

Martin Buber's  
For the Sake of Heaven  
Education as Prophetic

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## DEDICATION

To Charles, my father, who taught me to pay attention

To Kathryn, my mother, who taught me to care

To my nine brothers and sisters, who taught me how to relate

Judy  
Steven  
Glenda  
Mary  
Paul  
Charles  
Phillip  
Kathy  
Carol

Honor your father[s] and your mother[s], that your days may be long.  
Genesis

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## ABSTRACT

The author proposes to examine the ontological and epistemological foundations of Martin Buber's novel, For the Sake of Heaven, in this philosophical study. He purposes to use what he finds to address questions regarding the ways that educational communities often ignore the underlying ontological narratives that are important to communities. After describing Martin Buber's idea of dialogical relations, the author explores dialogical relations as a current running through the novel. Using the model of the epistemic commentary, he describes the Hasidic community of the character known as *the prophet* in the novel. Themes of ontology and epistemology are developed. The author then proceeds to consider some possible applications of Buber's ontology and epistemology that seem to ground the prophet's community. Here the author considers the roles of teacher and student with ample characterization of the kinds of relations that might develop in educational communities taking on the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the prophet's community. The author then brings to the discussion the critiques of Buber's work: Emmanuel Levinas' critique of the Buberian idea of symmetry in relationships, Karl Barth's epistemological criticism of Buber's novel, and some logically fallacious arguments against Buber's work in the novel. The author concludes his philosophical research of Buber's For the Sake of Heaven by paying attention to his own developing relationship with the text. Recommendations regarding future work, focusing on themes of the unintentional, on the development of ontological and epistemological grounding in educational communities, particularly in curriculum work, are made.

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## CHAPTER I Considering Martin Buber

### Introduction

This dissertation explores Martin Buber's novel, For the Sake of Heaven. It involves analysis of the text, interpretation of the analysis and subsequent application of it in imagined educational communities. It also involves criticism of the historical reliability of the text as well as criticism of its ontological and epistemological claims, followed up by a consideration of its practicability and applicability in educational communities. To get at the discussion of Buber's novel, some groundwork will be done in chapter one

First, I want to situate myself in relation to the dissertation. Second, I want to explore the kinds of problems that have interested me and why I think Buber may have something to offer in this context. Third, I will give some background on Martin Buber. Fourth, I will explore one of his most well-known works, I and Thou, using his own interpretation of it in Between Man and Man.<sup>1</sup> Finally, I want to point to his novel, For the Sake of Heaven, exploring the reasons I've chosen this text to explore Martin Buber's ontology and epistemology and its possible contributions.

### Situating the Author

As a beginning teacher more than twenty years ago, the kinds of problems I considered in education generally concerned my own preparedness in relation to

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<sup>1</sup> I will not spend time directly exploring Buber's poetic masterpiece, I and Thou. Instead, I will use Buber's own interpretation of I and Thou, in Between Man and Man. The reason for this is that the prose of Between Man and Man is much clearer and more concise than the poetry of I and Thou. Buber has made the task of interpreting I and Thou simpler. His interpretation of his own poetry should be considered authoritative. At least that is the assumption of this dissertation. Nevertheless, I will make reference to perhaps his greatest of works, I and Thou, in the course of this dissertation. But I will be interpreting it using his own words in Between Man and Man.

school curriculum and subject area knowledge. I worked on the premise that teacher readiness was the be all and end all of the successful classroom. If things in my classrooms weren't going well, I felt guilty, understanding that it must have been that I simply hadn't prepared well enough. School board initiatives pointing to the need for better teacher preparedness only reinforced this feeling of guilt. The solution seemed simple to me: I must work harder and do things better and faster. Deeper philosophical issues didn't seem to concern me much. More immediately pressing issues like classroom management took the foreground, and philosophical questions about problems in education just didn't occupy me.

It is not that I didn't have an interest in these philosophical questions. I most certainly did, and that interest was fed by undergraduate work as a student in philosophy and religion. Perhaps it was that I just never seemed to have the time to think philosophically in contexts for which thinking would seem constructive and not just an impediment to an *effective* classroom.<sup>2</sup> Through the years I have noted as well that elementary and secondary teachers I have known have not seemed for the most part to be interested in pursuing philosophical problems in education. There is little wonder that this is the case, given present political realities associated with the status of educational foundations scholarship in higher education. In my own graduate school, foundations of education coursework is gradually being displaced by other, apparently more useful subjects. Teacher candidates are typically not expected to pursue a significant amount of work in any of the three core areas of social foundations of education: history, sociology and most

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<sup>2</sup> I will return to Buber's critique of the idea of effectiveness in chapter two.

particularly, philosophy. Philosophy does indeed seem to have been given short shrift. And that is the more to pity.

### **Why Martin Buber**

To counter this seeming lack of interest in philosophy in schools, I have come to think it would be appropriate to consider in a philosophical way the kinds of issues that should concern educators and all other interested parties, including academicians, students, parents and politicians. This approach wouldn't limit itself to merely pragmatic considerations like class sizes, budgets and resource materials. Though it would not dismiss such concerns, it would focus on a much deeper level, laying the ontological and epistemological foundations of education. I have come to see this as *the problem* that plagues our educational communities. We don't generally require teachers and even school systems to detail their ontological and epistemological assumptions. This has been relegated to academia. Sadly, even there, philosophy of education coursework is not often required of students in schools of education.

It was Nel Noddings' work on care theory that turned my attention to Buber's work and to what it might say ontologically and epistemologically to me as an educator.<sup>3</sup> Buber's emphasis on dialogical relations had interested me as a student of religion, particularly as it applied to the reading of material like the Bible. I had understood that reading itself was kind of conversation. I first read his I and Thou

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<sup>3</sup> Nel Noddings, *Caring, a Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

around 1979 as a sophomore in college.<sup>4</sup> From that time to Nodding's reminder of his work, twenty-seven years had passed! A couple of academic degrees, about twenty years teaching in public and private settings and the pursuit of a terminal degree had made my approach to his works different, to say the least. What I bring to the conversation now has been affected by those years in classrooms with primary and secondary students, by all those meetings with colleagues, and by continuing conversations in college and university settings as both student and teacher. Perhaps it had already been affected by a serious interest in religious studies that I began developing as an undergraduate student in physics and chemistry. Maybe it was Buber's writings that helped shift me from a concentration in the natural sciences to their grounding in the humanities. Indeed it has been said that the mother of science is philosophy.<sup>5</sup> I cannot say for sure that Buber helped me decide to leave the academic study of science for the humanities as a young man, but such a thing would be appropriate, a fitting part of the narrative of a life coming full circle. Perhaps it was the case that I was not yet ready for Buber's ideas as a young man not yet twenty. At least that many years would transpire before I would pursue the opportunity to hear and respond to his words again.

I am convinced that a return to Buber's philosophy of dialogue would have something important to say to educators. There is something fundamentally wrong in our educational communities. A read of Jonathan Kozol's work gives some

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Buber and Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribner, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *The Future of the Humanities* (New York: Reader's Digest Press : distributed by Crowell, 1977).

indicators of this.<sup>6</sup> It is shocking indeed that the very schools named after the most well-known civil rights leaders are the ones where conditions are the bleakest. Students do not feel a connection with the schools in which they are placed, often in settings that are great distances from their own home communities. This is mentioned by the feminist bell hooks, who speaks of her own experience as a child having lost the sense of connection with her supportive neighborhood and the relationships with caring teachers in the schools into which she was placed as a consequence of desegregation.<sup>7</sup> The conditions that often exist in our schools do have something to do with the foundations that have been laid, foundations in our particular communities that are ontological and epistemological. These ontological foundations have to do with the narratives our communities hold to be important. They belong to our communities and involve the assumptions that we make concerning the meanings of what it is to be human beings, the meanings we give to things of physical, social, psychological and spiritual significance. These assumptions also have to do with our communities' narratives concerning God, the meaning and origin of all things, the fundamental assumptions about how deep seated problems can or should be addressed and the purpose of existence. These meanings are not derived through empirical investigation. They are *assumed* regarding the way things are. This is what gives the meanings ontological status.

Just as bell hooks observes, when we are torn away from the narratives of our own communities, we are consequently torn from the structures that support

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation : The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, 1st ed. (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress : Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

us. I believe this to be perhaps the fundamental issue which should concern our educational communities. How can we bridge the gap between education as it is made to appear in its present form, which pays close attention to specific outcomes measured against specific, measurable performances, identified in stated curriculum, and the apparent disconnect vis-à-vis stated curriculum and the ontological and epistemological foundations of our students' communities? In short, how can we begin to pay attention to student and community narratives, using them to inform our ways of teaching and learning?

Buber has something to say to this disconnect. As an existentialist, he brings to the conversation a realism which is willing to pay attention to the idea of suffering and the seeming absurdity of existence itself in light of it.<sup>8</sup> And this existentialist approach has the potential to inform a cultural studies concern with issues of domination. Addressing issues of domination is possible by paying attention to the idea of suffering. As an existentialist theologian, he brings a narrative that is *responsive* to the assumptions of many communities that are represented in our educational communities. As a philosopher of dialogue, he brings a language that educators can access, since dialogical relations are foundational concerns in educational communities. Attention to Buber's work has the promise of equipping educators and academicians with language to critique structures that support our educational communities. Addressing deep level concerns about the ways we relate to one another has the promise of fundamental, epistemological change. Addressing concerns about deep level narratives has the

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<sup>8</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Age of Reason* (New York,: Vintage Books, 1973).

promise of repositioning our educational communities relative our own ontological narratives.

### **Background on Buber**

Born in Vienna in 1878, Martin Buber was to develop wide ranging interests, fueled by his experiences in Europe of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. He faced questions about life as a Jewish intellectual in Hitler's Germany of the 1930s, wrote extensively about Jewish life in Palestine, was directly involved in the emergence of Israel and addressed a variety of issues in multiple disciplines. His writings have inspired research in philosophy, sociology, education, religious studies, history, and art history among other fields. His scholarly works include the first modern editions of rabbinic midrash literature, and he wrote extensively on Zionism and on Hasidic literature.<sup>9</sup>

Buber's grandparents' wealth, which was the effect of mining, banking and trade, gave Martin financial security until 1939 when Hitler invaded Poland and his grandfather's estate was ransacked. Until that time, however, Buber was free to pursue many interests, including the study of Hebrew, Yiddish, Polish, German, Greek, Latin and French.<sup>10</sup>

Buber entered the University of Vienna in 1895. He studied philosophy and the history of art there and at the Universities of Berlin, Zurich and Leipzig. He received a Ph.D. from Vienna in 1904.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber's Life and Work* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Stuart C. Brown, Diané Collinson, and Robert Wilkinson, *Biographical Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Philosophers*, Routledge Reference (London ; New York: Routledge, 1996), 111.

From 1900-1901, Buber began to come under the influence of Gustav Landauer, an anarchist who criticized Buber for his views on the German role in World War I. He was to become one of his closest friends. Later, Buber took up a Jewish religious studies lectureship at Frankfurt University and worked there until he immigrated to Palestine in 1937, where he taught social philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem until 1951. Until his death fourteen years later, Buber drew frequent visitors to his home, exploring issues in social philosophy. He visited the United States in 1951, giving lectures which eventually were published as "Eclipse of God"<sup>12</sup> and "At the Turning."<sup>13</sup> Union Theological Seminary gave Buber the Universal Brotherhood award in 1951. Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio, gave him an honorary Doctor of Letters degree that same year. Buber received the Erasmus Award in 1963 at the age of 85.<sup>14</sup>

At Buber's death, his bibliography had grown to upwards of 700 publications.<sup>15</sup> Needless to say, launching into Buber's works would take one across many fields. Many students of Buber, however, have gravitated towards perhaps his most famous text, I and Thou. It provides an insight into his ontology and epistemology, focusing as it does on questions regarding the possibilities of dialogue.

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God; Studies in the Relation between Religion and Philosophy*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper, 1952).

<sup>13</sup> *At the Turning; Three Addresses on Judaism* (New York: Farrar, 1952).

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Kramer and Mechthild Gawlick, *Martin Buber's I and Thou : Practicing Living Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> cf. <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0208.html> (accessed May, 2012)

## Between Man and Man

Between Man and Man was Buber's interpretation of I and Thou.<sup>16</sup> It is here that Buber attempts to extend and apply what was said in his pivotal treatment on dialogical relations published in 1923, I and Thou. It seems appropriate that I pay attention to Buber's own explanations of his writing, since it is my goal to address his ideas on dialogue. I hope to do this by describing as carefully as possible some of Buber's work here, adopting his language in the process. This will involve as well exploring the possible implications of his ideas from various perspectives, considering in what ways his ideas taken seriously might impact educational praxis in particular. Finally, I want to consider some potential problems with his ideas.

In keeping with my intent to follow Buber's lead, let me begin by outlining some of the elements in his own rich description and application of his ideas about dialogue.<sup>17</sup> First, Buber feels the need to illustrate and apply the dialogical principle introduced in I and Thou. Buber's dialogical principle involved the description of two ways of relating to others. First Buber speaks of the "I-it" way of relating to others. This is the way of objectifying others. Second Buber speaks of the "I-Thou" way of relating to others. This is the non-objective way of relating to others. Buber further explores the dialogical principle in "Dialogue", an essay published in 1923. I will begin with a description of Buber's philosophy of dialogue.

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<sup>16</sup> Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (London, K. Paul, 1947).

<sup>17</sup> I have chosen to use the bracketed expressions [man or woman] or [people] where Buber's customary usage is "man", except when the context needs to be gendered or won't be rendered apparently sexist by its use, as well as in the case of titles given to his works. This is an attempt to adopt more inclusive language. I do not think this will damage the work. Where it might, I will try to make note of that.

## Beyond Speech

Beginning with the description of a recurring dream in which he says he hears a cry for help, Buber demonstrates that communication does not always involve conversation:

Just as the most eager speaking at one another does not make a conversation (this is most clearly shown in that curious sport, aptly termed discussion, that is, 'breaking apart', which is indulged in by [people] who are to some extent gifted with the ability to think), so for a conversation no sound is necessary, not even a gesture.<sup>18</sup>

Buber further offers a couple of non-examples to clarify, first, the sharing of a lovers' gaze, the second the mystics' way of seeking a relationship with the divine. Buber points out that both of these involve gestures that are physical. Against these he offers the example of two people sitting on a bench, having met earlier and spoken, just sitting silently. One of them is ready to receive things from the other and the other is closed off. Buber calls attention to the possibility of a moment in time when the person less receptive might find himself or herself open so that he or she is ready to receive. Even though nothing is heard from or said by the other person, still the individual is ready. Buber offers this moment as an example of the kind of dialogical relationship to which he is pointing. Though he recognizes the importance of sound and gesture in dialogue, Buber suggests that dialogue is not dependent on them, since dialogue does not have to be objectively comprehensible, though it is indeed something that happens in the context of real, concrete human experience.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 3.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 4.

## **Beyond the Erotic**

To further delineate his idea of dialogue, Buber explores what it could mean in terms of the erotic in order to eliminate it as an aspect of the idea.<sup>20</sup> He speaks of the erotic as “a co-mingling and opposition of monologue and dialogue,” suggesting that the ecstasies of lovers are sometimes the ways a lover would delight in his or her own experience (and not in the other person’s). He avoids a description of dialogue in terms of the erotic, and points instead to the kinds of unpretentious glances that strangers might exchange, revealing a dialogical nature. Buber says that dialogue has an effect on people, producing change from “communication to communion” and gives an example from his own life of an apparently irreconcilable argument with someone. Buber discovers suddenly in himself the willingness to accept his opponent’s point of view and just let the opposition go, choosing to end it with an embrace.<sup>21</sup>

## **Beyond Ideological Impasse**

Against the objection that worldviews that are deep level must be exposed openly, making both parties vulnerable, so that people can meet each other conditionally, Buber suggests that his view includes this vulnerability, but goes further in offering dialogue as a way to overcome this, not simply through a worldview alone. People in dialogue don't have to “give up their point[s] of view”, but just “let themselves run free of [them] for an immortal moment.”<sup>22</sup> Against a

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Arthur Schilpp, Martin Buber, and Maurice S. Friedman, *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, [1st ed. (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1967), 130.

<sup>21</sup> Martin Buber and Ronald Gregor Smith, *Between Man and Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

second objection that people can't let go of points of view that are matters of deeply held confessions of faith, that doubters must be converted or instructed, Buber points to another view of faith that sacred ideas are clarified when people *turn* to one another in particular contexts. Buber is opening up a space here for religious conversation involving certainties but also involving genuine openness to the possibilities of others. He reminds us that even if speech and communication fail, what remains in dialogue is the “mutuality of the inner action, the action of *turning* to one another.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Three Ways of Receiving Others**

Buber considers three ways that people *turn* to or perceive one another, in order to situate his conception of dialogue in one of the three ways. Things that are perceived do not necessarily know that they are being perceived. Furthermore, it is irrelevant whether the thing perceived stands in relation to or has a standpoint towards the perceiver.

The first way of receiving an *other* involves what Buber identifies as *observing*. This involves an intentional fixing of a person in the mind. The perception here involves probing, writing up traits, and lying in wait. This would involve scientific investigation.

The second way of perceiving, *onlooking*, involves unintentional waiting to see freely, letting go of the need to take note of everything, even allowing forgetting. The onlooker is looking for neither character nor expression. Buber describes this as the way of the artist. Like the observer, the onlooker is oriented towards the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 7.

other person by his or her desire to perceive either traits (as for the observer) or existence (as for the onlooker). For both, the object of perception is separated from them. It is not involved personally with them. And it makes no demands on their lives. As Buber says, “the whole is given over to the aloof fields of aesthesis.”<sup>24</sup> This is *turning* as an aesthetic.

The third and final way of perceiving for Buber, *acceptance*, occurs in the “receptive hour” of personal life, when a person meets another in such a way that he or she has no objective grasp at all of the other. Still, there is the perception that something is said. It has nothing to do with the discernment of what kind of person is encountered, or what is going on in him or her. This way of receiving says *nothing* objective about the person being encountered. And yet, something is said that says something to the receiver. Something is spoken that is accepted. It might be that the receiver is being called to help this individual, or to hear something about himself or herself. The individual encountered really has no discernible relation with the receiver, since, as Buber observes, “It is not he [or she] who says it to me, as that solitary [person] silently confessed his [or her] secret to his neighbor on the seat; but *it* says it.”<sup>25</sup>

This thing being said in this third way of receiving cannot be objectively explained, since the person who is *saying* it to the other person is not the object of the perceiver. He or she is merely the one for whom the perceiver may have to do something or else from whom he or she might be called to learn something. The perception here is simply *acceptance*. Buber says this involves becoming aware, and

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

points out this may be of people, of animals, or even of plants or stones. Dialogue is only limited for Buber by the willingness to be aware.<sup>26</sup>

### **Signs of Address**

As the perceiver becomes aware, he or she is awakened to particular *signs of address*. These signs are part of life since living itself means that one is being addressed. All that is needed is to present oneself and to perceive.

However, Buber believes that humans have a built in mechanism to ward off the signs people give. These signs, “soundless thunderings” seem to “threaten us with annihilation”, so we “perfect the defense apparatus”, assuring ourselves that we are not being addressed, that all of those signs are for the world and not for us, that nothing is being required at all.<sup>27</sup> This is the way Buber says we turn off the power to receive from others.

Furthermore, by making the things that happen to us lifeless and sterile, removing the signs of address from them, we remove what is happening in the world which does not seem to directly refer to us. Ironically, speech itself becomes the way that we distance ourselves from this address, “addressing itself in speechifying ways regarding things with which we have nothing to do.”<sup>28</sup>

Buber answers some objections concerning these signs. First he considers the criticism that they might appear to be superstitious. He defends against this by pointing out that foretelling things depends upon laws that are known and

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>28</sup> Robert E. Wood, *Martin Buber's Ontology; an Analysis of I and Thou*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy (Evanston,: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 85.

repeatable, as well as upon rules that fortunetellers find in dictionaries. He says that this is a type of false knowledge and not even real faith, which begins “when the dictionary is put down.”<sup>29</sup>

Buber says that signs of address appear in the things that occur to us and that this cannot be interpreted using some pre-formulated information; it is unique; it can't be remembered independently; it belongs only to the moment of address.

Further, Buber explains using a metaphor of a stream and bridge:

Faith stands in the stream of 'happening but once' which is spanned by knowledge. All the emergency structures of analogy and typology are indispensable for the work of the human spirit, but to step on them when the question of the questioner steps up to you, to me, would be running away. Lived life is tested and fulfilled in the stream alone.<sup>30</sup>

Summarizing what he has observed regarding this third way of perceiving, Buber puts it eloquently:

With all deference to the world continuum of space and time I know as a living truth only concrete world reality which is constantly, in every moment, reached out to me. I can separate it into its component parts, I can compare them and distribute them into groups of similar phenomena, I can derive them from earlier and reduce them to simpler phenomena; and when I have done all this I have not touched my concrete world reality. Inseparable, incomparable, irreducible, now, happening once only, it gazes upon me with a horrifying look.<sup>31</sup>

## **Beyond Mysticism**

Buber does not want his idea of dialogue to be criticized as mystical. He recalls an event in which he failed to hear what was being said to him when a young

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<sup>29</sup> Buber and Smith, *Between Man and Man*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

man came with questions. Recalling at that time his conception of the religious as a sort of “getting away from the everyday into the mystical experience of ecstasy”, he saw how his response to the man had not actually involved listening at all. Buber says of himself that he really had not been there with the man “in the spirit.”<sup>32</sup> It was this experience that soured Buber with religion as a disconnected, mystical experience distanced from real life, as he says in the following passage :

Since then I have given up the 'religious' which is nothing but the exception, extraction, exaltation, ecstasy; or it has given me up. I possess nothing but the everyday out of which I am never taken. The mystery is no longer disclosed, it has escaped or it has made its dwelling here where everything happens as it happens. I know no fullness but each mortal hour's fullness of claim and responsibility. Though far from being equal to it, yet I know that in the claim I am claimed and may respond in responsibility, and know who speaks and demands a response.<sup>33</sup>

The religious is not the exception for Buber; it is everything. It is “the living possibility of dialogue.”<sup>34</sup> Prayer refers itself to real life and does not take one away from its real context. People are “called upon from above, required, chosen, empowered, [and] sent” and so are addressed in their everyday lives, in their “mortal bit of life”; the religious individual for Buber is not “swallowed up in a fullness without obligation” but rather “willed for the life of communion.”<sup>35</sup>

Buber says that it is God Who addresses us as we encounter others in dialogue in particular moments of life . He likens this to our understanding of authorship as we read poetry. When we really understand a poem, we may not

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<sup>32</sup> Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber and the Eternal* (New York, N.Y.: Human Sciences Press, 1986), 136-38.

<sup>33</sup> Buber and Smith, *Between Man and Man*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

know anything about its author, but with time and the reading of other poems written by the same author, we form a kind of “polyphony of the person's existence, as the subjects of the poems combine in various ways, completing and confirming one another.”<sup>36</sup> In such a way, “out of the givers of the signs, the speakers of words in lived life, there arises for us with a single identity, ‘the Lord of the voice, the One’...God’s hearing has been sunk down in the deafness of mortals where the voices of the creatures grope past one another, and in their very missing of one another succeed in reaching the eternal partner.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Beyond Morality**

Classical philosophical ethics does not point to human responsibility for Buber. The idea as “an 'ought' that swings free in the air” has to become connected to life as it is lived; “genuine responsibility exists only where there is real responding.”<sup>38</sup> This response involves being *attentive* to what is really happening in the world, required to *read the signs* that are given. This involves swimming upstream, “going against the current of world civilization which seeks to inoculate us against the consequences of attentiveness.”<sup>39</sup> We would not be able to take control of situations and could not rely on knowledge, techniques, systems or programs. We would not be able to distance ourselves from things by classifying them; we would have to receive from them. We would have to respond to the voice that is directed towards us out of everyday life not by being silent or by doing things

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<sup>36</sup> Friedman, *Martin Buber's Life and Work*, 316.

<sup>37</sup> Wood, *Martin Buber's Ontology; an Analysis of I and Thou*, 102-03.

<sup>38</sup> Buber and Smith, *Between Man and Man*, 16.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

as usual. We would have to enter into situations that face us. This would make these situations real and part of real life.

Buber gives examples to clarify the kind of response he is pointing to: "A dog has looked at you, you answer for its glance, a child has clutched your hand, you answer for its touch, a host of men moves about you, you answer for their need."<sup>40</sup> The response here for Buber is not *moral*, for morality is detached philosophical reasoning which does not respond to anything. It is an idea whereas religious response is a *phenomenon*. Buber puts it this way, "The reality of morality, the demand of the demander, has a place in religion, but the reality of religion, the unconditioned being of the demander, has no place in morality."<sup>41</sup> Buber concludes his first section describing dialogue with some final remarks regarding dialogue as religious:

Religion as risk, which is ready to give itself up, is the nourishing stream of the arteries; as system, possessing, assured and assuring, religion which believes in religion is the veins' blood which ceases to circulate. And if there is nothing that can so hide the face of our fellow-man as morality can, religion can hide from us as nothing else can the face of God. Principle there, dogma here, I appreciate the 'objective' compactness of dogma, but behind both there lies in wait the – profane or holy – war against the situation's power of dialogue, there lies in wait the 'once-for-all' which resists the unforeseeable moment. Dogma, even when its claim of origin remains uncontested, has become the most exalted form of invulnerability against revelation. Revelation will tolerate no perfect tense, but man with the arts of his craze for security props it up to perfectedness.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 18.

Buber speaks of dialogue of three types, two of which are only apparently dialogue.<sup>43</sup> The three types include genuine dialogue, already described above, technical dialogue which seeks objective understanding, and monologue, which pretends to be dialogue. The first kind, genuine dialogue, is rare, the second common in modern times and the third represents “an underworld of faceless specters of dialogue.”<sup>44</sup>

### **“Monologue” as Dialogue**

The third type of dialogue, “monologue masquerading as dialogue” has to do with speech which pays no attention to the listener.<sup>45</sup> Such people in this kind of apparent dialogue have no desire to communicate or to learn. They are not interested in influence or in developing a relationship. The goal appears to be to impress. This kind of “dialogue” is further represented in “friendly chat in which each regards himself as absolute and in lovers' talk in which both partners alike enjoy their own glorious soul and their precious experience.”<sup>46</sup> This sort of monologue cannot make an individual aware of the other. Even in deep intimacy, monologue can never get beyond the self.

Buber is not constructing a moralist egoism/altruism dichotomy in his description of dialogue. He speaks of people who have no personal relation with

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<sup>43</sup> Martin Buber and S. N. Eisenstadt, *On Intersubjectivity and Cultural Creativity*, The Heritage of Sociology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 70-72.

<sup>44</sup> Buber and Smith, *Between Man and Man*, 20.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

anyone except their enemies, but relate with them in such a way that “it is the enemies' fault if the relation does not flourish into dialogue.”<sup>47</sup>

Buber does not identify dialogue with love. No one can love every man he meets, says Buber, but love without dialogue, without reaching to the other, and accompanying with the other, love remaining unto itself, Buber identifies as demonic. The person who is unable or unwilling to enter into direct relation with each one who meets him is empty and useless. On the other hand, that one who can be “unreserved with each passer-by”, entering into “the companionship of creation”, is “bound up in relation to the same center.”<sup>48</sup>

To further clarify what dialogue is not, Buber points to what he calls “monologue's basic movement”, not turning away from an other, but rather a kind of reflection.<sup>49</sup> He does not mean egoism or egotism by this but refers to a person failing to accept another person in his or her particularity. This is without reference to the self, even though it touches and moves the individual. This kind of movement lets the other exist only as one's experience, as part of the self. Buber realizes what this basic attitude of monologue does when he says that this kind of dialogue “becomes a fiction” which reduces dialogue to a game, a kind of disintegration of reality.<sup>50</sup> The problem of retreating into singleness (being un-confronted) is that “it is not in reality primal Being but only one being, one soul confronting all our souls.”<sup>51</sup> The person who is seeking ecstasy or some other retreat from real meeting

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

with others is not made closer to “the God who is hidden above I and Thou, and he is farther from the God who is turned to [people] and who is given as the I to a Thou and the Thou to an I.”<sup>52</sup> Buber does not want dialogue to be misunderstood as a kind of absorption into otherness. The unity Buber points to is a “unity of life” as it is lived in moments of concreteness in which “the word is heard and a stammering answer dared.”<sup>53</sup>

Concerning classical philosophy's approach to thinking as the site where “pure subject separates itself from the concrete person in order to establish and stabilize a world for itself – a citadel which rises towering over the life of dialogue, inaccessible to it, in which man-with-himself, the single one, suffers and triumphs in glorious solitude”, Plato's “voiceless colloquy of the soul with itself”, Buber is doubtful.<sup>54</sup> Plato's monologue, as Buber sees it, points to the spirit an individual is intended to become, “the image-self.” to which thought is taken for approval, that is, for taking up into its own thinking.<sup>55</sup> This does not represent dialogue for Buber.

### **Thought as Dialogue**

Buber further draws on Ludwig Feuerbach who points beyond this image-self to “true dialectic...not a monologue of the solitary thinker with himself [but] a dialogue between I and a Thou” , between real persons and not just between idealized notions of persons.<sup>56</sup> This is not just reflecting for Buber but refers to the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Buber and Eisenstadt, *On Intersubjectivity and Cultural Creativity*, 73.

<sup>55</sup> Buber and Smith, *Between Man and Man*, 26.

<sup>56</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach et al., *German Socialist Philosophy*, The German Library (New York: Continuum, 1997).

seat of thought itself as “a relation to a genuine, not merely inward, Thou.”<sup>57</sup>

Thinking is not a game in a castle in the air. It concerns the business of life in which one is aware of the “otherness of the other” without contesting it, taking its nature into his own, thinking in relation to it, addressing it in thought.<sup>58</sup> The thinker is not in his or her thinking just relating to the other one for thinking alone. He or she is oriented towards the other, and thinking itself belongs to the other just as much as it does to the individual. Buber calls here for a time when “the action of thinking endure[s], include[s] and refer[s] to the presence of the living [person] facing us...when...the dialectic of thought become[s] dialogic, an unsentimental, unrelaxed dialogue in the strict terms of thought with the [person] present at the moment.”<sup>59</sup>

### **Eros as Dialogue**

Buber further defines what he means by dialogue. He recognizes that there are different kinds of love and he mentions two, the *Eros of dialogue* and the *Eros of monologue*.

Two people who experience dialogue as Eros love one another and receive the shared love from the other's side as well, from both sides, and thus “for the first time understand in a bodily way what an event is.”<sup>60</sup>

The Eros of monologue is manifest in many ways in the lives of self-described, “eroticized men and women”, “in love with passion,” displaying “feelings like medals”, interested in the effect he or she has on others, “rapturously attentive

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<sup>57</sup> Buber and Smith, *Between Man and Man*, 27.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 29.

to his [or her] own surrender,” “collecting excitement,” “displaying power”, “preening” himself or herself, “coveting to be himself [or herself] and yet to be idolized”, “proud of good fortune”, and “experimenting.”<sup>61</sup>

### **Warnings**

Buber warns also of “Leviathan monologists, who stipulate to the objects they intend to devour that their suffering is a sacred duty.”<sup>62</sup> He says these leaders confuse and disintegrate growing people, so that they can no longer be influenced for good. They cherish this power of influence, deceiving themselves and their followers into believing that they are molders of youth.

Buber says these monologists are vain. Only the person who himself or herself turns to the other human being and opens up to him or her receives the world in him or her. “Only when two say to one another with all that they are, ‘It is Thou’, is the indwelling of the Present Being between them.”<sup>63</sup>

Buber challenges the collectivist view of community as a conforming to political goals. Comradeship is valued in the collectivity because it “strengthens the band's reliable assault power.”<sup>64</sup> Obedience is demanded and drills take the place of open encounters between people. Real turning of person to person may be discouraged since it might not support the goals of the group. Buber refers as well to ideas about sacrifice of being and of self-realization as nonsensical. Renouncing happiness, possessions, power and authority may be necessary, but the renunciation

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

of being is for Buber simply absurd. Against this Buber proposes true, growing community, a multitude of persons being with one another, moving towards one goal but turning to one another dynamically. "Collectivity is based on an organized atrophy of personal existence," while "community [is based on] its increase and confirmation in life lived towards one another."<sup>65</sup>

Buber calls the world of the collectivity, generally, a world of pseudo-objectivism, since the collective for Buber is a "worldless faction", in which both "dialogue and monologue are silenced", "[people marching] without Thou and without I, those of the left who want to abolish memory, and those of the right who want to regulate it; hostile and separated hosts, they march into the common abyss."<sup>66</sup>

### **For the Sake of Heaven**

There is another text which Buber felt he could have only written towards the end of his career, a distillation of his thought across several fields, his 1945 novel, For the Sake of Heaven.<sup>67</sup> As with Camus' and Sartre's monumental works, the text appears in narrative form. It is a story of life in a Polish Hassidic community of late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century Poland. Buber pours into the story of the lives of two Hassidic rabbis his own ontology and epistemology. By juxtaposing the lives of two very different men, Buber teases out a philosophy of being and knowing which appears in fragments all across his work, brought to living example in novel form.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>67</sup> Martin Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia,; Jewish Publication Society of America, 1953).

I intend to analyze the character of the rabbinic figure referred to in the novel as “the prophet”. I will also look at the ways that the character known as “the Seer”, his community and the prophet’s community are used in the novel to lay out Buber’s ontological and epistemological assumptions. The two rabbinic characters represent for Buber, I believe, two approaches to questions of being (ontology) and to ways of knowing (epistemology). The narrative surrounding the prophet represents Buber’s own ontology and epistemology based on the idea of *turning* to others. The other character represents objectivism, the assumption that knowledge is objective and knowable apart from relationships. In the life of the prophet, he shows what could be called a “prophetic approach to education”. This represents applications of Buber’s thoughts on what is after him among feminists referred to as “relational epistemology.”<sup>68</sup>

Contrasting this prophetic approach concerning itself with knowledge that arises in the context of relationships, Buber develops the character of the “Seer”, a Hasidic Rabbi who represents an approach to education which might be referred to as “apocalyptic”. This represents objective knowing and top-down kinds of approaches to education. Its focus is on “visioneering”, as it were, on gazing into the future of education systems, ignoring the specific details involved in the development of intimate relationships among the significant players in education. Such an approach might be characterized as “*vision-erring*.”

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<sup>68</sup> Barbara J. Thayer-Bacon and Charles S. Bacon, *Philosophy Applied to Education : Nurturing a Democratic Community in the Classroom* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Merrill, 1998).

## Conclusion

I set out in this chapter to explore some of the reasons that I have turned to Martin Buber's work, to situate myself in relation to the dissertation, to explore Buber's background, to delve into his basic ideas about dialogical relations in I and Thou, using his text, Between Man and Man to interpret it, and finally to lay out my intentions in relation to his novel, For the Sake of Heaven.

I have attempted to give voice to Buber's concept of dialogue. The task which has sought to describe his philosophy of dialogue has gleaned the surface of his extensive writing. It is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks of philosophy merely to define the terms in its use, since philosophy has no specialized but only common language.

My approach in the sections following chapter one of the dissertation is informed by the idea of *epistemic commentary*, as it has been passed down to me in my own work as a graduate student of Dr. Barbara Thayer-Bacon. Passed to her from George Maccia, it is essentially a template for academic, philosophical writing.<sup>69</sup> The first task, which I will pursue in chapter two, is to describe what the author/scholar is saying in the work. This will mean for me extensive analysis of the text using a spreadsheet program. Appropriate fields will be created reflecting essential categories, including sayings and behaviors of the two main characters in the novel and their disciples. My attempt here is to faithfully represent what Buber is saying in the text by sticking as closely as possible to his characterizations and to his plot development. I will use the spreadsheet categories to tease out opposing

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<sup>69</sup> Kenneth Kincheloe Joe Tobin, *Doing Educational Research : [a Handbook]* (Rotterdam: SensePubl., 2006), 139-48.

ontological and epistemological themes developed in the novel, paying particular attention to the ontological and epistemological disposition of the character known as “the prophet.”

After I have laid out the ontological and epistemological themes developed in chapter two, I want to “play the believing game”, as per practice in an epistemic commentary.<sup>70</sup> Here I will consider the implications of Buber’s ontology and epistemology as it is developed in the second chapter. This will be where I consider the effects that Buber’s central ontological and epistemological ideas would have on our schools and in related academic environments, were they to be seriously considered.

Once I have considered the effects of a serious adoption of Buber’s ideas, I would like to bring in other voices to problematize the claims. First, I want to bring in the voices of scholars of historical fiction, in order to critique Buber’s narrative as a form in itself. I also want to consider the criticisms of Karl Barth and Emmanuel Levinas concerning Buber’s ontology and epistemology. Finally, I will bring to fore the criticisms of a number of scholars interested in the development of curriculum in education. These curriculum scholars will be used to critique Buber’s ideas about unplanned curriculum, a surprising effect of his ontology and epistemology.

It is my intent in chapter five to draw conclusions regarding Buber’s ontology and epistemology as it is manifest in For the Sake of Heaven. I want to consider a way forward, beyond the problems I was drawn to consider in chapter one.

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<sup>70</sup> Peter Elbow, *Writing without Teachers* (New York,: Oxford University Press, 1973).

## CHAPTER II For the Sake of Heaven

### Introduction

As I indicated in chapter one, it is my intent now to move to a full description of Buber's monumental work, For the Sake of Heaven, to get at a possibly denser description of his philosophy of dialogue. I hope to tease out themes of dialogue he explores by offering a rich description of the main character in his novel known as "the prophet." I hope to retell Martin Buber's story of the lives of two 18<sup>th</sup> century rabbis through a retelling of the life and ideas of his major character. I will consider the novel's setting, laying out some "facts" of historical context first. Then I will consider the ontological and epistemological details of the prophet's life and ideas, detailing the assumptions he makes regarding being and knowledge.<sup>71</sup>

### Historical Context

First, to set the stage, let us consider the known historical context of the novel. I limit this work to only the historic setting specifically mentioned in the text and therefore essential to it. Buber's setting was Poland of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, centered mainly in a particular Hasidic sect of the Jewish communities of Lublin and Pshysha. The story follows on the heels of the rise of Hasidism, a movement started by Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer, a man also known as the

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<sup>71</sup> *Ontology* is derived from the Greek, *ontos*, to be. *Epistemology* is derived from the Greek *pisteuo*, to believe. My use of the terms *ontology* and *epistemology* throughout the dissertation reflects this basic etymology. *Ontology*, as I am using the term, has to do with assumptions regarding the nature of being itself. *Epistemology* has to do with the nature of knowledge, as I am using the term. As I am using the terminology, *ontology* and *epistemology* involve assumptions which cannot be objectively proven or derived, since they are *assumptions*, like *postulates* in mathematics.

Baal Shem Tov. It is within this movement that the major events of the narrative occur.

The first mention within the novel of its historical setting involves the collapse of the Polish rebellion, which sought to throw off the Russian occupation, and the subsequent evacuation of Warsaw and Vilna by the Russians in 1794.<sup>72</sup> “Almost the entire Jewish legion fell in the defense of Warsaw. The suburb of Praga went up in flames and Poles and Jews were being massacred,” recounts Buber.<sup>73</sup>

### **Historical Characters**

Buber draws on known figures of history to populate his narrative, including the disciples of the Baal Shem Tov. Both the Seer as well as the prophet are fictionalized versions of actual persons belonging to Polish history, both of whom came under the influence of the founder of Hasidism, the Baal Shem Tov.

Buber’s novel explores the contrasting lives and thinking of the two main characters, the Seer and the prophet. Both were Hasidic rabbis known to history and both have the same given name, Jacob Yitzchak. The Hasidic rabbi of Lublin, Poland was Jacob Yitzchak, known in the novel as the Seer. The Hasidic rabbi of Pshysha, Poland was also Jacob Yitzchak. I will refer to Buber’s main character as “the prophet” throughout the dissertation.

There are other persons Buber draws from history in the novel, including other rabbis from the same era and similarly influenced, among whom is the Rabbi of Kosnitz, also known as “the Maggid” or “the Maggid of Kosnitz”. The Maggid was

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<sup>72</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 104.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

born in 1740 in Kosnitz, Poland, Buber uses other known historic characters including Napoleon Bonaparte, the Polish Prince Adam Czartoryski, the Polish Prince Josef Czartoryski and Czar Alexander of Russia, among others. I will refer to the characters that Buber uses to point to his ontology and epistemology, by example or by contrast.

It is not my task to consider all of the characters of history upon whom Buber draws in the novel. I will address this issue in chapter five of the dissertation.

### **Buber's Narrative**

Set within the larger context of certain events in Europe during the Napoleonic wars, For the Sake of Heaven is historical fiction of the type of Camus' and Sartre's existential works, The Plague<sup>74</sup> and The Age of Reason.<sup>75</sup> Buber brings to known history his own narrative, allowing it to be the vehicle of his own ontological and epistemological truths. The ideas and responses of the Seer and the prophet to what is happening at the time become Buber's way of exploring two possible ways that people understand and interact with the events of their lives and with other things and people they encounter in these settings. However, the character of the prophet is developed to embody Buber's ontological and epistemological ideas.

### **Political Events**

At the time of the massacre in Praga, Buber has sixty disciples of the Seer gathering in Lublin, Poland, pitting the activities and thinking of the Seer in support

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<sup>74</sup> Albert Camus and Stuart Gilbert, *The Plague*, 1st American ed. (New York,: A. A. Knopf, 1948).

<sup>75</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Age of Reason* (New York,: Modern Library, 1947).

of the actions of Napoleon Bonaparte. This is significant, for it establishes the Seer's role and thinking in relation to what is happening in the world at large. After establishing this connection, Buber retraces other connections of other characters in the novel with significant historic figures. Buber places the Maggid in a meeting with a member of the Polish royal family in 1787. The seventeen year old Prince Adam Czartoryski "disguised himself as a peasant to seek out a wonder working Rabbi."<sup>76</sup> Though the Prince was pretending to be concerned about relationship problems, the Maggid is said to have known his true identity immediately and to have seen through his attempt to hide his real purpose to get guidance regarding the relationship of Napoleon and the Russian Czar.

This meeting with the Czar is important because it sets up in the novel a type of relationship with political forces which is later to be juxtaposed over against another kind of relation to political forces. The Maggid advises the prince that a man was going to come who desired to rule over the whole world and that he shouldn't put his trust in that man. This establishes the relationship of the Maggid of Kosnitz and Napoleon in the novel. It is not one of trust.

Buber uses another bit of history, setting another meeting of the Maggid with the Prince when Czar Alexander visited the Polish royal family in 1805 in Pulawy, Poland, ultimately swindling them, resulting in the confiscation of their estate and the subjugation of the Polish monarchy. The Maggid forewarns the prince that the Russians and the Prussians, as well as Napoleon, want Poland. Upon the Russian occupation of Poland, Buber places Emperor Napoleon in Lublin in a chance meeting

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<sup>76</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 196.

with the Seer's own son, Zvi, a member of the Austrian army. Signifying the importance of the Seer at the time, Napoleon is said to have relayed to the Rabbi's son the message to the Seer that he "was not afraid" of him.<sup>77</sup> Napoleon has his first defeat on an island along the Danube a week later. Of such was the influence of the Seer. But it will not be until later in the story that the exact nature of the relationship of the Seer with Napoleon is established.

Contrasting the opinion of the Seer, the Maggid does not have a positive view of the role of Napoleon. On the eve of Purim, 1812, as Napoleon is dividing his army for the invasion of Russia, Buber places the Polish Prince Josef Czartoryski in a meeting with the Maggid. There the Maggid forewarns the Prince of Napoleon's coming defeat and of his own (the Prince's) death. Exercising a gift of prophecy, the rabbi utters "Napol Tipol", "Falling thou wilt fall" from the story of Esther<sup>78</sup>, and takes it to mean via the pun, "Napoleon, thou wilt fall."<sup>79</sup> The Maggid is elsewhere recorded as declaring, "I am a man of war. I guard here in my bed the five pebbles which the young David took from the brook for his sling when he went forth against Goliath, the Philistine."<sup>80</sup> The Rabbi is speaking here against Napoleon. The latter events of the novel coincide roughly with peace negotiations between Napoleon and the Czar of Russia in 1807 and conclude with the times of his exile to Elba.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>78</sup> Esther 6:13

<sup>79</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 258.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 311.

## The Prophet's Ontology

Since the major part of the novel is devoted to developing the prophet's way of interacting with things and people, let us consider some things the prophet did and said in the novel. It is the prophet's approach to things and people that deeply reflects Buber's own epistemological and ontological assumptions. The role of the Seer in the novel is used by Buber as a foil, providing in its contrast a justification of the way that Buber imagines the world of things and people ought to be. It is in the character of the prophet that Buber points to the way of dialogue in true communities, which he addresses in his interpretation of I and Thou in Between Man and Man, a subject that I addressed in chapter one.

As I consider the role of the prophet in the novel, I would like to address some ontological assumptions the prophet makes, as well as some epistemological concerns the prophet has. First the prophet's ontological assumptions need to be considered, since these form the basis of his epistemology.

"He told stories and I listened to him. He mingled truth with untruth. I marked and remembered the truth. And thus I became a Hasid."<sup>81</sup> Thus speaks one of the prophet's disciples of a rabbi from his youth, beautifully depicting the way that "truth" emerges from communities and is discoverable in a mingling of narratives, some of which may be "true" and some of which may be "untrue". At bottom, the determination of what is "true" is primarily an ontological question, only secondarily an epistemological one. It is entirely an assumption. To illustrate, the postulates of mathematics are entirely unproven assumptions. They form the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 226.

basis of mathematics, its philosophical foundation without which it can make only “common sense”. So it is with ontologies. They form the basis of all that we understand regarding our communities and indeed of our world. They are hidden in every idea we embrace. They are the underpinnings of the ways we approach others and the basis upon which we build our communities. And so I turn to some of the prophet’s ontological assumptions.

### **The Existence of God**

First of all, the prophet has a deep interest in the idea of God, and more deeply, in the assumption of the existence of God. The prophet’s concern with God seems to emerge in the context of conversations involving dialogue. The idea of God is applied in communal contexts. The prophet challenges the Seer on the assumed difference in “the miraculous” and “the natural”. As the prophet says,

This distinction does not actually exist. I am unwilling to believe that God confuses our poor understanding with artifices which contradict the course of nature. It seems to me rather that when we say 'nature', we mean the aspect of creation of all that takes place; when we say 'miracle' we mean the aspect of revelation. On the one hand we mean what is called God's creative hand; on the other hand we mean His pointing finger. The happening, though seen under the two aspects, is the same. The true distinction seems to me to lie in the fact that we often have a deeper awareness of the finger than of the hand. 'Miracle' means our receptivity to the eternal revelation. As for 'nature', since it is God's, who would presume to draw its boundaries?<sup>82</sup>

So it is to be understood that the prophet sees no difference between what is “miraculous” and what is “natural”. This is a good assumption, given the assumption of God. Assumptions are altogether the concern when we are speaking of ontology.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 112.

Furthermore, this lends itself to an assumption concerning the relationship between what is often assumed to be supernatural and what is natural. As the prophet says,

God clothed Himself in servitude by giving the world His Shechinah, His 'indwelling' and has permitted His Shechinah to enter into the process of history and to share the contradictions and sufferings of the world, and has sent His Shechinah into exile with man and with Israel.<sup>83</sup> It is written: 'In all its distress is He distressed.' The Shechinah is not inviolable by stripes and wounds; it has identified itself wholly with our fate, our misery, our very guilt. When we sin, it experiences our sinfulness as something that happens to it. It shares not only our shame but also the disgraces which we would not acknowledge as such; these it tastes in all their shameful. And the other way is this, that He has placed the redemption of His world in the power of our return to good. It is written: 'Turn back, O sons, who have turned away and I will heal your turnings away.' God would make perfect His creation not otherwise than by our help. He will not reveal His kingdom until we have established it. He will not assume the crown of the kings of the world until He can receive it from our hands. He will not be reunited with His Shechinah until we bring it to Him as a gift. With dusty and bleeding feet He permits His Shechinah to tread the road of earth because we do not take pity upon it. For this reason all calculations concerning the end of time are false and all attempts to calculate it to bring nearer the coming of the Messiah must fail. In truth all such things deflect us from the one thing needful, which is this, to reunite Him and the Shechinah by virtue of our return to good. Truly there is a mystery here. But he who knows it cannot make it known, and he who feigns to make it known proves thereby that he knows it not. And truly there is a miracle here. But he who would perform it will surely fail; only he who does not attempt it dare hope to have a share in it. Redemption is at the door. It depends only and alone upon our return to good, our teshuvah.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> "SHEKINAH (שכינה; lit. "the dwelling"): The majestic presence or manifestation of God which has descended to "dwell" among men. Like Memra ("word"; "logos") and "Yeẕara" (*i.e.*, "Kabod" = "glory"), the term was used by the Rabbis in place of "God" where the anthropomorphic expressions of the Bible were no longer regarded as proper. The word itself is taken from such passages as speak of God dwelling either in the Tabernacle or among the people of Israel."

cf. <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13537-shekinah>

<sup>84</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 230-31.

The prophet here conceives of a basic assumption regarding the relationship of man or woman to God. It is a relation of “teshuvah”, “turning”. Let us turn to the idea of turning now.

### **Teshuvah**

For the prophet, *turning* is a fundamental relation. Turning is conceived as a primordial way of relating, stemming from the assumed category of otherness. It is the way that all things relate to *other* things. Without the idea, it would be impossible to situate things other than to assume some kind of amalgamation where differences are ignored. And how does one begin to “turn” to God? Buber puts it in the mouth of the prophet: “when we deem ourselves lost it is a sign that God is about to let his quality of mercy prevail over his quality of exacting judgment. God is no magician; a magician would find no time for exercising mercy.”<sup>85</sup> The first step in turning to God is to “deem oneself lost”, that is, to recognize the gulf that separates a person from another person and indeed from *the ultimate other person*, God. This is a kind of despair which the prophet sees as fundamental in turning to others and ultimately to God. The prophet speaks of “periods of great trial” as times of “the eclipse of God”, times in which there is “no awareness of [God]”, the overcoming of which means that “the unimaginable must take place in us” so that we might turn to Him.<sup>86</sup> But what of the probability that the gods to which men seem to turn are images which they have constructed? Buber puts in the mouth of the prophet a caveat:

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 116.

one must not be too hard on men because they carve themselves images with a glorious and good-natured face and substitute these for God, seeing that it is so cruelly difficult to live in His real presence. And so, when we desire to lead men to God, we must not simply overthrow their idols. In each of these images we must seek to discover what divine quality he who carved it sought, in spite of everything, to delineate. Then tenderly and prudently we must help him to find the way to that quality. Our mission is not to the realms in which dwells the purity of holiness; it is to the unholy that we must pay attention so that it find redemption and become whole.<sup>87</sup>

That is to say, the prophet is concerned with the process of turning to the other, not so much with the absolute nature of the one to whom one turns, since that is to be discovered in the turning alone, not in treating the one to whom one turns as an object to examine.

There is another concern the prophet addresses, the ways that genuine turning to others and ultimately to God might become institutionalized as people submit the process to systemization. Communities can lose sight of their original intent. *Turning to God* can morph into something regimented and overloaded with concerns that have little to do with the ways that people turn to others and to God through them.<sup>88</sup> This is an important assumption which will figure significantly in the next chapter in which Buber's ideas are applied in educational settings.<sup>89</sup>

Once it is established that people might be conceived as turning to one another and to God ultimately, the next assumption to make concerns the role of the human will in this *turning*. The prophet relates the idea that congregations only

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>89</sup> The prophet's tale of the gradual morphing of *turning* into building bigger, uncaring communities (*For the Sake of Heaven*, p. 120) into money raising and the acquisition of things is said to be a work of the "Evil Impulse". This is the negative expression of turning to God, that is, turning away from Him to things and to their acquisition, even to the acquisition of people. This will figure as a deep criticism of the status of present systems of education in chapter three.

arise if the person who is destined to teach actually wants a congregation to form. Considering the claim that God could force a person to start a community, the prophet declares that such a god would seem cruel. Concerning this issue, the prophet admits, "I have learned to know something of the judgment of God, and it was incomprehensible to me even as it was to Job."<sup>90</sup> This represents an assumption regarding the kinds of knowledge from which the prophet is willing to draw. Concerning the subject of God, the prophet is willing to consider a variety of ideas, especially of the sort of the *unknown*. *Essential incomprehensibility* does not in this case imply non-existence. Nor does it imply that an incomprehensible *other* or that the absolutely incomprehensible other, God, is unworthy of attention. It just means that the other cannot be so simply categorized as *comprehensible*. This is an ontological assumption which justifies the category of *the incomprehensible*.

It is worth noting that the Biblical character, Job, never stopped paying attention to God, though he certainly could not comprehend Him and ended his trials amid mild paroxysm. Turning to God was for Job an inclusive act, admitting into his own relation with the world the incomprehensibility of the God Who nevertheless *showed up*, Whom Job could no longer ignore, to Whom *turning* became a necessity. *Not* turning to God would have seemed a kind of inattention to the *n<sup>th</sup>* degree. Any other kind of *failure to turn* would certainly not seem as significant.

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<sup>90</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 157.

## The Shechinah

Of the actualization of the life of God in a person's life, Buber conceives of this as a living outward from an inward presence of the Shechinah. As the prophet says, "[The Shechinah] breathed His breath into us, and if we are able to live from within outward as no other created thing may do, it is because His breath enables us to do so."<sup>91</sup> The prophet conceives of the ultimate expression of this as a kind of *unification* of God with His people, Israel, a joining of the Shechinah with people. The attempt at unification, something thought to be possible only in Israel, is said to be what kills the prophet in the end.<sup>92</sup>

This process of living outward from the inward manifestation of the Shechinah is said to be an effect of God's humbling of Himself. As the prophet says,

God clothed Himself in servitude by giving the world His Shechinah, His 'indwelling' and has permitted His Shechinah to enter into the process of history and to share the contradictions and sufferings of the world, and has sent His Shechinah into exile with man and with Israel. It is written: 'In all its distress is He distressed.'<sup>93</sup>

In a plea to a crowd of Jews and Christians seeking healing, the prophet offers the following moving words:

My brethren, my brethren. You suffer the suffering of mortality and the Shechinah suffers your suffering with you. With you it is lame and stricken and with you it laments your lamentations. I do not know why you suffer; I do not know how help is to be brought you; I do know that redemption will come. The redemption of the Shechinah will come. When that comes the woe of man will come to an end and with it your woe. God, the God of the suffering, will bless you. I bless you in His Name. To the becoming One of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Shechinah!<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 285-86.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 230-31.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 154-55.

So the prophet's vision of the future involves the redemption of the Shechinah when suffering will cease. Until then, the assumption is that the Shechinah is suffering with people. Still, the prophet is aware of the temptations men face when the pursuit of the presence of God becomes an end in itself, as if from one level to another, in an attempt to gain power from level to level. He notes that the high levels can become objects in themselves. Then a person's devotion to God alone would be in question, even though he or she might think of the devotion as entirely God-centered.<sup>95</sup>

A final word may be said regarding the relationship of the individual and the Shechinah in the prophet's ontological framework. It involves at the most fundamental level what the prophet calls "hesed." In a play on words, Buber puts in the mouth of one of the prophet's disciples the following:

It is written: 'The world is built by virtue of grace.' What is here called grace, hesed, is the mutual love between the Lord and His vassals, his hasidim. In every moment of life up to his very last moment, the world can be rebuilt for a hasid by hesed.<sup>96</sup>

What is here translated as *grace* is in other places translated as *unconditional love*. *Hesed* reflects the kind of unilateral grace which a ruler might bestow on a subject, as of that bestowed by an ancient suzerain on his subjects.<sup>97</sup> It says in a way, "Regardless of what you may do, I will keep my end of the bargain." This is what makes the relationship unconditional. It is also what prevents it from being

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 215-16.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>97</sup> <http://www.michaelsheiser.com/TheNakedBible/OT%20covenant%20ANE%20covenants%20Pt2.pdf> Accessed June, 2013

identified as just another kind of objectifying relationship. This relationship is shown in the Bible, in the book of the prophet Hosea. Hosea is said to have taken a prostitute as a wife. After she returns to prostitution, Hosea redeems her with all the money he has. In spite of her unfaithfulness, he loves her unconditionally. This kind of relationship is of the type assumed to exist between God and His people by the prophetic figure in Buber's novel. Indeed, "the world can be rebuilt for a Hasid by *Hesed*."<sup>98</sup> No matter what a person has done, redemption is possible, since the relationship into which one has entered is unconditional.

### **The Unintentional**

An ontological assumption regarding the role of *intention in relation to outcome* figures importantly in the novel. A parable relayed by one of the prophet's disciples tells how the intention of a rabbi to have his disciples blow the shofar (ram's horn) merely as an act of obedience turned out to have the effect of causing a storm to subside, though this was not the intention of the rabbi, who only wanted his disciples to blow the shofar as an act of obedience before the ship sank, a fact of

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<sup>98</sup> The ontological role of *hesed* in the relationship between God and people as well as among people suggests that it is possible to conceive of relationships in terms of some criteria of the sort of Kant's categorical imperative, rephrased loosely, that a person should choose a way of relating to others which is universally applicable. As I see it, the only kind of relationship which could be applied universally is one that might avoid particular, objectifiable limits. Entering into such relationships would not involve knowledge of defined traits or of objectifiable limits. Relationships of the sort of "I will do such and such or be such and such, just so long as you do or be such and such" are doomed from the start. On the other hand, the dictum, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you", is a guideline pointing to a way that people might be treated fairly. It seems to be a way of rephrasing Kant's imperative, looking backwards, as it were. It is a description of what seems to happen among people who love one another unconditionally. If there is a way of relating to others that is limited in application, that is, that might not work among some people, then that way is by definition not universally applicable, so it fails the test of the imperative, which only points to a possibility, not to itself as a self-objectifying principle. Look for something that will work for everyone. That is the principle which is not a principle. It points but does not itself spell out the limits of what is to be done or left undone in relationships. This I think is suggested by Buber's use of *hesed* in the novel.

which he was certain.<sup>99</sup> What is being taught here about the prophet's ontological vision is that *material causation* is not the only thing to which attention should be paid, since *perceived* material causes might in themselves only be distractions. Acts might have intentions which have little or no relationship to outcomes. In fact, in a kind of circular logic, the *intention* to make outcomes fit intentions might undo the intended effect(s). As the prophet's disciple, Bunam, says, "Had he [the Rabbi] intended to perform a miracle [by blowing the shofar], they would not have been saved." This assumption regarding the not-so-relevant relationship of intentions and effects figures elsewhere in the novel, fundamentally in the juxtaposition of the Seer's intention to influence the outcome of the Napoleonic wars over against the prophet's refusal to pursue that objective. The Maggid, a friend of the prophet who shared his vision of things, tells the Seer the following:

Do not believe that I did not know how lofty was your aim in your conflict with that disciple [the prophet] who opposed your undertakings. Nevertheless did you feed the heavenly fire with mortal substance.<sup>100</sup>

The words here, "feed the heavenly fire with mortal substance", are cautionary. They point to the prophet's awareness that *action* itself ought not to be conceived entirely in terms of causation. There are *reasons* for things that should not be expressed solely in terms of discernible causation. And there are effects of things of which the things themselves, a kind of *heavenly fire*, are inexpressible. They are things we do not know and cannot know. The Maggid actually *refuses* to answer a question about Messianic outcomes coming from the Seer: "It is not fitting

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<sup>99</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 306.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

for such a creature as man to return an answer to such a question as [the Seer's].  
There is an Other [God] who must answer it."<sup>101</sup>

### **Righteousness Vs. Having Rights**

The Maggid rebukes the Seer for being concerned about the actions of the French and the Russians in the Napoleonic wars:

We arise against that power which awakens and nourishes wickedness and iniquity and hostility to God in the souls of men. For wickedness and iniquity are in the souls of all men, in ours as well as in theirs. The combat against God's enemies is the combat against that power which causes wickedness and iniquity to wax great in the human soul. When we see them burgeon and bloom, then we know what they would be at. As they fade, all the power of evil which they have concentrated [is] scattered. But Thou, O Lord, are exalted in world-time. There is no covenant between God and Belial.<sup>102</sup>

The way of the prophet is about being *righteous*, that is, in a relationship with God through right relationships with people, not about pursuing the ends and means of political activism as a game of materialist causation. "There is no covenant between God and Belial," as the Maggid says. This involves the awareness that "heavenly fire" is not discernible. Though it is not objectifiable, it nevertheless is the cause of the kinds of outcomes to which the prophet is pointing.<sup>103</sup> As the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>103</sup> That "there is no covenant between God and Belial" is put another way in the Bible, in Ephesians 6. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against rulers in high places, against spiritual wickedness." This is another way of saying that the establishment of the relationship of discernible intentions to objectifiable, stated outcomes is problematic, especially when the unknown is considered. Honestly, we do not and cannot know why certain things happen. And that is as it should be. This ontological positioning is powerful, since it situates *action* in terms of itself, not in terms of imagined intentions. As another rabbi of note has said, "Take no thought for tomorrow, for sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." This is another way of saying that action should not have as its focus *intention*, as if thereby a chain of causation might be pursued. That is a way of the pursuit of power, of the control of outcomes in relation to intentions. The truth is that we do not often know what the effect of our intentions will be. The better tact would be to simply act in terms of our fundamental relationships with God and with

prophet says, "Never will a work of man have a good issue if we do not think of the souls whom it is given us to help, and of the life between soul and soul, and of our life with them and of their lives with each other. We cannot help the coming of redemption if life does not redeem life."<sup>104</sup> This is pointing away from the concerns of the Seer and of his disciples, involving the manipulation of world affairs without regard to the care of the souls of men.

Situating the importance of ontological assumptions in his educational community, Buber puts in the mouth of the prophet the following:

We do not demand what the world calls rights. All that we need is that the people of Israel have the right to arrange its life according to the directions of its God...God scattered us and is purifying us in the flames of suffering...You are permitted to dwell together, even though you have been partitioned among your enemies...you are beginning to see that in the lives of people the mystery of suffering is allied to the mystery of Messiah...the return to good is born in the depth of suffering and this return evokes redemption...the return is the beginning of justice, completed by redemption...<sup>105</sup>

Buber is situating himself ontologically. He assumes the idea of God as well as the possibility of a relationship of people with God and with each other in terms of it. He sees desired action in terms of this and is not concerned with *rights* as objective ends in themselves, taken out of this context. Through this it is possible for Buber to embrace the mystery of suffering as it relates to a people's turning to

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people, without regard to intended outcomes, since we cannot know what they may or may not be, since we cannot know the future. That said, lest the argument be dismissed as a kind of pursuit of powerlessness, an inherently impotent stance, this contention is indeed a call to a kind of power which transcends awareness of material causation. It is pointing to a kind of "heavenly fire", once given attention, promises to set ablaze the course of action in the world. It involves the embrace of what is wholly other, what transcends natural (material) experience.

<sup>104</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 256.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

God and to the possibilities of justice in terms of it. Out of this context, the terms make no sense for Buber.

It is my purpose now to extend the ideas concerning some of the prophet's ontological concerns into his approach to others and how this is situated in his view of knowledge. The concern within the next and last part of this chapter has to do with the prophet's epistemology.

### **The Prophet's Epistemology**

#### **Knowledge as Response**

Reflecting his ontological stance concerning the questionable relation of intention and effect, the prophet often sends his disciples on journeys which have no discernible, stated goal.<sup>106</sup> No wonder, for his assumptions regarding the presence of the Shekinah mean that along such journeys mysterious things would and should indeed happen. This points to an epistemology embracing the numinous, that there is a kind of knowledge of things which arises among people as they journey through life, in particular contexts and not apart from them. "The road of the world," the prophet says,

is the road upon which we all fare onward to meet the death of the body. And the places in which we meet the Shechinah are those in which good and evil are blended, whether without or within us. In the anguish of the exile which it suffers, the Shechinah looks at us and its glance beseeches us to set free good from evil. If it be but the tiniest fragment of pure good, which is brought to light, the Shechinah is helped thereby. But we avoid its glance, because we 'can not'. That is not strange when it comes to the rest of us. But Lublin may not avoid the glance; Lublin dare not doubt but what it 'can'!<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 241-42.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

Martin Buber describes evil as the tendency to turn away from others and ultimately from God, the wholly other.<sup>108</sup> He further describes the *evil urge*, or tendency to turn away from God, as present in everyone. So it is in the context of *conflicted intention* that Buber discovers the possibility of turning to God. In everyone there is a conflict, and it is in the context of this conflict that knowledge of others and of God can arise. Once turned to the other, knowledge of the other or in relation to the other is possible. The prophet says that he would not consider it wise to judge another person's judgment of his own experience before trying to understand the experience of the person judging him.

Buber speaks of knowledge in the contexts of meetings with others as a response to what is happening.

You may meet the Shechinah upon the very roads of the earth. And what do you do when this meeting takes place? Do you stretch out your hands? Do you help raise up the Shechinah from the very dust of the road? And yet who should do this thing if not the men of Lublin<sup>109?110</sup>

The prophet is here pointing to *responsible action* as a responding to the ones one may meet, not with a priori knowledge of such encounters had before such meetings, but with openness to the possibilities of those others. This is said to counter the claims of the Seer's disciples that spoke of Lublin "as the land of Israel, the court of the Seer's house as Jerusalem, [his] house of study as Mt. Moriah and the room of the Seer as the Holy of Holies wherein the Shechinah speaks from his

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<sup>108</sup> Martin Buber and Martin Buber, *Good and Evil, Two Interpretations: I. Right and Wrong* (New York: Scribner, 1953).

<sup>109</sup> Lublin is one of the chief cities in the novel. It is where the Seer and his younger disciples live.

<sup>110</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 34-35.

throat.”<sup>111</sup> He casts doubt on the status of the Seer’s miracles, asking whether one could know whether the Seer “hides himself behind all his miracles, in order that [he might not be seen], himself.”<sup>112</sup> He reminds us, further, of the following:

The serpent's 'lying truth' was that men and women would know good and evil like one who creates both...as two forms of being, which are as contradictory to each other as light and darkness. The Holy One, Blessed be He, knows the two things which He has created and goes on creating, namely, good and evil, even as he knows light and darkness, as two things, which at the very ends of the earth stand opposite each other and opposed to each other. But the first human beings, so soon as they had eaten of the fruit of the tree, knew good and evil as blended and confused. It is this blending and confusion which was brought into the world through their deed.<sup>113</sup>

The *knowledge of good and evil* of which scripture speaks<sup>114</sup> refers itself to a kind of knowledge of things which is fixed and easily described. But Buber is pointing here through the prophet to a kind of truth which cannot be known except in the context of the encounter with good and evil in encounters with others, to which a proper response isn't the gaining of some objective knowledge of good and evil but rather a *response* to it through turning to God by turning to others. Buber points to this non-objective way of knowing in the introduction to the text:

I, myself, have no 'doctrine'. My function is to point out realities of this order. He who expects of me a teaching other than a pointing out of this character, will always be disillusioned. And it would seem to me, indeed, that in this house of history the crucial thing is not to possess a fixed doctrine, but rather to recognize eternal reality and out of its depth to be able to face the reality of the present. No way can be pointed to in this desert night. One's purpose must be to help

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>114</sup> Genesis 1

men of today to stand fast, with their soul in readiness, until the dawn breaks and a path becomes visible where none suspected it.<sup>115</sup>

Buber interprets the ideas of good and evil existentially and thereby points to responsibility as “[facing] the reality of the present”, taking one’s grounding in “eternal realities”, those ontological assumptions which are foundational to all thought and action. “Helping men [and women] to stand fast” is a kind of adherence to the Golden Rule, one’s doing to others as one would have others do to one. It does not involve imposing on people strictures from without. It refers itself rather to that kind of living “from inside out” referred to in the previous section on ontology. The prophet’s disciple Mendel of Kozk speaks further of the prophet’s perspective concerning knowledge:

My heart is at one with those among Israel who today, equally distant from blind traditionalism and blind contradictoriness, strive with a striving meant to precede a renewal of the forms of both faith and life. This striving is the continuation of the Hasidic striving; it takes place in a historic hour in which a slowly receding light has yielded to darkness.<sup>116</sup>

The prophet’s perspective of knowledge is one which involves “the renewal of both faith and life.” It is not in itself a rejection of traditional forms or an attempt to be contrary for the sake of being contrary. “The Torah warns us not to make an idol even of the command of God”, the prophet reminds us.<sup>117</sup> This would involve the reinterpretation of tradition in the light of real encounters with others. In other words, traditions might figure more powerfully as they are given life in real encounters, as they become meaningful ways to respond to others in critical times.

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<sup>115</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, xiii.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, xii-xiii.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

Fixing these traditions in immovable stone, unresponsive to the needs of particular encounters, would amount to a kind of idolatry. The prophet admits that he had “come to recognize the truth of this way [Hasidism]”, but that the truth itself involves more than the truths of Hasidism, since it involves “all that takes place between [a person and his or her] fellow-man [or fellow woman].”<sup>118</sup>

The truth to which the prophet is pointing is existential truth. That place between a person and his or her fellow human being is the place “where Satan meets his limitation, seeing that love really exists and has *no limitation*.”<sup>119</sup> It is in this place without limitation that real knowledge of others occurs and belongs to these encounters. Concerning good and evil in these contexts, the prophet puts it eloquently:

It does not suffice me to know the truth concerning the evil that is in the world. And I certainly gain no experience of evil when I meet my fellow-man. For in that case I can grasp it only from without, estrangedly or with hatred and contempt, in which case it really does not enter my vision; or else, I overcome it with my love and in that case I have no vision of it either. I experience it when I meet myself. Within me, where no element of strangeness has divisive force and no love has redeeming force, there do I directly experience that something which would force me to betray God and which seeks to use for that purpose the powers of my own soul. At that point I understand that the evil of the world is mighty and that I cannot master it by virtue of what I do to my fellow-man, because it, itself, uses the power of love in order to poison what we have healed.<sup>120</sup>

Buber is pointing here in the words of the prophet away from simplistic analyses of others in which labels of good and evil are used to objectify people to a more humble stance in relation to others. It is impossible to experience evil by

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

observing a person, says the prophet, since the observation itself would involve hatred and contempt, in which case the observation would be skewed. A similar thing is said of overcoming evil with one's love. It would not enter one's experience. The observer would have entered his own field of vision, affecting it. Pointing to a more humble place, he suggests that the evil that people encounter is really within themselves. He speaks of this evil further, against the words of the disciples of the Seer who want to see Gog as an evil that exists in the world alone, which can be manipulated:

What is the nature of this Gog? He can exist in the outer world only because he exists within us. The darkness out of which he was hewn needed to be taken from nowhere else than from our own slothful and malicious hearts. Our betrayal of God has made Gog to grow so great. Neither in the soul nor in the people does the power of the light prevail.<sup>121</sup>

It is there that “no element of strangeness has divisive force and no love has redeeming force”, where a person “directly experience[s] that something which would force [one] to betray God and which seeks to use for that purpose the powers of [one's] own soul.”<sup>122</sup>

### **Knowledge as Limited**

And what of the “powers of the soul?” What do men and women bring to encounters with others as well as to their own experience that has the power to heal? Perhaps it is expressed by the prophet, curiously enough, after he ends his discussion concerning the evil of the world and its use of love to poison what has

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

been healed, when he says, “it is impossible to leave things at this point.”<sup>123</sup> The prophet goes on almost immediately to say,

it is here below that we are stationed and it does not behoove us to desert our post. It is here that we are to combat evil. Every heaven becomes an earth....the way...may be likened to the building of a road. You drag up your stones, you beat them into the earth, you roll the roller over them. Naturally you do not stick to the same place. You do get on. Such is the way.<sup>124</sup>

The prophet is pointing here to the locus of the “powers of the soul” as things that are mortal, things here in the world, so it is not necessary to look beyond what is here in the present to find the mechanism of healing about which the prophet speaks, though he assumes that it is founded in God. “Freedom dwells with God”, says the prophet.<sup>125</sup> He carries this theme forward in the following:

There are many who seek to interpret the things that are now coming to pass in the world. They assure us that these things are the birth pangs of the messiah or something comparable. But we say that it is not given us to know whether this be so or not. Those others are of the opinion that we should try to exert mystic influences in order that the shape of things be such as it should be. But we here do not believe that we have any duty except to turn to God with our whole being and to seek to establish His kingdom by a communal life of justice, of love, of consecration. Those others reproach us for interfering with their plans. But we have recognized the facts that all those plans of theirs turn us aside from the one thing that God demands of us.<sup>126</sup>

The prophet is not pointing to “mystic influences” here, but rather to the establishment, or rather the seeking for the establishment of *communal life* involving justice, love and consecration. He puts it in a prayer, pointing to the mechanism of healing:

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 238-39.

And am I not, Ribbono shel 'olam [Master of the Universe], Thy child? Yet I do not beseech Thee to reveal to me the mysteries of Thy way; I could not endure them. But this I pray Thee to reveal to me, deeply and clearly, what this thing that now happens means to me, what it demands of me, and what Thou, Master of the universe, wouldst communicate to me through it. Ah, I would not know why I suffer, only whether I suffer for Thy sake!<sup>127</sup>

Here the answer is given to the question, “What do people bring to encounters that is healing?” The answer lies in the prayer. Attention to what is happening at the moment and to what it demands of the person is what is needed. The prophet refers to this as something that is revealed by God. This way of knowing involves *turning* and is an effect of what is ontologically foundational for the prophet, that what God demands of us is that we turn to others and in the process turn to Him. Responding to what is over against a person is *the one thing that is needed*. The understanding that the response is *for the sake of heaven* is situated in the deep ontological foundation, that God speaks to people through the events of their lives, if they are paying attention.

### **Knowledge as Suffering**

What may be said further is that the nature of the response to others here may involve suffering. Indeed in this case it appears that it must involve it, for the prophet assumes in the prayer that “the thing that now happens” is a kind of suffering, since he asks concerning the things that are happening to him whether he is suffering for the sake of God. This points to a way of knowing which is situated in suffering. This suggests that there are revelations which are possible only in

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 239.

suffering, a frightening epistemology to be sure.<sup>128</sup> There is a way of knowing which is found in suffering for oneself, but this is not the kind of knowing to which the prophet is pointing.

### Conclusion

I have attempted in this chapter to say something of the historical context of Buber's narrative. It concerns the lives of two rabbis pitted against the backdrop of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Poland. In an attempt to get at Buber's philosophy, I have examined the ontology and epistemology of the chief character in the novel through whom Buber relates his own philosophy.<sup>129</sup> The result is a somewhat extensive examination of ontological material which reflects the views of a Hasidic Rabbi of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Carrying these assumptions forward, I have attempted to examine the epistemology of Buber's main character, his philosophy of knowing. What remains in the upcoming chapter three will first involve the consideration of what communities of learning would look like given the ontological and epistemological assumptions of Buber's main character, the prophet. The following chapter four will involve criticism of the prophet's assumptions. For both chapters, I will take my cue

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<sup>128</sup> This observation concerning knowing through suffering points to Buber's other work in The Eclipse of God. In it he does not point to certainties but to uncertainty as characteristic of the way that pays attention to others and to God. "Holy insecurity" is what he points to. The walk with others and with God is across a narrow bridge and involves uncertainty all along the way. This is not a way of knowing which involves objectivism, the certain, a priori awareness of things and of the nature of responses to them. It is a way of *not knowing* in an objective sense. Objective ways of knowing are limiting factors which abort the possibilities. The pursuit of natural or even mystical ends to control particular outcomes limits the knower. Turning to others, without hidden agenda, opens one to the possibilities which are in the encounter and to the revelation of God through it.

<sup>129</sup> Concerning the life of the Seer, the other main character in the novel, (as well as of his disciples) issues will be addressed in the fourth chapter of the dissertation, involving criticism of Buber's ideas. This is necessary, since the role of the Seer in the novel is primarily as a foil in Buber's ontological and epistemological framework.

from Buber's own work in For the Sake of Heaven. The Hasidic community under the leadership of the prophet will provide a role model as I consider the shape that communities built on the assumptions of the prophet's ontology and epistemology might take (*prophetic communities*). In the fourth chapter, criticism of the prophet's ideas and behavior taken from the novel will help shape the criticism I bring to bear on Buber's ideas, along with criticism taken from the work of other scholars interested in Buber.

## CHAPTER III The Believing Game

### Introduction

I turn to consider the educational implications of the prophetic narrative I have described. What would our educational communities look like were we to take what Buber is saying in For the Sake of Heaven seriously? Here I will attempt to pay attention to the possibilities of educational communities built upon Buber's ontological and epistemological foundations, as they are made to appear in his novel. I think it is necessary to reiterate some of those basic ontological and epistemological assumptions considered in chapter two, to make the unfolding narrative here seem consistent and to limit what might be said about the shape educational communities so affected might take.

The pivotal prophetic assumption in Buber's novel is that *turning* is a basic way of relating to others. This idea forms the basis of considering the way that people relate with one another, and through one another, ultimately, with God. Turning is assumed to involve suffering, but it is assumed to be possible because of *hesed*, unconditional love. This turning is considered not to be an *act* which controls desired outcomes, but rather an act conceived in terms other than mere causation and intention. Rather the act of turning as Buber conceives of it points to effects which are not expressible and to actions of an unintentional sort. Buber points away from justifications of actions based on intended objectives, but rather to the call to be responsive to others, to have *right relations* with others, without reference to intentions.

With this brief summary of chapter two in mind, I would like to begin a discussion of the kinds of effects which might be observed in educational communities taking Buber's narrative as their guide. I intend to use Buber's description of the community under the leadership of the prophet to frame the discussion. First, I consider the role of students in relation to others within their community. From these observations I imagine how students in similar educational communities might be transformed were they to take on similar characteristics. Likewise, I consider the ways that the Prophet relates to his students, and out of this frame a discussion about the role of educators in educational communities similarly imagined. I further consider how educators and students might relate to others outside the immediate community, given some of Buber's descriptions of the Prophet's community.

### **The Role of Disciple**

Let me begin by considering the role that students in the Prophet's community took on in Buber's novel. This might be considered in terms of particular qualities that seem to have characterized the community. Among these characteristics are loyalty, willingness to serve, readiness for the unintended, joyfulness and humility.

#### **Loyalty**

The kind of educational community built on Buber's model of prophetic education exhibits the quality of *loyalty* between students and teachers. "Long life

to the Yehudi” was a mystic saying one of the Prophet’s students uttered.<sup>130</sup>

Another of the Prophet’s students chose to die rather than to live in the world without him. At least that was his sentiment when he told the Prophet, “I have come to see that you must soon take leave of the earth, and I would not stay here without you.”<sup>131</sup> This is quite remarkable that an educational community would engender this level of devotion of a student to his or her teacher, but it seems possible in the kind of community of which Buber is speaking. Lest the possibility of this kind of loyalty be called into question, it might be profitable to consider that this kind of devotion might be attributed to other qualities of the community. What about such a community would tend to engender devotion of this kind? One instance in the prophet’s life with his students might give some idea of the kind of relationship he imagined he had with his students and therefore the kind of relationships he pursued. The prophet told a story in which he noticed the Hebrew letters, yod and yod placed one above the other.<sup>132</sup> “When two Yods (Jews) stand beside each other it signifies the name of God; but when one stands above the other it does not signify the name of God.”<sup>133</sup> Buber is considering the idea that an absolute quality of community happens when people are considered as equals, in a sense, beside one another. This is the way, as it were, that God is known in such communities. One way to define this is in terms of a non-example. Those communities, like the Seer’s own, which pit students and teachers against one another, one member above or

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<sup>130</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 38.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>132</sup> Yod is the Hebrew letter for Y. It is the first letter of the name of God in the Old Testament (YHWH), sometimes transliterated *Yahweh* with the 10<sup>th</sup> century addition of vowels to the written form of the Hebrew language, and is as well the first letter of the word for “Jew” (Yehudi)

<sup>133</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 39.

below another one, would not tend to evoke qualities like loyalty. They would rather tend to give rise to competition and objectification. Rather than be loyal to another student or to a teacher, a student might tend to want to be combative, set at odds with other members of the community.

### **Willingness to Serve**

The setting of members of an educational community *beside* one another and not above or below gives rise to another quality, namely the *willingness to serve*. Setting people beside one another makes it possible to entertain the idea that there are many and various ways of serving. The Prophet confirmed a saying of the Seer in this regard:

It will not do to tell one's comrade what way he is to pursue. There is a way of serving God by study, another of serving Him by prayer; one by deeds of loving-kindness toward one's fellows; there is a way to be pursued by fasting and there is one to be pursued by eating. All these are right ways to the service of God. But each man is to observe well toward which one of these ways his heart inclines him. Thereupon he is to be active upon that way with all his might.<sup>134</sup>

### **Readiness for the Unintended**

The willingness to serve brings up another characteristic of educational communities like the prophet's. There is a unique attitude toward the idea of *intention* which lends itself to the qualities of openness to the miraculous and of *readiness for the unintended*. The prophet defined "decision" differently, not as a response to a suggestion or to a call, but as an involuntary, inexplicable happening. He said that it comes, "as when, at the end of a run, one leaps. But if a man says to

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 32.

you: 'Leap!' and you leap from your stance, that is not yet a deciding. To be sure, Rabbi David bade me come hither often enough. I could not. Then, suddenly, this time I could."<sup>135</sup> This playful approach to the idea of decision making leads to the consideration of *indecisiveness* as possibly a preferred quality. In communities like the Prophet's, it may be preferable at most times to avoid making a priori decisions. In educational communities taking on the characteristics of the Prophet's community, there would be less time for planning intended outcomes and more time for spontaneous happenings. "The heart of man is not evil," says the Prophet, "only its 'imagination' is so; that is to say that what it produces and devises arbitrarily, separating itself from the goodness of creation, that is the thing called evil."<sup>136</sup> Intention lends itself to a certain level of arbitrariness since it is not given to us to know the future. The planning that occupies so much time in educational communities may in itself be a kind of distancing of the community from the kind of community to which Buber is pointing. Buber puts in the mouth of the Prophet these words, reminding us that in the matter of intentions, all parties seem to be on a level playing field, whether considered good or ill. Speaking of his persecutors, the Prophet says,

The fundamental motive of their persecution of me is to serve Heaven.<sup>137</sup> What is their predominant intention? Since it has been long known that Rabbi Israel will decline the succession, they desire to secure it for Rabbi Joseph, and why is that their intention? Because they believe that the succession of son to father in the function of

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>137</sup> Buber is hearkening back to the title of his book here, *For the Sake of Heaven*. This situates the novel from the outset as a critical work in relation to the establishment of communities in terms of intention. It puts every view founded in intention on equal footing. Everyone does *everything*, as it were, *for the sake of heaven*.

Zaddik<sup>138</sup> is the desire of Heaven. Assuredly, they are in error. They will affect nothing for Rabbi Joseph, and as for me, it is not I who stand in his way; I stand in no man's way.<sup>139</sup>

The point of this is to say that *intention* does not occupy a central place in communities like the Prophet's. That is, the intentions of the members of the community are on an equal footing and so cannot be used to guide the community forward. Communities which understand this might begin to experience a strong openness to the possibilities of *the unintended* or else of the unplanned, indeed, of the surprising and miraculous.

It would indeed be difficult to build a community like the Prophet's with positivist assumptions regarding the role that *intention* plays. Do x so y will happen. That is the way of intention. Reliance upon observations pitted against perceived outcomes in causal relations would seem to be precisely what communities like the prophet's are not about. Were our own educational communities to begin to pay attention to communities like the prophet's, less attention might be paid to the stated *intentions* of educational policy and practice with more attention paid to preparing students and teachers alike to the possibilities of being *surprised!* And this leads to the consideration of another characteristic of communities like the prophet's, the quality of joyfulness.

### **Joyfulness**

It is noted in Buber's novel that one of the prophet's disciples liked playing chess "with people of questionable character."<sup>140</sup> He sang songs as he played which

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<sup>138</sup> The term "Zaddik" (plural, zaddikim) means essentially "righteous". A Zaddik is considered a righteous one, a person who is in right relation with God and others.

<sup>139</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 277.

were appropriate to the chess moves and which touched people's hearts. He is also reported to play guitar while preparing medicine.<sup>141</sup> Another of the Prophet's disciples tricked the Seer into letting him drink from his Kiddush cup by dressing up like a peasant merchant, a joke even the Seer enjoyed.<sup>142</sup> This kind of playfulness would represent a novel approach in systems of education. Less attention to issues of control might allow educational communities more experiences of *joy*.

### **Humility**

This quality of joyfulness is related to another characteristic of the prophet's community, *humility*. Joy is a communal event, something that is shared with others. It tends to put the members of a community on equal footing. This lends itself to humility. Concerning the prophet's students, perhaps due most significantly to what was characteristic in the prophet's own way of relating with his students, the pursuit of power for its own sake was increasingly made to be a non-issue. Beginning with the practice of seating in communal gatherings, the disciples of the prophet sat informally in ways promoting humility. "Not as in Lublin did they sit at a long table with the rabbi at the head. The benches stood at random, and somewhere on one of them the teacher occupied a temporary seat, so that, despite the deep seriousness of his leadership, the picture presented was one of an uncomplicated and familiar comradeship."<sup>143</sup> While it is true that the prophet's disciples sometimes conceived of relationships in terms of power, the prophet was

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 90, 194.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 230.

concerned with pointing to other ways of being and relating. One of the prophet's students thought the prophet was "proceeding into the world to bring his old adversaries to an accounting" at one point.<sup>144</sup> But this was far from the truth.

Were students in our own educational communities shown ways to joyfully and humbly consider one another, such openness to others would no doubt result in understandings which are not planned, surprising "outcomes", unintended yet fulfilling in ways that can't even be described, especially since they are unintentional. One of the prophet's disciples, so affected by his time in the prophet's community, began to understand what forest birds were saying. It was so surprising to him, he actually prayed that the ability would leave him.<sup>145</sup> Our own educational communities should welcome this kind of unexpected happening. Learning the language of birds in unintended ways is an example of the kind of unintended effect that would bring new life to our communities. Taking this on board, we would open ourselves up to unlimited outcomes, not settling short of the miraculous.

### **The Role of the Prophet**

It is my intention now to move to fully consider the role of the Prophet in relation to his disciples. Here I see characteristic approaches to others reflecting the Prophet's philosophy. Conceptions of cooperation, freedom, effectiveness, power, relationality, humility, duty, generosity, the embrace of the oppositional and encouragement effect the Prophet's behavior in the community. These ideas give

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 250-51.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 217.

rise to ways of being which foster equality and openness to others. Taking these on, we would build our own communities on foundations of equality and openness.

### **Cooperation**

Concerning desire and intention, the prophet seems to respond to joint ventures, not to dictates made with measured outcomes in mind. He prefers *cooperation* to arbitrary direction. When a friend of his invites him to his home for Succoth, the prophet responds to his invitation, "Let us journey together to Lublin", by saying, "Let us do so."<sup>146</sup> Given directives, the prophet tends to ignore them. Apparently, the Prophet is not a "yes man". Were we to occupy positions in our educational communities in similar ways, we might not be well received. Nevertheless, along with academics like bell hooks, we might learn to transgress borders, challenging directives, pointing to other ways of being and relating.<sup>147</sup> We would seek a kind of serendipitous coming together involving the desires of students and teachers and of our own institutions. In this way, our communities' effects might be transformative and our directives more flexible.

Concerning directives given in educational communities, the Prophet sees the effects of institutionalization as negative.

After Moses came the Judges and after the Judges the Prophets and after the Prophets the men of the Great Synagogue. Then came the Tannaim and Amoriam and so it went on to the time of the admonishers. And when this thing, too, was defiled, and false admonishers multiplied, then arose the Zaddikim. And now I sigh because I see that this thing, too, is at the point of defilement.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>147</sup> Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress : Education as the Practice of Freedom*.

<sup>148</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 119.

## Freedom

Similarly, the prophet decries education as compulsory.

God...is the God of freedom. He, who has all power wherewith to compel me, does not compel me. He has permitted me to have a share in His freedom. I betray Him when I permit myself to be compelled.<sup>149</sup>

Education is *free*, which means in this context that its members ought not be compelled by forces external to themselves regarding participation and as well in relation to outcomes to be achieved in educational communities. Were we to take on this understanding, our educational communities would be altogether voluntary, with members choosing to participate in activities which are in themselves free. Such an experiment has been attempted at Summerhill, where participation in student activities is not compulsory.<sup>150</sup> Similar approaches have also been used in Montessori schools, where students are allowed flexibility in learning at their own pace and in their own ways.<sup>151</sup>

There are other possibilities which could be considered in elementary and secondary settings in which emphasis is placed on relationships and not on intended outcomes. In fact, Buber points to this in the context of a discussion about the Seer's attempt to manipulate the emperor, to achieve a favorable outcome in the Napoleonic Wars. As the Prophet says, "We stand, as it were, bound and an easy prey to that burning, which our leaders seek to intensify."<sup>152</sup> This charge that the Seer was intensifying a burning was in effect a criticism that the Seer was delving

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Alexander Sutherland Neill, *Summerhill; a Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (New York,: Hart Pub. Co., 1960).

<sup>151</sup> Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method* (New York,: Schocken Books, 1964).

<sup>152</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 255.

into things that were not important for the community and that had the potential to harm the community. It serves as a powerful indictment of educational systems which set outcomes which are inimical to right relationships in educational communities. Reflecting on the absolutely perverse practice of setting outcomes for members of educational communities which pay scant or no attention to actual relationships between people, Buber's narrative involves the Seer actually directing the prophet to die and thereby get a message for him from heaven!<sup>153</sup> Reflecting the sheer wickedness of such a directive and an indicator of how prevalent its influence was, one of the Seer's disciples believed that it would be better "that Jewish blood flow until one can wade therein up to the knees from Prystyk to Rymanov, if thereby our exile be brought to an end and our redemption dawn."<sup>154</sup> This is such a powerful reminder of the similar, wickedly satirical essay written by Jonathon Swift during the Irish potato famine, "A Modest Proposal", in which the author suggests that Irish children should be fattened up so the British might eat them!<sup>155</sup>

### **Not About Effectiveness**

The prophet's being asked to die and the suggestion that Jewish blood should be spilled for the sake of redemption, like the proposal that Irish children should be eaten, points to the fact that the prophet's educational community did not in general concern itself with the issue of *effectiveness*. One of the prophet's disciples asks the question, speaking of the Seer's community in Lublin, "Do you know, Jacob Yitzchak

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>155</sup> Jonathan Swift and Charles Allen Beaumont, *A Modest Proposal*, The Merrill Literary Casebook Series (Columbus, Ohio: C. E. Merrill Pub. Co., 1969).

[the prophet], what it smells of here?" The prophet's response comes, "Effectiveness is made a conscious goal here."<sup>156</sup> It appears that the pursuit of effectiveness itself is a nauseating stench to the prophet! He says, "I must reach the point of learning how to prevent the evil from using the good in order to crush it." Outcomes based approaches to education become in this light damnable. Were we to seriously consider Buber's powerful critique here, we would abandon outcomes-based approaches to education. Our systems of education would give up attempts at manipulating outcomes, which have been shown to have at times been *manufactured* in any case.<sup>157</sup> Results can indeed be fabricated, especially in the context of systems in which they are the be all and end all of discussions and concerns about education. Our communities need to look elsewhere, and taking on Buber's narrative would help.

### **Not About Power**

Pointing further to the problems associated with the pursuit of power *for its own sake*, in which quagmire modern systems of education are often entrenched, the prophet asks one of his disciples:

What is the device of the Evil Spirit? He shows to each the high levels he can reach and lets him reach them. Then is that man's mind fixed upon the levels; then he is no longer devoted to God alone, even though he thinks he is. The power which alone he does not perceive to be either delusion or fraud comes in the end to be himself and his striving from level to level....In Lublin I learned to recognize the delusion of the levels. And what is a man to do who is thus tempted to protect himself from the snare of the fowler? He goes into the lonely

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<sup>156</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 57.

<sup>157</sup> See <http://sepp.udel.edu/category/ethical-issues/data-falsification> for citations on data falsification in academia. (accessed June 2013)

forest and stands there and cries out until the levels and grades are taken from him again.<sup>158</sup>

## **Relational**

The kind of community to which Buber is pointing is *relational* at its core. It is concerned primarily with establishing right relations between people. It avoids the problems associated with the objectification of people, of the “striving from level to level”, the “delusion of the levels”. Building on similar foundations, our own educational communities would cease focusing on outcomes based approaches. They would open themselves up to other possibilities, particularly to the infinite potential that is open to systems which trust the human spirit, confident that members of educational communities will always surprise us with unintended outcomes, even some that will seem miraculous to us. I would think such a community would be *designed for discovery*. It is positioned for surprise.<sup>159</sup> And that leads to questions about the Prophet’s role in his community and to the ways that teachers in our own communities might take on similar roles.

## **Humility**

What lies at the core of the Prophet’s philosophy, perhaps, is a humble stance. How appropriate this seems, especially in light of postmodern concern with the arrogance of metanarratives, attempts to get at absolutistic explanations of things. There is, it would seem, no such thing as “unified field theory.”<sup>160</sup> And there

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<sup>158</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 215-16.

<sup>159</sup> I hope to argue this point in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>160</sup> <http://claesjohnsonmathscience.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/why-no-unified-field-theory/> accessed June, 2013.

is no similar theory explaining everything in any field. There is nothing that explains everything, if but for the sheer reason that *all explanations become part of the explanations themselves. The observer is observed.*<sup>161</sup> Given this *humility*, educational communities might take on more realistic approaches to praxis, all the while recognizing the importance of “hidden ones”. As Buber puts it in the novel,

A brother of [the prophet’s] father was one of the thirty-six hidden Zaddikim. These hidden ones sustain the world. Is the world not rather sustained by the manifestly righteous who are our leaders? The manifest just are themselves sustained by these hidden ones. Moreover, that within them which serves to sustain men belongs to their hidden and not to their manifest nature. All that sustains belongs to the realm of the hidden.<sup>162</sup>

I believe that it might be well put to say that educators who take on Buber’s narrative here will endeavor to be humble. While this might put this kind of educator at a disadvantage in a competitive community, it is best for caring communities like the prophet’s. The prophet was indeed marginalized by other communities and even by members of his own family at times.<sup>163</sup> But he resisted pitting himself against others, willing rather to consider himself equal to others and not above them. “Whatever you learn of my life will be equally true of his,” the Prophet said of another rabbi friend. He did not strive for notoriety.

Concerning the reporting of some miraculous events in the prophet’s life, he downplayed the events, citing them humbly, “The incidents themselves...are so spiritually shabby and absurd that I considered it unfitting to trouble your ears

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<sup>161</sup> Postmodern theory lends itself to discussions of relational ontology and epistemology. Theory is situated in contexts. Feminist academics have address these issues extensively. See Thayer-Bacon for some consideration of this point. Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, *Philosophy Applied to Education : Nurturing a Democratic Community in the Classroom*.

<sup>162</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 24.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

about them.”<sup>164</sup> He is said to have had an unusual relationship with animals, even understanding their speech.<sup>165</sup> In another instance, the prophet consented to bless an innkeeper, but had inadvertently forgotten his daughter. Begged to bless the daughter also, the prophet responded somewhat irritably, “I didn't know you had a daughter... Why is she not here? Let her come out at once.” The little girl came out, cured of an eleven year illness. Realizing the effect of this later, that an unending stream of sick and crippled people would be flocking to him for healing, the prophet thought of the consequences of this miracle as terrible. He did not grasp at elevation in the community regarding even this miracle. Educators taking on a similarly humble role would draw to themselves a community of other teachers and students who would also quell the flames of ambition and competition.

### **Not about Duty**

There is a compulsion among educators, set ablaze by popular ideas about “*duty*”, which might be set aright by taking on the role of the prophet. It might also settle issues about the importance of being earnest.<sup>166</sup> Seriousness in intention does not mitigate the disastrous effects of being governed by intention itself in a relational context, or so it seems. “It takes a long time before a man [or woman] gets to understand what his duty is. It is the duties which prevent him from doing so.”<sup>167</sup> What this implies is that *relationships* are the things that should concern us. But we should not be confused by any sense of duty and rather focus on relationships

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>166</sup> A pun on the play, Oscar Wilde's “The Importance of Being Ernest”, which incidently involves the deceit of two men whose goal is to deceive a girl and so win her over.

<sup>167</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 85.

themselves. This leads to the consideration of other qualities regarding communities like the prophet's, chief among which are generosity, love, compassion, the willingness to embrace opposition, tolerance and encouragement.

### **Generosity**

Focusing on relationships leads to *generosity*. The prophet habitually gave away any money he had left over nightly to the poor.<sup>168</sup> That is a degree of generosity that is hard to achieve, so it must be that it arises spontaneously in communities like the prophet's. In caring communities which are not compulsory, in which both teachers and students are humble and supportive, this kind of surprising behavior should be "expected", as it were.<sup>169</sup> Our own educational communities would be more supportive and generous in relation to our members, taking this seriously.

### **Embrace of the Oppositional**

A relational focus also lends itself to a loving approach to others, even to others who are *oppositional*. It is antithetical to an "us-them" approach to relationships, what Buber would elsewhere call an "I-it" relationship.<sup>170</sup> Love which embraces the oppositional transgresses borders, to borrow bell hooks' own language earlier cited. Buber addresses this kind of embraced of the oppositional here:

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>169</sup> Ironically, "expecting" to be surprised may in itself appear to undo whatever surprise one gets. Or at least that may be what the seeming rhetorical effect appears to be. On the contrary, "expecting surprise" is not a performance contradiction. It is the unplanned embrace of what has not been planned.

<sup>170</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou, Tr* (Edinburgh, 1937).

be they Philistines or servants of Abraham, hasidim of Satan or true hasidim, how far shall we carry the distinction? Are only the latter to be redeemed and not the former, too? When we say, 'Redemption of the World', do we mean only the redemption of the good? Does not redemption primarily mean the redeeming of the evil from the evil ones that make them so? If the world is to be forevermore divided between God and Satan, how dare we say that it is God's world? ...Are we to establish a little realm of the righteous and leave the rest to the Lord? Is it for this that He gave us a mouth which can convey the truth of our heart to an alien heart and a hand which can communicate to the hand of our recalcitrant brother something of the warmth of our very blood? Is it for this that He has made us capable of loving the sons of Satan? All our teaching is false, too, if we refuse to test it by them. Right, we are to fight them for the sake of God, we are to fight inexorably. But we are to fight in order to conquer the citadel for him, the seven times walled citadel of their soul, and not to engage in a general massacre for the honor of God! And how dare we battle against them, if we do not at the same time battle against ourselves? Are not stubbornness and callousness and sloth and malice to be found among us and not only among them? If we were to forget that, if we were to take the contradiction and, instead of annihilating it, let it cleave to the very depth of the primordial, would we not in the very midst of our combat against Satan have become his followers?<sup>171</sup>

This perspective works against competition and supports cooperation. It represents a willingness to embrace opposition, not to smother it. The Prophet himself even embraced the Seer, his bitter rival at times. Speaking of the Seer, the Prophet made his loyalty clear.

Heaven has bestowed great power upon the Rabbi, and he has tirelessly devoted this power to the redemption of the world. Even those who oppose him must revere him. We are all his disciples. Pshysha strives after another aim than Lublin, but without Lublin it would be unthinkable. Insofar as I am anything at all, I have become it through him. He who speaks against him, speaks against me.<sup>172</sup>

The Prophet's approach does not dissolve differences, but affirms and embraces them. In communities taking on this narrative, aggression is transformed

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<sup>171</sup> *For the Sake of Heaven*, 121.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 282-83.

into a positive energy. As the Prophet put it, “we are to fight in order to conquer the citadel for him, the seven times walled citadel of [his] soul”. This is not to say that communities like the Prophet’s escape opposition, but rather that they tend to embrace it. Our own educational communities would do well taking this on board, seeing our struggles as efforts to free community members. The motivating factor here is compassion, but this does not mean that there is no struggle. The educational community is vast and various. We will not all speak with the same voice. But we are able to give a space to every voice. To not do so would be “unthinkable”. Doing this would require much creativity. But first and foremost we must *turn* to one another. We must avoid easy characterizations of members of our communities as *evil*. As the Prophet puts it,

A man will do evil when the evil impulse overwhelms him. But that does not yet make the man evil. None intends evil. Either he slides into evil, he knows not how, or else he holds evil to be good. YOU ARE TO LOVE THIS HUMAN BEING WHO DOES EVIL.<sup>173</sup>

In our own educational communities, the voices we hear will sometimes seem strange and ill-advised. We may notice that some members of the community have turned away from others, entering into objectifying relationships which threaten to harm other members of our communities. But even these members must be treated in loving ways. The prophet puts it succinctly:

Lovingly you are to help [the one who does evil] escape this whirl into which the evil impulse has plunged him; lovingly you must help him recognize what is above and what is below. Otherwise than lovingly you will accomplish nothing. He will show you the door and he will be right to do so. If you call him evil and hate him and condemn him therefore, you will make him evil even when you desire to help him, indeed, especially in that case. You will make him evil, for you will

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 56.

cause him to cut himself off. The man who does evil does not become evil himself until he is imprisoned in the world of his actions, until he lets himself be imprisoned by it.<sup>174</sup>

Taking this kind of narrative on board, our own educational communities might learn to avoid some common kinds of objectifying relationships. We would not position students in opposition to other students by treating them as means to some end, particularly by focusing on intentions. Rather than focus on intentions, we would concern ourselves with building right relationships in our educational communities and out of these expect surprising developments, ones that we could celebrate. We would not subject students to an endless stream of goals and objectives constructed without reference to individual interests and abilities, outcomes constructed to pit the members of the community in hopeless, binary opposition, the “losers” and the “winners”, those who “achieve” and those who “fail”. We would rather aim for what is essentially the individual success of every member in terms that are appropriate to each member. Failure would not be an option. It simply wouldn’t be “thinkable”.

### **Encouragement**

In educational communities like the prophet’s, *encouragement* is possible even in extreme cases. Facing his own personal, physical death, one of the rabbis in the Seer’s community was told by the Seer that he should get ready to die, but the prophet spoke to him encouragingly, in spite of the bad report about his coming demise. The result was that the man lived. We can take this on in our communities, speaking life to situations, rather than simply reiterating what is only obvious by

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

casual observation. Here Foucault's political problem represented by "the gaze" is overcome.<sup>175</sup> Scrutiny does not stand in this case since intention (our intention relative others) is not the focus. In the absence of objectification, the members of our communities won't have to be made aware that they are objects being scrutinized.

### Conclusion

The possibilities I have discussed here lead back to questions about the merits of the discussion. Is it really possible to build educational communities like the prophet's? This question seems to turn on the pivotal assumption in Buber's novel, the ontological orientation vis-à-vis *turning, teshuvah*. Turning orients the prophet. It sets the essential themes in motion. *Turning* orients the community so as to make it attentive, caring, joyful, lighthearted, open to the surprising and miraculous, ready for the unintended, zealous, and embracing powerlessness, not focused on intention. The Prophet addresses this idea of turning, referring to the repentance of Joseph's brethren in the Biblical narrative. We can interpret this as a call to repentance in our educational communities. Here we may be depicted as needing to confess that we bear guilt in connection with the problems that we reify in our communities. As the prophet puts it, can the educational community say, "We are true men? If so, it would be untrue."<sup>176</sup> The prophet develops this further:

[The prophet] once asked Rabbi David: 'What can man do to cause the world to be redeemed?' And his answer was : 'Look, as long as the brothers of Joseph said to him: We are true men, he thrust them from

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<sup>175</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison*, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

<sup>176</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 57.

him in anger. But when they confessed: 'Yes, we are verily guilty concerning our brother, he had compassion upon them.' This didn't content the [prophet]. He said, "Yes, so it is. But that is not the whole. There still remains a mystery."<sup>177</sup>

It would appear that we must begin with repentance if we are to take on the Prophet's assumptions and ways of building community. This will have to involve our turning to one another, since that is what is essential in repentance. But there are questions that remain. There is yet a mystery, as the prophet puts it. And there are voices unlike the prophet's, critical voices which must be given a hearing. This is my goal in the next chapter, to bring in the voices that are critical of the prophet's approach to building educational communities. Buber anticipates these voices in his novel. I hope to access the criticism that he anticipated, drawing on conversations in the novel among members of other communities antagonistic to the prophet's community in Pshycha, particularly critical of the prophet himself. With these in mind, I will make spaces for the perspectives of other scholars critical of Buber's ideas in For the Sake of Heaven.

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER IV Doubts

### Introduction

I have come to the point in the dissertation at which I want to consider any criticism of Buber's work in For the Sake of Heaven. Before I proceed, I want to lay out the kinds of criticism of which I am aware. Since Buber's work beyond this text is quite extensive, I will not be able to consider every possible criticism of his philosophy. Only that which bears directly on this text will be addressed.

The first kind of criticism of the novel is historic. It questions the accuracy of the historical representation upon which Buber builds his work.

Second, there is the type of criticism which strikes at the work at a very deep level. This kind of critical approach involves deep level narrative criticism of the type that questions ontological assumptions.

A third type of criticism of the work, perhaps as powerful, involves criticism of the kind of community Buber seems to be espousing in the novel. Essentially, this kind of criticism questions whether educational communities should be imagined with more "rigor", with an eye towards effectiveness relative the attainment of stated goals, i.e., relative stated curriculum. It is essentially an attack of relational ways of being and knowing, against relational ontology and epistemology.

The fourth type of criticism involves a number of logically fallacious attacks, such as *ad hominem*. I include them to consider the nature of criticism in a larger context. Not every kind of criticism is legitimate.

Essentially then, there seem to be four kinds of complaints about the novel, only three of which deserve much attention, first that it misrepresents historical

characters and events, second that it is ontologically flawed, third that the ways of knowing Buber is espousing are false. The final category involving logical fallacy will be addressed since it is considered importantly in Buber's novel.

### **Historical Criticism**

Let me move first to the criticism involving the historical reliability of Buber's text. This criticism came early on the heels of the novel's publication, from a colleague of Buber's. It questions the accuracy of the representation of historical characters in the novel, particularly of the Hasidic rabbis represented.

Gershom Scholem accuses Buber of selecting aspects of Hasidism to confirm his own philosophical leaning, existentialism. Scholem argues that the "emphasis on particulars and the concrete that Buber so admired does not exist in Hasidism and that Buber's erroneous impressions derive from his attention to oral material and personalities at the expense of theoretical texts."<sup>178</sup> Essentially, Scholem criticizes Buber for relying on Hasidic tales at the expense of Hasidic doctrine.<sup>179</sup> Buber's response to this was that he would not be interested in Hasidism were Scholem's criticisms correct.<sup>180</sup> As for Buber's apparent preference for narrative material over legal material, this will be discussed shortly.

A similarly interesting criticism comes concerning the historical character represented by Buber as the Prophet in For the Sake of Heaven. Alan Brill says that Buber portrayed Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak ben Asher of Pryzsucha (1766-1814),

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<sup>178</sup> Sarah Scott, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Martin, TN: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy Pub.).

<sup>179</sup> Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 34-36.

<sup>180</sup> Dan Avnôn, *Martin Buber : The Hidden Dialogue* (Lanham [u.a.]: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

originator of Polish Hasidism, as opposed to rabbinic tradition. He observes that the Rabbi was the successor of Rabbi David Tevel Schiff, a great Talmudist and that the Rabbi was known as the leader of the exile, implying his position as a legal scholar.<sup>181</sup> Another Jewish scholar suggests that Buber patterned Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak ben Asher (the prophet in the novel) after the New Testament character, Jesus.<sup>182</sup> Buber's response to this was that any resemblance to Jesus was owed to the fact that the character in the novel as he was portrayed actually shared some traits with the founder of Christianity.<sup>183</sup>

Buber was interested in certain aspects of Hasidism more than in others, to be sure, but his interest was developed in more than forty years of research during which time he collected Hasidic tales. He paid attention to Hasidic tales and in them gleaned evidence of the lives of various Hasidic communities.<sup>184</sup> To dismiss his interpretations because they pay less attention to legal, scholarly material than to other kinds of narratives seems an unnecessary reaction. Furthermore, this criticism seems disingenuous, not actually paying attention to Buber's text. There is no indication in the novel that the Prophet is treated as an antinomian, antagonistic to legal texts. He is portrayed as attentive to the law of Judaism, but rather more aware of its being situated relationally, in communities. Appealing to more relational ways of being and knowing, he is depicted as respectful of traditional

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<sup>181</sup> Alan Brill, *Thinking God : The Mysticism of Rabbi Zadok of Lublin* (New York Jersey City, N.J.: The Michael Scharf Publication Trust of the Yeshiva University Press ; Distributed by Ktav Publishing House, 2002), 274.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. Baruch Kurzweil criticized Buber's depiction of Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak as Jesus in Ha-Aretz, an Israeli newspaper.

<sup>183</sup> Martin Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven* (New York,: Meridian Books, 1958). Buber's defense is in the introduction of this edition.

<sup>184</sup> *Tales of the Hasidim* (New York: Schocken Books : Distributed by Pantheon Books, 1991).

Jewish texts but opposed to the manipulation of educational communities using them.

These kinds of critiques open up the topic of historical criticism. In what sense should authors of historical fiction be held accountable regarding the characters and events they portray? Is there some limit regarding the interweaving of historical fact and historical fiction represented in these kinds of works? In what sense could or should an author be held accountable for twisting or ignoring the facts of history, resulting in distortion which should undermine his or her credibility? Questions like this are addressed by Carla Visser as follows:

Whereas the historian's role is, first and foremost, to explain the past, to make it understandable in terms of today's norms and values, fiction can create meaningful "realities" that people may never perceive otherwise, and even bring about changes in our conventional attitudes toward the world. The historical fiction of Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* and George Bowering's *Burning Water* not only brings the past to life, but it succeeds in changing our interpretation of it. By telling an "other side" of Canadian history, one that has not found its way into the accepted world view of White historiography, Wiebe achieves more or less the same effect as does Bowering by parodying the conventions of historical and realist fiction. Both provoke the reader's awareness of the omnipresence of historical and cultural conditions and of the need to look beyond the conventionalized perceptions of reality, beyond, that is, the apparent objectivity, representativity, and unchangeability of stories.<sup>185</sup>

Hayden White, author of Metahistory<sup>186</sup>, also points to these concerns in an essay published in 1980, in which he reminds us that the use of narrative is a way to

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<sup>185</sup> C. Visser, "Historicity in Historical Fiction + Bowering and Wiebe - 'Burning Water' and the 'Temptations of Big Bear'," *Studies in Canadian Literature-Etudes En Litterature Canadienne* 12, no. 1 (1987).

<sup>186</sup> Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore,: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

meaning that the mere reporting of history cannot convey.<sup>187</sup> He pointed to possible alternative approaches to telling stories involving historical characters and events. On the one hand is a “discourse that openly adopts a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it”. On the other is the “discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story.”<sup>188</sup> White, contemporary of Derrida and Foucault, suggested that historical narrative “imposes a mythic structure on the events it purports to describe” rather than “revealing the true essence of past reality.”<sup>189</sup> But White did not claim to be a poststructuralist, “denying the reality of evidence and historical facts.”<sup>190</sup> I point to him to engage questions concerning history and the ways that it can be communicated in narratives like Buber’s novel.

Historical fiction, in any case, becomes an opportunity to *play* with what are presented as the facts of history, to point to truths which otherwise remain invisible. It is a postmodern way of questioning objectivity and the representation of facts from hegemonic perspectives.

The question regarding historicity is not a small one. Consequently, there is not space to address it adequately here. I intend to come back to this issue in chapter five in the recommendations section. That said, while problems associated with revisionist history deserve attention, my goal here is to consider Buber’s text philosophically. The depiction of characters and events in the novel are not presented by Buber as factual, only loosely based on known history, although it has

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<sup>187</sup> H. White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980).

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>189</sup> Hayden V. White, *The Content of the Form : Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 113.

<sup>190</sup> E. Domanska, H. Kellner, and H. White, "Metahistory Is Passe, an Interview with White, Hayden," *Diacritics-a Review of Contemporary Criticism* 24, no. 1 (1994).

been demonstrated that Buber used the texts of Hasidism in the way that they were used by Hasidic rabbis, in the style of the Jewish Midrash<sup>191</sup>, incorporating elements in a larger narrative to teach a truth.<sup>192</sup> For the Sake of Heaven is not a historical text. And it can be argued that Buber does not seem to have had the goal of deliberately twisting the texts so that known historical characters are maligned or used for nefarious propaganda purposes. There is no holocaust denial here; nor is there anti-Semitism. Those are the kinds of concerns that become red flags in this question regarding the historicity of historical fiction.<sup>193</sup>

### **Ontological Criticism**

There is another kind of criticism of Buber's novel, one that involves deep narrative attacks of the material. Ontology lies deep in any philosophy since it involves assumptions. This is why a critique of the ontological assumptions in Buber's novel becomes so important and potentially so effective. Once the ontological foundation is troubled, the whole philosophical structure might be put in jeopardy.

### **Other Narratives**

One type of this kind of criticism involves the telling of other narratives which counter the narrative in consideration. Buber points to this kind of criticism

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<sup>191</sup> Midrash is a way of telling stories that involve the teller's incorporation of lessons that were appropriate in the given context. It is telling a story with a purpose in mind. We do this all the time when we impose on stories a beginning, a middle and an end. These do not occur *naturally*, as it were.

<sup>192</sup> Ran HaCohen, "The Hay Wagon Moves to the West: On Martin Buber's Adaptation of Hassidic Legends," *Modern Judaism* 28, no. 1 (2008).

<sup>193</sup> I. Wollaston, "Beyond Theodicy: Jewish and Christian Continental Thinkers Respond to the Holocaust," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 55, no. 2 (2004).

in his novel in several places. One example involves the Seer's assertion that God uses evil to accomplish his purposes. This kind of narrative is meant to challenge the prophet's perspective, that whereas God may indeed "use evil", humans should not. This is a direct challenge to the Seer's assumption that the Hasidic community should be involving itself in the elevation of Napoleon Bonaparte, in an effort to manipulate the coming of the Messiah. Buber puts it succinctly:

God may, Rabbi. God can use all things, seeing that nothing can prevail against Him. But the good...I do not mean God's good...I mean the good that exists on earth, mortal good - if it seeks to make use of evil, it drowns in that evil; unnoticeably and without noticing it itself, it is dissolved in the evil and exists no longer.<sup>194</sup>

In another place, the Seer asserts that God will make the work of the Hasidic community effective in relation to Napoleon's success by using the story of Jacob's wrestling with the angel.

Jacob endured wrestling with the angel and was thus prepared against Esau's weapons. He whose hip the Divine Hand has dislocated trembles no more before the power of the lords of the earth's peoples. Sabbath rejoicing means we endure His dreadfulness by virtue of our love. Lame but inviolable do we issue forth from His hands.<sup>195</sup>

The Seer chooses the narrative to challenge the Prophet's lack of interest in manipulating the wars of Napoleon. However, the ontological truth that the Prophet understands is that people are not saved from the wars of Gog and Magog by treating people as objects. These wars are God's concern and the Prophet understands that they are not to be manipulated. He understands that people should not imagine they will be protected from harm that comes through manipulation. The prophet understands that those who are manipulating others

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<sup>194</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 58.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

should not imagine that they are thereby made inviolate, protected as if by magic from any damage as a result of their manipulation. Manipulation in communities is always damaging, since it is objectifying.

### **Levinas' Ontological Criticism**

There is another criticism of Buber's ontology found in the works of Emmanuel Levinas. Buber's idea of God is critiqued by the postmodernist Levinas, yet not to dismiss the idea but only to argue for an ontological shift. Buber argues that God is not a wholly transcendent other, but rather closer to each person than his or her own self.<sup>196</sup> For Buber, God cannot be known apart from His relation to humans. Buber interprets religious texts like the Bible as the history of God's relation to man from the perspective of man. The Bible is essentially the record of a conversation for Buber, the conversation between God and people. God does not change through the texts for Buber. It is the *theophany*, the human experience of God, that changes. Buber calls this approach *tradition criticism*, emphasizing experiential truth and concerning itself with historical themes, in contrast to *source criticism*, concerned with verifying textual accuracy.<sup>197</sup>

Levinas argues that God in Buber's I-Thou relation is made lower than He is.<sup>198</sup> He believes that a symmetric I-Thou relation is not possible,<sup>199</sup> that it reifies

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<sup>196</sup> *Between Man and Man*.

<sup>197</sup> Friedman, *Martin Buber's Life and Work*.

<sup>198</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1998).

<sup>199</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being : Or, Beyond Essence*, Martinus Nijhoff Philosophy Texts (Hague ; BostonHingham, MA: M. Nijhoff ; Distributors for the U.S. and Canada, Kluwer Boston, 1981).

sameness and pays no attention to *difference*.<sup>200</sup> But this is contested among some scholars who suggest that Buber is not espousing an objectification of the other which diminishes it, but is merely proposing an openness to the other, to whatever the other is or wishes to be.<sup>201</sup>

Levinas' concern that relations must be asymmetric seems out of place, furthermore, given a careful read of Buber's novel. It does not seem to be Buber's intention to reduce the characters in his novel to sameness. The description of the educational community under the direction of the Prophet involves the deliberate acknowledgement of the Prophet's extraordinary abilities and stature in his community. It also involves the characterization of the Prophet's community as imperfect, involving objectification, but not situated on it philosophically.

Descriptions of the Prophet's educational community point to the Prophet's interest and ability to open himself up to the possibilities of others, whatever they might be. He is depicted as not interested in controlling the situations surrounding these encounters.

What Buber refers to elsewhere as "true meetings" are encounters between an individual and an other, without reference to *intention*. The problem of objectifying the other as "the same" is actually made to be a non-issue, since objectification is not the intent at all. It does not enter into the discussion of the encounter in any way. Rather, objectification (as from one height to another) is *the problem* that is overcome in Buber's account of things.

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Andrew Kelly, "Reciprocity and the Height of God: A Defence of Buber against Levinas," *Sophia* 34, no. 1 (1995).

Overcoming this problem is what *turning* implies. One might *turn* to God as easily as one might *turn* to a person. To neither encounter would one bring knowledge that objectifies the other.

So then the problem with Levinas' criticism is that the encounter he imagines between an individual and an other is already asymmetric because it involves objectification of the other even before the encounter takes place. That is, *the other* for Levinas is conceived of in terms of difference. Masquerading as ethical concern for the other, made possible by the knowledge of the other as *different* (for Levinas), the Levinasian relation is actually an objectification of the other and the process is not unlike the approach to any *thing* that can be so *imagined*.

The Levinasian ontological position here is that the relation to others is always objective, lending itself as well to objectivist epistemology. Things that are taught would appear to be for Levinas things that are objectively derived from a source that may be determined in terms of difference.

Levinas' position relative to Buber seems to ignore what Buber espouses in his idea of *turning*. The act of turning is not an objective thing; it is not conceived as something intentional, to do or be something, or to be an object of an action or of another person or thing. That is, in turning one does not position oneself to do or be anything in particular, in relation to the other to which one turns. This is what makes turning *relational* and not objectifying. Whether the one to whom one turns is infinitely or only finitely above or below one makes no difference, since this observation is not available to the one who is turning. Turning to God is in this context just like turning to any other person or thing. And this speaks *nothing* about

the actual height of God in relation to man, or of the *difference* to which Levinas is trying to point. Difference, it seems, is observable only when people are *objectified*.

### **Epistemological Criticism**

There is another kind of complaint concerning Buber's ideas in For the Sake of Heaven. This involves concern regarding epistemology, the assumptions that are made regarding the nature of knowledge. These are questions about the ways that people come to knowledge. In what ways do people arrive at knowledge? The overwhelmingly common assumption is that truth is determined by objective analysis. This is objectivism. It manifests itself in schools in the form of ideas about curriculum, concerns about what specific things must be taught, learned and performed in educational communities.

The literature on stated curriculum is ubiquitous. There seems to be a never-ending stream of commentary on the question of stated, intentional curriculum, without the slightest bit of attention given to the question as to its necessity or validity. That it is necessary and valid is generally assumed. Stated curriculum seems to be the holy grail of educational praxis. We do want to be in control! Is stated curriculum necessary, fundamentally? I will consider some philosophers and educators who think it is essential, and then balance these views with some who do not.

In general, complaints about Buber's conceptions of educational communities arise out of an objectivist epistemology, that knowledge is acquired deliberately, indirectly or directly, by observation of the environment. Knowledge is situated as something to be held at arm's length as it were, to be possessed as an

object. Freud's statement regarding knowledge about things that are real is illustrative. He averred that the only things that were real could be touched, tasted, seen, smelled or heard, and that it was an illusion to assume anything to the contrary.<sup>202</sup> This is the reductionist assumption of a materialist, not derived logically but only asserted and impossible to prove. Its implication, since knowledge is situated as objective and all things are considered in material terms, is that the entirety of knowledge can be described, listed and learned.

The objectification of knowledge leads to the development of stated curriculum and to the expenditure of vast amounts of energy in the development and adoption of stated curriculum. Whole departments of education are given over to the task of considering and developing stated curriculum, lists which detail everything that is supposed to be learned and taught in schools. Stated curriculum is considered to lie at the core of education and instruction is widely considered in terms of stated curriculum. There appears to be little worse in most educational communities than a teacher who is not teaching the stated curriculum or a student who is not busy paying attention to it, doing the things it says must be done. The expected *disposition* of both teacher and student is to be ever ready to explore the curriculum, that every activity and thought be given to the attainment of stated objectives. The broad ranging and specific levels of stated curriculum may include the following:<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, The International Psycho-Analytical Library (New York: H. Liveright, 1928).

<sup>203</sup> Jan Akker, "Curriculum Perspectives: An Introduction," in *Curriculum Landscapes and Trends* (Springer Netherlands, 2003).

- System/society/nation/state (or macro) level
- School/institution (or meso) level
- Individual/personal (or nano) level

Curriculum is conceived of in the same text as “a long and cyclic process with many stakeholders and participants; in which motives and needs for changing the curriculum are formulated; ideas are specified in programs and materials; and efforts are made to realize the intended changes in practice.”<sup>204</sup>

Curriculum is conceived as spelling out the details, generally and specifically of what is supposed to be going on in educational communities, including both the learning and the teaching, as to content as well as to method. Curriculum involves “all [the] planned learning outcomes for which [a] school is responsible...[It] refers to the desired consequences of instruction.”<sup>205</sup> It is said to involve “all the learning which is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, inside or outside the school.”<sup>206</sup> John Dewey said that curriculum was “a continuous reconstruction, moving from the child’s present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies...the various studies...are themselves experience.”<sup>207</sup> Robert Gagne said that curriculum is a “sequence of content units arranged in such a way that the learning of each unit may be accomplished as a single act, provided the capabilities described by specified prior units (in the sequence) have already been mastered by the learner.”<sup>208</sup> D. F.

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> W. James Popham and Eva L. Baker, *Systematic Instruction* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.,: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 48.

<sup>206</sup> John Fairhurst Kerr and University of Leicester., *The Problem of Curriculum Reform: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered in the University of Leicester 12th January, 1967* (Leicester,: University P., 1967).

<sup>207</sup> John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago,: University of Chicago Press, 1902), 11-12.

<sup>208</sup> Ralph W. Tyler, Robert M. Gagné, and Michael Scriven, *Perspectives of Curriculum Evaluation*, Rand McNally Education Series (Chicago,: Rand McNally, 1967).

Brown said that curriculum included “all student school experiences relating to the improvement of skills and strategies in thinking critically and creatively, solving problems, working collaboratively with others, communicating well, writing more effectively, reading more analytically, and conducting research to solve problems.”<sup>209</sup>

What is inherent in stated curriculum is the element of control. In every definition considered here, curriculum is objectified, even when it is made to include processes and anticipated change, for the processes themselves are planned and are made to transfer to known tasks and to fit with known expectations. As well, the conception of change in curriculum theory explored in the definitions above involves the objectified adjudication of curriculum as appropriate, contextually responsive or culturally relevant. While the intention for change seems laudable, the structure is still objectivist. Change is had by objectifying knowledge and related products and processes. Conceptions of curriculum seem to be thoroughly objectified, cast in stone, if continuously morphed by an objective process. The implementation of curriculum may be judged by observation, by the assessment of tasks relative to stated objectives. Given the assumption that what is important in curriculum can be planned and assessed, the stage is set to negatively critique the Prophet’s educational community in For the Sake of Heaven.

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<sup>209</sup> D. F. Brown, "Urban Teachers' Use of Culturally Responsive Management Strategies," *Theory into Practice* 42, no. 4 (2003).

## Barth's Epistemological Criticism

There is another objectivist criticism of Buber's work that comes from a contemporary of Buber, the German theologian, Karl Barth. In his Church Dogmatics, Barth critiques Buber's anthropology, his doctrine of humanity. He actually puts his criticism of Buber with his criticism of Confucian and atheist anthropologies, interpreting them as what might be called "natural theology."<sup>210</sup> Whereas Barth defines a human being in terms of his or her belief system, Buber defines humanity in terms of the encounters that occur among people. What this means for Barth is that if we are to understand the idea of humanity, we have to conceive of people first as believers. And we have to understand that right beliefs are the ground of faith. He says that faith "is what takes place in real knowledge of the Word of God and makes this knowledge possible."<sup>211</sup> Barth says that the Word of God can be "the object of acknowledgement and therefore the ground of real faith" and that people need to be fixed in the faith that is situated in the knowledge of the Word of God.<sup>212</sup> This involves the objectification of the scripture of which Barth speaks as well as the objectification of faith itself.

What Barth's criticism seems actually to involve is an attack of Buber's epistemology. For Barth, faith and scripture are objects to be grasped. Seen in this way, this Barthian criticism is another way that Buber's idea that knowledge is discoverable in relationships is critiqued.

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<sup>210</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 5 vols. (Edinburgh,: T. & T. Clark, 1936).

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. 1, Part 1.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

Buber does not objectify the Bible or faith. He chooses rather to situate faith in an experience with others and ultimately with God. The scripture for Buber is a record of a conversation between God and human beings.<sup>213</sup> To get in on this conversation, one needs to *respond* to others, to *turn* to others and by this turn to God. This view of scripture is contrary to Barth's view of scripture as the fixed object of faith. It is also contrary to Barth's view of faith itself. For Buber, faith is something that happens *between* people who *turn* to one another and by this turning, turn to God. Scripture as well as faith are interpreted relationally in this way.<sup>214</sup> What this means in Buber's novel is that relationships in Buber's educational community are focused upon and not the actual teachings or the dialectic positions taken by members of the community. Dialectic is supplanted by dialogic as the focus of the Prophet's educational community in the novel. While ideas are important, they do not situate the community. Rather, the community situates ideas. Ideas are therefore understood *after the fact* of relating with others.

### **Epistemological Criticism from Buber's Text**

Criticism of Buber's epistemology takes the form in his own novel of complaints against the Prophet's community's approach to teaching and learning. These complaints come from groups outside this community, as well as from other Hasidic groups. I include this criticism here to demonstrate Buber's anticipation of this kind of critique and to situate criticism of Buber's ideas more broadly. Buber does anticipate criticism of the Prophet's educational community. Some of the types

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<sup>213</sup> Martin Glatzer Nahum N. Buber, *On the Bible : Eighteen Studies* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), xvi.

<sup>214</sup> Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 223-24.

of complaints against Buber, taken from his own text, appear in the list below. They are here in column form with commentary following to assist the reader. The eight complaints listed below form the kernel of what is an attempt to disparage the prophet's lack of interest in what is essentially stated curriculum. These could be considered complaints against Buber's epistemology since they are meant to call into question his approach to the ways that knowledge is acquired.

1. The prophet's educational community is not focused on intention.
2. His educational community ignores stated curriculum.
3. He was ineffective.
4. It is not realistic.
5. It undermines others and their ways.

#### ***Not Focused on Intention***

The prophet was accustomed to sending his students on missions without any objective. Along the way, they would make unexpected discoveries, learning things in encounters with people along the way. The Seer, on the other hand, focuses on intention, *intending* to "risk the decisive attempt" to use his community to manipulate Napoleon Bonaparte.<sup>215</sup> This in itself is a criticism of the way that the prophet leads his disciples. Buber's focus was on building right relationships, without reference to *intention*. This is due to his ontological assumption that *turning* to an other person would predispose a person to learning/experiencing something that belongs only to that turning. In fact, such a turning would mean that a person would not be able to carry to the encounter any objective knowledge about the encounter. This means that the encounter is envisioned as totally open and not

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<sup>215</sup> *For the Sake of Heaven*, 293.

an objective process at all. This is the precursor to relational epistemology as it is described in feminist scholarship, that there are ways of knowing that belong to relationships among people.<sup>216</sup>

### ***Ignores Curriculum***

A similar criticism anticipated by Buber in the novel is that the Prophet wasted his community's time on things that were not planned, that he was therefore unable to do the things the larger community expected. This is essentially a complaint that the Prophet did not stick to the curriculum. An example is that the Prophet was uninterested in pursuing the supposedly higher, spiritual aims of the parent community of Lublin under the direction of the Seer. The Seer offered his students "knowledge that went beyond the merely human", wanting to engage them in a spiritual struggle on behalf of Napoleon.<sup>217</sup> Other areas (of *curriculum*) neglected by the Prophet include daily communal prayers (preferring to pray alone)<sup>218</sup>, sitting at table in the prescribed way (not at the head)<sup>219</sup> and participating in exegetical discussions rather than inviting others to *turn* to God.<sup>220</sup>

### ***Ineffective***

The lack of focus on intention and the failure to carry out things as prescribed leads to the charge of *ineffectiveness*. But the appearance of ineffectiveness here is only apparent. Given the assumption that the Prophet should be directing the community into planned, intentional activities, the charge of

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<sup>216</sup> Barbara J. Thayer-Bacon, *Relational "(E)Pistemologies"*, Counterpoints (New York: P. Lang, 2003).

<sup>217</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 139.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

ineffectiveness sticks, but the assumption may be considered to be in error. That is the whole point of the Prophet's unique approach to the activities of the members of his educational community; they focus on the unintentional, on the surprising, and not on the planned.

### ***Unrealistic***

A focus on the unintentional of course will have the appearance of not being *realistic*, since expectations don't appear to match any plans relating to observed behaviors or to *real* things in the environment. This is related to the charge that the Prophet's way is a pretense, only appearing to do anything valuable yet not really. It doesn't appear to espouse any kinds of expectations which mean that the members of the community should be able to do certain things or would learn specific things, thus apparently satisfying stated objectives.

### ***Undermines Others***

Related to these complaints about the Prophet's community in Buber's novel is the charge that the Prophet's way of teaching and learning would *undermine* other people and the ways in which they contribute to educational communities. If a person like the Prophet is allowed to lead his disciples without reference to stated objectives in an established, objective curriculum, this would have a deleterious effect on other educational communities, or so it would seem. These kinds of complaints, as they are made to appear in the novel, represent the ways that Buber

anticipates criticism of the kind of educational community he is espousing in the novel.<sup>221</sup>

### **Informally Fallacious Criticism**

There is a fourth kind of criticism, anticipated by Buber in the novel itself. I consider it here to open up a conversation about the nature of criticism itself. This criticism involves what are essentially logical fallacies, attempts to critique Buber's representation in the novel as immoral. The Prophet's educational community is variously characterized as bad for children, deceitful, disrespectful of things and melancholic.

#### **Bad for Children**

The complaint concerning the Prophet's way of teaching and learning being *bad for children* is reminiscent of similar charges being made against Socrates, though in that case, implications of corruption had a somewhat different import.<sup>222</sup> Nevertheless, charges that a philosophical approach to education does not support and even hinders children have a power of their own, not unlike the power that charges of actual physical abuse might carry. Education must in every sense serve students. Charging that it may not be serving students and moreover that it may be actually harming them is grave indeed.

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<sup>221</sup> The lack of any consistent, ongoing defense by the prophet against criticism in the novel speaks to his relational way. A defense is not always necessary in relational contexts. He does not seem to return kind for kind. He is depicted in general just going about the business of relating with people in his community with advice given to his disciples that counters the manipulating ways of the Seer and his disciples. One example of this is the prophet's contention that he was uninterested in taking anyone's place, which I discuss below. However, he does not seem to engage in argument with his accusers. I will address this further in chapter five.

<sup>222</sup> Patricia Fagan and John Edward Russon, *Reexamining Socrates in the Apology*, Topics in Historical Philosophy (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 121.

There is no evidence to believe that the Prophet's behavior or omission to do something in the novel actually harmed anyone. There is just the hint from the Seer, a subtle attack of the Prophet and his approach to education in which the Seer references Elijah, the Biblical prophet, who is said to be coming "before the great and dreadful day of the Lord in order to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the sons and of the sons back to the fathers."<sup>223</sup> The Seer is wresting scripture, objectifying it, as it were, to defend his own objectivist approach to education. That is, the highly esteemed prophet of the Hebrew Bible, Elijah, is situated as having an *agenda* at his appearance, that is, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the sons and vice versa. And yet the whole point of the prophet's approach to education is that the only way to do this is to approach education *relationally*, and not with an eye toward intention. It would seem, ironically, that *intending* to turn people to one another is *the way* to turn them inward or upon things or one another as objects. The Seer's subtle attack, made so much more effective by the use of text that is considered sacred, is actually manipulative, in content and in the use of it. Hearts will never be turned when they feel the weight of implacable intention bearing down upon them. Whatever would transpire from that would not be a turning. The charge against the Prophet as manipulative is a gross distortion. The kind of approach to others he espouses is anything but manipulative. And it is curious that this charge comes from the mouths of the Seer and his disciples who seek to manipulate the outcome of the Napoleonic Wars!

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<sup>223</sup> Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven*, 49.

## **Deceptive**

The Prophet was accused by a student of the Seer as an *arrogant deceiver*, pretending that he was the Seer himself.<sup>224</sup> “Where there is a great light”, said Rabbi Jehuda, disciple of the Seer, “the powers of darkness gather round about, seeking to devour it. But how can they approach it in their own dark guise? They must themselves put on a garment of light. And light is pleasing in the eyes of the light.”<sup>225</sup> This was a direct attack on the Prophet. The Prophet himself denied trying to usurp anyone’s authority. In fact, his whole intention was to point to the ways that *intention* might not be made the focus of his own educational community.

## **Disrespectful of Things**

The Prophet’s generosity is also attacked by the Seer’s disciples as disrespectful of things. Allowed to use the Seer’s shirt during his absence at one point, the Prophet made a gift of the shirt to a beggar. This was interpreted as highly disrespectful of the Seer.<sup>226</sup> Of course it was not. It was simply that the Prophet did not make of the shirt an object to be revered, seeing in the *relation* with the beggar the more important thing. He chose the relation with the beggar over the value of the object. That is only due to his relational way.

## **Melancholic**

A final criticism of the Prophet in Buber’s novel is that the way of the Prophet is *melancholic*. The Seer is made to say repeatedly that melancholy is not

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 69,73.

appropriate in educational communities. "Avoid melancholy with all your might. It hurts the service of God more than sin."<sup>227</sup> This is a telling remark, for it says of *sin*, which is basically a kind of refusal to *turn* to others and ultimately to God, that it is not as bad as being melancholic. This is the complaint of an objectivist appraising things. On the surface an educational community may seem happy, but at a deeper level people are not attending to one another, turning to one another in open ways. That this turning might involve at times a certain kind of melancholy is characteristic of life. Things that happen are not always good. A *pie-in-the-sky* kind of temperament does not always serve an educational community well, given objectivist approaches to curriculum and the life of an educational community. Claims about happiness in the community might only reflect feelings of fulfilled expectation. To be sure, people do get a sense of fulfillment when they achieve stated objectives. Furthermore, that the Prophet's educational community was melancholic does not seem to bear up under scrutiny. As I averred in chapter three, the community seems unusually joyous and high spirited.

### **Silencing**

Another kind of criticism of the ways that the members of the Prophet's community learned and taught, as it is made to appear in the novel, involves actual, outright lying as well as misdirection by insinuation. These arguments are not attempts to attack ideas or the ways that people relate in the novel. In some senses, these kinds of attacks might be considered uncharacteristic of philosophical argumentation, but sordid elements enter into every kind of argument. No human

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 6, 7.

argument is without flaw. Informal fallacies abound in human communication. These particular arguments involve actual fabrication or else deliberate inattentiveness. The Seer is said to be unable to stop listening to lies about the prophet, a fact which strikes the prophet “to the heart.”<sup>228</sup> These attacks may involve threats and uncaring comments, for instance, that the members of Buber’s educational community in For the Sake of Heaven are not in the right field, that is, that they ought to get out of education. The prophet is told in no uncertain terms, “This is not the right business for you”, and is forbidden to comment on scripture.<sup>229</sup>

Short of that, there is as well the disingenuous honoring of the prophet’s community, a kind of *attack by joining*. In a bait and switch move, the prophet’s educational community is honored, only to be invited to *force* its views on every other community, thereby potentially undoing itself along with its view towards *unintentional curriculum*. Speaking with the prophet, the Seer proclaims how similar their goals really are, in spite of everything.

We are, all of us, the errant sons of a single Father, some doubtless a little more foolish than the others, but all so full of failings that the differences among us are no great matter, nor the little more nor the little less, sons and brothers as we are.<sup>230</sup>

This demonstrates how truths that belong to relationships may be objectified and used to set one’s ideological opponent off balance. The Seer in another place, all the while feigning repentance, invites others to join him in his quest to manipulate Napoleon.

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 95.

Like yourself I have felt it to be my duty to work with might and main to the end that he become that Gog concerning whom prophecy speaks. But it is given to no man to know in what manner the triumphs and the defeats of this man are allied to redemption. It is not for us to be partisan on one side or the other. This was not always my opinion; I have recognized my error. Our only aim must be to see to it that the density of happenings does not thin out, but become greater and greater. This is our common task. Each one may cultivate a special feeling in his heart; the work must be common to us all.<sup>231</sup>

In such a way political movements are started, with an eye towards the objectification of this or that person or thing, even of God. And to this task is marshaled all the groundswell of common feeling. This kind of logically fallacious attack is perhaps one of the most deadly to human communities, since it has the appearance on the surface of humility and of usefulness in relation to the common good. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

### **Conclusion**

I have attempted here in chapter four to explore some of the criticism of Buber's work in For the Sake of Heaven. As I have interpreted it, the criticism has seemed to fall into four categories, including the historical, the ontological, the epistemological, the logically fallacious and the political. While I have not covered all possible critical considerations of Buber's literary corpus (that would be impossible here), I have considered some of the major criticisms of his work in the novel.

My intent now is to move to a discussion of the status of things as I see them. Given the consideration of the implications of Buber's work in For the Sake of Heaven, along with an appraisal of the critical readings of Buber's work in the novel,

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 223.

I intend to draw some conclusions regarding the implications of the novel. As well, I would like to point to possible directions future studies might take among scholars interested in Buber's work. The question that concerns me now is whether and how scholarly work on Buber's ideas presented here can move forward. I also want to examine the implications of Buber's ideas presented for our own educational communities, examining what this means as I consider my own role as an educator and as an emerging scholar. This involves the question as to the significance of Buber's novel in education in general and in the academic community specifically.

## CHAPTER V Synthesis

### Introduction

In this chapter I retrace the steps I have taken in the dissertation and consider where it has taken me. I also want to imagine where a similar journey might take other students of Buber as well as how this can lead to the development of *new* ideas and practices. I want to pay attention to the revisiting of old ideas about our educational communities as well, reminding the reader that there may indeed be “nothing new under the sun.”<sup>232</sup> Acknowledging the way I have come has always been contingent, I want to position myself humbly as an emerging scholar and as an educator pointing a way for others to learn from a narrative of the unintended, the unplanned and the surprising.

### A Disposition

As I look back over the course of my work in the dissertation, I am overwhelmed with the feeling that the journey has been full of surprises. Feeling as though I were setting out on a journey to revisit an old friend, I approached Martin Buber’s novel with the expectation that I was indeed going to be surprised by what I was to discover, since I was already quite familiar with his work and I had long admired his wisdom. I just knew that he would pack For the Sake of Heaven with gems it would take a lifetime to unearth. I suppose that in essence this is an *expectation* that is not an expectation. It’s more an *expectation* that is willing to be surprised. It is willing to not know the details about what is to come but is happy to wait and see. I am

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<sup>232</sup> Ecclesiastes, The Bible.

speaking here of the kind of response that readers of novels have to writers like Buber who masterfully develop characters. Such readers pay attention to the details, especially if they understand that the writer is not just the average novelist, but a world-renowned philosopher. Furthermore, the read is made so much sweeter when the language is as colorful and astoundingly beautiful as it is in Buber's writing. I say this here to position myself more significantly in Buber's works, not to invite to my approach to Buber a doubtful, sidelong, reproachful glance, as if my comment is to be seen as unnecessarily gushing. No. I say this here just to say that I have *really loved* reading and gleaning from Buber's novel. I have actually *wanted* to pay attention to it. It has been *enjoyable*. There is something in all of this I am saying now, something that points to how we do things as relative to our ontological and epistemological foundations. What I am pointing to is the idea that our projects are made so much sweeter when we love what we do by turning to them in dialogical ways. We can love what we do or whom we are with only when we pay attention to what we are doing and to whom we are with. But paying attention is only possible by turning. I feel I have paid attention to Buber's ideas in For the Sake of Heaven, and what is more, I have entered into the work, as it were, falling in love with the character of the prophet in particular. Lest I be framed as unscholarly in this, I want to position myself in relation to bell hook's idea that love needs to be allowed an entry point into scholarly conversations about education.<sup>233</sup> So, let me say without qualification, "I loved doing this work!" And this to me is quite surprising.

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<sup>233</sup> Bell Hooks, *Teaching Community : A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

## Looking Back

### Chapter One

I set out in chapter one to lay out an agenda.<sup>234</sup> I was going to speak of the plan for the dissertation. Then I intended situating myself in relation to it. I planned to explore Martin Buber's background and then address his ideas in Between Man and Man. It was then my intention to give some reasons why I chose to explore Martin Buber's only novel, For the Sake of Heaven. I believe I did those things in chapter one, but the reasons I approached the novel originally seem to me now somewhat disingenuous, if true. Of course I wanted to and needed to consider Buber's ontological and epistemological ideas developed in Between Man and Man, but the reasons for this I truly only understand now that the process is complete. I think rather now that I was *drawn* to consider Buber's ontology and epistemology for the very reason that *I needed to be surprised*. I want to come back to this idea again, with recommendations regarding educator ontological positioning and stated curriculum. The idea and experience of surprise needs to be incorporated into a more flexibly imagined curriculum. Sometimes, ironically, this only happens with hindsight.

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<sup>234</sup> The reader will note the unusual, passive use of language in this and other review sections to follow, e.g., "I was going to speak...," rather than "I spoke". This usage is deliberate. It is used as an attempt to engage the reader in the unplanned process that seemed to take over as I wrote. Approaching the novel with an *intention*, I discovered that something besides the intention I had was the driving influence in the work of the dissertation. I am attempting to pay attention to the tension that exists between intending to do things and being willing to be led by unplanned forces.

## Chapter Two

Chapter two was where I paid attention to Buber's novel in a very deliberate, planned way. I spent inordinate amounts of time reading and re-reading the novel, then recording and sorting data I gathered in the novel. I began to understand that the character of the prophet represented Buber, so I knew I had to pay close attention to that character's ontological assumptions, as well as to his way of relating to others in the novel.

I paid attention to the historical context of the novel as well as to historical characters Buber was representing, as well as to the way that Buber *narrativized* the characters. I developed ideas concerning the prophet's ontological grounding, addressing his basic anthropology and theology in connection with ideas about God and humanity. This entailed exploring the prophet's assumptions about *turning* as the way that people relate with other people and even with God. I noted the prophet's assumptions regarding the Shechinah, God's manifest Presence that dwells in the world. Beginning to expect the way that ontological foundations fed into epistemology, I began noticing the prophet's *modus operandi*, a focus on the unintentional and his assumption that the most worthy goal of his own community was to pursue *right relationships with others* rather than *rights*. This led in chapter two to a focus on the epistemological assumptions of the prophet. I began taking note as to the prophet's ideas about the nature of knowledge, observing the prophet speak of it as *response*, as *limited*, and as *suffering*.

As I consider the intention I brought to chapter two, I am surprised by the reasons I gave, just as I was regarding my intentions relative to chapter one. Of

course I needed to do everything I set out to do. It seemed abundantly clear to me that ontology and epistemology needed to be addressed. I understood the foundational importance of these branches of philosophy. I knew how critical they were in philosophical argument and that ideological attacks in terms of ontology and epistemology could be shattering. I *had* to explore these issues, just as a philosopher. They interested me academically. *But now that I look back over the work*, I sense that I was *being lead* into something I could not have anticipated. I was being taken into a world in which ontological assumptions are embraced and celebrated. In this world to which Buber was leading me, I was being made to witness the lives of individuals who admitted and embraced a complex ontology. It was a world of *believers*. While the details of the assumptions were not made to appear to be set in stone, they nevertheless were made to become the very air that this Hasidic community breathed. In a sense, I was being shown *how to breathe*. I think one does that ontologically. That is, without an ontological foundation that is *lived* and not just expressed philosophically, I cannot understand how I can ever really live! Buber has taken me to a place I could not have anticipated. There was no plan for it. But this willingness to pay attention to questions of ontology in the context of a Hasidic novel has changed the way I see things. Ontologically, it is like a new birth.

### **Chapter Three**

I set out to “play the believing game” in chapter three. I wanted to take Buber’s work seriously, suspending disbelief in an effort to give him a fair hearing. I understood that it was essential to imagine how Buber’s ideas as they were

embodied in the life of the prophet needed to be applied in real contexts. The surprising realization came to me that Buber had already done the essential work. Right before me in the novel itself was a community which was living out its ontological and epistemological foundations. So I intended to examine the roles of the prophet and his disciples, using Buber's novel to describe how a community taking on the ontological and epistemological foundations of the prophet might appear.

Descriptions of the prophet's community were detailed. I discussed the possibility of an educational community in which students were loyal, willing to serve, joyful, humble and ready for the unintended. I began to see that educators in such a community would be willing to cooperate with others, not positioning themselves as experts looking down upon lower level students. I noticed that participation in such communities would not be compulsory. It was delightful to observe that *the focus of such communities would not be upon intention*. Nor would the focus be upon power dynamics as one member played against other members for domination. Such communities would be relationally focused, intent upon developing right relationships with people and not upon grasping at *rights*. I observed that such communities would orient themselves humbly. Educators would not see their roles as *duties* to fulfill but as interesting relations to which they are drawn. They would be generous, giving of themselves, of their time and energy. Not taking the easy road of forming communities based on common interests alone, they would *embrace the oppositional*, since *making ideas dependent upon communities*, and not vice-versa, accommodates that. I saw that in every instance, such a

community would be *encouraging*, since it could be in every case, since the focus was on relationships and not on *effectiveness*.

The reasons I gave for imagining an educational community that took on the prophet's ontological and epistemological assumptions were good reasons. I understood that this was doing Buber justice. I needed to consider his ideas in real contexts so they might be critiqued. But what I did not realize was that *I was being taken* by Buber into a world where people got along just fine without planning everything. I was made to stand by, wondering at this or that surprising moment as disciples were sent on missions without goals, just to see what *might* happen. I think I *needed* to be surprised and that is perhaps the real reason I was *drawn* to this novel. Moreover, I needed to see that it was possible and even okay to live in a world where everything is not regimented. I needed also to witness and imagine a world in which fundamental assumptions are embraced and are made overt.

#### **Chapter Four**

There were more surprises in store for chapter four. I intended giving an ear to criticisms of Buber's ideas as I was developing them in the analysis of For the Sake of Heaven. That was my intent. This is what I did. However, what came of this was much more than I anticipated. I began the chapter looking at some historical questions. I wondered what it meant for a writer to take persons from history and then construct a world around them. I was asking questions about historical fiction. That opened up a fascinating problem, one which I do not believe I adequately addressed. I will return to that in the recommendations section, later on in this chapter.

Besides the historical problems, I knew there were going to be problems concerning the ontological assumptions Buber embodied in his character, the prophet. The surprising thing to me was that the novel itself opened up to me as anticipating these kinds of (ontological) criticisms. Buber was *showing me* how the problems with his ontology might be considered by providing examples of other kinds of narratives which could be used to attack his assumptions.

Emmanuel Levinas' criticism of Buber struck at an extremely deep level, attacking his idea of God as well as his basic idea of dialogical relationality. Calling attention to *difference*, Levinas pointed out that Buber's dialogical relation entailed a symmetry which could not be true. He attempted demonstrating this by pointing to God as *wholly other* and at others as radically other. He said that Buber's relation made God less than He is. He used the same idea to situate *others* in asymmetric relations, seemingly contradicting Buber's ontology. The surprising consequence of my paying attention to Levinas' argument was that I began to see that the argument was essentially *objectivist*, that Levinas was already implicating himself in objectivism by insinuating difference in a relation. People entering the moments of true Buberian dialogue do not bring to it assumptions about others.

Similarly, my analysis of Karl Barth's criticism of Buber's epistemology led to surprising results. Barth's contention that we have to look at people as *believers* first was his attempt to detract from the attention Buber gave to others on their own terms. I discovered that Buber's epistemology situates ideas as dependent upon educational communities, in real contexts. Ideas that swing free of contexts are not

Buber's focus. But this is not what became so surprising to me. That was yet to come.

I expected that criticism of Buber's epistemology could come from the field of curriculum and educational theory. I looked at some of the literature on stated curriculum and noticed that it involved a level of control of the type that would be loathsome to the prophet in Buber's novel. I recall the reaction I had to the prophet's observation that Lublin *smelled of effectiveness*. I could hardly stop laughing. What was so surprising to me was that *I could not have had this experience* other than through a read of Buber's novel. It brought me to this wonderful community which grew up around the prophet and it showed me that it was possible to live with others in educational communities and to *let go* of control.

Buber anticipated criticism of his ontology and epistemology. It became apparent to me as I dissected and reconstituted data on the prophet's community in For the Sake of Heaven. He expected that the character of the prophet, along with his educational community, would be criticized for not focusing on intention, for ignoring curriculum, for being ineffective and unrealistic, as well as for undermining other educational communities. It was that first criticism, concerning intention, that surprised me the most. It seemed such a *deep level criticism*, I was immediately struck by its absolute importance ontologically. This, I think, is perhaps the most profound discovery I have made in this analysis of Buber's novel. The unseating of *intention* as the ground of being in educational communities is absolutely astounding. Intentional acts seem to be the holy grail of academic pursuits. *Everything* is made to seem to have to do with intention. But the dethroning of

intention in an educational community's ontological stance seems a project worthy of attention. There is more to say about this in the upcoming recommendations section.

I noticed an interesting kind of criticism of Buber's ontology and epistemology, anticipated in the novel. Involving logical fallacies, it includes charges that the kind of educational community the prophet was part of was bad for children, deceptive, disrespectful of things and melancholic. There was even *ad hominem* involving direct lies and threats that the prophet should not even speak. To my mind, this kind of illogical attack is part and parcel of what it means to live in communities that are built on the wrong ontological and epistemological foundations. Buber has helped me imagine that it is possible to build upon more sure foundations.

I explored Martin Buber's novel, For the Sake of Heaven, with the intention of the analysis and application of findings to imagined educational communities. I have explored problems related to this and have come away with a better understanding of the issues. Moreover, the awareness that important things are not always apparent and that their discovery seems to be possible only in unplanned, unintended events was for me a kind of *performance of the narrative* itself. The more important result of the work involved in the dissertation was the embrace of the narrative. I believe I *responded* to it existentially. I was given a chance to live out Martin Buber's narrative in a sense, experiencing the surprising effect involved when one embraces the unintentional. This felt to me like a gift.

## Looking Forward

### Embrace the Unintentional

With a similar process involving unintended results in mind, the next question concerns the possibilities inherent in taking this stance relative to things that are unplanned and unintended. On the face of it, this question seems a tantalizing irony. That is, *how is one supposed to take a stance in relation to something that is not even on the visible horizon?* Aren't stances in themselves supposed to be attitudes and dispositions in relation to issues, conditions and realities that are *known*? How could taking a stance relative the unintentional even be imagined? How could an educator, for instance, take a stance regarding the embrace of the unintentional regarding curriculum? This is a troubling question, especially in light of concerns about stated curriculum, addressed in chapter four.

I do not recommend that things that are planned need to be ignored, nor that the act of planning ought to be considered altogether subversive. Nor do I think Buber would recommend similar action. As was shown in chapter 3, Buber was not setting up a false dichotomy vis-à-vis the prophet and the Seer. The prophet was made to say that he owed much to the Seer, even though he did not subscribe to his view of the manipulation of Napoleon Bonaparte. We, like the prophet, live in a material world. We must interact with things and people objectively. Observation, the gathering of data, its analysis and application are part and parcel of the mechanism that clothes and feeds us. These are ways of interacting with things and people that are objectifying. Were we to abandon them, it is certain that disease, starvation, rapid societal breakdown and even death would occur. It would not be

wise to advocate the abandonment of all things that are objectifying. In that case, I should not have written this dissertation nor bothered reading anything other scholars have written, since all of that would involve objectification of the material.

I do not advocate the wholesale abandonment of planning among educators. I have been a teacher for more than twenty years and I do understand the value of planning. Without structure of some kind it would be impossible to have meetings with people. There are considerations like time which constrain us. Are we going to meet at ten o'clock or at half past five? This involves objectification, since time is treated as an object. That is, the intention of the meeting is that it begin at such and such a time. Other things, like location are also things that become objects for us.

While I do not recommend ignoring intention altogether, I recommend that it ought not be situated as *the place where we live*. By that I mean that intention does not need to govern everything that we do in our educational communities. We need to learn to *let go* of control at times, just abandoning ourselves to the possibility that we might experience the feeling of *being led* by something or someone we cannot describe and may only assume to be real or important, something or someone nevertheless, with *tremendous ontological significance*. This kind of willingness to be led by the unknown leads to another consideration.

### **Choose the Place Where You Live and Breathe**

Do I recommend that all educators should adopt Martin Buber's ontology as it appears in For the Sake of Heaven? I do not, though it is a possibility worthy of attention. I would point rather to the possibility that people in educational communities might begin to embrace their own ontological narratives and bring

them forward, making them overt and not hidden. An ontology is the elephant in the room of which few want to speak. It is the structure which gives support to every kind of philosophical force, undergirding thereby every kind of thought and action imaginable. Exposing any particular ontology becomes increasingly important particularly when it is a structure supporting oppressive hegemony. Educators need to be aware of the ontological narratives that are in themselves antithetical to dialogical processes which are liberating. We need as well to take note of the ontologies which cause our communities to flourish in dialogically relational ways.

As I said earlier in this chapter, embracing ontology is like breathing. It's our life's blood, oxygenating all our systems. Seen in another way, it's where we live. We need to express what we assume to be true among ourselves, paying attention to one another's words, aware that objectivist criticism of ontological positions is logically fallacious. While this is true, we need to be aware that nothing that we assume to be true is so sacrosanct it is impervious to criticism, to the kind of relationally situated, dialogic criticism that is an aspect of Buberian dialogical relations.

Ontologies are like houses situated in city neighborhoods along tree-lined streets with sidewalks to accommodate passersby . People walking by might speak of the house where a person lives in terms of its appearance and overall condition. Issues might be raised concerning the life of the house, how long it has been in the particular spot, whether it has been remodeled or is in swift decline, or whether it is fit for habitation. Concerns might come from neighbors who complain about the

overall effect the particular house is having on property values and so on. This is the way it is with ontologies for us. Like houses, they can be critiqued by casual observers. This brings to mind a story Leo Buscaglia once told of his neighbor's concern about the leaves in his (Buscaglia's) yard. To the neighbor, the leaves were an eyesore, but to Buscaglia, they were *remarkably beautiful*. With graduate students help, Buscaglia promptly went out to his lawn, put all the leaves in large bags and brought them into his house, pouring them on the floor of his living room, at the feet of his befuddled graduate students. From Buscaglia's perspective, this was the solution that made both parties happy, his neighbor and himself.<sup>235</sup>

Casual observers can make excellent observations of ontological positions, but objectivist critique that comes to them is a fallacy. The principle here is *kind for kind*. Ontological structures can be dismantled or, short of that, reformed, using other ontological structures. Assumptions cannot be disproven using appeals to logic, except in terms of other assumptions. It is true that some assumptions are better than other ones, but not by virtue of anything that can be proven, only by virtue of the seeming *soundness* of a contrary assumption. Trying to take down an ontology with a bit of data or with an observation derived on the basis of an opposing ontology is a bit like trying to take down the sky using a toothpick. The logical fallacy here involves a category error.

Ontologies are structures that cannot be brought down by casual observation. Like houses which remain unaffected by casual comments of passersby, ontologies will *always* survive objective critique. Ontological positions

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<sup>235</sup> Leo F. Buscaglia, *Love* (Thorofare, N.J.; C. B. Slack, 1972).

are deep. The structures of ontologies will only be dismantled when forces are in place which have equal weight. That is, one cannot minimize the effect of an ontological position by analytical critique. It will only be affected by something of the same category, by *another ontology*. This is like the dismantling of a house. Things are brought in that have a relatively equal weight in relation to the house, like bulldozers, sledge hammers and pry bars, along with less weighty but powerful, less damaging things like screwdrivers and hammers. It goes without saying, of course, that things like these are allowed in a person's house *only* with the permission of the homeowner. No comment ever made by a casual passerby will *ever* dismantle a house. But when permission is given, home remodeling is possible. Ontologies are subject to modification, indeed. But just as the prophet observed in the novel, try dismantling a person's assumptions like *the existence of God* without permission and care and you will be shown the door.

People in educational communities need to be aware of their assumptions and to make them known. They need to occupy the houses they are in, proclaiming to every passerby with unapologetic joy, "*This is where I live!*" Educational communities need to open up spaces where ontologies can be *mined*, as it were. Perhaps this is akin to the discovery of gold deposits in someone's backyard. As we talk together, visiting one another's houses, we may discover things about the places where we live that are altogether lovely and indeed, surprising. But never should one bring to one's visits to neighbors' houses uncaring and objectivist criticism, a mean-spirited lack of appreciation for the beauty that one's neighbor sees, even if one does not.

What of the possibility that the house of one's neighbor is filled with hatred? What if the ontology that seems to be embraced by the other is evil? How is one to enter the house of that other whose ontology is dark and hateful? This issue was addressed in chapter one of the dissertation, involving Buber's discussion of the idea of good and evil. The discussion of this issue involves the definition of evil itself. For Buber, the term *evil* is not useful as a descriptor of a person. No one is essentially *evil* for Buber. No one inherently *wants* to do evil. Such an idea is self-contradictory for Buber. He develops this further in his text, Good and Evil, cited in chapter two. *Evil* is the tendency in every person to turn away from an other; the ultimate expression of this for Buber is *turning* away from God, the logical extension of otherness.

So how is one to approach an other whose ontology is evil? The way is by *turning* to that other. In dialogical relations, the other is protected against the oppression of an objectivist approach. This works for the good as well as for the evil. Taking a dialogical stance does not mean that in the hard cases one can decide to take an objectivist approach to an other, treating him or her as an object. One does not *get* to take to a dialogical relation an assumption about the other, nor any other assumptions regarding possible realities or outcomes. Does this mean that opening oneself up to an other whose ontological position is evil may bring suffering? Yes, it does. But this is the price of redemption at times. Every kind of evil can be changed.

If not, all that is left is an eventual *nihilism*, the embrace of *meaninglessness*. In that case, evil triumphs and the good is an hypocrisy.<sup>236</sup>

How could teachers begin bringing their own ontological grounding forward? To begin, colleges and universities need to imagine curriculum that addresses this concern. Philosophers need to play significant roles in teacher preparation programs. Courses need to be designed that explore ontological issues in terms that are accessible to teacher candidates. I would go further and recommend that courses should be required of all college and university students which invite them to consider their own assumptions in a non-threatening atmosphere, even where the assumptions of academicians are brought forward. The understanding needs to be maintained throughout that ontological positions are in some senses immune to objectivist criticism and that any successful challenge of anyone's ontology will have to involve another ontology. The message here is that in the end (and in the beginning,) all we get is a story. And that is entirely an assumption, which grounds it extremely powerfully. All anyone ever gets in ontology is an assumption.

One last recommendation relative to the preparation of teachers: storytelling must not be abandoned in our communities. I am aware that narratives already play a significant role in educational communities. But we need to be aware

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<sup>236</sup> I am not advocating conditions for the wholesale slaughter of the innocents. There are limits in human encounters which philosophy is ill-disposed to predict or serve. Reasons are never needed for irrational or non-rational behavior. No one has ever heard of a "philosophy of irrationality or non-rationality"; that is a contradiction. That is, irrationality does not respond to reasons. Nor do forces like rage and fear respond to reason. In the times of rage and fear, dialogical relations are not possible. They will have to first subside. These are the times of madness, of turning in on oneself and against others. It would be best to wait for one's neighbor's madness to subside before entering his or her house.

of the *truths* of our own narratives and bring them forward so that we can embrace them fully and even compare them with other ontologies. Making narratives like For the Sake of Heaven available in educational communities might open up the possibility that people might come to their own ontological positions without fear, considering in the narrative of an 18<sup>th</sup> century Jewish sect the possibilities of their own ontological standing.

### **Your House or Mine**

The houses in which we live can become prisons for us, unless we open them up to others. Opening our houses up will involve *relating* to others dialogically. “Come on over. Soup’s on and I’ve got so much to share with you!” In the process of planned meetings like this, other things can happen which are not planned. A telephone call interrupts the conversation, sending you and your friend on a mission for which you weren’t prepared. But along the way you meet an individual who changes the course of your life. Just in a moment when you least expect it, an answer to a deep question comes to you and you feel forever changed. It is in meetings like these, at first intentional but morphing into times in which all control seems to have gone out the window, that we begin to understand what it can mean to relate to others dialogically. To open ourselves up to others in real attentiveness is the possibility of which I am speaking. The issue for our educational communities is “How can we plan for this kind of event? Like the idea of planning for the unintentional, explored above, the idea of planning for real attentiveness seems somewhat paradoxical. How is it that a planned meeting begins to lose the character of being planned? I am pointing to Buberian dialogical relationality.

Entering into dialogical relations may seem something that should not concern people in educational communities since they apparently do not involve intentionality. How could one even plan for dialogical relations? The deeper question may be: *Why* should people prepare for dialogical relations?

The houses in which we live are the ontologies we embrace. Moreover, the meetings we have from house to house represent our epistemologies. How we share those ontologies has to do with our epistemological assumptions. The concern in epistemology relates to how we acquire knowledge about things. What gets to be counted as knowledge?

The future of educational communities I am imagining involves true openness to others. It is in the context of *openness* alone that certain kinds of knowledge can arise. While I am calling here for a renewed emphasis on the creation of spaces in which dialogical relations can manifest, I am not suggesting that every kind of knowledge transmission should be limited to the dialogical. But I am suggesting that advocating for objective knowledge to the exclusion of knowledge derived in contexts of relationships is, as Buber put it, “diabolical”.

### **Remarks of a Passerby**

As I have been writing the dissertation, I have noticed there are things that might have been done, somewhat tangential to this project, but nevertheless interesting. I would now like to point to these as possible directions that future research might take. I think of the ferryman in the Herman Hesse novel, Siddhartha, who at the end of a life as a gifted Brahmin and a pursuer of wealth and hedonism, finds himself working at a simple task at life’s end, ushering people through the

terrors of a river.<sup>237</sup> I do not pretend to have the answers to every question that may interest the reader, nor even to be able to imagine what all the questions should be, but with Buber I can say that I am interested in pointing to a way to find them. I would like to consider four possible directions of future research in this area. First I would like to consider research which concerns the historicity of historical novel writing. Second, I would like to point to the kind of research that is interested in the investigation and codification of ontological narratives. Third, I would like to suggest research which codifies educational curricula. And finally, I offer the idea that new curricula should be written for educational communities which situates itself ontologically and epistemologically.

### **Research in Historicity**

As I considered possible criticism of Buber's novel, I was drawn to the question of the historicity of his text. This opened up questions about the ways that history is in itself a kind of narrativizing. Questions about the ways that our own narratives (ontological assumptions) are always implicated in the ways that we tell history began to surface. A fascinating way that Buber's novel could be approached in the future would involve the investigation of these kinds of questions more thoroughly. From a historian's perspective, this type of investigation should prove to be quite thrilling. The reader of such research could be made to feel more at home in the novel as well. The effect of this might be to make Buber's rich narrative take on a greater significance in our educational communities.

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<sup>237</sup> Herman Hesse, *Siddhartha*, 1st ed. (Jackson Hole, WY: Archeion Press, LLC, 2007).

### **Research in Ontological Narrative**

A fascinating direction that research could take would consider the forms that ontologies take. That is, future research might involve the collection and codification of ontologies discovered in novels like For the Sake of Heaven as well as in other kinds of collections, including narratives found in interviews, collections of sayings, oral histories and in other types of literature and in other genres. The stories of Native Americans, of gypsies, of Hasidic communities, of early Christians, of Temple period Jews, of Reform Judaism, of Chinese Buddhists and Japanese Shintos and of a host of other communities could be collected. Categories might be imagined and ontologies compared and contrasted. This would be an invaluable tool as educational communities seek to develop their own *ontological position narratives*.

### **Research in Educational Curricula**

In light of the discussions in this dissertation regarding stated curricula, I think future research might take the form of investigations into the nature of curricula. Published curricula could be analyzed and compared across particular domains, with an eye towards ferreting out any indicators of invisible ontological grounding. That is, research might seek to establish the dominant ontologies informing particular curricula, bringing them to the light of day. Results from research I suggested in ontological narratives could inform this third type of research. As knowledge is developed regarding ontologies across multiple communities and comparisons are made, such knowledge could be used as a

template to determine the origins of curriculum content. And these results might inform the development of new, accountable curricula which honestly builds upon stated ontology. No more would curricula appear to be situated as appearing out of thin air, without logical, ontological antecedents. No more would curriculum be forced on communities in which the members consider the ontological foundations of said curricula unworthy of attention, antithetical to the communities' own narratives. Why should anyone be *forced* to do or speak the things that are situated in ontological contexts that are *foreign* and *inimical* to the life of one's community? Making ontologies visible would mean that people who live in educational communities and who cross borders into other educational communities would be on an equal playing field, able to critique and live out the ontologies of choosing. Hiding ontological positioning would just be another way to assert hegemonic dominance, all the while keeping from the members of an educational community the right to critique the ontological foundations of dominance.

### **Research in New Curricula**

The final suggestion I make is that new models should be developed for new curricula. What I have in mind here is that published curricula designed for educational communities ought to be informed by the logic of *particular community ontology*. Curricula should *begin* with ontological positioning. This would validate the curriculum as contextually relevant, responsive to the narratives that are assumed in particular communities. This would mean that curricula would be as varied as are ontological narratives. Curricula would be developed for every kind of narrative. This would not represent a watering down of curricula across the board

at local, regional or national levels. It would signal a burgeoning of the life of curriculum. Imagination in relation to curriculum would soar. Curricula for Native Americans and others would be developed that pays attention to the group's narratives. There would be such an honoring of ontological foundations in this kind of research. The significant players in particular communities, including parents, siblings, religious leaders, counselors, scientists, workers, students and others would see this kind of curriculum research as monumentally significant and worthy.

### **Surprises**

We need to have a relational focus in our educational communities. This means that we will need to focus on ontological and epistemological positioning. But in all of this, there is a theme that runs through the work involved in imagining new kinds of educational communities. This is the element of surprise. Educational communities need to be *situated for surprise* with focus on the unplanned and unintended. This is a departure from common practice, for nothing could be less like the educational communities we usually imagine than the element of surprise. We are in general frightened by surprising things in educational communities. We want to be in control, especially in light of the attention that is given to outcomes based education approaches. We tend to focus on effectiveness which forestalls any development of curricula which involves unintended surprises. Normally, we relegate surprise to aspects we identify as *hidden curriculum*, at best a kind of lip service to the idea of focus on the unintentional.

What if we were to let go of the need to control in our educational communities? What if students were given no stated curriculum and allowed to

explore things at their own pace and in their own ways in contexts which are supported by ontological grounding?<sup>238</sup> I am not speaking of attempts at developing ontologically neutral educational communities. I would see in such a monstrous undertaking a fantastic *pretense*.<sup>239</sup> In such contexts it would be impossible for students to find any sure footing that would propel them forward. Every action does have an equal and opposite reaction. A movement *forward* for a person means that the force of the ground pushing the person up and forward must be at least as great as the force of the person's foot pushing against the ground or else all that will come of attempts to move forward will be a most certain *sinking feeling*. Ontological grounding provides that equal and opposite force which makes it possible for students to move forward in an educational community. Students could latch onto community narratives and find in them some direction and a force which belongs to the student's *having to do* with his or her own community's ontology. This force and direction is a vector, precisely what stated curricula lack, in their typical forms at present. No wonder the idea of a focus on the unintentional and surprising is so frightening in our current educational communities, in general. What would students do if they did not have experts around to tell them what to do? This is the kind of concern of an educational community which has no ontological grounding. It does not know its own narrative. In contexts in which ontology has been identified and embraced, such a focus is welcome. And this is why students in such communities might wake up on school mornings actually wanting to go to school. It

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<sup>238</sup> Situating educational communities ontologically appropriately is a recommendation across all age groups. Every member of an educational community so situated would benefit.

<sup>239</sup> The monstrous undertaking of which I speak is the most current form of curriculum development, as I see it. Curriculum is *not* built on relevant ontological footing, in general.

is why teachers might see their own work as a thrilling opportunity to see just what might happen when people get together and really pay attention to the narratives that each brings, situated in ontological relevance. The results promise to be nothing short of *surprising*.

### **Conclusion**

I began this chapter of the dissertation by retracing the steps I have taken in the dissertation. I spoke of a particular experience I had as I was writing, that I found myself becoming willing to be surprised, losing control of the process of writing in a sense. I found in the process a love of the work that I was exploring.

As I looked back over the work, I pointed to the embrace of the unintentional as one possible result. I pointed to the clarification of ontological grounding in educational communities as a kind of taking up residence in a home. Then I compared the development of dialogical epistemological grounding as a way that educational communities or that individual members of educational communities might share their own ontological perspectives or might influence one another positively. I observed that ontological criticism could be successful only from another ontological perspective, not from objectivist analysis.

Considering what direction future research might take, I reiterated particular themes I intended to revisit in the context of recommendations. Among these was the recommendation for research in the historicity of historical novels. I also pointed to the possibility of research in ontologies in which particular ontological positions might be compared across relevant categories. A third direction I imagined research might take was in educational curricula, with an eye towards

examining hidden ontological grounding. I then recommended that new curricula be developed that pays attention to particular ontologies.

Finally in the chapter, I returned to two themes I found to be among the three most powerful discovered in the novel, For the Sake of Heaven. The first, very strong idea concerned the focus on the *unintentional* in the prophet's community. The second concerned the theme of *surprise* and how it could become such an integral aspect of educational communities the way that we might begin to imagine them.

The last theme I would like to turn to is the theme Buber developed concerning *turning*. To honor Buber's work, I am willing to be informed by the Biblical narrative which informed the development of the prophet's Hasidic community in the novel, For the Sake of Heaven. To that end, I end the dissertation with a Psalm and its dialogical interpretation.

### **Psalm 23**

There is a psalm that bears in its words some of the ideas I have been trying to convey in the dissertation. In the first part of the psalm, the writer speaks of the *other* using the third person reference, *Lord*, and the pronoun, *he*:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Suddenly, the psalmist moves from third person to second person pronouns of address, using *Thou*.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Then the Psalmist recapitulates his stance using a third person reference to goodness and mercy. He is speaking *about* them.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.<sup>240</sup>

Here is the image of someone in flight, pursued by an enemy. And then there is the image of Bedouin, desert hospitality. The author of the poem speaks of an *other*, in the psalm identified as “the Lord.” He or she speaks in third person of the relation with the other as restoring, recognizing the way the other is issuing a call into right kinds of relationship (righteousness). And then there is a turning. From the third person, the psalmist moves to an address in the second person, from He (or She) to Thou. Out of suffering (the valley of the shadow of death) there is the awareness of the other. And in that there is a turning. Now it is “Thou.” In this turning there is the recognition that there is comfort even in the presence of enemies. In dialogical ways of being and knowing, there is the possibility of comfort even when things seem bleak. In dialogical relations there is a turning which awakens one to the awareness of presence. And, it is this kind of awareness of others that opens up an infinity of possibility to the ones who are turning. The “anointing” that comes with this signifies a kind of validation.

Dialogical ways of relating qualify the ones who are turning to one another in word and in deed. They become fully prepared for whatever it is they are called to

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<sup>240</sup> Psalm 23

be or do or to understand. This is the significance of the cup running over. There is more than enough to meet the demands of the relationship, whatever they might be. The Psalmist does not bring to the *other* anything at all, no assumption, no program, no plan. Still, his or her cup runs over out of the abundance that comes out of the relationship.

At last, the person who has come to his or her *other* finds himself or herself becoming an object of pursuit in the relationship. Now the person who has turned to the other, pursued by an enemy (objectivist ontology and epistemology) finds that goodness and mercy is *following*. This is another shift out of the world of *Thou* back to the world of *It*. Instead of merely imagining a far off notion of goodness and mercy, the one who has turned to the other has suddenly found himself or herself the one to whom the other is turning, and it feels as if the one to whom the other is turning is now being pursued, this time by goodness and mercy.

Even in this objectifying knowledge, fear of objectification evaporates. The one finds that in the presence of the other, in the house of the Lord for the Psalmist, there is a dwelling place (an ontological dwelling). Even in the times that movement is out of the dialogical and back into the objective, there is no fear in it. The objective is swallowed up in the relational. In Buber's terms, dialectic has become dialogic.

I believe that the way forward in our communities of education is found in the basic movement of turning to others even in contexts in which things and people are treated objectively. The worries that plague our communities as we objectify things and people might be made to seem to evaporate as we transition in the cycle

of turning to others in dialogical relation in contexts that are ontologically situated, shifting back into objectifying stances and back again into the dialogical.

Even the frightening aspect of what pursues us and what we make objects of our own pursuits can take on a new character in ontologically situated contexts that admit dialogical relations. Even objectification can seem to be good and merciful in this kind of dialogical context. This is the way forward: *turning*.

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## VITA

Joseph Lee Hall was born in Gastonia, North Carolina on April 29, 1960 to Charles Hall and Kathryn Green, both of Murphy, North Carolina. Joseph was raised and educated in Gastonia and matriculated from Hunter Huss High School in 1978. He was offered a full scholarship to enter the textile chemistry and physics program at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina, but declined it to enter a private, liberal arts college where he could also pursue interests in music. Entering the physics and chemistry program on academic scholarship at Erskine College in Due West, South Carolina, he graduated with a Bachelors of Arts Degree in Bible and Religion, Cum Laude, with particular emphasis in Middle Eastern languages and literature. After some time spent substitute teaching and pursuing some academic work in education at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina, he entered a graduate program of education via an assistantship program at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte, North Carolina. He earned his Master of Education degree there in 1991, then spending five years in elementary and middle schools in Duval County, Florida, followed by three years teaching elementary science and secondary English conversation in Kuwait. Joseph returned to the States to teach in elementary and middle schools settings in Georgia in 2001 and began doctoral work at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 2005. He has completed doctoral requirements in Cultural Studies of Education at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, with particular emphasis in Philosophy of Education. Joseph looks forward to academic work in private and public settings.