

# DIALOGUE BEYOND DIVERSITY: A BUBERIAN POSTSCRIPT

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## Is Global Dialogue Possible?

Is global dialogue or dialogue among diverse civilizations possible? If so, how? If dialogue is premised on common points as starting points, what are those starting points? How can they have common starting points when precisely their *diverse* cultures clearly spelled out as religions, philosophical and political systems as ideologies—would not allow them?

On the other hand, dialogue among civilizations is necessary. It is an urgency, if not settled on the table of peace, shall result in a global wasteland of unrest and doom. To date, millions of children die of hunger and thirst, women desecrated and abused, basic human rights are moral claims alone of the few. There is a global necessity for dialogue; but is it possible?<sup>1</sup> How?

This paper suggests that global dialogue; dialogue among diverse civilizations is a mode of interhuman relations—hence genuine dialogue is possible amidst diversity and adversity. But which *philosophy* can make this possible?

Many philosophers have talked dialogue; but it was Martin Buber who, in my mind and the minds of others, has this tremendous influence on the philosophical consideration of dialogue as an interhuman relation. Hence, this paper opted to offer Buber's concept on Dialogue.

## How can an Interhuman Dialogue be Possible? What is It in the First Place?

The term 'dialogue' can be taken as a *noun* and as a *verb*. As a *noun*, 'dialogue' can be taken in four senses: it may refer to 1) the words spoken by characters in a book, a film or a play or a section of a work that contains spoken words<sup>2</sup>; or 2) a formal discussion or negotiation

especially between opposing sides in a political or international context; or 3) a talk of any kind between two or more people (formal); and 4) a work of literature in the form of a conversation.<sup>3</sup> As a *verb*, dialogue means, “to take part in a conversation, discussion or negotiation.”

Prof. Ioan Voicu, in his lecture<sup>4</sup>, takes Dialogue in its *second sense*, to mean *a formal discussion or negotiation between opposite sides* in a political or international context—particularly among diverse civilizations. But then dialogue in the *second sense*, implies dialogue in the *third sense* to mean “a talk of any kind between two or more people.” Now we call dialogue in the *third sense* as interhuman relation—a man to man. And I argue that the *second sense* of dialogue is reducible to the *third sense* as interhuman. Therefore, the possibility of genuine dialogue among civilizations is reducible at least philosophically to the possibility of interhuman relations a special mode of dialogue. So it is in this sense, that I understand the *philosophical foundation* of permanent dialogue among civilizations—as an *interhuman dialogue*. It is in this sense I speak of Martin Buber’s Dialogue.

## **Martin Buber on Dialogue**

Dialogue in its various modes simply resolves into its simplest form. It is the form that must pass through the myopic and hyperopic lens of a thinking being called a philosopher. However, it is not the platonic form so detached from the physical reality but it is the form so close to the marrow of human existence and existent; it is the form that passed through the lens of an existentialist philosopher, called Mordecai Martin Buber. Mind you, I am not an existentialist whose innocent slogan: “*existence precedes essence*” which grounds its metaphysical root to subjectivity like Buber. Rather my existential metaphysical root is grounded both on the firm ground of empiricism’s tenet on the infallibility of the senses and the intelligible certainty of rationalism. My existentialism is the midway between Rationalism and Empiricism, which refuses to affirm what Rationalism and Empiricism deny; but agree with what they affirm. *Empiricism* is correct affirming the validity and infallibility of the senses; but wrong denying any valid knowledge beyond the senses. Rationalism is correct by affirming the objectivity of our ideas, but wrong denying the reliability of the senses.

My existentialism is in between, I affirm what they both affirm, but deny what they deny. However, Buber's existentialism affirms what rationalism denies but then denies what rationalism affirms: for existentialism truth is not objectivity, it is human subjectivity.

I shall not discuss in detail Martin Buber's life. It suffices to say that Buber was an Austrian Jew, a Zionist. He knew his literature, history of art, philosophy and even economics well. He knew Ernst Mach, Wilhelm Wundt and Carl Stumpf. He was well versed in Nietzsche, Kant, and Kierkegaard. Martin Buber was an editor, an activist against terrorism and arms race and nuclear weapons, a mediator between the Arabs and his fellow Jews—rolled in one. However, his contribution to philosophy and the world is his philosophy on Dialogue; but still for some, it is his *being* rather than his teaching, which is the dialogue itself. Murphy summarizes his influence:

Martin Buber was the foremost Jewish thinker of our time and one of the world's most influential philosophers. He was a theological bridge-builder long before ecumenism achieved its present popularity. He served as a kind of patron saint for such towering Christian intellectuals as Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, Jacques Maritain and Gabriel Marcel.<sup>5</sup>

What caused such tremendous influence on such great thinkers? The reason is Buber lived his philosophy—that of Dialogue.

I know of no one with life as rich with intellectual adventures or so strongly responded to their challenges as Martin Buber. His greatest contribution was himself, his very being. There was magic in his personality, richness in his soul. His sheer presence was joy.<sup>6</sup>

I resist the temptation to discuss so many things about Buber such as the influence of Nietzsche, Kant, Kierkegaard and Heidegger on him and in turn Buber's influence on the rest. Let me instead talk about his concept of dialogue as a possibility for a global mode of dialogue. Hence, this lecture merely intends to introduce a philosopher whose passion is

dialogue—and if he were alive today would speak at International conferences like dialogue among civilizations.

## **The Character of Buberian Thought**

### **It is Dialogic:**

Man is a being in relation; because “all real living is meeting.” If for Aristotle and others, man is a rational animal, for Buber man is a ‘subject in relation.’ Buber is a qualified monist not dualist in his view of man. He sees not the dichotomy of rationality and animality. Man is man—the whole package as an individual person. As an individual person, each man is unique. Man is not rational alone nor body alone but a totality of both—a subject with potentialities waiting to be actualized. But, then at the same time, man is aware of other unique subjects. I am a subject, he is a subject—we are both unique—hence we are beings in relation. Hence, man aware of the existence of other subjects immediately perceives that human existence is between man and man. This is called intersubjectivity—the “in between.”<sup>7</sup>

To be aware of a man is to perceive his wholeness as a person determined by the spirit; it means to perceive the dynamic center which stamps his every utterance, action and attitude with the recognizable sign of uniqueness.<sup>8</sup>

Man, the moment he was born enters into relation with the world<sup>9</sup>; and he expressed with primary words his primary attitudes as a subject. These primary words are combined words, not to be taken separately. If separately taken they become meaningless. Unlike most words, these primary combined words do not signify a thing or object—but only relations. They are:

The I-It  
The I-Thou

Subject-Object relation characterizes the I-it relation. Man as the subject relates with things including other men as objects of his experience as individuals to love and control. Buber calls this 'objectification.' It is an attitude of one extreme, in this case, the subject who takes possession of the object and controls it—in this case the world. To man, this world reveals itself to him as an object of his knowledge and desire; and sometimes his fancy. "It is his object and will remain to be as long as he wishes it to be. He can take it and it lets itself be taken, but then it does not give itself to him. He can hold on to it for life and will sustain him, but then he cannot meet others in it."<sup>10</sup> In the realm of knowledge, the "I-It" is called science; and "it includes mundane acts such as mass consumption, industrial production, and societal organization. The world of technical mechanization and scientific objectification and control results from the I-It way of apprehending reality."<sup>11</sup>

The 'I-It' is good in itself. In fact without an 'It' man cannot live.<sup>12</sup> Science would not be possible without it. Objectivity is necessary. The world would be miserable if sciences are not objective. Problems crop out only in its abuse; when objectivity misses the individual human existence. When  $E = MC^2$  a scientific theory is translated into a reality a bomb that exploded killing millions of people, when people for the sake of exactitude is known not through their names but through their control numbers or ID nos. "I am Mr. 12345" my cell no. is 678910", when we look at another as a mathematical figure, statistics, as a Doctor, as a lawyer, as anything—when respect is commanded by what degrees we achieved—not the face behind such degree, then it is an "I-it" relation. Worst of it all, when a mother looks at her child as an object, a burden, and another mouth to feed, then the mother child relation is reduced to an I-it relation. It is the worst form of I-It—because it is between a mother and her child—the noblest human relation known to man.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, 'Subject-Subject' relation characterizes I-Thou relation; because it has no "thing" as its object,<sup>14</sup> but only a subject. Existentialists call this inter-subjectivity: '*when the other comes to meet me and I, him.*' Here the subject is not an individual but a 'Thou'—a person. An 'It' is that which we meet in time and space at the mercy of causality.<sup>15</sup> It is something we think, we will and feel. The I-Thou has no object to begin with but another subject, a Thou to whom the "T" stands in

relation. This is the relation that happens in time, situated in space and determined by causality. But, this ‘stepping into I-Thou relation’ is not grounded on space and time as I-It—but transcends it.<sup>16</sup> In the I-It relation, the ‘I’ enters not with his whole being; he reserves some to himself just like the I-It mother mentioned above. On the other hand, the I-Thou relation transcends time-space-causality but muses on merely being human. It is this relation where a man meets another; in this meeting there is no anticipation, no lust, no right and wrong, no philosophical systems—but only a mutual sharing of selves. And this juxtaposition of persons is called Dialogue, the “in between”. It is an “in between” because it is there where minds, wills, and everything human—meet. It is neither I alone, nor Thou alone. It is I-Thou. It is only in this relation that a man realizes his authentic human existence. It is here where each man un.masks himself off layers upon layers of diversity, prejudices that cover us from the other. It is a sort of excavation. Once fully excavated—it is here that one can speak of the Face—a true human meeting. “Only man with man provides a full image” (BMM).

Hence, man, as being in relation, is fully realized in dialogue. It is only in dialogue man becomes himself and transcends himself. “it is in virtue of its dialogical character that human life touches upon absoluteness and acquires an absolute meaning that overpasses its own conditioned nature.”<sup>17</sup> Hence this dialogic relation is the matrix of man’s finite infinity.

If man cannot live without the ‘It’, then the man who lives with ‘It’ alone is not a man.<sup>18</sup> It is only in dialogue that man can reaffirm his uniqueness and completeness. It is in genuine dialogue when while ‘meeting others, one holds on to one’s ground.

“Between you and ‘it’ there is mutual giving: you say Thou to it and give yourself to it, it says Thou to you and gives itself to you. You cannot make yourself understood with others concerning it, you are alone with it. But it teaches you to meet others and to hold your ground when you meet them. Through the graciousness of its coming and the solemn sadness of its going it leads you away to the Thou in which the parallel lines of relations meet. It does not help to sustain you in life, it only helps you glimpse eternity.”<sup>19</sup>

Hence, Buberian dialogue is a protest against dehumanization, depersonalization and objectification of man.

### **Buberian Dialogue is an Affirmation of ‘We’ Community**

For Buber, the I-Thou relation, which is an interhuman relation necessarily implies another interhuman relation, this time its social dimension: the “We” relation. The “we” is merely the plurality of I-Thou. But human community a “We” community is possible only and only if, there is an I-Thou relation when “. . . men are capable of truly saying Thou to one another can truly say ‘We’ with one another.”<sup>20</sup>

“What corresponds to the essential Thou on the level of self-being, in relation to a host of men, I call the essential We. . . a community of several independent persons, who have reached a self and self responsibility, the community resting on the basis of this self and self responsibility, and being made possible by them.”<sup>21</sup>

The “we” relation may be temporary, maybe borne out of urgency, maybe represented by diversity in culture—but then just like the I-Thou relation it must be sincere, trusting, must reflect genuine communion wherein participants take off their cultural masks which tend to isolate and estrange them from the rest—to reveal that same face of the other. In the “We” community, the global community—authentic dialogue happens. Nations settle global concerns: respect for human rights, balance of powers, protection of nature—for the good of all.

Since man is dialogic wherein he realizes his authentic human existence, then I-Thou relation and in fact, human existence is repugnant to individualism and totalitarianism. Individualism is too narrow to open self to the other; hence no dialogue is possible for an individual who lives in isolation. When one is full of oneself, it overflows with oneself and it drowns the other. It is merely an ‘I-I’ relation. Totalitarianism on the other hand, is too broad that the individual becomes an anonymous face in the sea of masked faces. The sea of ‘masked faces’ is the faceless “we.” In either case, individualism and totalitarianism are an ‘I-It’ relation. The “I” looks at the ‘other man’ as object to control, with whom the ‘I’ converses

with insincerity, without care, without mutuality and intensity, in other words without dialogue. On the other hand, in Buberian dialogue, the individual face is affirmed and confirmed together with the other face.

### **It is Religious:**

But, this I-Thou relation is not limited to man and man. It is not merely dialogic—it is also triadic. For Buber, dialogue is possible between ‘man and man’—because of the dialogue between ‘man and God.’ Hence, atheists for that matter cannot have an authentic human existence in the mind of Buber. Indeed, an atheist can converse with another man; he can even sympathize with another—but this is not dialogue. There is no meeting, no “in between” possible without an authentic relation with God as the ground of any genuine dialogue.

Hence, the “dialogic man” for Buber is the “religious man”. This is understandable because Buber is a religious existentialist who believes that God the Eternal Thou is the source of the I and Thou—of the dialogue itself. Hence man is essentially oriented to God as the Eternal Thou.

Is dialogue with God possible for Buber? Dialogue with God is possible because God initiated the dialogue with man, *firstly*, through creation; then, *secondly* through revelation.

In *creating* man and things around him, God set the dialogue. He initiated it. Creation itself is a constant dialogue with man. When a scientist discovers a law of nature and expresses it in fine, clear and almost exact formula—then the scientist merely translates into human terms the divine words through His creation. God speaks through creation and scientists merely serve as interpreters translating into human terms the beauty of creation. When God said: “it was good”—from that time man has to see for himself why God said it. Buber said:” God made no tool for himself, he needs none, he created for himself a partner in the dialogue of time. . . . In this dialogue, God speaks to every man through the life which he gives him again and again. Therefore man can only answer God



with the whole of his life...the way in which he lives this given life.”<sup>22</sup>

In *revelation*, God speaks clearly His mind and heart—what He wants. For Buber the Biblical history of Israel is a living dialogue between God and man. God has been “talkative” as if it were in the Scriptures. He initiated the first divine dialogue in the Garden of Eden wherein God conversed with Adam about the forbidden fruit. God’s last dialogue with Adam was His promise. Then God’s calling of Abraham and His divine promise again. Later, God almost in detail even designed the Ark of the Covenant—betraying that feminine quality of His.

But then this dialogic relation to God is not that of dogmatic formula, which Buber disdains. It is more of trust, not the mindless recitation of religious formula—but it is more of total commitment of one’s being and one’s life to the Eternal Thou. It is similar to that commandment: love God with all your mind and heart” but this time it is more on trusting God completely; because dialogue is premised on trust. And God proved through creation that he could be trusted since human life entirely depends on Him for its being and subsistence.

For Buber, God needs man; and God attains only His authentic Divine personhood when He meets man in that dialogue. Scandalized? Why create man if God does not need man? Of course this ‘Divine need’ is not a need for what one lacks in one’s being (God is all perfect) but it is more of a “need” to share what one has. A teacher “needs” his students (not necessarily for the honorarium) not only because a teacher is not said to be a ‘teacher’ without a pupil or disciple—but mainly because the teacher needs to share what he knows—the truth that fascinates him, the good that delights him and the error and evil that disappoint him. In other words, dialogue in a way is based on needs.

In turn, meeting God, man receives divinity. Through this dialogue God’s presence fills up the meaningless of human existence. Here, the Buberian ‘being’ is better than the ‘Heideggerian being’; because, the latter with its ‘deontotheologic’<sup>23</sup> character fails to reach the redeeming grace of the genuine dialogue. Through this redeeming dialogue, man opens

his mind and heart to another man—a stranger now assumes a familiar face; an enemy becomes a brother, a sinner is entrusted to his care as a greater responsibility—as a person who is in need more of love. Genuine responsibility i.e. the ability to dialogue is to respond to what happens to another.

### **It is Existential:**

But what is the philosophical grounding of Buber's I-Thou? Answer: human existence. Actual human existence; precisely that individual human existence who thinks, wills and feels at this moment—not that abstract and cold human existence of the rationalists. For Buber, man is a concrete and unrepeatable subject. The unique man is not an object to be manipulated—man is a THOU not an IT. Since man is a THOU, then he is a person who deserves respect. The abstract man is non-existent, cannot have a living dialogue with another abstract man. God though not sensible is not abstract. He is concrete. It is absurd how can a not so concrete God create a real concrete world? God must be supremely concrete, but this does not mean that God has to be a body to be concrete. Our mind or intellect is concrete yet it is not a body. Shall we speak about our soul? Our will? Our thoughts? They are so real that to deny them is to affirm them in fact. It is in this way that we understand that human concreteness is different from divine concreteness. Yet there is something common between them when they dialogue, it begins in time, space and causality. The meeting must be in time, space and causality but the completion of the meeting, the genuine dialogue happens beyond such limitations—one becomes responsible for the other. “Responsibility is readiness to respond in the dialogue with God which takes place in the lived moment of existence.”

This dialogue with God need not be in any institution with sets of norms and dogmas to follow. This dialogue with God, for Buber, need not be in a religion; it may be so—but not necessarily. What is essential is that meaningful dialogue with a deity (God) or someone in place of any deity (as in the case of Buddhism); because only with this rare ‘dialogue’ with a divinity, that an interhuman relation becomes possible.

## **The Buberian ‘Truth’ is ‘Dialogue’; hence ‘Truth’ is ‘Situational’**

Contrary to scholastic definition of truth, ‘truth’ for Buber—is not the ‘conformity between the intellect and the thing’; but rather it is the ‘confirmation of one’s responsibility to the other’. There is *truth* when there is genuine responsibility—wherein one is able to answer, a readiness to respond to the other who is willing to dialogue with self. Truth is not a statement whose subject and predicate must conform; but truth for Buber is the responsible conformity between the two subjects, the participants in a dialogue. This is situational.

### **The Characteristics of Buberian Dialogue:**

Based on the above, how do we characterize Buberian dialogue?

**Dialogue is an interhuman relation.** It is a special kind of relation because it is between two human subjects. Interhuman relation is different from merely social relations wherein man finds himself in a group just like this group in this colloquium. As philosophers or teachers we sit together—one feels a sort of belonging—if not boredom. We may smile at one another when the lecture seems faulty or we may all feel the same grumbling stomach after some more hours. Sympathy or similarity of situations does not entail necessarily an interhuman or inter-subjective relation. At most it is merely social or merely instinctive. The interhuman relation goes beyond all these—it is a personal confrontation.

“There is genuine dialogue—no matter whether spoken or silent where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between him and them.”<sup>24</sup>

**Dialogue is not monologue.** Monologue monopolizes the meeting. It is a disguised dialogue. The “I” talks to the other as an “IT” who can listen but cannot confront or at least—we prevent to confront us.

Monologue is actually turning away from the other. Dialogue, on the other hand, "...whether spoken or silent—where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between him and them."<sup>25</sup> Dialogue is turning towards the other, not only physically but our being: "If you look at someone and addressed him, you turn to him, of course with the body but also in the requisite of the soul, in that you direct your attention to him."<sup>26</sup>

**Dialogue is 'being', not 'seeming.'** Being and seeming refer to the attitude of the participants to enter into a dialogue:

**"Seeming"**. One *seems* to dialogue but does not really. This is "seeming" dialogue. Here the participant is not ready to have a genuine dialogue—he merely wants to make an impression on another whom he considers as an It—to possess, control or manipulate. Doing so, the participant skillfully projects a masked image of self and deceives the other. This is clearly a threat to genuine dialogue because it destroys an honest relation; here the "I" refuses to enter a dialogue with another and cannot address the other as "Thou" but as an "It." "To yield to seeming is man's essential cowardice, to resist it is his essential courage."<sup>27</sup> The "seeming" man fails to achieve an authentic human existence. Here there is no genuine dialogue, but only a seeming one.

**"Being"**. One courageously un.masks self to enter into a genuine dialogue. Here, no pretenses, only spontaneity without rudeness or ill manner. The man of "dialogue" is honest with his intentions; he is not present to impress or deceive anyone—he is too mature to wear any mask to hide his true face. He may have his own agenda but he sincerely lays down those on the table of dialogue—and looks to the other for approval or otherwise and says: "this is what I have in my mind, what do you think?" The man of "being" is ready for a genuine dialogue and usually does it well.

## **Dialogue is Confirmation, Awareness and Personal Presence of the ‘THOU.’**

**Dialogue is Awareness.**<sup>28</sup> The man of “being” does not only present himself as he is to the other as unique individual but he likewise is aware of the uniqueness of the other. It is not to look at the other as an object of contemplation and observation, —but as a person who “steps out to meet and confront me, whom I can attempt to make present to myself just in this way and not otherwise his wholeness, unity and uniqueness and with his dynamic center.”<sup>29</sup> This is awareness. The other may oppose me, but we both accept each other as partners with whom we struggle. We oppose each other’s predicament but we affirm each other as persons. I am aware of the other as the Thou.

**Dialogue is Personal Presence.** The awareness of the other—brings in something more—the other becomes *personally present* to the “I”. This personal presence is to “imagine” concretely what the other person thinks, wills, desires, feels and even perceives. This would not be possible if one wears a mask and hides himself to the other. Personal presence is “being” presence not “seeming presence. Buber says:” I prefer the name ‘imagining the real’ for in its essential being this gift is not looking at the other, but a bold swinging—demanding the most intensive stirring of one’s being—into the life of the other.”<sup>30</sup> Personal presence is possible only when one maintains one’s ground and yet meeting the other’s own ground—intensely.

**Dialogue is Confirmation.** Hence there must be an acceptance, a confirmation of the “other” as bearer of his own ideas, ideology and convictions. Those convictions maybe opposed to the other but it is the sincerity of the other that makes him a *partner* the person that he is. Buber says: . . .each should regard his partner as the very one he is. I become aware of him, aware that he is different from myself, in the definite, unique way which is peculiar to him, and I accept whom I thus see, so that in full earnestness, I can

direct what I say to him as the person he is.”<sup>31</sup> This is confirmation an essential requirement for a genuine dialogue—as human meeting. Confirmation done, the other the man of “being” becomes a partner. Buber says:” But if I thus give to the other who confronts me his legitimate standing as a man with whom I am ready to enter into dialogue, then I must trust him and suppose him to be also ready to deal with me as his partner.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Dialogue is not an Imposition but an Unfolding:**

Genuine dialogue is opposed to **imposition**. Imposition for Buber means the “I” forces himself to the other—his ideas, his desires. The intention is not to dialogue but to dictate—wherein one lays down his cards on the table and the other must take them.

But rather, genuine dialogue happens with the **unfolding** wherein the “I” helps the other unmask and unwrap his potentialities.<sup>33</sup>

Each person is in the process of becoming; and this is the beauty of dialogue. Each person becomes better through dialogue—as Buber says: “by existential communication between someone that is actual being and someone that is in the process of becoming... ”

“This unfolding cannot be by imposing because it destroys the uniqueness of the other. “For the proper existence of the interhuman it is necessary that the semblance not intervene to spoil the relation of personal being to personal being. It is further necessary, that each one means and makes present the other in his personal being. That neither should wish to impose himself on the other.”<sup>34</sup>

**Dialogue is not a Speech.** Sometimes dialogue uses speech; but not always because dialogue is more than a speech. It is more than a speech because a speech may conceal our thoughts.<sup>35</sup> One can have a dialogue without words. One is speechless because there are no words available for the moment, what we feel and think. In a dialogue no sound is necessary, not even a gesture.

“Human dialogue, therefore, although it has its distinctive life in sign, that is in sound and gestures, can exist without the sign, but

admittedly not in an objectively comprehensible form. . . . But, in its highest moments, dialogue reaches out beyond these boundaries. It is completed outside contents, even the most personal which are or can be communicated.”<sup>36</sup>

And for Buber, the life of dialogue may dispense with speech and communication, but it has as its minimum constitution one thing, ‘mutuality of inner action’.<sup>37</sup>

One may talk too much, but not necessarily in dialogue; and yet one may speak less yet is in dialogue. In fact, a dialogue can be a silent prayer, a picture and a whistle.<sup>38</sup>

**Dialogue is not monologue.** Monologue is disguised dialogue as said above. Monologue is ‘speechifying’—when one merely speaks and does not listen. But rather dialogue happens when the participants unmasked themselves into “being” not “seeming”—when both are “aware” of the uniqueness of each other—but nonetheless both are “personally present” to each other and finally “confirm” each other as a partner.

**Dialogue is not love.** It is true, love may motivate the dialogue and accompany it in its completion—but it is not love. However, love without dialogue is self love—opposed to dialogue.

**Dialogue is connatural to man.** Man enters into dialogue the time he was born. Yet the sound he uttered was not an intelligible sound that everyone can spell out and follow grammatical syntax. It was a simple cry. Everyone present especially the mother was happy hearing the baby cry. Everyone present understood what the baby meant. . . . without words, but only a cry. The first dialogue the baby had was a simple cry. . . . not in Thai, not in Filipino, not in English—cry has no nationality—it is a universal language. We all understand the cry of millions of children all over the world—some more minutes or hours before they die of hunger.

**Silence is essential to Dialogue.** Dialogue is ‘the response of one’s whole being to the otherness of the other; that otherness is comprehended only when one opens himself to the other in the present and responds to his need even though he is not aware that he is addressing the other.’ This is clear to the noblest form of inter-human relation: a mother and her child. Is there anything more awesomely intimate than the dialogue between the mother and her child? Yet their words are merely utterances.

Those are utterances of trust, which beget a sense of security. It is the babe, in fact, who gives security to the mother—not so much the reverse. It is more of the security that one is needed; not so much the one who apparently is in need for a moment. The cry of the newborn babe gives its mother security. But, is there anything more intelligible, anything more tragic than the silent cry of an aborted baby? Now, it is not hard to realize that nowadays, the cry of the newborn babe is more of a cry of gratitude for having been spared of the abortive forceps.

Many times the most difficult question is answered by silence. More often than not, silence is the answer itself. In fact, the gap between words, we call ‘pause’ is the ‘magical force’ behind thoughts. In writing, the ‘Em’ dash “—” gives force to the sentence we want emphasized. Most intimate moments happen in silence, in whispers. There is eloquence in silence. It is not so much on what you say and hear but more on what is left unspoken to celebrate union of being at that magic moment. Dialogue is union of “being”—not unity of sentences following a grammatical rule; dialogue is union of “beings” an ‘I-Thou’, which follows the rules of being human.

Why all these? It is because dialogue is “turning towards one another”. Participants in a dialogue may have opposite views. But in a dialogue, despite diverse views, participants turn to one another to share the uniqueness of their grounds. It is this turning towards one another what Buber speaks of the “in between” as the narrow ridge.

### **Dialogue is an Agent of Change:**

When one thinks and speaks what he thinks, something happens—he actualized himself. It was not merely the ‘before’ and ‘after’ of the act of speaking; but it is more of giving birth to thoughts. In dialogue, ideas are born. Ideas are conceived first painstakingly, and then they are born. This way, we understand why thinkers are called ‘Fathers’ of sciences. To give birth to humans is motherhood; but to give birth to ideas is fatherhood. But, among these two modes of generations, ‘intellectual fatherhood’ is more difficult and painful. If a woman labors for several months to give birth, a thinker labors in years, and years—then probably would even give birth to a monstrous idea. Now, in dialogue, when one



listens to a person's ideas, intently and sincerely—there is another change that happens—the “being” of the other, dwells in another man's mind and grows there; then hopefully sinks into his heart—to finally give birth to another idea. In dialogue the “unfolding” comes to be. It is in this way that philosophers, and thinkers in general are said to be movers of history—through dialogue, ideas pass from one generation to the other moving people along the way.

Children are always reminded, “never to talk to strangers.” That is a prudent advice to children. But the trouble with that advice is that the child carries that advice till he is old enough to be a parent himself. We never talk to strangers. What's wrong with strangers? Our friends were once ‘strangers’. Maybe we should rather qualify it saying: “we should not talk to strange looking people” or never talk to people who estrange themselves.”

In a genuine dialogue, something wonderful happens. We thought we knew our friend. Until one day, you had this magic moment we call dialogue—wherein amidst silence impoverished with words, your outlook about your friend changed. Dialogue indeed is the “oxygen of change.”<sup>39</sup>

Teachers are said to be agents of change—because they are agents of dialogue. Educators, worthy of their salt, are educators of character. We, teachers, are simply unaware of the influence we have on our students. We do not realize when our influence begins and where it ends. Surely, when teaching becomes a dialogue—when we look at our students' faces intently in a dialogue, that's the time, teaching begins; and we teachers have no idea when and where it ends. Many times, when boredom creeps in after years of teaching—and I want to treat teaching lightly, I use to go to a pond. There I throw some pebbles on the still pond. Once the pebble disturbs the quiet water, I watch the ripples. Layer after layer, the ripples form—until they are not visible. Afterwards, I enter the classroom with renewed strength. That's our life as teachers. We cast ideas to the still minds of our students to create ripples—but ripples are created only when their minds, like ours, are still and thus ready for a dialogue.

## **Conclusion:**

Are the above concepts and characteristics of Buberian dialogue, applicable to global dialogue? Can those principles answer the two questions posed at the beginning? Or are these theories, just like any philosophical posture, unrealistic?

The first question: 'Is global dialogue, among diverse civilizations possible?' This question is theoretical. The second question: Is it a matter of fact that there 'were' and 'are' genuine dialogues among civilizations? This question is a question of fact.

*The answer to the first question:*

Yes. It is possible, because inter-human dialogue is possible; and in fact, it is possible because it is essential to man as man. But, global dialogue among civilizations is a mode of interhuman dialogue. Dialogue among civilizations is an intercultural dialogue, a global one. Yet, global it may be, intercultural it may be—in its very core it is interhuman—a 'man and man' dialogue an 'I and thou' dialogue. Ergo, global dialogue among civilizations is possible; and in fact, essential.

*The answer to the second question:*

But is it a *matter-of-fact* that diverse cultures and civilizations have a genuine dialogue? Before answering this matter-of-fact issue, let us first theoretically apply the characteristics of Buberian dialogue to global dialogue.

First. When delegates of each nation sit together to discuss a global issue or concern—they first sit there at first with the mask of their culture. This is "seeming". The diversity of civilizations is the uniqueness of each nation. Everyone is "aware" of this uniqueness. As the dialogue goes on, slowly they unmask themselves—and face each other as a man facing another. This is called "being". Each delegate listens while maintaining one's ground—intends to meet the other's ground. This is "personal presence". Acceptance

follows which is called “confirmation”. This time they look at the same direction—they see that what concerns their country initially concerns the rest of humanity. *There is diversity precisely because there is commonality*. Once outer layers, as cultural layers which separate nations and civilizations, are removed and scraped through ‘unfolding’, there is one ultimate layer left common to all men—their humanity. Humanity shares the same needs, aspirations and happiness, better known as ‘we’ community.

Second. With this face of humanity, unmasked off-layers-of-diversity, each delegate comes face-to-face with the other delegates this time with similarity rather than diversity. Diversity comes to be because there is similarity first. We speak different languages, you say. That’s a language barrier. But, rather language is meant to serve as a bridge rather than a barrier. Language serves as the bridge among cultures. We use words to express our ideas. But, though words have nationality yet ideas they convey—have none. Language is merely geographical—but ideas are beyond bounds of geography—where man and man can meet and dialogue.

Third. Yet, each delegate preserves his own cultural uniqueness, since he represents his own nation or country with its own culture. But, it is uniqueness which is capable not only to express its uniqueness but responsible to listen to the rest; it is uniqueness that is ‘aware’ of and ‘confirms’ the unique presence of the other delegates. It is a cultural uniqueness, which instead of excluding other civilizations, in fact confirms the same—without losing its own ground. There is a cultural meeting here, not cultural antagonism.

Fourth. It is true. We have diverse religions. But among Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Jews—something is common: they manifest the same ‘act-of-religiosity to give gratitude to the Ultimate Reality to render an act of justice to the supreme being or an ‘enlightened One’—the very essence of religion.

*To the second question then:* “As a matter of fact, are there or were there genuine dialogues, as described above, among diverse civilizations?” The answer is **yes**. There ‘were’ and ‘are’ genuine dialogues as evidenced by the following United Nations General Assembly Resolutions:

- “Human Rights and Cultural Diversity.” A/Res/58/167
- “Human Rights and Administration of Justice.” A/Res/58/183.
- “Incompatibility between Democracy and Racism.” A/Res/58/159.
- “Rights of the Child.” A/Res/58/157
- “Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom while Countering Terrorism.” A/Res/58/187
- “Universal Realization of the right of People to self-determination.” A/Res/58/161.
- “International Covenants on Human Rights.” A/Res/58/165.
- “Promotion of peace as a vital requirement for the full enjoyment of all human rights by all.” A/Res/58/192.
- “The Right to Food.” A/Res/58/186
- “Human Rights and Terrorism.” A/Res/58/174
- “Human Rights and Unilateral coercive measures.” A/Res/171.
- “Non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity.” A/Res/58/168.
- “Globalization and its impact on the full enjoyment of all human rights.” A/Res/58/193
- “Science and Technology for development.” A/Res/58/200
- “Necessity of ending the Economic Embargo and financial Embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.” (A/Res/58/7
- “Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of punishment.” A/Res/58/104.
- “Implementation of the United Nations convention to combat desertification in those countries suffering serious drought/or desertification particularly in Africa.” A/Res/58/242.

There were heated debates in the process of and in the making of the UN resolutions as shown through the video by the previous lecturer.

But then each delegate, taking the uniqueness of his own ground and culture, gradually unmasked and unfolded himself. Until finally, a resolution is drafted and passed. Each resolution speaks of the agreement, that which favors humanity as a whole.

Not convinced? Let us listen to a UN delegate speaking about *dialogue* among civilizations:

The greater danger confronting us in the world today is not that we speak in different language; but we don't always listen in any language. The Art of hearing one another, the commitment to respond to what one is told; these are the fundamental dynamics of dialogue. And dialogue—two way communication—is of supreme importance in attempting to address the vast complexity of civilization that have evolved over the course of centuries...

Civilization is alive, it is the basis upon which dialogue with others is possible...our civilizations are our voice and meaning; they are capacity to mutual understanding.<sup>40</sup>

It sounds familiar; it sounds Buberian.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> It is sad that some universities removed or at least attempt to remove from their curricula, ‘philosophy course’ in the name of industrial and technological progress, as if philosophy is unproductive and an obstacle to progress. ‘Progress’ to mean production and industrialization—or getting the humanity of man.

<sup>2</sup> There are three modes of possibility: physical, moral and metaphysical or mathematical possibility... The physical possibility, as in the case of physical events, phenomena and physical behavior of things, entirely depends on the physical laws for its actuality until God intervenes. Moral possibility depends on the human will for its actuality; while metaphysical or mathematical possibility entirely depends on the metaphysical and mathematical nature of the thing that even God cannot intervene nor deny. In the case of inter-human relation we speak of moral possibility.

<sup>3</sup> Like the dialogue of lovers, like Romeo and Juliet.

<sup>4</sup> Prof. Voicu delivered this lecture on June 23, 2004 at Assumption University, Bangkok.

<sup>5</sup> People dialogue for various reasons: and because of these various reasons many of them entitled their finest works as “dialogue.” Some dialogue to express their philosophical ideas (philosophical dialogue). Plato wrote the Dialogue a conversation between two or more people. His dialogues are actually discourses that are primarily concerned with the presentation, criticism and conflict of philosophical ideas. He wrote several dialogues: the Apology, Cratylus, Crito, Enthypho, Gorgias, the Laws, Meno, Parmenides, Phaedo, Protagoras, the Republic, the Sophist, the Symposium, Theatetus, Timaeus.

Hume’s “Dialogue concerning natural religion” Others, dialogue for religious reasons (religious dialogue). Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) wrote Dialogue which stresses love of neighbors. Also a scientific dialogue like that of: Galileo (1632) wrote his first scientific masterpiece: “the Dialogue concerning the Two Chief World Systems” comparing the Ptolemaic-Aristotelian and the Copernican system—proving that the latter is true or more reasonable. Others dialogue to forget human suffering, as a comfort (a dialogue of comfort). St. Thomas More wrote his finest English work “a dialogue of comfort against tribulation” while he was in prison. Others to defend what they believe (apologetic dialogue). Justin the Martyr (100?-165?) the first defender of the Christians against non-Christians wrote the “Dialogue with Trypho”...an account of his conversion.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Murphy. Buber’s Philosophy of Education. Great Britain: Billing and Sons Ltd. 1988, p.40. Likewise, Martin Buber was instrumental to the Heideggerian radical Metaphysics. As Richard May commented: “In view of his [Heidegger] engagement with a number of non-Western *topoi* or key-words) it is not improbable that Heidegger, with his penchant for poetic expression, received early on, long before *Being and Time*, inspiring and significant stimulation from reading the appealing and delightful *Zhuangzi* of Martin Buber (1910), along with

other works...” May, Richard. *Heidegger’s Hidden Sources: East Asian Influences on His Work*. Trans. Graham Parkes. London & New York: Routledge. See page 43.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> “‘Between’ is not an auxiliary construction but the real place and bearer of what happens between men, it has received no specific attention because, in distinction from the individual soul and its context, it does not exhibit a smooth continuity, but is ever and again reconstituted in accordance with men’s meeting with another.” BMM, 204.s

<sup>9</sup> KOM, 80.

<sup>10</sup> “To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words, which he speaks. The primary words are not isolated words but combined words. The one primary word is the combination I-Thou, the other primary word is the combination I-It; wherein without a change in the primary word, one of the words He or She can replace It. Hence, the I of man is also twofold. For the I of the primary word I-Thou is a different I from that of the primary word I-It.” (I-Thou)

<sup>11</sup> Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. [Henceforth, ‘I and Thou’] Trans. Maurice Friedman. New York: Charles Scribners. 1958, page 32.

<sup>12</sup> Aguas, Jove Jim. *Notes on Buber*.

<sup>13</sup> I and Thou, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Mother Teresa once commented: “if a mother can kill her own child, I see no reason why we cannot kill one another.”

<sup>15</sup> As object to be known, willed, desired, controlled. Subject that which/who reacts or acts upon something/someone.

<sup>16</sup> “The world of IT set in the context of time and space.” I and Thou, 33.

<sup>17</sup> “The Thou appears in space but in the exclusive situation of what is over against it, where everything else can be only the background out of which it emerges, not its boundary and measured limit. It also appears in time but that of the event, which fulfilled itself ‘it is not lived as part of a continuous and organized sequence, but is lived in a ‘duration’ whose purely intensive dimension is definable only in terms of itself’. Buber contended that the world of the Thou appears simultaneously as acting and as being acted upon and not linked to a chain of causes: ‘Only the world of It can be arranged in order: only things can be coordinated in time and space, but the Thou knows no system of coordination.’” Aguas notes on Buber. “The world of Thou is not set in the context of either of these [time,space,causality]” I and Thou, 33.

<sup>18</sup> Buber, Martin. *Between Man and Man*. [Henceforth ‘BMM’] Trans. Ronald Gregor Smith. Glasgow: Collins Sons & Co. 1979, page 167.

<sup>19</sup> I and Thou, 34.

<sup>20</sup> I and Thou, 33.

<sup>21</sup> BMM, 176.

<sup>22</sup> Introductory essay of Maurice Friedman. Buber, Martin. *The Knowledge of Man A Philosophy of the Interhuman.* [henceforth, 'KOM'] Ed. Maurice Friedman. Trans. Maurice Friedman & Ronald Gregor Smith. New York: Harper and Row. 1965, page 27.

<sup>23</sup> Buber, Martin. Israel and the World, the Two Foci of the Jewish Soul.

<sup>24</sup> Deontotheologic means ontology freed of theological color as opposed to Scholastic ontology.

<sup>25</sup> BMM, 19.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> KOM, 76.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>29</sup> Buber speaks of three modes of perceiving man: 1) as an observer wherein man intently fixes his mind on the traits, gestures and expressions of the other; 2). As an onlooker wherein one pays attention not to the traits, gestures and expressions of the other but in an objective way; 3) awareness wherein one is conscious of the other as someone who “says something to me” and instantly that person enters my being.

<sup>30</sup> KOM, 81.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> KOM, 79

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 80

<sup>34</sup> “Dialogue is a prerequisite at the face-to-face level for any helping relationship.” Edgar H. Schein (1928 -U.S. educator and author. Process Consultation Revisited: Building the Helping Relationship.

<sup>35</sup> KOM, 82.

<sup>36</sup> The true use of speech is not so much to express our wants as to conceal them. Oliver Goldsmith (1730 – 1774) Irish-born British novelist, playwright, and poet. Essays, “The Use of Language”.

<sup>37</sup> BMM, 4.

<sup>38</sup> BMM, 8.

<sup>39</sup> “you know you didn’t have to act with me, Steve. You don’t have to say anything and you don’t have to do anything. Not a thing. Oh, maybe just a whistle. You know how to whistle, don’t you, Steve? You just put your lips together and blow”. Lauren Bacall (1924-) U.S. stage actress from the motion picture: “To Have and Have Not.”

<sup>40</sup> Jim Maclachan U.S. Business consultant.

<sup>41</sup> Mr. Negroponte (USA delegate) A/56/pv.43.



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