

TWO ATTEMPTS TO OVERCOME THE LACK OF SENSE (II)

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Abstract: *The twentieth century was a century of revolutions crisis - because it began with a planetary revolution of founding and ended up with a revolution of planetary destruction of the foundation; between the beginning and the end there was the Holocaust, extended in the third millennium century. Human being, from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century, took place from the eclipse of reason to the eclipse of the absolute. The author presents two philosophical attempts to overcome the sense lack of the absolute.*

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Ontology of the Human after Holocaust in Martin Buber

Martin Buber's culture philosophy work has found its true identity through confrontation with the various doctrines of socialist trends of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which were feverishly looking forward to a "different" social, "paving the way" to transform entire civilization for human regeneration. The empathy of the creative, comprehensive, critical and stimulating thinking as an alternative onto the proximity of man to man, defines the conception of culture and civilization in Martin Buber, in accordance with the spirit of "fill" the world as a force field, and within this "field of spirit" special relationship can be manifested in the form of the paths in Utopia¹. The core of the philosophical researches in Martin Buber's work is concentrated in a famous paper of the time, namely *Der utopische Sozialismus*, that expressed a double recorded history of the twentieth century, universalism and particularism, socialism and Zionism. The ontology of this three-dimensional interval - present in his *opusculum* entitled *The Eclipse of God* and symbolized by the prophet as the past, the *ego* as the present and Messiah as the future - is Martin Buber's response to the question whether philosophy about man and man himself can exist after Auschwitz. The Buberian philosophy of the human identifies the geometrical locus of the human spirit as being, conceptually expressed by the category of *Das Zwischen* (literally: "Between"), as ontically privileged space between two people, who face each other in the relation "I - Thou". In the interval between (*zwischen*) I and You shall take place the *truth* (or the *falsehood*) through the need of the two wills to manifest simultaneously. Thus, the range is filled with a force field out of which the truth is gushing as a fact of living and not as a matter of language or knowledge.

Buberian *Truth* is an event that happens between two partners, the man and the world, over which blows a breath of grace, namely God. The concrete expression

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¹ Théodore Dreyfus, *Martin Buber*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1981, p. 63.

of the truth is the human community where the existential situation of man in the world is defined but, unlike Heidegger's man, who was in the same situation characterized by asymmetry and monologue, in Buber, the person barriers are actually broken, and thus a unique phenomenon arises, authentic and true, to achieve the situation that the other is actually present in front of the *ego*, specifically addressing to him, neither as a creation of his imagination, nor as a pure feeling of his presence or merely as the object of knowledge, but as a time term of a state of grace, which flows from himself to the other, to meet in an existential and essential dialogical relationship. The speculative dialectics of self and otherness true relationship finds its proper expression, in Buber's theory about the human community as a result of a double output from the self to God, towards the world through creation, and towards the man through revelation, giving to the human being a salvation chance in the aspiration for utopia, which presupposes all human activities, in particular concrete social relationship in which the *ego* is no more absorbed by the otherness. The construction of the utopian salvation is presented by Martin Buber in his *Der utopische Sozialismus (The Utopian Socialism)*.

The first German edition of the paper *Der utopische Sozialismus (The Utopian Socialism)* appeared in 1950 as part of a larger scope work, dedicated to utopia, with the full title *Pfade in Utopia. Die Abhandlung. Zwischen Gesellschaft und Staat (Footpaths in Utopia. Study. Between Society and the State)* printed in Lambert Schneider Verlag, and in 1952 appeared in the same publishing house as an independent work devoted to the utopian social tradition as specific programmatic alternative to the social reality of the advanced capitalism (*Hochkapitalismus*).

Der utopische Sozialismus (The Utopian Socialism) is ordered in 12 chapters, and the first two of them theorize the meanings of the term *utopia*, of which Martin Buber holds the most general description of what might be imagined to be: “*Das utopische Bild ist ein Bild dessen, was «sein soll», wovon der Bildende wünscht, daß es sei*”¹. Secondly, the author frames the Marxism into the evolutionary line of the utopian socialism and, both of them, in the broad tradition of utopia, without making distinctions, highlightings or valuations, in the sense of not favoring any one of many utopian paintings of the world. The next four chapters are dedicated to the historical opening operated by the utopian socialism, starting with St. Simon, Ch. Fourier and Robert Owen² and continuing with Proudhon³, Kropotkin⁴ and Landauer⁵, booking a chapter to each of them. In the economy of his work, Buber introduces a chapter devoted to the programmatic researches⁶, where he deals with Cabet's *Icaria* and how it was used by Louis Blanc in the French national program of socialism, analyzing at the same time the utopian programs developed by the Englishmen William Thomson between 1828 - 1830 and William King's in 1930, based on “sympathy” and “solidarity” as constitutive principles of mechanized production units, whose practice has been

¹ Martin Buber, *Der utopische Sozialismus*, Köln, Verlag Jakob Hegner, 1967, p.19.

² *Ibidem*, *Die Ersten*, p. 33–45.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 46–67.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 68–80.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 81–99.

⁶ *Ibidem*, *Versuche*, p.100–136.

theorized as the idea of the stock cooperative enterprises¹. Martin Buber's provisional conclusion is that all left-wing social acquisitions, arising in the development of industrial capitalism, take the socialist tradition.

It follows two substantial chapters devoted to the historical works of Marx and Lenin regarding the renewal of the societății² undertaking a social experiment worldwide. The next chapter deals with the spread of socialist initiatives in Europe, America and Canada³. The last two chapters are mainly theoretical, as the concentrated expression of the subtle conceptual apparatus developed by Martin Buber to capture more than just a historical phenomenon (the road to socialism, from the utopian ideal to the real experimental), as an attempt in the eternal dialogue between I (“Ich”) and Thou (“Du”; where “Du” means God), in response to the rhetorical question “Can one believe in God after Auschwitz?” made by Buber in his opusculum, *The Eclipse of God*, written in 1952.

Martin Buber, as a distinctive philosophical and political personality of the twentieth century, is considered more a Socratic wise type, spiritual master, Hasidic *tsadiq* type, than a philosopher, at the confluence among the religious beliefs and practices, philosophical attitudes and political-theological outlooks where Christianity, Judaism and Zionism coincide, along with religion, science and philosophy of the latest generation, namely phenomenology and existentialism.

The historical man Martin Buber was born on the 8th of February 1878 in Vienna and died on the 13th of June 1965 in Jerusalem. He was traumatized as a child of 3 years old when his parents divorced, and little Martin was raised by his grandparents in Lemberg in Galicia, where he attended primary school and gymnasium. At 14, he returned to Vienna where he graduated from higher education, taking his doctorate with a dissertation entitled *Theory of individuation in the thought of Cusanus and Jacob Böhme*.

Martin Buber's intellectual youth was marked by political issues specifically Jewish. Thus, in 1901 he led the Vienna magazine “Die Welt”, the Zionist Organization weekly. Between 1916 and 1928 he edited a monthly magazine “Der Jude” which was the major site of expression for the German Jewry. In 1925, 400 years after Martin Luther, Martin Buber began to translate the Hebrew *Bible* into German, along with his friend, the philosopher Franz Rosenzweig. In 1933, after Hitler's rise to power, Buber has initiated a series of anti-Nazi conferences, banned by Gestapo, so that in 1938 he accepted the chair of social philosophy at the University of Jerusalem, which he will not leave until his death. The Jerusalem period is the most fertile one in his writings, when Martin Buber published *Gog and Magog, Faith of Prophets, Moses, Israel and Palestine; Man's Way according to Hasidic Education, Footpaths in Utopia, Life in a Dialogue, Between Man and Man, The Eclipse of God, Speeches on Education*, etc. In 1961 Martin Buber finished the German translation of the Hebrew *Bible*. Throughout his life, Martin Buber was considered not a philosopher, but an educator and a teacher, a Hasidic *tsadiq*.

To understand his work, *The utopian Socialism*, it requires some conceptual clarifications on the system developed by Martin Buber, as an expression of his

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 108.

² *Ibidem*, *Die Erneuerung der Gesellschaft*, p. 137–167; and respectively, p. 168–216.

³ *Ibidem*, *Noch ein Experiment*, p. 217–233.

endeavors to understand and to lead man to harmony with God and the world, in the triad of “Ego, Thou (God), the world (other)”. In his book, *The Problem of the Human*, there are few summary lines, highly suggestive in this regard, where Martin Buber is reformulating its main theses with respect to: individual-society report; the preeminence determination of the relationship against individuals; the authenticity of human existence expressed by the relationship “between” (*zwischen*); the language as sign and means for the human awakening.

Following Martin Buber, the ontically essential determinative of the human existence is the relationship as a manifestation area of the spirit, with a pair exemplary verbal expression “I – Thou” capable to express the authentic relationship between persons also, and not only between individuals. In the interval between (*zwischen*) Ego and Thou, spirit resides (not in Ego, nor in Thou). Hence, the qualification of Buber's philosophy as “an ontology of the range”, where “*Das Zwischen* («between») is the locus of the spirit as being” (Em. Levinas). The relationship «between» (*das Zwischen*) takes place in a three-dimensional universe symbolized by Martin Buber in three persons: the prophet – the past; the Ego – the present; the Messiah - the future. Among the three persons, prominent is the size of the Messiah - the future, as projected beyond man's own self and humanity beyond itself, initiating the utopian dialogue – constitutive to the human universe – among the three persons that abolishes the pragmatic *hiatus* between belief and making, between knowing and living the truth, between morality and politics. The Ego – the present has but now the great role to achieve the genuine meeting and the human dialogue between people, in three (and only three) spheres of existence: nature, society, God.

Hence, Martin Buber`s qualification as the founder of regional ontologies. God is the only and eternal Thou, without purpose, without any possibility of decay from His dignity of the absolute Thou. Man as Ego makes real the authentic dialogue with God as the absolute Thou, in a flashing manner, and only in an absolute state of grace, in a real act of living together, so that any Ego can become Thou. The Ego realizes also, however, another type of relationship, namely with «The That» (*das Es*), as a relation between the person Ego (*Ich*) which is possessing and the possessed object. The relationship “The Ego (*das Ich*) – The That (*das Es*)” establishes the existential duality - nature and society – where it takes place the human experience of cognition and of rational possession.

Utopian socialism is – in Martin Buber's thought – the proceeding (the proper, and the single) to transform the objectual relationship “The Ego – The That”, in the genuine interpersonal relationship Ego - Thou¹. Consequently, beyond the ways of science - Martin Buber considered - the human being can make real the return to consciousness, ranking himself in the heart of the dialectical movement of history by recovering the dream - that is utopia - the freedom to desire and the willingness to commit. In other words, the possible rebirth of freedom can be determined and implemented in the projection of the future, already registered in the deeds of the present².

¹ Martin Buber, *Eu și Tu (Ich und Du)*, trad. de Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1992, p.152 sq.

² Martin Buber, *Der utopische Sozialismus*, Köln, Verlag Jakob Hegner, 1967, p.16–17.

The dynamics between social theory and utopia is forged - in Martin Buber's view - on a road which crosses the thinking and practical experience, to finally arrive at an opening – an utopian one - where thinking and experience, the essence and the appearance, society and the state coincide¹.

Martin Buber's undertaken analysis in *The Utopian Socialism* refers to the postwar world situation reduced by approximately 55 million victims disappeared under tragic circumstances, and faced with the necessity to choose between two social systems, both failed: the advanced capitalism (*Hochkapitalismus*) of the consumer society that transforms the human beings in things, and socialism as the prototype of a new society originated in the hope of a better world, but failed in the dogmatism of productive cooperatives². The choice was considered impossible by Martin Buber and as a sign of a deep and violent crisis for humanity in transition having three symptoms³.

Firstly, it is the extreme precariousness of the international situation that causes people's anxiety and makes fragile the human individual condition. Everything happens in the world as each individual, in order to save his personal existence, let himself to be caught in the wheels fighting with the death, to the point of raising this obsession into a destructive principle of all mental concepts of aid or solidarity between different cultures and divergent views. Secondly, the contemporary man is suffering from a relentless expansion of the masificate, collectivized loneliness, which cancels any identity, prohibits any fiction, cut off all communication. Man without a spring, with no future, uprooted, limited to his small enclosure and his passing individuality, is defending against the other taking advantage of this, as if this would be an object and a means to achieve his own goals. Society is no more than an aggregate of individuals without internal cohesion, which only has political power and ability to maintain a unit which is still abstract⁴. The last feature of the contemporary world crisis refers to the empty mind for any purpose, any bare hope, devoid of the courage conquering new horizons due to the enhanced terror of the risk, a thought lost in the labyrinth of the indefinite analyses, oriented toward the past, folded itself without finding the way to the reality of the accomplished act, expressed at most in a speech without action, without work.

The postwar society is, according to Martin Buber, a post-revolutionary society constituted from its very beginning on the ground of an inner inability to unify the individuals or to overcome the violent conflicts erupted among the different social groups. Therefore, it necessarily follows the growth of the political power authority, the only one capable to dominate these oppositions. Martin Buber considers the society dependence of any of its institutions as a servitude of man⁵, as a cancellation of his word relevance, as a negation of his will. Consciously or unconsciously, able or unable to save himself against his self, the human being is clinging desperately to an abstract collectivity, quitting his personal responsibilities, contenting merely to submit himself. So, the social man is no

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 255.

² *Ibidem*, p. 217-223.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 234 sq.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 249.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

longer participating in the political or common existence which essentially rests of a private and productive order.

Martin Buber believes that it is impossible to overcome such a profound crisis only by contemplation of the elapsed time mirage. Man must continue to move forward, to overcome his own dissolution, to invent again his own way. Human to human evolution may not now than to go through the strict limitation of the political power and restoring the social forces, in order to achieve a further development of life and autonomy of various communities members. Now - Martin Buber states – it raises the question of knowing which kind of society is able to provide to the greatest extent to the human being the coincidence between the wish of being for himself with the wish to be for the other. As far as describing the emergence of an “other” social, of a new world and a new society, of a “still-not-being” but hoped that it will take place, it is an obvious case of a utopia. Here is registering Martin Buber himself in the tradition of the pragmatic social utopia initiated by the utopian socialists as St. Simon and Ch. Fourier and maintained by Karl Marx at the theoretical level and by V. I. Lenin at the level of a (macro) social experiment¹.

In Martin Buber`s view, it is a very intimate connection that binds the social and the utopia in the horizon of a hope to achieve, in a transformation able to produce new socio-political structures, not so much in politics and economics as in public life. Various aspects of the social renewal must be regarded as an expression of one of the fundamental needs of social life, namely cooperative movement in the meaning of Hugo Grotius - *civitas composite* - or of Althusius - *consociatio consociationum*². It is fundamental for the new society to be interested in popular and social structures, not only in a political and strategic perspective. In the “new” social structure, it becomes important to use the proper time of the path transformation to the new society, in order to overcome the power relations of domination, as a whole variety of human communities where the meeting takes place between individuals in accordance with their common bargain. Martin Buber`s reproach to the Marxism and to the Leninist experiment refers to the error to believe that whoever fights against immeasurable force, against the sweeping and unjust power, one can not effectively than revolutionary planning a tighter centralized structure than the denied one³. So that, the planned social future must be based on the practical achievements and the real roots. No matter how strong (or weak) is, the socialist movement - believes Martin Buber - must turn its attention to early forms of new businesses, to encourage cooperative relations as *kwuza* and *kibbutz* type⁴. These associations could become - according to Martin Buber - the *embryo* of a living community. The association movement shall release the human action against human toward human.

Martin Buber has the certitude that the only human relationship is able to reach a just society capable of meeting the expectations of men. Following Buber, "utopians" are not all those dreamers and reformers inevitably delayed, as Marx wanted to believe, but a new breed of intellectuals able to anticipate the future and

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 137 sq; p.168 sq.

² *Ibidem*, p. 258.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 213–215.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 231.

to believe that the future will be subject to scientific verification in the new forms of social life, either pluralism or as unitarism: „*Restrukturierung der Gesellschaft als Bund der Bünde und Reduktion des Staates, oder Resorption der amorphen Gesellschaft durch den allmächtigen Staat; sozialistischer Pluralismus oder «sozialistischer» Unitarismus*” – “Restructuring the society as an alliance of alliances and reducing the state or the amorphous society resorption in the powerful state, socialist pluralism or unitarism «socialist»”¹.

Anticipating the future is essential to any foreseer approach concerning the present as *hic et nunc*, for utopia makes the future possible, for which utopia is primarily the legitimate right to dream and desire. Utopian dream function is to foreshadow a debt for being that mobilizes all the energies and stimulates them to do that is still only of the planning order. For Martin Buber, the utopian dream appears from the depth, fueled by “nostalgia of justice” that produces a secret pain before arriving at a clear conscience all wishing to know that will not become visible but coming from the boundaries of the individual to enter in to the frames of beings community of work and life together. Conjunction of dream and desire is only able to raise the passion and the patience necessary to great causes and grandiose projects. Yet, the power of imagination is not effective but only under the control of reason over the will of probation practice. The crisis is serious, so it requires to be overcome, a thorough knowledge of the situation and a keen sense of human responsibilities toward man². Knowledge can not reach, in turn, to the effective date unless it is transformed into a will. Nobody knows for sure what the social net will be in the immediate future, but the social frame contains in itself the form it will take.

Believing in a dream project – Martin Buber considers - means to be convinced that the social changes through the insertion of the human thought and action in an analysis of being. The human being sensitive to the prevailing trends, of the economic and political order, but also to the less obvious social trends, is subjecting all the rules to a severe critique as to know whether they bear in themselves the power to overcome the contradictions of society.

Martin Buber rejects any fatalistic view on history, supporting and firmly believing in the power of choice and decision. Far from being an obsolete aspiration, the transformation is first of all, to Martin Buber, a deliberate and voluntary preparedness for restructuring society, a people's mobilization to want history and making history that they want³.

Proceeding with patience in the analysis of the major utopian works considered representative for the real movement of the human in order to-be-fully-human, Martin Buber emphasizes the necessary and founding difference between political and social principle, between the state and society, between the authority reign only for the State and the government in the interest of serving the common people. Therefore, Martin Buber insists on the urgency of transmitting the power of decision to the social Prince, predicting the revival or creation of the viable “popular cells”, which could take the form of producer and consumer cooperatives such *kibbutz*. Popular cells are indispensable - according

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 233.

² *Ibidem*, p. 234–236.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 256–257.

to Martin Buber – for the transforming renewal from inside of the old community social relations able to cause radical changes in the entire social order. In Martin Buber's view, the socialism must turn a society as a sum of individuals with abstract identity, into a large family such as that proposed by Lao tse but also by the Christian category of *koinonia*¹. Therefore, “the popular cells” are *embryoes* for the human cooperation mode, characterized by the unification of labor, where the consumption and production, mental and manual labor, agricultural and industrial work are articulated in a consistent manner, as same rights and opportunities are common, all community members have common interests and each of them take part in the lives of others. Only respect for justice within each cell can truly make and propagate fair order for the whole.

The positive solution, practical and pragmatic envisioned by Martin Buber is the generalized extension of the integral cooperatives, constituting on the basis of the fusion of consumption cooperatives (based on interest) with production cooperatives (based on practical efficiency), which occurs within the association members each other, so that the social interaction renews the community through the common action of its members. The result is - Martin Buber argues forcefully – to limit the political dominance condition of man by man and the immediate start - *hic et nunc* - to the man always be convened in relation to his neighbor.

Beyond the boundaries of *The Utopian Socialism*, contemporary Jewish and Christian theology can not be adequately understood without reference to Martin Buber. Martin Buber has written numerous books including the best known is *I and Thou* (1923), *Gog and Magog* (1941) and *The Eclipse of God* (1952), which influenced the major Protestant theologians like Emil Brunner, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr. Martin Buber remains in the contemporary philosophical culture not only by translating *The Hebrew Bible* and through the humanist interpretation of Hasidism, but also by the major role in the Zionist worldwide movement, through the writings on education and psychotherapy, and not ultimately by his political writings. In 1952 Martin Buber was awarded the “Goethe”; in 1962, the “Bialik” award; and in 1963 “Erasmus” award, for his contribution to cultural and social heritage of Europe. In Israel today there are some institutions that function according to Martin Buber's thinking about education, such as training school for adult educators Ulpan Akiva, in Nataniya, and “Martin Buber” Institute for Studies of Adult Education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

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¹ *Ibidem*, p. 253.