. it is in this sense that these pages are faithful buberian essays.

my reading of martin buber takes me to this principal insight: god is not in heaven nor on earth. god is not above nor below. not within and not without. not in the soul or in the flesh. god is not an entity anywhere: god is the between of an i and a thou.

it is essential to note that buber was not a religious person in the conventional sense of the term "religious." much as in zen, buber saw scriptures and rituals not as paths to a revelation of the divine, but essentially as hindrances to the possibility of a personal i-thou relationship with the "eternal thou." and this is also essential to understand: for buber, experiencing the presence of god should also not be understood in the conventional sense of the term "experience." experience, in this case, is not only an inner perception or a phenomenon of the within, for the experience of god is actualized in the in-between of the relationship between person to person and between persons and all beings. our experience of god is the deed of thou.

in other words: we can say that the essential thinking in martin buber's philosophy is that the presence of god in us is always enacted as the presence of god between us. god, like love, is a deed we do. the god-deed is actualized not in rituals or temples, but in the practice of the sacraments of the neighbor. for there is nothing we can predicate of god, certainly not existence, which itself is not a predicate. but we can

CHAPTER 1

still meet god in the embrace of the neighbor. god is no-thing, but there is nothing that isn't god in the between of an i and a thou.

god and nature are one and the same. when i sit under the mango tree, i'm sitting with god. where else should i sit? no ritual or puja is necessary to make the invisible visible. and i do know this: if a neighbor is in need, there too is where god is. for if i forget the mango tree, and if i forget the neighbor in need, where will i find the presence of her who is the mango tree and the neighbor in need? god is everywhere in the between.

i refer to these meditations as a dialogical-ecology because from buber's perspectives the i-thou relationship applies to all realms of existence: the personal, the social and the natural. if any one realm of existence is ignored none can be fulfilled. therefore i-thou dialogue is an ecological project. or in other words: philosophy we can learn, but poetry we must be.

consider this: when i was born i did not need lenses to read the beautiful poems. but as i grew up, they became necessary. i understand that sometimes those lenses took the form of beliefs, or ideologies, or religions, or just cultural commonplaces. but now, i want to read the beautiful poems without the mediation of filters. but this non-mediating method is also a belief, and it is also an ideology and a cultural commonplace. i understand that. and yet, i've learned from the poets that this is true: the touch of your woman teaches you everything you need to know. and in reality there is nothing you really need to know. but we still ought to touch, and even more so, we should learn how to receive the touch. it is that simple. it is that complex.

we will never learn life unless we breathe and we touch. for love, like god, like poetry, is a deed we do. and god is a neighbor we embrace. to embrace is to say thou to all that exists. to say thou is to do the deeds of love and compassion. as the poet buber said: all real life is meeting.

we make a distinction between dialogue and interactions. we call dialogue those relationships that are based on i-thou, and we call interaction any other transaction that is based on i-it. only a dialogue is a relationship.

but it is essential to comprehend this: i-thou dialogue is both a personal and a social practice. it is about our personal ways of relationship with our own selves, with our neighbors and with the world, and it is about society's ways of relationship with one another and with nature. dialogue has both an individual and a social dimension.

we do not begin within ourselves, nor do we begin outside of us: we begin in the between of you and me. compassion and love, like god, like poetry, are deeds we do, and those are the deeds of the between of i and thou. therefore we cannot be taught to

INTRODUCTION

feel compassion for it is compassion that will teach us. we cannot be taught to love, we must let love teach us.

dialogue has a social dimension because when we interact with the neighbor as i-it, we must develop a social system that both enables and sustains i-it interactions. conversely, when we relate to the neighbor as i-thou, we must develop a social system that both enables and sustains i-thou relationships. therefore, our personal healing depends on the healing of society, and the healing of society depends on our personal healing. to attain the liberation of the self we must attain the liberation of society. and to attain the liberation of society we must attain the liberation of the self. often times we focus on the self as an entity unto it-self. we believe that the self can stand alone and apart from society. but self and society are in a dialogue that is primordial, and as such, they cannot be separated one from the other.

we must understand that the liberation of the self is an existential project of the liberated between. the liberated between is a way of relationship in society. healing cannot happen neither within nor without, but only in the between of i and thou.

consider the case of moses, as it clearly illustrates the concept of a dialogical ecology: moses knew that the slaves cannot attain personal inner liberation except within the context of a free community enjoying social, economic and political freedom. therefore rather than teach torah to his slave people, he spent his time fighting their oppressor. but note that the word "egypt" in biblical hebrew, is "mytzrayim" which means "narrowness or constriction." but moses' fight against the oppressor is itself the teaching of the torah. for freedom is not of the within, nor it is of the without: freedom is of the between of i and thou. and it is for this reason that moses took the people out of the physical land of constrictions and into a physical land of promise. for moses, social freedom precedes inner freedom, and for freedom to ring across the land moses needed a land of promise in which to enact the liberation of the people.

there is no liberation that is not enacted as a community of man. there are no promised lands, there are only lands of promise. in that land of promise, the people will create a society of justice and peace, thereby becoming free to be liberated. moses did not bring the revelation to the people while still slaves in the land of constrictions, for he knew that revelation is not of the within, nor it is of the without, the revelation is of the between.

in other words: to receive a torah a people must be free, for freedom precedes any possible torah. there is much liberation in a torah, but none can be lived if the people are not free. and that which is not alive is dead.

the generation of freed slaves spent forty years in the desert and never entered the land of promise. and neither did moses, the messiah of the slaves. moses did not

CHAPTER 1

think the people were yet truly free to be liberated. consider this: the generation of freed-slaves was the one that had witnessed the most important event since the creation of the day of sabbath, that is, moses bringing to them the torah in his own hands down from the heights of mount sinai. and yet, moses knew that the people were still lacking. the people saw and heard miracles and signs and did not believe, for they did not know how to see and hear their neighbors. and that is the true dukkha of all existence.

for we must know what moses knew: a torah will never be within if it's not in-between. true torah, like love, like god, is a deed we do. it must be enacted as ways of relationships in the community. moses knew that a people that receives the torah but does not make it a deed of in-between will never enter a land of promise. and they didn't. and they are us: for to this day, we are still waiting in the vast wilderness.

since the days of moses we were given the poetries of thinkers like martin buber, ravindranath tagore, fernando Pessoa, rumi, and many other poets of whom i write in this book. and yet, we are still not truly free to hear the words. i met their words as a child in the between of pages that smelled the magical fragrances of softcover books. now i went to meet them again. and i ask that you do too.

your life does not depend on reading true words, but true words depend on you reading them. truth always depends on the sacred deeds of meeting.

god is everywhere in the between. it is all will and grace. for god exists in the will to say thou to a being and in the grace of saying it again. we must awake to the truth that sacredness is nothing other than the will to love, and the grace to let love be our sacrament.

CHAPTER 2

GOD IS THE BETWEEN OF I AND THOU

notes and thoughts on the principles of dialogical ecology

this we know: god is not in heaven nor on earth. god is not above nor below. not within and not without. not in the soul or in the flesh. god is not an entity anywhere: god is the between of an i and a thou.

i consider dialogical ecology: dialogical ecology is the place of encounter between many existential poetries: the dialogical philosophy of martin buber, some aspects of the bodhisattva practices of zen buddhism, the practices of dhammic and religious socialism in the east and in the west, the teachings and struggles of liberation theology and its exhortations for a sacrament of the neighbor, as well as other manifestations of the fundamental buberian understanding that at the beginning it was the encounter, and all real life is meeting.

i speak of existential poetries, not of theologies, and not even of scholastic or psychological digressions into the subject of relationships. for this is my understanding of religion: religion is a misdirected poetic insight. the religious beliefs we commit to are our innermost poetic aspirations uprooted away from their original i-thou moments of inception. we redirect the verdant roots of the experiences of the poetic and replant them within the less fruitful fields of theological systems of belief.

i speak of ecology to underscore the fact that i-thou dialogue is not only a manner of interpersonal relationships, not with god or any other person. i-thou dialogue between people and with nature cannot be genuinely enacted unless the existing social system ceases the economic practices of assigning a commodity value to human life and to all beings. in that sense, i-thou dialogue is an ecological project that encompasses both the personal and the social realms of life.

we make a distinction between the ego and the self. ego is the i in the i-it interaction. self is the i in i-the thou relationships. we renounce the ego in order to free the self.

in these pages i dialogue with thinkers like martin buber, babasaheb ambedkar, mahatma gandhi, ravindranath tagore, fernando Pessoa, j.l. borges, thomas merton, rumi, antonio machado and others. at the core of these thinkers philosophies there is an understanding that the spiritual realm of life must be enacted in the ways of relationship within the community and with the environment. for the realm of the

CHAPTER 2

spiritual is not separate and apart from the realm of the physical: both are one and the same.

this emphasis on the life of relationship in community has lead some of these thinkers to advocate social systems that encourage and sustain a life of dialogue. buber spoke of religious socialism and ambedkar spoke of dhammic socialism. we will observe the many points of encounter between these different forms of dialogical religious existentialism. we must aim to interpret and set free the poetic essence that lays dormant within the walls of our theological religions. for poetry offers existential insights that we must discover anew. our task is to recapture this poetry.

in other words: to find eternity in a fleeting moment it's easy. but finding a fleeting moment in all of eternity, that's what truly matters. to see a god in a little fig it's not difficult. but seeing a little fig in a god: now, that's the human predicament.

i speak of a god. but my definition of god is different. i do not believe in a god that exists in the same sense and meaning of the concept of existence as it applies to the beings and objects of the universe. existence, as we are able to understand it, requires a material component. being this the case, the god abraham, jacob and isaac spoke of cannot possess any of the anthropomorphic attributes predicated of it. that is to say: god is not a body nor a spirit, and he is not omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent. nor, of course, is god any of its opposites.

it follows from this that god does not possess a personhood, and therefore it does not act toward the world in a personalized way. we relate to god in a personal way, but we cannot make the same claim in regards to god. therefore, in contrast to theistic theology, we ought not view god as a participant in history or in the cosmos.

founded on the same abrahamic theological premises, maimonides argued that every biblical reference depicting god as having a body or any other human characteristic ought to be understood only as a metaphor or an allegory. if that is the case, the references to a god that is a creator, a redeemer and a providential provider, are only metaphors or allegories. metaphors or allegories to what? to our innermost poetic insights and feelings.

many of the thinkers and poets i dialogue with in this book write the word "god" in their texts. therefore i too use the word god. but my god is not of a spirit transcendent. god is the embrace of the neighbor. i will however argue that when thinkers or poets speak of the experience of the divine, they are speaking of their profound dialogical encounter with the realm of the poetic.

what is it that the concept of god is an allegory of, or a metaphor for? like all poetry, the concept of god is an allegory or a metaphor for our existential experience of the

realm of the poetic. in other words: we have chosen to call god this exuberant feeling of the beauty embedded in the saying of thou to one another and to nature. therefore, the theistic concept of god is the psychological construction of an anthropomorphic reference to that which we experience as an overwhelming emotional content.

but this experience of the realm of the poetic refers not only to deep emotional contents of the mind. the experience of the poetic is not a mystical phenomenon, it is the ordinary and simple deed of saying thou to a neighbor and to a being. the essence of the poetic, primarily and essentially, refers to its enactment as a deed between i and thou.

for god is not a belief we hold, god is a deed we do. this poetic realm i speak of is the deed of embrace of the neighbor and all beings, and in this context, when we speak of our love of god we must remember that the sacraments of the divine are nothing other than the sacraments of the neighbor.

but let us be clear on this, for this is the entire principle behind dialogical philosophy: we are not saying that performing divine sacraments will bring providence to our neighbors: we are saying that engaging in dialogue with the neighbor is, in itself, the divine sacrament. when we say that the sacrament of the divine is one and the same as the sacrament of the neighbor, we do not mean to say that performing one fulfills the requirements of the other. what we are saying is that the performance of the sacraments of the neighbor fulfill the requirements of any possible sacraments of the divine.

that the most fateful events of life are revealed through simple and ordinary events is one of zen's most important insights. zen says: before enlightenment we carry water and chop wood. after enlightenment we carry water and chop wood. before enlightenment we thought that rivers and mountains were just rivers and mountains. during training we began to see that rivers were not just rivers and mountains are not just mountains. after enlightenment we realize that rivers are just rivers and mountains are just mountains. pessoá the poet said that the only mystery is why do we believe that there is something mysterious about life. a hasidic story tales of that student who used to rush in the morning to watch his master tie his shoelaces. in other words: the recognition of the "suchness" of every thing that exists, as-is, in its outward form and inner content, is the entirety of the state of enlightenment.

tagore gathers fruit, dogen cooks rice, pessoá drinks wine and buber pets a horse. where else will we find liberation? in other words, as dogen might say, these poets are enlightened because they are present in intimacy with the ten thousand things.

by creating the concept of god as separate from the experience of the poetic, and by identifying this experience as a unique inner event that can only be ascribed to the

CHAPTER 2

realm of the transcendent, we essentialize the divine, and that is the fundamental error of all spiritual life. we experience our lives and the world as whole-beings, not as minds alone or as bodies alone. we exist as human beings through our modes of relationship, and when we experience i-thou, that is the living god of all existence.

buber said this in a slightly different manner, one i deem not fully satisfactory. buber said that in every genuine meeting between two people, god is like the electricity that surges between them. electricity seems to suggest an element that exists outside of the relationship itself, only generated through it. but if we consider that electricity already existed within the two elements, only to be awoken through the relationship, then we can argue that god is not distinct and apart from the relationship itself.

if god exists as an entity unto itself, we do not know, nor can we possibly know the essence of divinity. but we do know of the ways we can meet her presence, and in that sense there is no god outside of our dialogue with a being. we meet god in our dialogical relationships with one another and with nature, for god is the meeting itself.

and this is of the essence of dialogue, for if god is the relationship, the kind of community we create amongst us will either be the manifestation of the presence of god or it will be its eclipse. in other words: the messianic age is now and here, at each moment, and in every place. for messianism is not a stage of history in the future, or one we have lost in the past. every deed of embrace of the neighbor is the unfolding of the days of the messiah.

that is to say: each one of us is the one and true messiah, and each one of us is the rebellious and beloved prophet.

the poet ravindranath tagore, in contrast to some strains in theology and mysticism, argued that we should not seek to empty our human-self in order to fill our emptiness with the presence of god. tagore tells us that man must manifest his humanity if god is to manifest his divinity. for the poet the reverse is true: god needs to empty itself so the human could fill the divine and manifest himself. buber likewise said that to bring the presence of god into our lives we must not abandon, but affirm our whole-being humanness with all that it entails and contains. it is perhaps for this reason that heschel the poet said that god is in search of man: god, like man, is in search of lost between.

tagore and buber are arguing for the dialogical view that only a fully manifested human can be in a true relationship with the divine. but we become fully human in the between of the i and thou, and a relationship with the divine is nothing other than our embrace with a being of life. that is the difference between a poet and a prophet. a poet speaks *with* the beings of the world. a prophet speaks *to* the beings of the

world. a poet who believes in his words speaks never to himself but to the thou he encounters. a prophet who believes in his mission speaks only to himself, even as he addresses the world.

everything that lives was born of a relationship. broken homes are relationships too. and so are broken hearts. death is the precise moment when all relationships cease. but we ask: if the fundamental fact of life is the meeting between i and you, why so many failed relationships? we have devoted our mental energies to conquering the world, and some of us to conquering the mind, but we must redirect our searches and learn the hardest of all tasks known to humankind: how to meet a being in genuine relationship. we search within and we search without, and some of us believe that there is a search beyond the within and the without. but the entirety of the human story is our search for lost betweens.

it is a fundamental truth that we must be present in the here and now, for there is no other time or place. and only presence liberates. but we cannot ask the oppressed and the suffering to be here and now. and most of us are not aware that we are living in bondage in the lands of constriction. for not every here is here, and not every now is now. we must attain the true-here and we must attain the true-now. it is a clear principle: to enact the liberation of the self in the concrete and practical manners of our daily lives, we must transform the self together with the social system. in particular we must transform the structures of labor.

in this book i write of poets and thinkers that have seen. and that have also heard. i believe that the dialogical insight is present in their words because it was enacted in their lives. for we judge religions not by their textual teachings, but by the manner in which they have been enacted in the relationships of our lives. the poets and thinkers i dialogue with have actualized the between of i and thou in the realm of relationships between humans and with nature. but of course: none of them are saints to worship or heroes to idolize. that would render them as "its" in our spiritual paths. that would be the buddha we must kill.

we have often made the error of engaging in "spiritual bureaucracy." that is: we assign different spiritual roles to our companions on the path. and we give titles to these roles. spiritual bureaucracy is not the same as institutional bureaucracy, but it stands as its cause and gives it its sustenance. we all need to be poets and thinkers and doers and sitters and rescuers and believers and doubters and peacemakers. we are fools in the cause of love and clumsy in relationships, and it is for that reason precisely that we are the saviors of one another. existence is one because it is diverse, therefore we must not limit ourselves, nor should we seek the opposite. we should refuse labeling our paths. we should refuse being defined by outside roles and rules. and more importantly, we should refuse to define our companions on the path by formal roles and outside rules.

CHAPTER 2

we can say that the presence of god on earth depends on man being present with each other and with the beings of earth. buber insisted that his philosophy of dialogue cannot be reduced to the realm of the interpersonal. as viktor frankl pointed out, a monologue of two is not a dialogue. buber understood dialogue as a way of living with one another and in society, therefore this dialogue depends entirely on the social system within which we live.

in other words: dialogue transcends the meeting of two, for the meeting of two can only be the beginning. dialogical philosophy calls for the creation of communities of dialogue where interactions of i-it will be replaced by relationships of i-thou. from a buberian perspective, the reconstruction of society as a whole is the foundation for the dialogical transformation of our modes of relationships with one another. we will replace i-it with i-thou only in the context of a dialogical society.

we know this to be true from our own human experience: we misdirect happiness into possessing things, believing there is no distinction between having and being. we misdirect love for one another into loyalties to the false idols of wealth, flags and race. but i hold that what stands at the foundation of the religions that inspire us, and what hides behind the happiness we seek, are poetic insights seeking expression and understanding. religion does offer a way of explanation for the wonder of life, even if this explanation is itself unexplainable. but poetry explains nothing and for that reason we can learn everything from her.

the paradigm within-without is a false dichotomy. we are whole-beings, and there is no going toward the within nor toward the without: there is only the going toward the between. to seek and train the within is as erroneous as seeking and training the without. we experience the world in the mind and in our bodies, as existence precedes essence and dialogue precedes both.

there is no-mind separate and apart from the world, for there is no life separate and apart from the world. the experiences in the mind are created in our relationships with the world that is inside and outside of our minds. that is to say, the contents on the mind depend on our relational enactments toward that which stands next to us. in existential terms this calls us to choose whether we will say thou or it to the world. and it is that choice alone that will determine whether our experiences in the-within will be peace and gladness or strife and sadness.

we are not spirits without a body, nor are we in any way detached and isolated from the natural world and from one another. as zen argues, we live in a world of interbeing in which everything that exists comes to existence through a process of dependent co-arising. that is to say: all that lives depends for its birth and sustenance on everything else that lives. everything in the world is within everything else, and

therefore the goodness we bring to any being is the goodness we bring to ourselves and to all beings.

we are whole-beings in an ecological realm of being. no being in the world limits my space, it only expands it to an unknown infinite. the freedom of my neighbor in no way limits mine, it only makes it real.

we saw that from a dialogical perspective, we make a distinction between the self and the ego. ego is what emerges from the interactions of i-it. self is what emerges in the relationships of i-thou. there is no i without a thou. the i apart from the thou is not the i, it is the ego. and only the ego can say IT. egos interact with each other, but can never dialogue with one another. but the moment we say thou to a being, it is our true self that emerges to life. true-selves enter into relationships with one another. we can interpret the buddhist concept of no-self as referring to the ego. thus no-ego is the self. we can only say thou with our whole-being, and the whole being is a manifestation of the true-self.

buber wrote: "what has to be given up is not the i, as most mystics suppose: this i is indispensable for any relationship, including the highest, which always presupposes an i and you... what has to be given up is not the i, but that drive for self-affirmation which impels man to flee from the unreliable, unsolid, unlasting, unpredictable, dangerous world of relation into the having of things." this is a fundamental understanding of dialogical philosophy: the i of i-it is the ego. the i of i-thou relationship is the true self. through the i-it i become an IT, but through the i-thou i realize the nature of my humanness. therefore, using dogen's words, the self that needs to be dropped is the false self that emerges through our i-it interaction with the myriad things. once this false self is dropped, as dogen says, we become enlightened by our genuine i-thou relationships with these same myriad things.

psychotherapy, as practiced by the official profession, is inherently non-dialogical. the setting of healer and healed, however it might be coached in egalitarian terms, cannot be conducive to true healing. it can only bring a measure of emotional skill geared to adaptation and conformity. in dialogue there is no healer and healed, there is only a dialogue in which both parties participate. our minds can tell us to feel equanimity with the outside world without regard to our physical or material conditions, but this is essential to understand: this kind of healing, detached from the existential world of relationships, is not a manifestation of our true-selves, it is but a delusion of the ego.

consider what hermit siddhartha learned under the bodhi tree when confronted with a determined maya just before his moment of awakening. or moises of the desert understood when he demanded pharaoh to let his people go. they recognized their

CHAPTER 2

confrontation with false idols, powerful enough to engender feelings of trust and complacency. the peace and gladness we experience in the mind is in the within, but it is not only from the within: the true peace of the mind is always from the between of i and thou.

the buddha told us that happiness is within us if we follow some precepts in our relationships with all beings. the i-it system of capitalism tells us that happiness is outside of us, generally in some commodity we can purchase. capitalism fabricates both the artificial needs and the artificial means by which to satisfy them. and this is a never-ending process. the buddha identified this i-it approach to life as the perennial wheel of dukkha.

moses agreed with the buddha, but he argued for a different solution to attain the end of suffering: for moses happiness requires leaving a land of bondage and creating a new community in a land of promise. moses did not ask the people to find liberation in the here and now, for the people's here was a place of bondage and the peoples' now was a time of injustice. moses argued that to be happy we must live in a free society, and for that purpose, we must construct a community sustained by compassion and social justice. in other words, there can be no happiness, not within and not without, in a society sustained by the interactions of i-it. capitalism is a mode of the interaction of i-it, and it ought to be replaced with new modes of relationships based on i-thou. as erich fromm said, the dichotomy is either to have or to be.

and this is the essence of the concept of the sabbath, the most genial of all creation of the biblical mind. the sabbath is the one day of the week when all commodity related activities are strictly prohibited. even the thought of labor must be avoided. the understanding is that the pursuit of holiness cannot be compromised with the deliberate and willful pursuit of materialism.

both moses and siddhartha felt they had to leave their homes if they wished to find liberation. but this is the essential dichotomy: moses' desert was different from siddhartha's forest, for moses did not leave alone and did not leave his child behind. moses left with all the people, with all the families, and with all the animals. moses knew this well: as long as one person is not free, no one is. as long as one person is not happy, we are all trapped within the bondages of dukkha. if one person remains behind in egypt, we will never reach the land of promise. and siddhartha, as the buddha, came to understand this too. for he left his tree behind and went to the marketplace to meet the people. and this is the concept of prophet and the concept of bodhisattva.

the common understanding is that when we speak of zen-buddhism, we must first speak of buddhism, as zen is a modifier to the system of buddhism. but i argue the

contrary. i believe that the system of buddhism is a modifier to zen primordiality. the experience of zen is a primordial relationship between us and life, and therefore it precedes any religious constructs built around it, and in this case, the religion of buddhism. the human experience of the practice of zen is the essential moment of inception, only modified in its search for enactment and understanding by the creeds of institutional buddhism.

a primordial substance refers to the original matter that exists prior to and independent of any subsequent additions and modifications. in other words: primordiality in the realm of the spirit is the original *moment of inception* of personal and social experiences. buber speaks of i-thou dialogue as the primordial moment of inception of all genuine spiritual revelations.

from a dialogical perspective, experiences are not only of the mind. an experience is a whole-being response to an encounter that entails both feelings and deeds. a primordial experience occurs in the unmediated encounter with the suchness of the here and now. "suchness" is a concept in zen that indicates the true nature of reality as-is, prior to any rational and emotional descriptive interpretations of it. in zen the emphasis is in the dropping of all manners of conceptualizations of the experience, as concepts mediate between the mind and the primordial reality. the primordiality of the moment and place emerges as the natural response to an original encounter. this immediacy ought to be understood as the experience of the poetic. the primordial remains naturally untouched by the interferences of both reason or intuition. in zen terms, this is the direct pointing from the phenomenon to the mind, and that is what zen entrusts as the primary characteristic of its practices.

consider this usage of the concept of primordiality: the hebrew prayer of "adon olam" (master of the universe) states it clearly: god was king before the universe existed and will remain king after the world ends. in other words: kingship is primordial to the essence of god, not contingent on external conditions.

the principal idea in zen's understanding of the spiritual life is that liberation can be attained without recourse to scriptural theologies or religious rituals. for zen liberation is in everything we do now, and in everything we meet here. but we must understand that not every now is a now, and not every here is a here. we must attain the now and the here, and that attainment is all the liberation zen speaks of. how do we attain the now and the here? through a life of i-thou dialogue with the ten thousand things.

zen argues that there is no realm of existence or of the mind we need to attain that is separate and apart from the realm of the immediate. there is nothing above and there is nothing below. there is nothing hidden and there are no secretes to be revealed.

CHAPTER 2

in other words, from a zen perspective, liberation occurs when we understand that we are already liberated. but the tragedy of life is that we have forfeited this liberation in exchange for a life of i-it. therefore, the awakening of our liberation depends on us choosing to stand in i-thou relationship with all beings. buddhism speaks of mindfulness. mindfulness is being present here and now, and presentness is being in i-thou dialogue with our neighbors and with our earth. how do we practice mindfulness? through a life of i-thou dialogue with the ten thousand things.

i'm sailing on the mandovi river ferry. in zen they say that we must discard the ferry once we reach the shore. after all we can't walk on the promised land while carrying such a heavy burden. in other words: all religious practices become unnecessary once the goal behind their practices has been attained. for zen, this distinction between skillful means and end-goals is very important, but also very paradoxical. zen says: nirvana is samsara, and samsara is nirvana. that is to say: dualism is a delusion as the means and the goals are one and the same. but for some of us there is no firmer ground than the waters over which we sail. after all, we can't carry the shore on the ferry, it will sink. for in the realm of the spirit, no one can lead anyone anywhere. but to be more precise: if they can lead, they will lead us astray. zen understands this well. they say: if you meet the buddha on the road, kill him. indeed. but as for me, i refuse to kill: i have learned instead to smile and cross the street.

theistic religions teach their own version of non-dual spirituality, as for them no distinction exists between the rituals they perform and the goals these rituals are intended to attain. the rituals are sacraments, and as such, at no point can the believer discard them. the goal to find god is found in the sacrament itself. this is the meaning of halacha in orthodox judaism: one cannot discard the mitzvot for only in their performance will god be present.

from a dialogical perspective, often times we cannot attain liberation for we are too distracted seeking it. the most intractable distractions to liberation are of two kinds: the spiritual-systems we have invented to help us attain it, and the social systems that fragment our lives into times of freedom and times of lesser-freedom. for freedom and liberation cannot be partial, otherwise, what shall we call those times of day we are not free or not liberated? there is no being partially in freedom, there is only being partially in bondage. to have less freedom means to have more bondage and to have less liberated-time it means to be not-liberated all of the time

based on this understanding of buber and zen, the basic premise of dialogical ecology is that spirituality, or poetry, or god, is a deed we do. that is to say: the life of the spirit, or the life of the poem, or the life of the god, must be enacted in the ways we live our lives with the world and with each other. spirit, poetry and god are the between of i-thou relationships. we do not manifest spirituality by performing

religious rituals: we manifest the spirit by embracing the neighbor. and we embrace the neighbor by entering into relationships of genuine dialogue. we do not manifest poetry by only writing words. as francis of assisi well said: we teach the gospel, and if necessary we use words too. we manifest gospel by the ways of our relationship with the whole of existence. god is not *in* the relationship, god is *the* relationship.

and if indeed the realms of the spiritual, the poetical and the godly are realms of relationship, we must understand that our human calling is to engage in the transformation of society. we must transform society from an system based on i-it interactions to an community founded on i-thou relationships.

we meet god as we meet with one another in genuine relationship, and therefore the manner of our meeting defines the biblical distinction between the realms of the sacred and the realms of the profane. god is absent in the profane interactions of i-it, as in the psalmist's poem that tells of the eclipse of god. god emerges in the relationship of i and thou, as the biblical poet told us of this creative god that realized that it wasn't good for man to be alone and decided to give adam a beloved eve.

there is a religious language to help practitioners hide behind a spirituality that has no calling for dialogue. this language promotes a belief in a spirituality that is independent of the relationship between people. in other words, rather than dia-logos, that is to say the existential meaning that can only be actualized in the relationship with the other, the belief is in mono-logos, that is the spiritual error that requires the withdrawal within the self. this belief system argues that enlightenment or salvation is a private state of being, and in that sense we can say that this is a form of spiritual narcissism.

but salvation is not from above nor is salvation from below, it is not from within nor from without: salvation is from the life of the community. that is to say: we are saved in the practices of the sacraments of the neighbor. but aside from salvation, the truth of the spiritual life is that there is no spirituality outside of the between of i and thou.

these pages argue for a different manner to approach our spiritual yearnings. i do not believe in religions for that which we call spirituality is a poetic dialogue with the world. it is in that sense that i speak of a realm of the "spiritual." i do not believe in any of our existing holy books. and i presume i wouldn't either in any future ones, as i do not agree with the concept of holy books. the holy book is the one we write with our deeds in the world.

i do not believe in prophets, but i believe in each of their prophecies. for prophets are poets gone astray, and in that sense, each one of us is born a prophet. every person has access to a plentiful and exacting revelation. none is binding on anyone else,