



readers'

# FORUM

## The I-Thou Theme, Contemporary Psychotherapy, and Psychodrama

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<J.L. MORENO>

A PSYCHIATRIST writes . . .

Professor Paul E. Pfuete in an article, "The Concept of the Self in Contemporary Psychotherapy" (*PASTORAL PSYCHOLOGY*, February, 1958) discusses on page 18 the origins of psychodrama and says: "In a private conversation with the writer, Dr. Moreno confided that he knew Martin Buber and has taken inspiration from the implications of the I-Thou motif for his own 'psychodrama'." This statement is inaccurate and misleading, and I do not recall having said it. It is improbable because Buber had no relation whatsoever to the beginnings of psychodrama. Indeed, if one gives priority to dates of publication it may be said, on the contrary, that Buber has taken some inspiration from my writings before publishing his book *I and Thou*. However, it seems to me that this is not a matter of priority but rather a matter of interdependence between leaders in a pioneering period. The crucial prob-

lem is to evaluate the concepts which have had the good luck to survive and become the center of world-wide discussion forty years later.

I have presented the I-Thou motive and the concept of the living encounter ("*Begegnung*") in several pamphlets and books published many years before Buber formulated his own. My first publication, *Einladung zu Einer Begegnung (Invitation to a Meeting or Encounter)* appeared in the spring of 1914, before the outbreak of the First World War, and was followed by twelve religious dialogues, speeches, and books all bearing the same over-all title of "*Begegnung*" and dealing with the I-Thou theme, published between 1914 and 1925. I was chief editor of the "Daimon" magazine; Buber was one of its contributing editors, and published in Volume 2, No. 1, January 1919, an article on Chassidism, the "*Geschichten Vom Berdyczewer*." Immediately following, in the same issue, is contained

my "*Die Gottheit Als Redner*" (The Godhead as Preacher) dealing with the I-Thou theme. Other contributing editors were Franz Blei; Alfred Döblin, Francis Jammes, George V. Lukase, Robert Musil, Giovanni Pascoli, Max Scheler, Jakob Wassermann, and Franz Werfel. It is quite evident that at a time when I was exclusively dedicated to the I-Thou theme, the concept of the living encounter, and the religious actor in the Here and Now, Buber was still dominated by a religious-historic orientation and his work on Chassidism. I am, however, unfamiliar with the further development of Buber's work since the time of our original contact through the "Daimon" magazine.

The first question is: Which are the essential concepts, and are there any similarities between their presentation by Buber and myself? I believe that there are some overlapping concepts and common phrases: The I-Thou, the dialogical concept of the meeting—in its two meanings with Man and with God, the concept of the Here and Now, the concept of the degradation of man to an impersonal object, to an "It." But there are divergencies which are greater than the similarities. My concept of self-realization represents an important point of difference. Buber's "I and Thou" is written in the third person. Although it speaks of I and Thou, it is not quite the "I and Thou" in the first person as presented in my *Einladung zu Einer Begegnung*. This different emphasis illustrates that Buber was a religious philosopher and historian; I was a physician and psychotherapist centered on the living God in the present moment, bent to help in the Here and Now, taking an a-historical and often anti-historical position.

The second question is: By what

steps did the ideas of the I-Thou relation and encounter develop into the theory of interpersonal relation, and how did they penetrate the American field of modern psychotherapy and pastoral psychology? Last but not least, how did psychodrama itself develop? Buber, being a religious philosopher primarily, was not concerned with the relation of the Self, the I-Thou and the encounter to psychotherapeutic problems. But I, being a physician and psychotherapist, attempted to bridge the gap between religion and psychiatry and so became the natural carrier of their gradual rapprochement. I presented the earliest conceptualizations and descriptions of therapeutic psychodrama in the *Godhead as Actor*, 1919, and in *The Theatre of Spontaneity*, 1923. As soon as I came to the United States in 1925, I began to publish these theories in books and to demonstrate them in hospitals, universities, and churches. My acquaintance with William Alanson White in 1929, the outstanding figure of American psychiatry of that period, was a fortunate event. He took a deep interest in my ideas, sponsored my theories of interpersonal relations, group psychotherapy, and sociometry and brought them to the attention of the psychiatric profession from 1931 on, until his untimely death in 1937. This led to the gradual dissemination and transformation of the neo-religious and incipient existentialistic ideas into psychiatric and scientific terms.

Dr. Pfuete's assertion is herewith confirmed that contemporary psychotherapy and the theories of interpersonal relations owe a major part of their foundation to the religiously inspired writers of the first quarter century. The influence of G. H. Mead upon the contemporary psychotherapeutic situation was negligible. His

great contribution was the analysis of the cognitive structure of the Self; but dynamic role theory, the methods of the experimental role playing and acting out were imported to the United States in conjunction with psychodrama; he was not concerned with religious and psychotherapeutic problems. The outstanding American forces in this area in my opinion were C. S. Peirce and William James. Thus major credit goes rightly to the neo-religious forces in Europe and the United States, but only in a very remote way to pragmatism and behaviorism.

Buber, I, and many others did not originate anything new but re-discovered and reformulated for our time, old ideas. The I-Thou theme is as old as religion, at least as old as Judaism and Christianity; the relation of I to Thou is at the core of religious

thinking; religion means *relegare*, to bind. But in a period of growing Godlessness it had lost its true meaning for many; it had to be rediscovers and filled with a new vigor so that it would be fortified against the influence of Marxism and psychoanalysis. The dominant ideology in the social sciences was then Marxism, which stemmed from an analysis of economic forces and placed its chief emphasis upon the masses; the dominant ideology in psychotherapy was then psychoanalysis which stemmed from biology and theories of evolution, placing its chief emphasis upon the individual as a biological organism. An expanding psychotherapy was then in the making which craved to bring to the human being, in addition to analysis, love, warmth, and affection. In that great crisis neither sociology nor psychology had an answer. It was at this

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terms, in my early writings, and especially in the preface to the *Legende Des Baalshem* of 1907. By the way, Hasidism already then did not mean for me "history," but actual existence.

As to Dr. Moreno, of his writings I have read only *Einladung zu Einer Begegnung*, and this I did not understand, obviously because its reader is demanded implicitly to read it as having been written by "The Father," a demand I am utterly unable to understand. I have never thought Dr. Moreno may be influenced by me.

—MARTIN BUBER

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crossroad that revolutionary religious thinking in the form of the I-Thou theme was able to cross the bridge. This became the model after which modern psychotherapy shaped its fundamental concepts. Since then they have penetrated religious, sociological, and psychotherapeutic literature.

It may be helpful for orientation purposes to outline some of the powerful neo-religious trends which operated between 1910 and 1930 in Europe and from then on in the United States.

1. Renewed interests in the writings of Kierkegaard from about 1910 on; some of his exponents were Theodor Haecker, Ferdinand Ebner, Eberhard Grisebach, and Friedrich Gogarten. My critique of Kierkegaard was that although he ardently tried to reach his fellow man on the level of full Christian responsibility, he never succeeded. He remained addicted throughout his life to interminable self reflection, never able to come to a real encounter. His self-accusation was that he never was able to cross a bridge between I and Thou. Kierkegaard's own failure to fulfill his credo as a living prophet is probably the reason why the existentialism of today is so thoroughly anti-Kierkegaardian. Kierkegaard's system needed a second existential revolution. The nearest to it was my "Begegnung" idea and the psychodrama.

2. The Chassidic movement interpreted by Martin Buber, 1910-1923.

3. The living encounter complex of Moreno leading to interpersonal therapy and existential psychodrama, 1918-1921.

4. The Existential Analysis (*Das-einsalysis*) of Martin Heidegger: *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1927; after 1940, Binswanger, Boss and Frankl.

5. Karl Jaspers and his book on psychopathology.

6. Mead's social behaviorism (1934) and the neo-analytical groups of Fromm and Sullivan, 1937, about a generation later on the American scene.

7. The revival of pastoral counseling, 1925-1958 (Boisen, Dicks, and others).

It is commonplace to say, but it is necessary to repeat, that scientific ideas developed out of religious beliefs, as astronomy from astrology, or as scientific medicine from primitive magical rites. It is therefore not astonishing that the most modern methods of psychotherapy, dependent upon the interaction of persons, emerged from religious ideas, and is forging towards a synthesis of religion and psychiatry.

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#### DR. PFUETZE replies . . .

I am grateful to Dr. Moreno for his valuable comments on the origins and history of psychodrama, the I-Thou motif, and its uses in psychotherapy. Some of these facts were unknown to me. His letter also gives me an opportunity to make clear my own position in the matter.

Dr. Moreno takes issue with my footnote on p. 18 (*PASTORAL PSYCHOLOGY*, Vol. IX, No. 81) where I write: "In a private conversation with the writer, Dr. Moreno confided that he knew Martin Buber and has taken inspiration from the implications of the I-Thou motif for his own 'psychodrama'." This conversation, the details of which are now forgotten, took place several years ago, when Dr. Moreno was a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Georgia. I immediately found in him a kindred spirit; I told him of

my interest in Martin Buber, and we talked of our mutual concern.

In the context of my article, my words here may appear ambiguous and misleading; but a careful reading, I think, will show that I did not say, certainly I did not intend to say, that Dr. Moreno had *borrowed* his ideas from Martin Buber. It may very well be that Dr. Buber derived some of his ideas from Dr. Moreno. I don't know; and only Dr. Buber knows the answer to this matter of priority. Certainly Buber has claimed no priority nor monopoly of his central thesis. Many others have employed similar concepts or have come close to them in their theory and practice.

In this particular article I was not concerned with tracing the *origins* of the I-Thou theme. I was not trying to establish copyrights to any ideas. I was concerned only to *identify* the motif and to show how two quite different but first class minds had attempted to formulate the problems of man in the light of this theory. Furthermore, I was concerned to show the fertility and fruitful employment of this, and other similar concepts and theories of the "social self" by a host of writers, scholars, and therapists (including Dr. Moreno with his notions of living encounter and dialogic relation).

I was not concerned with priorities, borrowings, or dependencies. Therefore, I wrote (p. 10): "In what follows, it should not be inferred that Mead and Buber are regarded as the only, or even the primary, sources of this concept of the 'social self' . . . Mead and Buber have given exceptionally thorough, attractive, and fruitful expositions of this theme which has many other expressions—some of them historically not derived from either Mead or Buber." On p. 12: "Many of

those writers explicitly acknowledge their indebtedness to Mead or to Buber, or to both; but whether or not there is conscious dependence upon or parallelism with Mead or Buber, it is only too evident that this ego-alter, dialogical, interpersonal *motif* becomes germane to the problems in which contemporary ethics, social and political theory, education, epistemology, Protestant theology, and psychotherapy are interested."

The lines of influence are obscure and often indirect, but this idea has now become a powerful and pervasive factor in psychological analyses and therapy, and its germinal seeds, wind-borne in many directions, have produced a rich harvest. Dr. Moreno has been one of the most imaginative and productive workers in this field. But as he himself observes: it is not a matter of priorities but of interdependence between leaders in a pioneering period. I happen to have found Mead and Buber—no less than Moreno, to be inspiring pioneers in the contemporary re-discovery of and discussions centering upon this seminal concept. Let us all continue to carry forward this dialogue about dialogue, personal encounter, and its possible uses for religion and psychiatry.

—PAUL E. PFUETZE  
Professor of Philosophy  
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#### DR. BUBER comments . . .

I thank you for sending me the two statements. With the history of the "dialogical principle" in the two last centuries I have dealt at some length in the postscript to *Die Schriften über Das Dialogische Prinzip* (Heidelberg, 1954). There (on page 293) I report that the idea of "I and Thou" has already been expressed, in the same...

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bottom.}