

# BETWEEN MAN AND MAN

martin buber

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Translated by
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## **EDUCATION**

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darkness. We meet them again in almost every system of that widespread and manifold spiritual movement of gnosis, which at that time seized the embarrassed heirs of the great oriental and antique cultures, split the godhead and emptied value from creation; and in the most consistent of these systems, in Manichæism, there is even, consistently, a double earth. Here man can no longer be a thing among things, and he can have no fixed place in the world. Since he consists of soul and body he is divided between the two kingdoms, he is simultaneously the scene and the prize of the struggle. In each man the original man who fell is manifested; in each man the problematic of being is stated in terms of life. Augustine emerged from the school of Manichæism. Homeless in the world, solitary between the higher and the lower powers, he remains homeless and solitary even after he found salvation in Christianity as a redemption that had already taken place. So he asks Kant's question in the first person, and not, indeed, as with Kant, as an objectivized problem, which the hearers of his logic lectures could certainly not understand as a question directed to themselves; but he takes up the question of the psalmist again in real address, with another sense and in another tone: What is man that thou art mindful of him? He asks for information from one who can give it: quid ergo sum, Deus meus? quæ natura mea? He does not mean only himself; the word natura says clearly that in his person he means man, that man whom he calls the grande profundum, the great mystery. And he even draws that same anthropological conclusion which we have heard in Malebranche; he does it in his famous accusation of men, that they marvel at mountains, at the waves of the sea and the course of the stars, but "relinquish" themselves without being astonished at themselves. This wonder of man at himself, which Augustine demands as a result of his own self-experience, is something quite different from the wonder with which Aristotle in his metaphysic makes all philosophizing begin. The Aristotelian man wonders at man among the rest, but only as a part of a quite astonishing world. The Augustinian man wonders at that in man which cannot be understood as a part of the world, as a thing among things; and where that former wondering has already passed into methodical philosophizing, the Augustinian wondering manifests itself in its true depth and uncanniness. It is not

philosophy, but it affects all future philosophy.

In the post-augustinian west it is not the contemplation of nature, as with the Greeks, but faith which builds a new house in the cosmos for the solitary soul. The Christian cosmos arises; and this was so real for every mediæval Christian that all who read the Divina Commedia made in spirit the journey to the nethermost spiral of hell and stepped up over Lucifer's back, through purgatory, to the heaven of the Trinity, not as an expedition into lands as yet unknown, but as a crossing of regions already fully mapped. Once again there is a selfenclosed universe, once again a house in which man is allowed to dwell. This universe is still more finite than that of Aristotle, for here finite time too is taken into the image in all seriousness—the finite time of the Bible, which here appears, however, transformed into a Christian form. The pattern of this image of the universe is a cross, whose vertical beam is finite space from heaven to hell, leading right across the heart of the human being, and whose cross-beam is finite time from the creation of the world to the end of days; which makes time's centre, the death of Christ, fall coveringly and redemptively on the centre of space, the heart of the poor sinner. The mediæval image of the universe is built round this pattern. In it Dante painted life, the life of men and spirits, but the conceptual framework was set up for him by Thomas Aquinas. As of Aristotle, so too it is true of Aquinas, though he was a theologian, and therefore in duty bound to know about the real man who says "I" and is addressed as "Thou", that man speaks here "as it were always in the third person". In Aquinas's world-system man is indeed a separate species of a quite special kind, because in him the human soul, the lowest of the spirits, is substantially united with the human body, the highest of physical things, so that man appears as it were as "the horizon and the dividing line of spiritual and physical nature". But Aquinas knows no special problem and no special problematic of human life, such as Augustine experienced and expressed with trembling heart. The anthropological question has here come to rest again; in man, housed and unproblematic, no impulse stirs to questioning self-confrontation, or it is soon appeased.

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In the late middle ages there already emerged a new earnestness about man as man. The finite world still hedged man safely in; hunc mundum haud aliud esse, quam amplissimam quandam hominis domum, says Carolus Bovillus as late as the sixteenth century. But the same Bovillus cries to man: homo es, sistere in homine, and thus takes up the motif that had been expressed by the great Cusa before him: homo non vult esse nisi homo. This by itself certainly does not imply that man by his nature steps out of and forth from the world. For Cusa there is not a thing which would not prefer its own being to all being and its own way of being to all other ways of being; all that is wishes in eternity to be nothing but itself, but to be this one thing always more perfectly in the way proper to its nature; it is precisely from this that the harmony of the universe grows, for every being contains everything in a special "contraction".

But with man there is also thought, the reason which measures and values. He has in himself all created things, like God; but God has them in himself as the archetypes, man has them in himself as relations and values. Cusa compares God to the coining master of the mint, and man to the money-changer with his scale of values. God can create all, we can know all; we can know all because we too carry all in ourselves potentially. And soon after Cusa, Pico della Mirandola draws from this proud self-assurance the anthropological conclusion, which again reminds us of the words of Malebranche: nos autem peculiare aliquid in homine quaerimus, unde et dignitas ei propria et imago divinae substantiae cum nulla sibi creatura communis comperiatur. Here the theme of anthropology already clearly appears. But it appears without that setting of the problematic which is indispensable for the genuine establishment of anthropology—the deadly earnestness of the question about man. Man steps forth here in such autonomy and such consciousness of power that the real question does not step up to him. These thinkers of the Renaissance affirm that man can know, but the Kantian question, what he can know, is still quite foreign to them: he can know all. It is true that the last in the series of these thinkers, Bovillus, excepts God: the human spirit cannot reach God, but Bovillus lets the whole universe be known by man, who has been created outside it as its spectator, in fact, as its eye. So securely are these pioneers of nameless, impersonal godhead, comes to "birth" in the human soul; then I had been under the influence of the later Kabbala and of Hasidism, according to which man has the power to unite the God who is over the world with his shekinah dwelling in the world. In this way there arose in me the thought of a realization of God through man; man appeared to me as the being through whose existence the Absolute, resting in its truth, can gain the character of reality. It was this point of view of mine which Scheler meant in his remark; he saw me as still holding it; but it had long since been destroyed in me. He on the other hand surpassed it by his idea of a "becoming of God". But he too had had a decisive experience during the war, which for him was translated into a conviction of the original and essential powerlessness of the spirit.

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Primal and present being, the world's ground, has according to Scheler two attributes, spirit and impulse. In this connexion one thinks of Spinoza; but with him the two attributes are two of infinitely many, the two which we know. For Scheler the life of absolute being consists in this duality. Further, with Spinoza the two attributes of thought and extension stand to one another in a relation of perfect unity; they correspond to and complete one another. With Scheler the attributes of spirit and impulse stand in a primal tension with one another which is fought out and resolved in the world process. In other words, Spinoza grounds his attributes in an eternal unity which infinitely transcends the world and time; Scheler-in fact though not explicitly-limits being to time and the world process which takes place in time. With Spinoza, when we turn from the world to what is not the world, we have the feeling of an incomprehensible and over-mastering fulness; with Scheler, when we do this, we have the feeling of a meagre abstraction, even a feeling of emptiness. Scheler, who speaks in his lecture on Spinoza of the "air of eternity of the very godhead", which the reader of Spinoza breathes in "in deepest draughts", no longer gives his own reader this air to breathe. In truth the man of our time scarcely knows with living knowledge anything of an eternity which bears and swallows all time as the sea a fleeting wave; though even to Sursul ad gracestro miti'
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