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POLAR DUALITY

EXISTENTIAL DUALITY AND ITS EXPRESSIONS

In his childhood and youth, Buber lived in several different cultural worlds simultaneously, worlds that were in fact rather distant from each other. From the end of the nineteenth century until he began his university studies in Vienna, he lived in the spirit of *fin-de-siècle* doubt, constantly struggling with tensions that riddled his world.¹ He wrestled with the shreds of his own torn Jewish world, with the tensions between his origins and German culture, and also with conflicting tendencies within his aim of fitting into German culture. The flame of these inner struggles is discernible through the conceptual distinctions contained in his early writings. The rifts within his Jewish identity are embodied in several intertwining dualities:

- Hasidism versus Haskalah
- Eastern European *Yiddishkait* versus emancipated liberalism
- Life in the diaspora versus the visions of Zionism

Buber conceived these and similar oppositions not simply as spiritual and cultural tensions, but primarily as inner splits. “We have become aware of a deep schism in our existence,” he wrote, in the first-person plural, as though testifying as a witness.² He gave sharper and more revealing expression to this feeling about the world in saying

of the “Yehudi” that “he experiences it in his inmost self, as a duality of his I.”³

As noted above, Buber also experienced spiritual struggles transcending questions of Judaism and the Jews. Between the turn of the century and the beginning of World War I he drew upon realms that were very distant, perhaps even cut off from each other: Far Eastern and Christian mystical doctrines and western philosophy, particularly that of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Several of the foci of his spiritual leanings came directly out of his affinities with German folk ideology and from his being anchored in the organic-developmental approach.⁴

Beyond the existential and spiritual tensions mentioned above, an additional contradiction stands out, pervading both the shreds of his Jewish world and also his quests within other cultures. This was the duality of decline versus rebirth, the destruction of the world of the past together with the drive for renewal.⁵ In an early article written about his friend Gustav Landauer, a man who shared his spirit, Buber expressed the inner struggles comprised by that contradiction:

Consciousness that every true action is rooted in the deepest doubt, that every true creation is based on the most radical negation, that every pure affirmation of the world derives from the final despair—all of this has been hinted by philosophers and mystics of all ages. However none of them ever acquired, [like Landauer,] that awareness of our immediate feeling of life, nor did they make it flourish. With no one else can such impressive and varied forms of this basic motif be found. However only rarely does the entire personality itself become the expression of that message; for Landauer never tires of probing examples and doubting answers, undermining certitudes, but, each time, knowing how to raise up a new picture of the world in place of the old model; instead of the old answer, giving a new metaphor of the world; and he builds a kingdom of untrustworthy illusions, playfulness, awareness as creativity, where the ground has been completely removed from under our feet.⁶

Here one feels Buber’s identification with Landauer’s spiritual world, expressed directly by his use of the first-person plural, thus stressing Landauer’s “awareness of our immediate feeling of life.”

Buber struggled with the conflicts in his being and tried to relate them to each other, both in a personal-existential manner and also with conceptual efforts to resolve the contradictions. Buber’s friend

and partner in his educational and political activities for many years, A. E. Simon, called him "the bridge-builder."⁷ But at times Buber freed himself, as it were, from the effort of building bridges—or else he viewed it as irrelevant from the start—and he turned to a spiritual-mystical world, cut off from his Jewish identity, as in *Daniel* (1913).⁸

This little book is suffused with cultural and literary allusions drawn from East and West. The Greco-classical and the Indian, the pagan-Scandinavian and the Christian worlds meet and are absorbed here. The reader would barely sense that the author is Jewish if he were not to attend the whispered reservation sounded melodiously and objectively by the words "to the Christians." Jacob and Esau, too, are mentioned without identifying them, as a bare illustration and as an aside. In this book, Buber is seen embarking on his long journey through the world of universal human thought.⁹

Buber also entertained yearnings for mystic fusion in entirely personal existence, "entry" to which was acquired by denying common human reality and rational-scientific ways of thinking.¹⁰

Resonances of western cultures in all their strata and hues are present in his work, side by side with manifestations of the Far East. One must ask what part of all the cultural abundance that is woven into the various areas of his writings also became a dominant part of his spiritual world. The question also arises as to the limit of his ability to digest and fuse opposing, sometimes even mutually contradictory, cultural worlds.

Buber's sense of living in a polar world, as expressed in the 1904 article previously cited, finds direct extension in a letter he sent to Max Brod many years later, on 12 December 1926, where he confesses that he is divided between standing on the edge of an abyss and extricating himself from it. In that letter, too, Buber reveals himself by means of reference to the intricacies in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*:

Throughout I have read this book as touching upon myself most profoundly, and even in the passages where it oppressed and stunned me, my trust in it was unaffected, and I never reflected that perhaps something should or could be different than what it is. . . . The meaninglessness with which we are dealing here is counted a producer of meaning until the last moment. But as we deal with it and are entangled in the thickets of concrete anti-meaning, is it not precisely there and precisely in that way that we, with cruel dedication,

from time to time, though we refuse to admit it, become aware of a meaning which is shown to be not at all like ours, though it is addressed to us and makes its way upward through all the pollution to the walls of our hearts. And at the last moment, the correct moment, does the meaning nevertheless reach them and conquer them? And now, take these words as though your ears were his.¹¹

Whereas the 1904 article on Landauer reveals a utopian affirmation of life arising on the horizon of existential despair, the letter to Max Brod, which depicts being on the threshold of destruction, reflects no focus of light, positiveness, or faith—but rather only a constant struggle with the lack of meaning. The occurrence to which he testifies is not a unique event but rather one that is repeated, as he says, “from time to time.” One may place these two revealing expressions in the background of a passage ostensibly devoted to portraying Rabbi Naftali of Roptchitz but actually expressing, though implicitly and in disguise, the feelings about the world of their author, Martin Buber:

We hardly know of another zaddik whose soul harbored such a mass of contradictions as did that of Rabbi Naftali of Roptchitz. But if we consider them all together, they are by no means formless and chaotic, but give the picture of a real human figure. He introduces into the hasidic world a type not uncommon among the distinguished intellectuals of the modern era: a mixture of irony and yearning, skepticism and belief, ambition and humility.

From his youth on, he was given to jests, many of them bitter, and to all manner of pranks including some that were really malicious. In his youth, he reflected on his own endowments with extreme pride, in his age with doubts verging on despair. He once observed that his teacher Rabbi Mendel of Rymanov was holy and knew nothing of cleverness, and added: “So how can he understand what I am like?”¹²

One who knows of Buber’s traumatic experiences and the tragic spiritual struggles that marked his intellectual biography through his testimony in writing,¹³ and who also knew him personally and held long conversations with him, cannot but sense his own features in the description of this Hasidic master. In the foregoing lines a dual structure predominates, a turbulence in direction that commenced in Buber’s youth with his aspiration to overcome the “world of confusion” and break out of inner chaos towards a “direction” or “way.” Manifesta-

tions of this structure appear in different guises in Buber's thought over more than a generation.¹⁴ Here, in depicting Rabbi Naftali of Roptchitz, we find an exceptional example of it: in opposition to turbulence ("formless and chaotic") Buber does not posit a "direction," as he usually does, but rather a turbulence that has the form of "a real human figure." Here we no longer have the aspiration to transcend turbulence but rather an expression of awareness of the need to resolve the "mass of contradictions" so that they will not be chaotic. There is no single path from the mass of contradictions to a state of clarity. One must know how to struggle with them and how constantly to raise a form up out of the turbulence.

It seems to me that this is an expression of personal lucidity, the fruit of years of experience; this is the wisdom of old men who know "the limits of advice," the boundaries of human ability, acknowledging that "man's purpose in the world is to fight that stranger [Satan] to his last breath upon earth, and to introduce him from time to time to the very Being of the Holy One, Blessed be He."¹⁵ Among the contradictions Buber mentions here are those between skepticism and faith and between great pride and doubts bordering on despair. These enable us to trace a direct line from the expressions of the secrets of his worldview in the article of 1904 through his letter of 1926 and on to the passage under discussion here. A broader understanding of this passage demands that it be seen in the context of Buber's interpretations of the figure of Rabbi Naftali of Roptchitz in *For the Sake of Heaven*. He took several traits of that personality from the world of Hasidism and others from his own personality in the spirit of the process that typified his own spiritual biography.¹⁶

The foci of Buber's thought cannot be separated from his biography. His worldview is inseparable from his experiences.¹⁷ The structure of his ideas was consolidated, as noted above, with the absorption of various currents of thought and influences, which did not erase his rootedness in the spiritual possessions of his people but merely shunted it aside, for a short time. He wanted to digest opposing sources of sustenance with the power of his spirit, and at times his spiritual pendulum swung to one pole and stayed there for a while. However, at bottom he strove to create a synthesis marked with the stamp of his own personal "direction."

Below I shall try to clarify the features common to many of the types of duality in his writing.

WHAT IS POLAR DUALITY?

There is no need to speak at length of the essential duality in the Jewish psyche. Duality as a basic characteristic of the Jewish nation has been noted by a number of scholars of our national character. This duality is seen as the source of our calamity and our great poverty, and also as the source of our wealth and strength. Duality: that is, the rule of two characteristics in the soul of the nation, contradicting each other and vying against each other. This duality turns the soul of the nation into the battlefield of a never-ending war. This war wears us down; the two elements fight with each other and oppose each other and obscure each other. Thus they weaken and obscure the face of the nation. On the other hand these contrasting elements enrich our national character. They do not let us slumber. The opposing powers are fertile in their union, making the nation many-faceted and variegated.

—H. N. Bialik, "On Duality in Israel" (1922)

The foregoing discussion has already shown that Buber's struggles with various kinds of duality were marked by a tendency toward resolving contradictions, bridging chasms, and bringing together distant extremes; he simultaneously wrestled with various polarities and also related them to each other.

The dual approach was the foundation of Buber's thought from its earliest expressions. An early lecture given to a Berlin circle in 1900, never published during his lifetime, already had its base in dual distinctions.¹⁸ Here the duality was between the "old community" and the "new community." The former is expressed, according to Buber, in utilitarianism and coercion, while the latter is directed towards creativity and freedom.¹⁹ This lecture also discusses the conflict between external social arrangements in a modern city and "inner form" (which will give birth to the "new community").²⁰ At twenty-two Buber spoke in this lecture of "the harmony of opposites" which exist beside each other within the interior of the individual. That harmony will permit "the joining of forces for unity in life."²¹ Buber was referring to the duality of inner versus outer, the outer being identified with the "new society." He also emphasized the object of his yearnings by means of a second duality, that of life and fellowship as two sides of a single entity.²² All these pairs of opposites represented various and contrasting versions of the concept of what is and what ought to be. The mystic and utopian regime for which he yearned was embodied in his notion of the "new community."

Between the time when he gave the lecture mentioned above and afterwards, when he proposed a worldview combining examples of the dualistic approach to man in the world, Buber consolidated his thinking and conceptions. He expressed his new view in an article ostensibly devoted to discussing the work of the Jewish artist Lesser Uri.²³ This discussion is based on pairs of related principles or situations, such as “form” and “color,”²⁴ “inner” and “outer,” and “personal” and “historical.”²⁵ He also spoke of “the moment” versus “eternity,” “the historical” versus “the monumental,”²⁶ isolation versus human settlement,²⁷ destiny versus choice,²⁸ and life versus idea.²⁹ This list does not exhaust all the examples of duality in “Lesser Uri.” The effort emerging in this article to build a dualistic picture of the world was not unique. It was deepened in Buber’s subsequent writings in the first decade of the twentieth century, in which the vital foundations for the later consolidation of his thought were laid.³⁰

The formation of one of the types of duality in “Lesser Uri” enabled Buber to establish a general principle: that since the time of Adam and Eve “everything is a miracle and everything is necessity,”³¹ and neither of these two realms is possible without the other. “Everything touches upon everything else, awakens and develops everything else . . . everything because of its fellow and within its fellow”—either as an “eternal war” or as “eternal brotherhood.”³² In these formulations, which point toward a fundamental duality, the parts of which are related to each other, there are indications of the kind of duality that was to occupy a central place in Buber’s thought. His letters from 1910 to 1913 show repeated efforts to characterize his dualistic world view in the spirit of the foregoing formulations, observing the contrasts within the world and the pairs of opposites that abounded in his spirit as a kind of division in which the parts are not cut off from each other and do not contradict each other. He called this duality “Polaritaet” (polarity).

The phenomenon of polarity entails the existence or manifestation of two contrary principles at once, influencing each other and reacting to each other and also conditioning each other.³³ The opposite of polarity is dichotomy—division into two mutually exclusive members that negate each other.³⁴

In principle, one may say that Buber’s formulations of the essence of polarity apply beyond the context in which they were originally presented. This assumption also applies to his interpretation of the essence of polarity in the early speeches on Judaism:

It is a fundamental psychological fact that the multiplicity of man's soul appears to him, recurrently, as a dualism. . . . Man experiences the fullness of his reality and his potentiality as a living substance that gravitates toward two poles; he experiences his inner progress as a journey from crossroads to crossroads. No matter what changing meaning-contents (*Inhalte*) or names the two opposites of man's inner striving may have, no matter whether the choice at the crossroads is perceived as a personal decision, an eternal necessity, or even a matter of chance, the basic form itself remains unchanged. One of the essential, determining facts of human life (perhaps even the most essential), it conveys the awesomeness of the primal dualism, and with it the source and significance of all things of the spirit.³⁵

It would seem that this was the purport of the sentence that he placed in parenthesis in a personal letter to his friend Gustav Landauer, dated 10 October 1910: "I am now, as I never have been, full of a goal [*Ziel*] and full of alienation [*Entfremdung*] at the same time."³⁶

In another letter, dated 20 May 1912, Buber once again presented polarity as an essential and primary characteristic of the world. There he speaks of "the act of polar becoming that is eternally renewed" and that marks the spiritual activity of mankind, which is *single*. "The polar nature of thought," Buber states, "is a primary fact of the spirit."³⁷

Polarity occupied an important place in his philosophical-mystical work of 1913, *Daniel*. There it is illuminated from various viewpoints in the fourth and fifth dialogues, "On Polarity" and "On Unity."³⁸ In the context of these dialogues there is, among other things, reference to what Buber calls "the primordial dualism itself."³⁹ They state prominently that truly to experience the world means to experience the dualities permeating the tension between spirit and matter, form and material, existence and becoming, intelligence and will, the positive and the negative element.⁴⁰ In order fully to grasp Buber's underlying ideas in *Daniel*, they must be extracted from the mystical poetry of his language.

In his correspondence, Buber referred to the contents of *Daniel*, and he himself clearly summarized the central conception of polar duality that he presented in it. One of his correspondents was Gustav Landauer. The background of their exchange of letters is as follows: in 1913 a German publication devoted a special issue to Buber, who was then only thirty-five years old but already well known beyond the circle of those who heard his lectures.⁴¹ Prominent in that issue of the maga-

zine was a comprehensive article by G. Landauer that made reference to Buber's remarks on the basic duality of feminine and masculine as expressed in the recently published *Daniel*.⁴² The issue that concerned Landauer was the importance of the feminine element for the recovery of the declining cultural life of Europe. Buber, finding that his friend had not properly grasped his approach in this matter, responded in a letter dated 18 March 1913. Landauer answered Buber's letter the following day, reiterating his position.⁴³ Buber presented the duality of female and male in the context of "the tensions which are spoken of in the last dialogue of *Daniel*," and on that basis he presented the main points of his conception of polarity. He does not conceive of the duality (which, in his opinion, is found everywhere) as something that splits experience into two different and separate worlds, but rather as a cause of tension between its contrasting elements. The elements upon which he concentrates in his letter—the feminine and the masculine—are conceived as polar opposites; each of them must find its "opposite pole so that from the two of them the unity of the spiritual life may be created." He emphasizes that it is not his intention "to blur the contrasts and neutralize them."⁴⁴

The themes of the fourth and fifth dialogues in *Daniel*, "On Polarity" and "On Unity," are interconnected. The main idea at base of both the dialogues is set forth in the aforementioned letter. He wished to live simultaneously (to use names of essays by Ahad Ha-Am) "At Both Extremes," to experience the polarity of being "Between the Realms." He did not view the contrasting realms in life as different and separate from each other, but rather he wished to *relate* them to one another, postulating that "in the spirit this tension is intermingled."⁴⁵

A fitting supplement to the foregoing letter is found in another one written to Sh. H. Bergmann on 7 May 1913, which dealt with the subject of "Realisierung" (realization or fulfillment) in *Daniel*. In this context he added, almost incidentally:

By the way: it was said that before the creation of the world there existed only the Creator and His Name—that, it appears to me, is because unity, which is not conceived of as a goal but as a source, can no longer be grasped as pure unity, since we are not capable of grasping this entire act of creation except in polarization, as an expression of immanent duality.⁴⁶

In contrast to the unity of the life of the spirit expressed in Buber's letter to Landauer, the letter to Bergmann brings out the problematic nature of "unity beyond all duality," that is, the unity of God.

Buber's view of the essence of polar duality appears to be that it is not a static situation. It is a living experience that changes in form and is subject to dynamic processes, in which there are contradictions. Buber was aware of self-contradictions as early as the first decade of the century (in a source to which we have already referred): "Judaism is not simple and unequivocal, but permeated by contrasts. It is a polar phenomenon."⁴⁷ These basic assumptions nourish later presentations of his conception. Thus, for example, in the context of a discussion of culture, he states that "it is impossible to grasp its essence without a grasp of its contradictions." These are active within "several kinds of duality which are found in every cultural process." "True culture" is, for Buber, "the active unity of the spirit" in every area of life. It is an essence "which is produced by a *polar* process."⁴⁸ The consistency of law and system in philosophy and science is incompatible with the desire for unity. This desire is organic by its very nature and arises out of a reality, at the basis of which are interrelated dual divisions.⁴⁹

POLARITY AND RELATION: POLARITY THAT TRANSCENDS DIALOGICAL THINKING

Buber tells of the deep change that took place in his path, "an overturning of the heart," as he calls it, following which he departed from a mystical, personal existentialism in the direction of dialogue: from being swallowed up in a "fullness without obligations" to a "dialogical life of relatedness, involvement, and responsibility."⁵⁰ One might suppose that this turning point brought about the formation of the unified direction that supplanted duality in his view of the world; however, we must determine whether the patterns of duality, especially that of polar duality, did continue to play a central role in his writings even after World War I, when that "overturning of the heart" took place.⁵¹

Sh. H. Bergmann was among those who noted the continued presence of duality in Buber's thought. As early as the 1930s he wrote an article pointing out the connection between the expressions of inner duality in Judaism and the aspiration for unity, as found in Buber's "Judaism and Humanity" (1910), and the duality and unity at the basis of his "I and Thou." Buber's gaze is directed particularly at the

relation underlying dialogue: “the duality of I and Thou is the essence of the world. This is not actually duality, but rather unity; the two axes of this unity, the I and the Thou, are merely the two columns spanned by the arch. *The inwardness of the world is relatedness.*”⁵²

Many years later Bergmann developed and sharpened this viewpoint in his introductory essay to his Hebrew volume, *Besod Siach*, in which he points once again to the basic approach common to both the early “Speeches” on Judaism and to Buber’s philosophy of dialogue. Now he states clearly, however, that in its various stages this duality is based on polarity. In Buber’s speeches given in the years around 1910, Bergmann finds an expression of the existential situation which also characterized him as a child of that time. The main feature of this existential situation was the attraction “to two opposite poles” and also the aspiration “to build a bridge” between them. “The polarity of existence and the joining together of the poles” are, in Bergmann’s opinion, the main subject in Buber’s dialogical thinking.⁵³

Bergmann’s comments do not exhaust all the kinds of polarities at the foundation of Buber’s dialogical thought.⁵⁴ Its underpinning is a dual structure, the two facets of which are “the world of relationships” (the I-Thou relation) and the “world of otherness” (the I-It relation).⁵⁵ Polarity characterizes not only the I-Thou duality that builds up the “world of relationships,” but also the relationship between the “world of relationships” and “the world of otherness.” Moreover, in his portrayal of this structure in his writing Buber traces dual conceptual schemas, interpreting one facet as being embodied in the essence of dialogue with its opposite member, while at the same time they are also in polarity with each other. Such dual schemas are freedom and determinism,⁵⁶ community and collectivity,⁵⁷ religiosity and philosophy.⁵⁸ Each of these dualities has variant forms in Buber’s writings, taking on the form appropriate to the contexts in which each appears. Thus, for example, the schema of freedom and determinism also appears as prophecy and destiny (and/or prophecy and apocalypse).⁵⁹

Buber sometimes tends to express a general rule by concentrating on one of its representations. As an example of that, here are his statements in “The Faith of Israel” regarding the polarity of freedom and determinism:

It is only when reality is turned into logic and A and non-A dare no longer dwell together that we get determinism and indeterminism, a doctrine of predestination and a doctrine of freedom, each excluding

the other. According to the logical conception of truth only one of two contraries can be true, but in the reality of life as one lives it they are inseparable. The person who makes a decision knows that his deciding is no self-delusion; the person who has acted knows that he was and is in the hand of God. The unity of the contraries is the mystery at the innermost core of the dialogue.⁶⁰

These statements may be applied not only to the various guises of the foregoing polarity but also to the types of polarity connected with Buber's dialogical philosophy. In his opinion it is impossible to live in only one reality, whether it is a dialogical reality or a reality characterized by the I-It relationship. These two modes of existence are not mutually exclusive and are not isolated from each other. They are related to each other. At the same time he gives primary preference to a life of relationship.

Having noted the aspects of polar duality emerging from his dialogical thought, we must inquire whether all manifestations of polar duality in his writings can be included within his dialogics. I shall try to respond to this question through the examination of two complementary declarations of faith, in the combination of which I find the principle of Buber's conception of polarity. I refer to passages that stand by themselves and that were interpolated into his writings. One of them was written in the late 1940s and the second a few years afterwards. In both passages the story of creation in the Bible serves as a platform for the presentation of the duality in which the orders of nature join together with the world of history, as well as for expressions of this duality in human existence. In the context of the first passage our unredeemed world is presented as based from the start on "the double nature and the double fate of man":

The Book of Genesis begins with two accounts of the creation which, no matter when and how the one or the other originated, complement one another perfectly, like nature and mind, and like man's sense of living at the fringe of the cosmos as a latecomer, and man's sense of being at home in the center of his world, as one of its first-born. The first account of the creation ends with a double blessing: a blessing upon the first human beings and a blessing upon the Sabbath. The second account ends with a double curse: a curse upon the first human beings, and a curse upon the ground. Between the two stands sin. The blessing inaugurates natural man, the curse inaugurates historical man, and both together inaugurate the double nature and the double destiny of man.⁶¹

The kinds of duality mentioned in the second passage are presented as pairs of polarities, and a generalization is also made according to which the principle of polar duality permeates everything:

The Torah, the teaching of Israel, is a teaching of distinction. As the creation is founded on distinction: in space—between the higher and the lower waters, in time—between day and night and so forth, and at the end of creation stands man, he too divided into man and woman, so man is bidden by revelation to distinguish: between God and idols, between true and false prophets, between pure and impure, between good and evil, between sacred and profane; in sum, between that which conforms to God and that which does not conform to Him. There is no place for an indeterminate multiplicity. . . . But in contrast to the cosmic divisions, which embrace both poles with the same affirmation, the divisions of revelation are either armed with the strongest accents of Yes and No, of pleasing to God and condemned by Him, as is the case with the “ethical” distinction between good and bad, or the perfection concentrates itself at the one end and leaves a wide room for all that is outside of it, as is the case with “cultic” distinction between sacred and profane. And the destiny of man, his destiny in the most exact sense of the term, that of the individual and that of the totality, depends upon the right distinction. In the sphere of the holy this finds expression in the tradition that whoever comes into unauthorized contact with its symbols has forfeited his life, in the realm of good and evil it finds expression in the message that God has placed before his people “life and good and death and evil.” Here the structures of creation, to which life and death belong, are mixed with the structures of revelation.⁶²

The duality of nature and history, which Buber took from romanticism,⁶³ is presented directly in the passage from “Abraham’s Mission,” and in the second cited passage it is represented in the phrases “the structures of creation” and “the structures of revelation.” By means of biblical exegesis he spreads out the full extent of the polar duality that he finds everywhere. Here polar distinctions in the Torah of Israel are brought out rather than the unity of opposites within creation as emphasized in biblical monotheism.

In the passage from “The Faith of Israel” quoted above the characteristics of polar duality are presented as being in accord with Buber’s general outlook: the presentation of “a thing and its opposite” at the same time and their relation to each other. It also shows a negative attitude toward dichotomies. However, at the same time, it does place

emphasis on dialogics (unlike the paragraphs quoted above from “The Mission of Abraham” and *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism*).

Buber’s dialogical thought, with all its ramifications and all its importance in his world, is ultimately an aspect—though a central one—of his dualistic view of the world. The dialogical aspects of this approach do not encompass or exhaust it. Buber’s polar duality has important expressions that transcend the application of his dialogical faith.

In the various stages of his writing he repeatedly emphasizes “direction” and “path.”⁶⁴ But he did not ultimately believe in an unequivocal, unidirectional path, and he discovered an ability to penetrate the reasons for a contrary view and even to identify with it. He had a tendency, though it was not emphasized or made much of, to *experience* the polar duality of paths. This emerges, among other things, as we follow the pendulum swings of his attitudes towards Herzl, which vacillated between opposition and admiration.

Buber’s contacts with Herzl date back to 1899, when Buber invited him to come and give a lecture to the Leipzig Zionist Federation. Their joint efforts in the Zionist movement began when Herzl invited Buber, who was twenty-three, to edit *Die Welt*, the central organ of the World Zionist Organization.⁶⁵ Buber’s youthful admiration for Herzl could not blunt the edge of his approach to Zionism, which, from the start, was at the opposite pole to that of the prophet and father of the Jewish State.

In the months immediately following Herzl’s death in 1904 Buber published three articles dealing with Herzl. Subsequently he pondered over his image for decades.

The earliest of these articles, “Theodor Herzl,” was published a month after Herzl’s death and was apparently meant to be a eulogy, though written with critical distance. Buber, then twenty-six, torn between the contradictions of his world, saw things, both near and far, in their perspective. He emphasized the various aspects of the dualities that, in his opinion, characterized Herzl’s being. He opened by mentioning that in late 1895 and early 1896 two of Herzl’s books appeared, *Das Palais Bourbon* and *Der Judenstaat*, “which are in strange contrast to each other, but not in opposition.”⁶⁶ In reviewing these books Buber struggles with the conception of Zionism found in *Der Judenstaat*, “where the persecution of the Jews became the Jewish question, and the common enemy became the basis of Jewish nation-

alism.”⁶⁷ He also noted that Herzl’s book “can make an idea into a program, make a movement into a party, and arouse the masses.”⁶⁸ As his article continued Buber pointed out three paradoxes that typified seven years of activity on the part of the journalist who became an active Zionist leader after the First Zionist Congress:

1. the paradox of a decidedly western individual at the head of a movement rooted entirely in the East;
2. the contradiction between Herzl’s disdain for politics and his yearnings for great action and the daily activity of the Zionist movement;
3. the paradox of a statesman without a state, active among states and heads of state.⁶⁹

Herzl died, states Buber, “without being conscious of the tragic paradoxes which he bore in his soul.” The article ends with praise for the purity and faith of the man who “left even his opponents with a picture of a sunny and harmonious phenomenon.” However this praise was tempered with a critical note; Herzl is presented as “a poet whom his nation’s fate turned into a hero.”⁷⁰

A different point of view guided the second article, entitled “Herzl and History,” which Buber published about a month afterwards.⁷¹ A residue of depression from Buber’s relations with Herzl seeped into this article. In it Buber continued an argument which he had had with Herzl in his lifetime. At the same time he never tired of praising and extolling his opponent. He even spoke of Herzl’s conception of Zionism in an essentially favorable light, without bringing out the points of criticism that were included in his first article. Remarks on Herzl’s personality stand out in this article, though they were not presented centrally. The relationship that united the man and his actions was emphasized: “Herzl, in his entire essence, had to make himself and his movement into one thing. That was the source of his great power. He believed in himself not as someone believing in a *person* but as a believer in a *cause*.” The unity of Herzl the man and his activity is also implicit in sentences like the following: “Above all Herzl’s personality stands before one who surveys [it] in the light of history”; ‘he was the lord of a sick nation’: he unconsciously forged an image for his nation which the nation called by its own name.” The article ends with words that cannot be outdone: “a figure without the shadow of a flaw, with

the pure outlines of a genius, a brow radiant with messianic light—the highest grace.”

These outlines provided the basis for the exaltation of the figure of Herzl in an article written six years later, “He and We.”⁷² Whereas the first of Buber’s articles about Herzl (“Theodor Herzl”) called attention to the tragic paradoxes in his world, here Buber did not attribute these existential oppositions to the subject of his article but rather to the Jews of the diaspora of his time—presenting himself as one of them:

Judaism is given to us in problematic fashion; since our own inner being is given to us in problematic fashion; because existence is given to us in the form of a problem. This is the great, tragic Jewish inheritance: the problematic essence, the diaspora form of inner duality.⁷³

This way of being was epitomized in what he called there “the great paradox of being.” In this article the lines formerly used to depict Herzl were now used by Buber to represent his own world. At that time the contrasts that typified his existential situation aroused longings within him to transcend duality. Along with that inner duality he had then presented a second duality, that between what is and what ought to be—the object of one’s longings; the latter duality is embodied in the title of his article: “He and We.”

Buber presents “activism” in contrast to the “problems” of the diaspora Jew: “[T]he man whose foundation is activism was given an inner life in the form of a full measure of urges, which he grasps in order to use them”; existence is given to him “in the form of a full measure of reality, which corrects his form and then waits for him to correct its form.” In contrast, “the man of problems was given an existence in the form of a full measure of contradictions, demanding reparation by him and finding their reparation only in what is beyond nature and not in experiential reality.”⁷⁴ Diaspora Jews, with whom Buber identifies himself, must overcome “all the sin,” “all the inner restraints,” and “first overcome thousands of despairs” in order to achieve the dimension of unity.⁷⁵ Herzl, by contrast, is viewed as a unified man “by his very nature,”⁷⁶ and in his being the antithesis of the diaspora Jew he is an object of esteem.

“He and We” is contemporary with Buber’s early speeches on Judaism, and the existential situation that was their background also resonates in it. There is a special affinity between it and the second of the two aforementioned lectures, “Judaism and Mankind,”⁷⁷ in which

Herzl is presented as the embodiment of the desired mankind: "a pure power, unity, greatness."⁷⁸ The significance of these traits for Buber emerges from his discussion of the character of the "Jewish movement" in the beginning of the very same article. Buber is wary of ideologies whose human subject is not kept in view, of a "program" based on the masses, in whom the "human visage" disappears. His dream is directed towards a "task" based on "people's humanity."⁷⁹ As in the article discussed above, "Herzl and History," here too Herzl is taken as expressing the palpable unity of the individual and his enterprise, and here that means the combination of idea and action: "Theodor Herzl is a leader for active life." The "task," "life," and "the human visage" here are placed on the same footing. It is not clear whether Buber also intended to imply that Herzl looked to individuals in their individuality, to "people's humanity," and paid heed to them,

Many years later, in "The Cause and the Person," the duality between "man" and "idea" or "enterprise" that is presented in several guises in "Herzl and History" and "He and We" was given the form of a dual structure, the poles of which are "cause" and "person."⁸⁰ That article takes an ambivalent attitude towards Herzl, at the basis of which is a distinction between the man and his conception of Zionism. Not only that, his relation to the "person" is no longer toward an elevated, unified figure. Buber also says of himself that even at the time of the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903 he had a mixed attitude toward the personality of "his leader and guide." Until then Buber's critical attitude towards Herzl's conception of Zionism had been related to the content of that conception and distinct from his personal attitude towards Herzl.⁸¹

Even with the passage of several decades Buber did not acquire an unequivocal perspective upon his adversary. Another aspect of his ambivalent relationship towards Herzl appears, after many years, in an article in honor of the eightieth anniversary of the Zionist leader's birth in response to the question: "What would Herzl say if he were still alive?"⁸² In Buber's opinion Herzl was a "magnanimous and wide-ranging liberal," and, as such, he strove "to supply the existing forces with the possible action in the given conditions of life." But such a view is not consistent, according to Buber, with Zionism, "the meaning of which is the desire fundamentally to change the conditions of the people's life, in such a way that by means of that change the primordial essence of the nation will break through the shell of its degeneration."⁸³

Hence his conclusion was that, because Herzl was Zionist, “a new soul entered him. But he did not give it all the room it demanded.” That soul is a kind of “primordial essence that is different from the ordinary sphere, which should have been allowed to break through the shell.”⁸⁴ Buber assumes that Herzl never learned to heed the voices of his hidden interior, his primordial Jewish soul, in which the source of his Zionism received its thrust. He brought up the question: “And would Herzl have heard, if he had remained alive, what the second soul demanded of him, the additional soul, which was truly nothing but the primordial soul?” His answer, with which the article ends, is unequivocal: “I am certain that if Herzl had passed through our experiences with us, he would have recognized that no mere plan can make us truly into one nation, but merely the spirit, which is one. And at that moment, when Herzl acknowledged that, his Zionist soul would have overcome his liberal soul. . . . When I imagine Herzl to myself as an old man, I know that at this time he would not have been with those who are in the habit of speaking in his name, but rather with the faction which is gradually coming into being.”⁸⁵

Herzl the liberal, we are told in the body of the argument, saw Zionism as “a tarred road paved between a bad present and its improved continuation.” Buber, the utopian, imagines it as “a cord strung between the secret of the distant past and the secret of the near or far future.”⁸⁶ He “knows” that Herzl, in his alertness to the stirrings and imperatives of his “primordial soul,” would also have seen that if he still had been alive.

Beyond the condemnation of what Buber saw as the outward aspect of Herzl’s world, there is hidden a struggle against the leading tendencies of the Zionist movement; he wishes to free Herzl’s path from identification with political Zionism, with which he had had a basic disagreement for many years.

Various manifestations of duality of the soul, which are aspects of a single basic approach, appear in Buber’s writings of the 1940s; it is the duality of the “visible I,” which guides the steps of most people, versus “the hidden self of the personality,” which must be laid bare, fostered, and allowed to flourish.

Our survey of Buber’s attitudes toward Herzl shows the polar shifts that took place in it over four decades. One cannot point to a straight line of development in that attitude. From emphasis upon the contradictions in Herzl’s being, of which Buber had to take note in the article

written soon after his death, the pendulum swings to the pole of praise and admiration just a month afterwards (in "Herzl and History"). Thence a direct line leads to a unified view of Herzl, full of respect and admiration, in 1910. That attitude deteriorated over the years, and in 1940 Buber saw Herzl as the figure of his own world: as having two souls, as living an existence of opposites, of which he was not aware in his short life. His ideological grappling with Herzl continued, finally concluding in two chapters of *On Zion*.⁸⁷

The contradictions between Herzl's visage in Buber's articles from various times illustrate conflicting tendencies and inner struggles within the person doing the describing. Two of the articles devoted to Herzl, "He and We" and "The Cause and the Person," even permit Buber, as we have seen, to testify directly about the inner rift within his world.

It is fitting that the manifestations of duality in Buber's attitude toward Herzl's world should be placed in the background of his becoming acquainted with the mighty battle between the two roots of the soul (including the worldviews that derive from them). This battle provides the focus for a kind of novel that Buber wrote based on the world of Hasidism. The occasion upon which Buber expressed the assumption that two souls were vying within the author of *The Jewish State* would seem to be no coincidence. If Herzl had still been alive, it would have been his eightieth birthday. At that time Buber was involved in a stormy crisis of inner duality corresponding to ideological duality, expressed in *For the Sake of Heaven*, a work based both on historical events and on the spiritual struggles within the Hasidic movement in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries. The aforementioned article was published a short time before Buber started serializing many of the chapters of this book in the daily press.

Two central figures vie with each other on the stage of that work and represent diametrically opposed views of the world: "the Seer of Lublin" and "the Holy Yehudi." The tension of the contrasts between them had preoccupied Buber intensely, as he reports, as early as the last year of World War I. At about that time he began a novel focused on the relations between those two men, but that project ended twice in failure, and he abandoned it, returning to it at the beginning of World War II.⁸⁸

The Seer was a withdrawn man, tending to melancholy and removing himself from mundane affairs. He was taken up with his mystical visions. The "Yehudi," in contrast, was characterized by humane

understanding and sensitivity toward his fellow man. As early as 1922 Buber wrote, "Anyone dealing with this issue [of their relations] finds that his foot has trod upon tragic soil." Even then he saw that the relation between the Seer and the Yehudi was a combination of inclination (*Neigung*) and opposition (*Gegensatz*).⁸⁹ This gives us a key to understanding a work that he pieced together two decades afterwards.

The paths of religious faith and behavior exemplified by these two spiritual leaders are not mutually exclusive. They do penetrate each other to some extent. The Seer viewed the Yehudi as compensating for his own shortcomings, and the Yehudi could not free himself from an inner bond with his master, the Seer. This polar duality, which was depicted on the basis of Hasidic sources, reflects a mighty battle in Buber's own inner world between his spiritual drives, including his tendency toward mysticism, and the dialogic experience here on this earth. His conscious leaning was towards identification with the Yehudi, but at the same time a hidden affinity with the Seer bubbles up in his work. He struggles with these two poles—his two paths—at the same time. I have already noted the significant place in *For the Sake of Heaven* that is given to Rabbi Naftali of Roptchitz. The contrasts from which his portrait is drawn are a reflection of the contradictory strains that were combined in Buber's own spiritual world.⁹⁰

In this context we cannot discuss the other characters of this work, which express the inner recesses of its creator's world. "None of Buber's books is as personal as those about Hasidism," noted Gershom Scholem.⁹¹ Perhaps we might extend that statement and view *For the Sake of Heaven* as the most personal and confessional of all of Buber's writings. In any event, Buber's testimony regarding the radical contrast expressed in this work are an indication of his general view of the world:

What I had to try to do was to penetrate to the kernel from both sides. This attempt could succeed only if I placed myself in the service of neither of the two tendencies. My only admissible point of view was that of the tragic writer who must delineate conflicting forces, each in its own nature, and whose antithesis is not between a "good" and an "evil" will, but lies within the cruel antithesis of existence itself.⁹²

These words are echoed in an earlier statement about the tragic inability "to be, . . . in an inner sense, the representative of *one* side," which