



From the Absolute of Either-Or to the Uncertainty of And*

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Abstract

An application of Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue to a controversy of current popular interest, that of Free-will versus Determinism, via the derivation of systems of interpersonal ethics for both the humanist and the behaviorist, and resulting in a definition of man, a prediction of his future, and an interpretation of Truth.

Keyphrases

Interpersonal ethics, humanism versus behaviorism, free-will versus determinism, social psychology, moral philosophy.

Preface

This essay was intended to serve as a unique illustration and elaboration of Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue: an interpretation of his classic work, *I and Thou*, as applied to a question of current popular interest, that of the existence of either free-will or determinism. As a consequence, no attempt has been made to provide a critical account of the issue with equal representation from both sides of the argument. Thus, the treatment of this controversy remains on the level of a general discussion and is admittedly biased with Martin Buber as the sole spokesman for the humanists and without any spokesman whatsoever for the behaviorists. As such, the term *humanist* should be interpreted only as defined and then later represented by Martin Buber; while the term *behaviorist* should be interpreted only as specifically defined without any further associations of this word with its previous use by individuals supporting the science or philosophy of behaviorism. Furthermore, the definitions of these terms undergo a significant transition in the essay: from a definition of humanists and behaviorists as professional philosophers and scientists to their definition as two types of people differing in their actions and possessing different systems of interpersonal ethics. And it should be clearly noted that a theoretical behaviorist in his profession as a scientist may well be a practical humanist in his actions as a person and vice versa. I myself,

as a professional scientist in training, cannot deny the overwhelming body of factual evidence gathered by the experimental behaviorists, yet I consider myself to be a humanist in my actions as a person.

From the Absolute of Either-Or to the Uncertainty of And

Ours has been called the Age of Analysis; its foundation lies in science. We live what has been called the civilized life; its master, technology, rules with undisputed authority. We cannot imagine life without all of the comforts and conveniences which modern civilization has to offer. Should our knowledge and machinery ever fail us, who, if any at all, would survive? And what of the individual person — what of you and me? What has become of us? Are we people or are we nothing but cogs on the wheels of the great mass survival machine called man? And what has become of man? Is he machine or is he still man? Will he indeed survive or will he become extinct?

Science is the foundation of modern civilization. It is that discipline which seeks to analyze life and the world. It attempts to assign a spatio-temporal world-order to life. He who pursues this task is called a scientist. He proceeds according to the rules of rational thought, logic, and the experimental method. He hypothesizes, experiments, and observes. He analyzes, characterizes, and categorizes his observations to derive his results. He uses inductive and deductive reasoning to draw conclusions from his results. He forms theories to create a world-order of cause and effect. He explains life so that we can live with greater assurance of survival. He adds to the ever-accumulating strength and power of technology so that we can live life more easily.

A behaviorist is a scientist who analyzes behavior. His theory of cause and effect states that all behavior is innate and conditioned response. Our actions are either an innate response to a stimulus or a response conditioned by positive and negative reinforcement. As such, all behavior is determined and can be predicted according to the contingencies of reinforcement and the mathematical laws of probability. And what is the nature of an innate response and what constitutes a positive and a negative reinforcer? That is to ask, what is the primary driving force of all behavior? — Survival. The behaviorist says that man is nothing but an animal driven by his instinct for survival; he does not possess free-will.

A scientist is one who conducts a search for an explanation of life so that life can be lived. A humanist is one who conducts a search for an understanding of life so that life may be worth living. The humanist must therefore oppose those scientists who are behaviorists because if man is nothing but an animal without free-will, then his life is not worth

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living. Life can have meaning only if man is more than an animal, only if man possesses free-will. And so the humanist says that man is more than an animal because his actions transcend those of mere animalistic survival and that man *does* possess free-will because he *chooses* to act in this way, a way which is not determined by the driving force of survival.

Man is unique in that he alone can perceive the world in its totality and not merely those spheres of existence necessary for his own continued existence and functioning, his survival. Only man ponders his existence; only man questions the nature of his existence and the meaning of life. Only a man, when he fails in his personal search to find meaning in his own life, commits suicide. To imagine a domestic or wild animal, a dog or great white shark, committing suicide because it could not face up to the demands of life is not only humorous but altogether absurd.

The humanist asserts that free-will exists. The behaviorist asserts that free-will does not exist. A raging controversy ensues; it is known as Free-will versus Determinism. It continues in learned books, academic seminars, informal discussions or arguments at the dinner table. With glee, the humanist declares that free-will exists by virtue of the choice which exists between free-will and determinism themselves. Nonsense, replies the behaviorist, declaring that the humanist is conditioned to believe in free-will and the behaviorist is conditioned to believe in determinism, therefore free-will does not exist and the respective conditioning for each is driven by the force of the survival instinct, each believing that which enables him to live.

The behaviorist always has an answer. His system is fool-proof; it provides a fully comprehensive solution. He is satisfied and content with the great wisdom of its simplicity. But the humanist relies on faith and will not relent; he claims that the reasoning of the behaviorist suffers from the fallacy of an enormous inductive leap. Each provides logical proofs, each provides criticism of his opponent's logic and attacks his proofs. For each argument, there is a counter-argument.

Does free-will exist? Is all of our behavior determined? Are we animals concerned solely with our own survival? Does life have meaning? Is there a correct answer? Who is right — the humanist or the behaviorist? To prove one or the other right or wrong is impossible. We may argue to sharpen our wits or to entertain ourselves, but ultimately we must accept the fact that there is no absolute answer and that to argue in the sincere hope of proving one right and the other wrong is futile. Life is not so simple.

We should not question the validity of science; that is not my intent. Nor should we question the empirical findings of the behaviorist. That is to say, we should not be concerned here with epistemology. What we are and should be concerned with here are the assertions of the humanist and the behaviorist. The humanist bases his assertions on his perceptions of life and the world; they are formed in his mind. The behaviorist bases his assertions on experiments which he conducts in the world; but it must be remembered that his assertions are merely theories formed in his mind and are not the original experimental facts. Assertions, whether they be those of the behaviorist or those of the humanist, are still assertions and nothing more.

Neither one is more or less valid than the other. Each is a statement of personal belief, an individual claim, and every individual is free to choose whether he believes in the assertions of the behaviorist or in those of the humanist *regardless* of whether his choice is one of free-will or one of conditioned response.

We act in accordance with our beliefs. We need not be consciously aware of how we obtained our own system of beliefs or even for that

matter whether we possess one. And certainly, the dogmatic insistence of a belief, when it does occur whether by ourselves or by others, scientists or philosophers, state or church, leads to an infusion of thought into real life. Every system of beliefs, conscious or unconscious to the individual, derived by faith or conditioning, gives rise to a fundamental attitude through which we perceive the world and a fundamental stance according to which we act in the world. The question of the absolute existence of either free-will or determinism is therefore pragmatically irrelevant! However, the question of the nature and difference of man's actions when generated by a belief in either free-will or determinism remains pragmatically relevant.

Indeed, it is that question to which the answer also answers the extremely pragmatic and crucial question of man's survival. If we believe in determinism and believe that man is an animal driven by his instinct for survival, how do we act? If we believe in free-will and believe that man can find meaning in his life, how do we act? The question is not one of how do we come to believe what we believe, but rather it is one of what do we do when we believe what we believe. What interpersonal ethic does a belief in either free-will or determinism each generate? Which if either lead's to man's survival or to his extinction?

The sciences and the humanities, reason and faith, rationality and emotionality. Practical and impractical, relevant and irrelevant. Machine and man, animal and man, free-will and determinism, meaningful and meaningless, survival and extinction. The world is dichotomous; it is made of opposites. And that makes life simple because everything can be reduced to either one or the other of two alternatives. Question and answer, right and wrong, good and bad, black and white. Yet how can we be certain that when we see the world as white, other people do not see it as black? Life is not so simple. Maybe, there is only one thing about which we can be absolutely certain: uncertainty.

Separation and association. The self and the other, a subject and an object. What lies between? What of their meeting? Life is not black; nor is it white. It is the uncertain shade of grey. Or so Martin Buber tells us. Perhaps, he will help us find an answer to the question of man's survival. Rather than paraphrase with my words what he tells us, I will let him speak with his own words. I preserve intact a significant portion of his book, *Ich und Du*, or *I and You* (more frequently translated as *I and Thou*):

The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude.

The attitude of man is twofold in accordance with the two basic words he can speak.

The basic words are not single words but word pairs.

One basic word is the word pair I-You.

The other basic word is the word pair I-It; but this basic word is not changed when He or She takes the place of It.

Thus the I of man is also twofold.

For the I of the basic word I-You is different from that in the basic word I-It.

Basic words do not state something that might exist outside them; being spoken they establish a mode of existence.

Basic words are spoken with one's being.

When one says You, the I of the word pair I-You is said, too.

When one says It, the I of the word pair I-It is said, too.

The basic word I-You can only be spoken with one's whole being.

The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one's whole being.

There is no I as such but only the I of the basic word I-You and the I of the basic word I-It.

When a man says I, he means one or the other. The I he means is present when he says I. And when he says You or It, the I of one or the other basic word is also present.

Being I and saying I are the same. Saying I and saying one of the two basic words are the same.

Whoever speaks one of the basic words enters into the word and stands in it.¹

These first three sections together with the following selections from five of the next six sections of *I and You* constitute the basic framework of Buber's philosophy of dialogue:

The life of a human being does not exist merely in the sphere of goal-directed verbs. It does not consist merely of activities that have something for their object.

I perceive something... I want something... The life of a human being does not consist merely of all this and its like. ... [which] is the basis of the realm of It. But the realm of You has another basis.

Whoever says You does not have something for his object. For wherever there is something there is also another something; every It borders on other Its; ... But where You is said there is no something. You has no borders.

Whoever says You does not have something; he has nothing. But he stands in relation.

Man goes over the surfaces of things and experiences them. He brings back from them some knowledge of their condition — an experience. ...

But it is not experiences alone that bring the world to man.

For what they bring to him is only a world that consists of It.

The world as experience belongs to the basic word I-It. The basic word I-You establishes the world of relation.

Three are the spheres in which the world of relation arises.

The first: life with nature. ...

The second: life with men. ...

The third: life with spiritual beings. ...²

I and You is composed of three parts each divided into sections similar to those above. The three parts were entitled "Word", "History", and

"God" in an original sketch,³ but were left untitled in the final version. *I and You* encompasses all aspects of life; these are described in both abstract and concrete terms. However, here we cannot touch upon every major point of Buber's philosophy, but rather, only those aspects which I have selected to present to you because I feel they are most pragmatic and relevant to our concern: descriptions of the systems of interpersonal ethics associated with each of the beliefs in either free-will or determinism and a prediction of their causal effect upon man's survival. In this regard, that is, concerning what is most relevant to life itself, I must agree with Buber as he singles out the sphere of life with men: "Of these three spheres one is distinguished: life with men. ... This is the main portal into whose inclusive opening the two side portals lead."⁴ Obviously, the sphere of life with men is the only realm in which we can describe systems of interpersonal ethics. But in order to do so, we must first ask the question: What in fact is the I-You!? In the following selections, all taken from the "First Part", Buber gives us some answers. Above all, it is ineffable:

– What, then, does one experience of the You?

– Nothing at all. For one does not experience it.

– What, then, does one know of the You?

– Only everything. For one no longer knows particulars.⁵

Although we cannot conceptualize the I-You itself, we may attempt to characterize it. The I-You requires openness or receptiveness and the union of "will and grace" as preconditions in order to be "drawn into a relation" of total involvement:⁶

The You encounters me by grace — it cannot be found by seeking. But that I speak the basic word to it is a deed of my whole being, is my essential deed.

The You encounters me. But I enter into a direct relationship to it. Thus the relationship is election and electing, passive and active at once.⁷

The I-You is characterized by its directness:

The relation to the You is unmediated. Nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You, no prior knowledge and no imagination; and memory itself is changed as it plunges from particularity into wholeness. No purpose intervenes between I and You, no greed and no anticipation; ... Every means is an obstacle. Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur.⁸

It is characterized by its "power of exclusiveness":⁹

Before the immediacy of the relationship everything mediate becomes negligible. It is also trifling whether my You is the It of other I's ("object of general experience") or can only become that as a result of my essential deed. For the real boundary, ... runs not between experience and non-experience, ... but across all the regions between You and It: between presence and object.¹⁰

By its presentness:

The present — not that which is like a point and merely designates whatever our thoughts may posit as the end of "elapsed" time, ... but the actual and fulfilled present — exists only insofar as presentness, encounter, and relation exist.

Only as the You becomes present does presence come into being.

... insofar as a human being makes do with the things that he experiences and uses, he lives in the past, and his moment has no presence. ...

What is essential is lived in the present, objects in the past.¹¹

Its reciprocity or mutuality:

Relation is reciprocity. My You acts on me as I act on it. Our students teach us, our works form us.¹²

And lastly, it is characterized by that which causes it to be a dilemma for man, its fragility:

This, however, is the sublime melancholy of our lot that every You must become an It in our world. However exclusively present it may have been in the direct relationship — as soon as the relationship has run its course or is permeated by *means*, the You becomes an object among objects, possibly the noblest one and yet one of them, assigned its measure and boundary.¹³

In summarizing the It-world and the You-world, Buber tells us that a true encounter of relation is one of freedom, responsibility, and risk and that it is one of the meeting of two people and not the merging of the two people into one. We should not confuse this concept with two others: the more abstract one of the presence of the whole being in the Between, or that which exists between the two people in their meeting; and the more concrete one of the necessity for the whole being of the person to enter into relation. With the following selection from this long section of summary, Buber ends the "First Part" on the extremely significant point that it is impossible to live in the You-world alone but whoever lives in the It-world alone, which is possible, is not a man:

The It-world hangs together in space and time.

The You-world does not hang together in space and time.

The individual You *must* become an It when the event of relation has run its course.

The individual It *can* become a You by entering into the event of relation.

These are the two basic privileges of the It-world. They induce man to consider the It-world as the world in which one has to live and also can live comfortably... In this firm and wholesome chronicle the You-moments appear as queer lyric-dramatic episodes. Their spell may be seductive, but they pull us dangerously to extremes, loosening the well-tried structure, leaving behind more doubt than satisfaction, shaking up our security... Since one must after all return into "the world", why not stay in it in the first place? ... And when one cannot get around saying You, ... why not say You and mean It? ...

One cannot live in the pure present: it would consume us if care were not taken that it is overcome quickly and thoroughly. But in pure past one can live; in fact, only there can a life be arranged. One only has to fill every moment with experiencing and using, and it ceases to burn.

And in all the seriousness of truth, listen: without It a human being cannot live. But whoever lives only with that is not human.¹⁴

In Kaufmann's notes to this edition, he suggests a comparison between the words of Buber in the last paragraph of this section and those of Hillel:¹⁵ "If I am not for myself, who will be? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" (Avoth 1:14).

Buber has been ridiculed with the claim that his work is nothing but redundant poetical nonsense. That this claim is blatantly false can be clearly demonstrated by the possibility of deriving a concrete system of interpersonal ethics from his supposed poetical nonsense. But in order to do so, I must once again defer this attempt and first provide you with a portion of another section, this time, of one from the "Second Part":

The I of the basic word I-It appears as an ego and becomes conscious of itself as a subject (of experience and use).

The I of the basic word I-You appears as a person and becomes conscious of itself as subjectivity (without any dependent genitive).

Egos appear by setting themselves apart from other egos.

Persons appear by entering into relation to other persons.

One is the spiritual form of natural differentiation, the other that of natural association.

The purpose of setting oneself apart is to experience and use, and the purpose of that is "living" — which means dying one human life long.

The purpose of relation is the relation itself — touching the You. For as soon as we touch a You, we are touched by a breath of eternal life.¹⁶

At last, I can now describe the systems of interpersonal ethics both for the ego (previously translated as "individual") who belongs to the It-world and for the person who belongs to the You-world. "Kant told men always to treat humanity, in our person as well as that of others, as an end also and never only as a means."¹⁷ The ego treats other men always as a means and never as an end. He uses other men to assure his own survival for the future and to improve his well-being in the present; his sole concern is for himself. The person treats other men as an end also and never only as a means. (He must treat men as a means part of the time because it is impossible to live in the You-world alone.) He lives a life of dialogue with other men in the Here and Now; his concern is not only for himself but also for others as well.

The life of the person is distinguished by this participation with others in a verbal and non-verbal dialogue of mutual reciprocity, of a spontaneous and unaffected communication of a true understanding of himself to the others. He desires to be true to the other men before whom he stands and desires confirmation from them yet displays courage in discarding all deception, distortion, and contrived images of himself as what he would like to appear in order to possibly gain acceptance from them more easily. His own confirmation of the others leads to his acceptance of what they are as they are without any preconceived images of them and to his *avoidance* of imposing himself or his perceptions of *truth* upon the others or otherwise changing them to suit his own needs. He lives in the freedom of choice to enter into a relation with others; in making this decision, he possesses an awareness of his own personal direction towards the others, of how he relates to them, in a confrontation of his whole being with them.

In this dialogue, a living relation is established in which each accepts the responsibility of the unreserved giving of his entire person, of his

undivided attention to the other; in which each is able to understand the other without becoming the other but rather while still remaining himself. The result is the trust which occurs between the two people. But, herein lies the risk of the person in his life of dialogue: trust does not last forever. The other who was once a person of life may now all of a sudden become an ego of survival. This total unpredictability of human freedom may cause severe damage to him who remained a person while the other became an ego. Yet, for the true person, a life of survival is not worth living; for him, only the life of dialogue has meaning.

And so he bears the risk seeking ever again to enter into relation with others because "every encounter is a way station that grants him a view of fulfillment"¹⁸ despite his sad knowledge that he may never meet another person again and that he may be often fooled by an ego. To do so, he relies on the faith that "all actual life is encounter"¹⁹ even though meeting does not "make life any easier for [him] — it makes life heavier but heavy with meaning."²⁰ Thus for him, entering into relation is the meaningful and defining act of man. He chooses to be a man, not an animal.

We now have an interpersonal ethic for the ego and for the person. But what of the behaviorist and the humanist? Do they correspond to the ego and the person? The following portion of another section from the "Second Part" provides the answer:

In the It-world causality holds unlimited sway. Every event that is either perceivable by the senses and "physical" or discovered or found in introspection and "psychological" is considered to be of necessity caused and a cause. Those events which may be regarded as purposive form no exception insofar as they also belong in the continuum of the It-world: this continuum tolerates a teleology, but only as a reversal that is worked into one part of causality without diminishing its complete continuity.

The unlimited sway of causality in the It-world, which is of fundamental importance for the scientific ordering of nature, is not felt to be oppressive by the man who is not confined to the It-world but free to step out of it again and again into the world of relation. Here I and You confront each other freely in a reciprocity that is not involved in or tainted by any causality; here man finds guaranteed the freedom of his being and of being. Only those who know relation and who know of the presence of the You have the capacity for decision. Whoever makes a decision is free because he has stepped before the countenance.²¹

If it has not been clear before, it should be obvious now. The behaviorist with his belief in determinism is an ego who belongs to the It-world. The humanist with his belief in free-will is a person who belongs to the You-world. An ego is nothing but an animal who survives. A person is a man who lives a life of meaning, one of dialogue.

The interpersonal ethic of the behaviorist is one of self-oriented survival. The interpersonal ethic of the humanist is one of other-oriented dialogue. The behaviorist seeks pleasures and the immediate gratification of his desires. The humanist seeks to achieve the greatest accomplishment which he is personally capable of rendering for the betterment of mankind. The behaviorist works for the good life for himself. The humanist works for a life of good for all men. The behaviorist rejects the world as it is and seeks his own. The humanist not only accepts the world as it is but also seeks to improve it.

But maybe you scoff at me, you claim that I have described at length the interpersonal ethic of the humanist but have not really described the interpersonal ethic of the behaviorist. And besides, how could an insignificant percentage of the population, a handful of behaviorists and humanists alter the future course of man's world? Behaviorists and humanists are not just a bunch of professional scientists and philosophers as I originally defined them, they are in fact all of us, you and I, because "the attitude of man is twofold in accordance with the two basic words he can speak."²² And it is we who will choose whether man will survive or become extinct. Once again, it does not matter whether it is a choice of free-will or of conditioned response. *Nor* does that allow us to avoid the necessity and our responsibility to make this decision.

We are either behaviorists who say I-It or humanists who say I-You. Humanists are rare, too rare. Most of us are unaware of them unless they are objectively labeled as saints or prophets. Behaviorists are terrifyingly multitudinous. But maybe they are not terrifying to most of us because most of us are unaware of them as well. Behaviorists constitute the overwhelming majority of the population; that is why they are so terrifying to the humanists. But I have not yet pointed an accusing finger at them. Who *are* the behaviorists? They are all those who are not even aware of the existence of both behaviorists and humanists. Why? Because they can only perceive those spheres of existence necessary for their survival; the majority of men are blind to the world.

The behaviorists are all those who think that the right choice, the right decision, the right course of action, can be made and followed solely by the use of science and the experimental method even though they are not necessarily scientists and would never themselves describe their actions with these words. These are the self-righteous and self-sufficient, assuming and arrogant men who exalt logic and rationality and scornfully reject faith and emotionality. Only they have forgotten to ask the essential question: Whose logic? They know only their own or if they do concede the existence of other systems of logic, they immediately deny the validity of any but their own, only their logic is correct. It is one based on success, and that means survival.

The behaviorists are all those who are solely concerned with their own self-advancement within their careers; they are all those who live solely by the power of money and authority. They are all those who think that life is nothing but a game and whoever plays the best, whether according to the rules or not, is the one who wins and can then make his own rules. And they are all those who think that life is a maze and walk through it slowly and cautiously, trying to do as little damage as possible, hoping not to fall into a death-trap along the way, and denying the existence of the sure death-trap which awaits them at the end of the maze. And those who think that life is a lot of little boxes, packages of pacifiers, and they run from one box to the next, looking for the one which offers the most sheltered and comfortable hide-out.

To the humanist, aren't the power-mongers and game-players terrifying, the maze-walkers contemptible, and the box-hiders pitiable? But that is of no concern to these behaviorists who are unaware. Or even if they are able to catch a glimpse of Buber's "actuality", it is easy enough for them to rationalize their actions or delude themselves as in fact most of them do. Generally speaking, we could say that those behaviorists who respond to positive reinforcers are strong egos; they are the logicians and career-seekers and especially the power-mongers and game-players who, in some way or another, rationalize what they do. Similarly, we could say that those behaviorists who respond to negative reinforcers are weak egos; they are the maze-walkers and box-hiders

who delude themselves into perceiving their situation as other than it is. Whether rationalization or delusion, the majority of men deceive themselves; they are blind to the world. It is easier that way. And in the fight for survival, the strong will live and the weak will die.

These behaviorists, who “cower at the tempests of causality” of positive and negative reinforcers, these blind men, whom “the whirl of doom” envelops, are a most unhappy lot.²³ Shouldn't they be enlightened? Can we allow the deception of the majority of men to destroy Truth with lies? And what is Truth?

Those of you and those others who would still scoff at this list of behaviorists are like those who ridicule Buber and his You-world and in so doing reveal themselves as egos of the It-world. Those who deny the existence of logicians, career-seekers, power-mongers, game-players, maze-walkers, box-hiders, and all other behaviorists in their fight or flight for survival must also deny the rise and fall of all empires and civilizations throughout history. They must also deny the rise to power of all conquerors and dictators and their fall from power when defeated by their successors. They must also deny the repeated, in fact, incessant occurrence of all wars whatever their cause or purpose may be. And they must also deny what *has* been denied with ever so much blindness so many times already in the past: the murder, slaughter, and extermination of millions and millions of men throughout history. And if they do, they *are* blind, blinded by the certainty of their absolute truths. How can you scoff? If you still do, you deny life itself.

Now we can consider the question of man's survival. If all men or even if some men are behaviorists, then man will consist of a continual evolution of individual and/or groups of dominant egos ruling over individual and/or groups of submissive egos as has been evident throughout history. It is the powerful drive of man's survival instinct which causes and maintains man's endless fight for survival, and which does not allow the submissive to remain the ruled and the dominant to remain the rulers for long and hence the continual cycle of submissive becoming dominant and the dominant becoming submissive or being destroyed. We can call this condition of man war. If all men are humanists, then man will consist of a genuine community of persons interrelating in the Between of the life of dialogue. We can call this condition of man peace.

Certainly, peace and life are good while war and death are bad and therefore since life is twofold, we advocate the good and disparage the bad. Unfortunately, life is not so simple. How do we know that peace is good and war is bad? After all, not *all* men will die in war. So we must reject our naive assumptions concerning war and peace and let us rather be cynical and critical. We shall enter the It-world and more carefully analyze the situation of war and peace. But to make the analysis easier and more relevant to the individual, I will scale down man as a whole to man as an individual and thereby replace war and peace with their progenitors, the behaviorists and the humanists. If the humanist is a man who lives a life of meaning with others whereas the behaviorist is merely an animal who survives for himself, then in order for us to be men, we must say that the humanist is good and the behaviorist is bad. But you claim that this argument is nothing but a boring repetition of previous definitions followed by my own personal value judgment. You are right; just because I choose white does not mean that you will not choose black. I am still being naive; maybe it *is* better to experience power and success even if only for a short while and even if only a few will gain that experience.

Since I have not yet been cynical enough, I will attempt a different argument using some familiar institutions of the It-world. First, gambling:

The humanists of the You-world of peace are assured life and if life is assured then obviously survival is assured because it must precede life. The behaviorists of the It-world of war suffer high casualties. The arrogance of the conviction that the individual behaviorist will survive is a blatantly false assertion of absolute certainty. The behaviorist can no more predict that he will be a dominant or a submissive ego in such and such a place and time than that he will even survive at all. Some but not all behaviorists of the It-world of war will continue to exist; all humanists of the You-world of peace will continue to exist. Individual humanists make zero-risk bets; individual behaviorists make high-risk bets. Certainly, a zero-risk bet is less of a gamble than a high-risk bet. Second, another kind of gambling: The It-world of modern civilization sells insurance. Most everybody buys life insurance, home insurance, car insurance; in fact, we can buy insurance for just about anything we please. We do so in order to improve our chances of surviving. The purchase of any insurance policy is a gamble. The individual can make a high-risk bet, arrogant in his belief that it can't happen to him, and possibly become bankrupt paying for the new house or car to replace the one which was destroyed in a fire or collision. Or he can make a low-risk bet and simply pay for his future financial security. Buying insurance is the lower-risk bet which results in the individual's greater chances for economic survival in our society. Now, if we assume that any human existence is better than no human existence whatsoever, then we, each individual, should choose as good that world which provides him with the greatest chances for his continued existence. The way of life of the humanist offers greater chances for a continued human existence than the way of life of the behaviorist. So why don't we all buy a share of the great insurance policy for man which Buber is selling, a way of life which he personally lived to the fullest, the life of dialogue? We can see now that maybe I was rash in my declaration of the irrelevance of the absolute existence of either free-will or determinism. To convince people of the value of the purchase of this insurance means that we must induce them to make a choice. But is it a choice of free-will or a choice of conditioned response? And will that knowledge enable us to convince them with more or less difficulty of the validity of that choice which we believe results in the survival of a greater number of men?

So humanists and peace are good whereas behaviorists and war are bad. Only life is not so simple. We must remember that the humanist as a person is one who lives in the You-world but he must still survive in the It-world as a prerequisite for his life in the You-world. And so he becomes exactly like the behaviorist as an ego but the difference is that he does so for only part of the time. That is what is crucial. Buber warns us:

There are not two kinds of human beings, but there are two poles of humanity.

No human being is pure person, and none is pure ego; none is entirely actual, none entirely lacking in actuality. Each lives in a twofold I. But some are so person-oriented that one may call them persons, while others are so ego-oriented that one may call them egos. Between these and those true history takes place.

The more a human being, the more humanity is dominated by the ego, the more does the I fall prey to inactuality. In such ages the person in the human being and in humanity comes to lead a subterranean, hidden, as it were invalid existence — until it is summoned.²⁴

Ours has been called the Age of Analysis; its foundation lies in science.

We live what has been called the civilized life; its master, technology, rules with undisputed authority. Whosoever denies the undisputed authority of technology denies the existence of man's machines which now have the capability to cause the total annihilation of both man himself and his world. Many of us often speculate on the possibility of this catastrophe occurring not even in the course of war but rather by pure accident. We are at the mercy of the machines built by groups of egos so blinded in their struggle to achieve dominance that they fail to recognize that we have reached a critical stage in our history. No more will it be a mere cycling of dominant and submissive groups for it is the Age of Analysis. It is time we summon the person in every man lest the Age of Annihilation befall us.

Martin Buber has been labeled in many different ways: philosopher, existentialist, theologian, prophet. I have already implied what I would choose to call him: an insurance agent, one of incomparable consequence, but nonetheless an insurance agent selling a policy of survival to all peoples of the world. No man or nation has any more right to survival than any other man or nation. Buber himself expressed his position with the following words:

I have occasionally described my standpoint to my friends as the "narrow ridge". I wanted by this to express that I did not rest on the broad upland of a system that includes a series of sure statements about the absolute, but on a narrow rocky ridge between the gulfs where there is no sureness of expressible knowledge but the certainty of meeting what remains, undisclosed.²⁵

Buber rejects that interpretation of life which has beset man throughout the ages, that of the fundamental dichotomy of all life and the dogmatic insistence upon black and white either-or alternatives and the supremacy of one over the other. Instead, he provides us with a third alternative, that of the reconciliation of conflicting opposites into a paradoxical unity — a unity which constitutes the reality of life in all of its complexity and multiplicity. It is this reality which Buber affirms as the sole authentic truth of life.

Precisely what this paradoxical unity of life is can best be seen, you may already be aware of it, by the example of the resolution of the controversy between Free-will and Determinism as I have presented it: Humanists were declared good while behaviorists were declared bad. But in arriving at this conclusion, it was paradoxically that which was declared bad which was used: the behavioristic argument that any existence is better than no existence at all. This concession is also tantamount to the recognition that humanists must be behaviorists part of the time. And I leave to those behaviorists who are behaviorists as professional scientists the task of discovering how a study of determinism may possibly help in convincing people to believe in free-will. In this resolution, we also find an intimation of Buber's interpretation of good and evil: Evil cannot be abolished, but the forces of evil can and must be harnessed by the forces of good, and used for the benefit of good. This manner of resolution represents an acceptance of the authenticity of life. There is no deception here where there are no lies.

As true men, we cannot be persons without also being egos. We cannot be humanists without also being behaviorists. We cannot believe in free-will without also believing in determinism. We can no more assert the primacy of the humanities, faith, and emotionality than we can assert the primacy of the sciences, reason, and rationality. Buber affirms with the utmost conviction that there is indeed only one thing about which we can be absolutely certain and that is uncertainty. Life

is not black and white; it is infinite shades of grey.

It is extremely ironical that in his affirmation of the multiplicity and uncertainty of life as the sole authentic truth of existence, Buber felt compelled to arrive at this conclusion via the traditional assertion of the duality of life: "The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude"²⁶ Yet in his introduction to his translation, Kaufmann points out the existence of the I-I, It-It, We-We, Us-Them, and I-Thou in addition to Buber's original word pairs, I-It and I-You.²⁷ I myself have already taken heed of Kaufmann's criticism: Throughout this meeting of writer and reader, I have often spoken with you and about us with the word *we*. Maybe, a description of life as infinite shades of grey is still inadequate. How about life as an infinite variety of colors? Perhaps, therein lies its beauty.

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[Martin Buber](#) published the original German version of his book *Ich und Du* in 1923. It was first translated to English in 1937 by Ronald Gregor Smith and then again by Walter Arnold Kaufmann in 1970.

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Notes

¹Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, intro. ed. trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann, 1970 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), pp. 53-54.

²Ibid, pp. 54-57.

³Ibid, p. 50.

⁴Ibid, p. 151.

⁵Ibid, p. 61.

⁶Ibid, p. 58.

⁷Ibid, p. 62.

⁸Ibid, pp. 62-63.

⁹Ibid, p. 58.

¹⁰Ibid, p. 63.

¹¹Ibid, pp. 63-64.

¹²Ibid, p. 67.

¹³Ibid, p. 68.

¹⁴Ibid, pp. 84-85.

¹⁵Ibid, Kaufmann's notes, p. 85.

¹⁶Ibid, pp. 111-113.

¹⁷Ibid, Kaufmann's introduction, p. 16.

¹⁸Ibid, p. 128.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 62.

²⁰Ibid, p. 158.

²¹Ibid, p. 100-101.

²²Ibid, p. 53.

²³Ibid, p. 59.

²⁴Ibid, p. 114-115.

²⁵Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, 1947 (London: Kegan Paul), p. 184.

²⁶Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 53.

²⁷Ibid, Kaufmann's introduction, pp. 11-15.