

Opening paragraphs of Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (1923)

To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude.

The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks.

The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words.

The one primary word is the combination *I-Thou*.

The other primary word is the combination *I-It*; wherein, without a change in the primary word, one of the words *He* and *She* can replace *It*.

Hence the *I* of man is twofold.

For the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* is a different *I* from that of the primary word *I-It*.

Primary words do not signify things, but they intimate relations.

Primary words do not describe something that might exist independently of them, but being spoken they bring about existence.

Primary words are spoken from being.

If *Thou* is said, the *I* of the combination *I-Thou* is said along with it.

If *It* is said, the *I* of the combination *I-It* is said along with it.

The primary word *I-Thou* can only be spoken with the whole being.

The primary word *I-It* can never be spoken with the whole being.

There is no *I* taken in itself, but only the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* and the *I* of the primary word *I-It*.

When a man says *I* he refers to one or the other of these. The *I* to which he refers is present when he says *I*. Further, when he says *Thou* or *It*, the *I* of one of the two primary words is present.

The existence of *I* and the speaking *I* are one and the same thing.

When a primary word is spoken the speaker enters the word and takes his stand in it.

A Paraphrase of Buber's opening paragraphs of *I and Thou*

To humans, the world is divided into two parts according to the two attitudes that we have toward it.

Our two possible attitudes toward the world emerge from the two corresponding "primary words" behind each of these attitudes.

These "primary words" are not individual words, but made of two sets of inseparable combined words.

One "primary word" is the combination *I-You*.

The other "primary word" is the combination *I-It*; the *I-It* primary word can change the *It* to either *He* or *She* and still be part of an *I-It* relationship.

As a result, there are two ways to be an *I* in this world.

The *I* of the "primary word" *I-You* is not the same *I* as the one in the "primary word" *I-It*.

These two "primary words" do not name some external thing, but they point to relationships.

"Primary words" do not describe something that exists outside of the active relationships they name; speaking/living out *I-You* or *I-It* brings about their existence.

"Primary words" can only be spoken from who we are.

Whenever anyone says *You*, he or she is always also saying *I*, the *I* of the *I-You* "primary word."

Whenever anyone says *It*, he or she is always also saying *I*, the *I* of the *I-It* "primary word."

The "primary word" *I-You* can only be spoken/lived with one's whole being.

The "primary word" *I-It*, on the other hand, can never be spoken/lived with one's whole being.

There is no independent *I*, every *I* is always defined by its being part of one of the two "primary words": it is the *I* of *I-You* or the *I* of *I-It*.

Whenever anyone says *I*, one is either saying *I-You* or *I-It*. Whenever anyone says *I*, either the *I* of *I-You* or the *I* of *I-It* is present. In the same way, every time we say *You* or *It*, the *I* of *I-You* or *I-It* is also present.

The existence of *I* can only happen as part of the speaking/living out of either *I-You* or *I-It*.

Whenever you speak/live out one of the two "primary words" (*I-You* or *I-It*), you embody that word and take your stand in that "primary word" in your relationship to others.