



Research Paper

## An Overview of the Dialogicality of the Interpersonal Relationship With Reference To Martin Buber's Philosophical Approach

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### ABSTRACT

Human interiority is a mystery. It would have been an impossibility to penetrate the interior nature of man if not for the gift of language. Language or the capacity to communicate, therefore, is an essential distinctive nature of man as a person. Through the process of communication, the interior content of the human mind otherwise inaccessible is made visible and accessible to the other(s). This build up to what is named encounter. In an encounter, both the one encountered and the one encountering become aware of their own selves and that of one another. This awareness in turn facilitates attention and understanding which brings about growth. This growth is necessarily spiritual, psychological and socio-cultural. Invariably, this atmosphere of mutuality in which life blossoms is the ultimate desire of every human being. In this mutuality of intersubjective relationship, the "I" now speaks to its "Thou" and the "Thou" responds to the "I". More so, in this mutuality of I-Thou relationship, in which understanding of one another is made possible, every sign, every gesture, and in fact every movement becomes a comprehensible language. It is a relationship in which God is found. The above points are the goal of this study. To be able to accomplish this objective, the researcher primarily uses the methodological approach of philosophical reflection and presentation.

**KEYWORDS:** Dialogue, Intersubjectivity, Relationship, Mutuality, Genuine.

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### I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

It was Jean Paul Sartre who opines that everyone comes into the world as an individual but everywhere man is in chains. In effect, he implies that no man is an island. We are at every moment in need of each other. Hence, the Igbo adage rightly says that a tree does not make a forest. This ecological dependability is an integral nature of man in the universe.

Man as an existent being relates with the world/things, with fellowmen and finally with God. This threefold relationship is a necessity for every single human being in so far as it is still in existence and is desirous to bring the potentialities of its being into actuality. Hence, Buber defines man as: "...being who is capable of the threefold living relation and can raise every form of it to essentiality" (Buber; 1947). Moreover, he adds that man is as well, "a being in whom God loves himself" (Buber; 1947). Man is authentic when he considers the entire threefold relationship essential through a meaningful intersubjectivity or what Buber in his characteristic way called I-Thou relationship.

Invariably, therefore, I-Thou relationship is basically founded on and sustained in the mutuality of give-and-take of talk. Information moves from individual to another through the process of communication, without which each individual person would be imprisoned in its own world. It is through this essential give-and-take of talk that man can go over and above himself to meet the other in essential mutuality in which life blossoms.

### Dialogicality of Interpersonal Relationship

According to Buber, I-Thou relationship is dialogical. This is as a result of the fact that: "Human beings are Social...beings, born to live in a community with other human beings" (Gratsch; 1985, p. xxii). The consideration of man as a social being implies man's ability for communication.

For no man is without strength for expression and our turning towards him brings about a reply, however, imperceptible, however quickly smothered in a looking and sounding forth of the soul...(Aquinas; 1941).

It is this communication that facilitates the communal life of man. The question of man occupying the first position in the corporeal world should have been meaningless if not for man's ability for language. Man's rationality can only be manifested and activated through dialogue.

In a cordial and mutual relationship, "I" relate with its "Thou" in a total openness. This openness is made possible through conversation. Ordinarily, human mind is impenetrable. In this regard, therefore, the Igbo adage puts it that the spoken words are the human mind made visible and accessible (Onwuatuegwu; 2010, p.32). Conversation has made it easy to reach very deep into the depth of human mind. Conversation has physical body as its starting point but gradually penetrates right into the human soul. Hence, Buber writes:

If you look at someone and address him, you turn to him, of course with the body, but also in the requisite measure with the soul, in that you direct your attention to him (Buber; 1958, p.113).

By the way of dialogue, concepts which exist in an individual's mind is transferred or made known to another individual. For:

To speak to another is nothing other than to make known to him the concept he has not in mind(Buber; 1947, p.45).

Acceptably, it is very obvious then, that it would have been a futile effort or a matter of impossibility to decipher the contents of an individual person's mind outside the context of communication.

Moreover, without language, thinking also becomes impossible. Hence, in the animal kingdom, animals do not think because they have no language. This is so, because:

...between one power of thought and another there is no other mediator but speech (Buber; 1958, p.41)

Man is able to formulate concepts because of his ability for language. Animals do not communicate, for the power of communication naturally belongs to man. Hence:

what is peculiarly characteristic of the human world is above all, something takes place between one being and another, the like of which can be found nowhere in nature (Buber; 1958, p.42).

Concerning this very issue Aquinas also writes:

speech...properly is that by which one leads another to the knowledge of something hitherto unknown to him so that what was formally absent from him becomes present to him (Buber; 1958, p.9).

Meanwhile, speech has rendered I-Thou relation an actualized fact in the human world. Consequently, individuals can then possibly form ideals and concepts and shape their world through healthy relationship (Onwuatuegwu; 2010, p.35). Insistently, Buber postulates that mutual relationship is direct. Its directness is made possible because of language through which man's inner reserve can be resolved.

An essential relation to individual men can only be a direct relation from life to life in which a man's reserve is resolved and the barriers of his self are breached (Buber; 1958, p. 118).

### **Everything becomes language in a mutual relationship**

The life of individuals are disclosed and completed in a meaningful conversation; conversation in which life blossoms. As regard I-Thou relationship, communication is not limited only to vocal output. In this relation, everything and signs turns into language. Ockham defines sign as: "something that stands for or represents something else" (Ockham; 2002, p.190). Considering the fact that in a genuine and mutual relationship everything can be language, Buber points out that:

Resting in one another, the expression and discernment of which can be satisfied by a glance, indeed by the mere sharing of a gaze which is rich in inward relations (Buber; 1958, p.118).

Hence, between faithful friends as it happens in I-Thou relationship, even silence can be understood as language. According to Buber, a genuine relationship demands a total openness and willingness to listen and to receive; to speak and to give. Hence, Buber writes:

...I and Thou take their stand not merely in relation but also in the solid give-and-take of talk. The moments of relation are here, and only here, bound together by means of the element of the speech in which they are immersed (Buber; 1958, p.118).

Meanwhile, dialogue is the bedrock of I-Thou relationship. Hence, Buber stresses therefore, that:;

Dialogue is not to be identified with love. But love without dialogue, without real outgoing to the other, reaching to the other, and accompanying with the other, the love remaining with itself – this is called Lucifer (Buber; 1958, p.39).

In other words, I penetrate my beloved through conversation and my beloved enters me only in conversation. Hence, any relationship that is devoid of dialogue is bound to fail. Little wonder J. Powell emphasizes that wherever communication ends, there suspicion comes in. In his book "Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?" Powell proposes that:

The fully human person is in deep and meaningful contact with the world outside of him. He not only listens to himself, but to the voices of the world. The breadth of his own individual experience is infinitely multiplied through a sensitive empathy with others. He suffers with the suffering, rejoices with the joyful. He is born again in every springtime, feels the impact of the great mysteries of life: birth, growth, love, suffering, death. His heart skips along with the 'young lovers', and he knows something of the exhilaration that is in them. He also knows the ghetto's philosophy of despair, the loneliness of suffering without relief, and the bell never tolls without tolling in some strange way for him (Powell, 1969, p.100).

The confidence and trust that exist in relationship find their solidification in a genuine dialogue. However, those who have attained to greater heights in interpersonal relationship have been those persons whose relationships have been mutual and sustained in a meaningful dialogue. It is only in a solid give-and-take of talk can a relationship blossom and through it can it endure.

### **Genuine and Non-Genuine Dialogue**

Admittedly, Buber accepts that not all dialogues are genuine. He distinguishes three kinds of dialogue. These are: genuine dialogue, technical dialogue and monologue disguised as dialogue. The communication that is not genuine rather than of revealing meaning to the other(s) conceals meaning instead. Flaubert alluded to this book "Madame Bovary" when he writes:

... the more flowery a person's speech, he thought the more suspect the feelings, or lack of feelings, it concealed. Whereas the truth is that fullness of soul can sometimes overflow in utter vapidness of language, for none of us can ever express the exact measure of his needs or his thoughts or his sorrows; and human speech is like a cracked kettle on which we tap crude rhythms for bears to dance to, while we long to make music that will melt the stars. (Flaubert, 1985, p.267).

The ability and the capability of man to externalize his thoughts is actually what makes him a real authentic person. This implies that communication must be honest and reveal or convey the exact content of the human thought. Any noticeable discrepancy between the communicated words and the real content of the human thought makes language to lose its meaning and functions as well. Powell is aware of this aspect of Dialogue as he states thus: "This is the real meaning of authenticity as a person, that my exterior truly reflects my interior" (Powell, 1969, p.44).

Hence Buber persistently and strongly insists that a genuine dialogue does not consist in monologue between one and oneself or the soul speaking to itself. It is rather a conversation of persons. Thus:

True dialectic is not a monologue of the solitary thinker with himself; it is a dialogue between I and Thou (Jaspers; 1967, p.125).

More so, Buber insists that for dialogue to be genuine, it must be focused on establishing a living relationship. Thus he regards genuine dialogue as a situation:

Where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them (Buber; 1958, p.104).

From the citation, one can easily conclude that what Buber means by genuine dialogue is not necessarily our everyday conversation. Our everyday discussion is often necessitated by our particular needs: such as that which takes place between us and people we meet on the way, or those we are working with. Such dialogue is often prompted by our particular needs either to pass on information or to get or ask for information. It can also happen when we want to give command or rebuke. Hence, our everyday conversation merely arises from need. It is not intended for establishing a living and mutual relationship between the conversants.

Therefore, genuine dialogue directs interest and intent on realizing a living and mutual relationship in which God is found.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

The world is always the world of humanity. It is impossible to have a perception of the world without thinking of man who is at the boundary of the spiritual and the material. Man is connected with the world/things through his body and connected with the spiritual through his mind. This man who is by nature both free and rational is the apex of God's creation. For man to occupy his position as the apex of God's creation necessarily engender the need for the endowment of the ability to communicate. Hence, even the deaf and dumb person makes every effort to communicate and with meaning. Therefore, he is happy and fulfilled whenever his communication is understood. The ability to communicate with meaning is, therefore, intrinsically and essentially a distinctive nature of man as man.

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