PHILOSOPHIES OF I-THOU: A HISTORICAL SURVEY ADDRESSED TO THE GLOBAL SELF

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Abstract
This essay reflects on a series of conditions that can allow for the possibility of civilisational liveability and edifying cultural experiences within the context of the globalising problematics. As such, the essay offers a critical survey of the philosophies of I-Thou, mainly from Western modern philosophy such as French Personalism and ethical phenomenology as well as from Japanese philosophies and the Kyoto School influenced by aspects of Zen Buddhism. The ultimate message is a call for redeeming ways of thinking the I-Thou principle and its place as a civilisational gravity.

Keywords: Martin Buber –Personalism – phenomenology – Zen Buddhism – Kyoto School – Nishida Kitaro – Nishitani Keiji – globalisation

Prolegomenon

Human beings, caught in the phenomenon of globalisation, are increasingly prone to casually experience things *as such*, formalistically, without too much concern for the *place* of what is experienced, temporally, or spatially, be it the historical background, the cultural context, the community within which we find ourselves, or simply the person to whom we relate.

Undeniably the infiltration of all kinds of technology at all levels, locally or globally, is largely responsible for what has been widely described as an existential decadence.[1] Oddly enough, however, perceptual experiences of the *such-ness* of things have, from a Westernised perspective, traditionally been associated with "Oriental" culture and in particular Chan or Zen Buddhism.[2] At first glance the similarities between the modes of perceptual suchness generated by globalisation and those found in areas of East Asian traditions of thought are striking. Yet, from an ethical and therefore existential perspective, the delusion could not be more obvious. The formalistic suchness experienced in globalisation stands in sharp contrast with the ethical suchness of things found for example in Mahayana Buddhism (*tathata*).[3]

The crux of the issue is indeed ethical. In fact, the perceptual "disinterested" attitude induced by the phenomenon of globalisation that has pervaded so many layers of life, speaks in many ways against the traditions of kenotic attitude that had customarily shaped important sections of Western cultures or even against other ethical philosophical traditions such as the *ubuntu* philosophies of Africa,[4] Buddhist-inspired thought across

[1] For a Personalist criticism of the techno-world, see Gabriel Marcel, *Les Hommes contre l'humain*, 1951; Jacques Ellul, *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*, 1954; Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Système et le chaos. Critique du développement exponentiel*, 1973; as well as Nishida Kitaro's "Logic and Life," *Ronri to semei*「論理と生命」, 1936.

[2] See e.g. Jacqueline I. Stone, "The Contemplation of Suchness," *Religions of Japan in Practice,* Donald S. Lopez (ed.), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, 199-209.

[3] See Guang Xing, "Tathatā: The Creation of the Doctrinal Foundation for Mahāyāna Buddhism," *Journal of Buddhist Philosophy* 4, 2018: 121-138.

[4] See Mogobe B. Ramose, "The Ethics of *ubuntu*" & "Globalization and *ubuntu*," in *The African Philosophy Reader*, P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (eds), London: Routledge, 2003, 324-330 & 626-650.

Asia[5] or Confucianism in East Asia.[6]

That the techno-economics of globalisation is mechanically transforming the cultural world into a configuration comprising modes of formalistic suchness and its correlating disinterestedness, amounts to a revolution that twentieth century Western philosophers such as Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) or Gabriel Marcel (1989-1973) concerned with understanding the essence and consequences of such existential mutation already warned against in different ways. Interestingly, the disinterested attitude that began to emerge in nineteenth century Europe and stood as a reaction against the traditions of metaphysics, grand narratives of all kinds, object/subject dualisms, the ethos of authenticity and so on, seemed to be confined to the Western world, reaching its peak with postmodernism.[7] In reality, the phenomenon of globalisation is generating a uniformed mode of disinterestedness to the point of obliterating the postmodernist version of its origins.[8] True, Western postmodernism developed an ethos of "difference" and "particularity" as opposed to "sameness" and "universality," but the climate of disinterestedness is certainly something it shares with globalisation albeit on a smaller scale.

This essay reflects on a series of conditions that can allow for the possibility of edifying cultural experiences within the context of the globalising problematics. To do so, the essay critically expounds modes of ethical thought that still prove to be relevant to understanding the relational effects of globalisation on the prospect of meaningful existence, whether that of persons or communities.

The following selective study of pertinent key texts by Western modern philosophers from the Personalist movement and the movement of phenomenology as well as by Kyoto School thinkers who pondered on the question of the *I-Thou* nature of the paradigm of self-determination, self-formation, and self-identity – seeks to reinterpret this relational paradigm in non-dualistic, non-hierarchical, differential, and complementary terms, with the aim of setting the conditions for a "civilisational liveability."

In the history of Western modern philosophy, the I-Thou conceptualisation underwent a particular development in the personalist and phenomenological movement. To formulate the conditions of "civilisational liveability" the study has focused on critical aspects of how the concept of I-Thou has evolved in Western modern philosophy, in particular French Personalism and ethical phenomenology, as well as in Japanese Zen Buddhist-influenced philosophies such as Nishida Kitaro's (1870-1945) and Nishitani Keiji's (1900-1990).

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[5] See Daniel Cozort and James Mark Shields ds., "Part II, Ethics and Buddhist Traditions," *The Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Traditions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, 75-313.
[6] See for example Huang Nansen, "Confucius and Confucianism," *Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy*, Brian Carr and Indira Mahalingam (eds), London: Routledge, 2005: 481-496.
[7] See Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, "In Search of the Postmodern," *Postmodern Theory*, London: Macmillan, 1991: 1-33.
[8] See e.g. Omar Lizardo and Michael Strand, "Postmodernism and Globalization," *ProtoSociology* 26, 2009: 36-70.

Evolution of I-Thou conception in Western modernity

In "*Zur Geschichte des dialogischen Prinzips*" (1954)[9] Martin Buber (1878-1965) identifies the mentions and the evolution of the concept of "I and Thou" (*Ich und Du*) in Western philosophy by tracing it back to a 1775 letter by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819). Jacobi states: "I open eye or ear, or I stretch forth my hand, and feel in the same moment inseparably: Thou and I, I and Thou […] The source of all certainty: you are and I am!"[10] Furthermore, "[t]he I is impossible without the Thou."[11] Jacobi also identified a kinship between "the Thou of the 'other' and that of God," but for Buber, his approach unavoidably run the risk of a "vague intermingling" that had to be avoided on an existential ground. Then comes Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) for whom, in his own words, "[t]he consciousness of the world is mediated for the I through the consciousness of the Thou […] the I that stands over against a Thou and that is itself a Thou over against another I," which he qualifies in terms of "mystery of the necessity of the Thou for the I."[12] But, unlike Jacobi's amalgamating understanding of "the Thou of the 'other' and that of God," for Feuerbach "[m]an for himself is man (in the usual sense) – man with man – the unity of I and Thou is God."[13] God therefore becomes that very "unity" between I and Thou, in other words a unifying relationship that brings the two together – a communion that expresses the essence of the divine. This conception is further elaborated by Søren Kierkegaard for whom "to be the Single One" implies what Buber calls "the highest essential relationship."[14] But even if Kierkegaard's existentialism does not allow for the Thou to be assimilated with the divine, Buber typically criticises that it does not truly make the relationship between fellow human beings "an essential relationship."

It is only at the beginning of the twentieth century and World War I that the question of the essence of the relationship between I and Thou will start afresh again. For Hermann Cohen (1842-1918), "only the Thou, the discovery of the Thou, brings me to consciousness of my I."[15] The Thou is here thought to lift "the personality" of the I "to the light of day." Buber identifies in Cohen something that will become a tenet of his own relational philosophy: the reciprocity between human beings and the divine being conditional on the "inclusive" relationship itself between human beings. Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) in *Der Stern der Erlösung* (1921) goes a step further by suggesting that the manifestation of the divine is in God's origination and opening of the dialogue whereby the Thou "can reveal himself as I."[16] Ferdinand Ebner (1882-1931) in *Das Wort und die geistigen Realitäten* (1921) also highlights the fundamental of the Thou by showing how the "solitude of the I" (*Icheinsamkeit*) is no more than the

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[9] Martin Buber, *Zur Geschichte des dialogischen Prinzips* [The history of the dialogical principle, 1954], *Werke*, *Schriften zur Philosophie*, *Erster Band*, Munich and Heidelberg: Kösel Verlag and Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1962 [1954] / trans. Maurice Friedman "The History of the Dialogical Principle," *Between Man and Man*, London: Routledge, 2002, 249-264.

[10] Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, quoted by Buber in "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 250.

[11] Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 250.

[12] Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums* [The essence of Christianity] (1841), quoted in Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 250.

[13] Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 250.

[14] Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 251.

[15] Hermann Cohen*, Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* [The religion of reason out of the sources of Judaism] (1919), quoted by Buber in, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 252.

[16] Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung* [The star of redemption] (1921), quoted by Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 253.

"closing off from the Thou."[17] Importantly, Ebner stresses that the love of God should thus also be the love of fellow human beings. But in no way does he conceive of an "authentic existence" that would ignore the divine. The Thou cannot replace the God. Or should it? Asks Buber in a Kierkegaardian fashion. The argument against, as we might expect from Buber, is relational: "the self-relating individuals who look at the world but are in the last instance acosmic, who love men but are in the last instance ananthropic."[18]

Buber himself started to contribute to the history of the I-Thou conception as early as 1901.[19] In *Die Legende des Baalschem* (1908) Buber differentiates "pure myth" from "legends" in I-Thou terms, so to speak: "The god of pure myth does not call, he begets; he sends forth the begotten, the hero. The god of the legend calls, he calls the son of man: the prophets, the saints."[20] In other words, unlike in "pure myths," "legends" involve "callers" and "called" and a dynamic that makes "the finite" entering into "the infinite" that in turn is in need of "the finite." This is the crux of Buber's conception of the dialogical relationship that will lead to his *I and Thou*, taking from Hasidic teaching based on "the two-directional relation of the human I and the divine Thou, on reciprocity, on the *meeting*."[21] This is the period when he laid the foundation of his relational philosophy.[22] Buber's conception of the twofold human nature forms the basis of his philosophy of "I and Thou," which was formulated in 1923 in a book entitled *Ich und Du*.[23]

One key theme of the book is the well-known distinction between "I-it" and "I-Thou," which can be traced back to Buber's *Daniel : Gesprache von der Verwirklichung* (1913) where he differentiates between the "objectifying" attitude and the "making-present" attitude.[24] Crucially though, his reflection in *I and Thou* departed from the standpoint of the subject found in *Daniel* and evolved into the standpoint of the relational subject. Buber identifies other philosophers who contributed to what may be more broadly called relational philosophy: Hans Ehrenberg's (1883-1958) *Disputation I Fichte* [Debate I Fichte] (1923); Eugen Rosenstock-Heussy's (1888-1973) *Angewandte Seelenkunde* [Practical knowledge of the soul] (1924); Friedrich Gogarten's (1887-1967) *Ich glaube an den dreieinigen Gott* [I believe in the three-in-one God] 1926); Rosenstock-Huessy's *Der Atem des Geistes* [The breath of the Spirit], 1951).

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[17] Ferdinand Ebner, *Das Wort und die geistigen Realitäten* [The word and the spiritual realities] (1921), quoted by Buber in, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 253.

[18] Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 254.

[19] See Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue,* New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960, p. 51 n.b.: "In his essay on Boehme in 1901 Buber writes that Boehme's dialectic of the reciprocal condition of things finds its completion in Ludwig Feuerbach's sentence: 'Man with man—the unity of I and Thou—is God.' ('Über Jakob Böhme,' p. 252f.) In 1905 Buber uses the term 'I and Thou' in a discussion of the drama and of the tension of the isolated individual [Buber, 'Die Duse in Florenz,' *Die Schaubühne*, I(15), December 14, 1905]. . . ."

[20] Martin Buber, *Die Legende des Baalschem* (Frankfurt am Main: Rfitten & Loening, 1908) / trans. Maurice Friedman, *The Legend of the Baal-Shem*, New York: Harper & Bros., 1956, xiii.

[21] Buber, *Der grosse Maggid und seine Nachfolge* [The great Maggid and his succession] (1922), in "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 255.

[22] See Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*. From *Cheruth: Ein Rede über Jugend und Religion* [Cheruth: a speech about youth and religion], 1919: "Man experiences the Absolute as the great presence that is over against him, as 'Thou' in itself.'" (*The Life of Dialogue*, 41) From *Gemeinschaft* [Community], 1919: "The erection of new institutions can only have a genuinely liberating effect when it is accompanied by a transformation of the actual life between man and man." (*The Life of Dialogue*, 46).

[23] Martin Buber, *Ich und Du* [I and Thou], Leipzig: Insel, 1923.

[24] Martin Buber, *Daniel : Gesprache von der Verwirklichung* [Daniel: Dialogues on realisation], Leipzig: Insel, 1913.

Gogarten's *Ich glaube an den dreieinigen Gott*, in particular, shows some interesting relevance for any reflection on the ethics of globalisation from a historical and human point of view. From Gogarten's conception, Buber already sensed the fundamental of the relational character of "history." Gogarten conceives history as "the meeting of Thou and I" as well as "God's work,"[25] recalling thus nineteenth century German historian Leopold von Ranke's (1795-1886) view that "every epoch is immediate to God" in *Über die Epochen der neueren Geschichte* (1880)[26] – a view that Nishida Kitaro in his essay "History" (*Rekishi* 歴史, 1931) reinterpreted from a Buddhist perspective in terms of "absolute" here and now of each epoch that determines the entirety of our lives.[27] As for Gogarten, Buber only retains the apparent determinism involved in his assertion of the divine design of history thus labelling it as "undialectical" and therefore un-relational (i.e. it can as a result only overlook "history as meeting"). Gogarten's *Glaube und Wirklichkeit* (1928) equally falls under Buber's criticism in the sense that its account of the axiom "the meeting of Thou and I is reality" remains historical within the Protestant Reformation and as such fails to grasp the more universal spiritual dimension of the human nature.[28]

Other identified sources include Karl Heim's (1874-1958) *Glaube und Denken* (1931) that sees new modes of thinking unfolding when the perspective of the "I-It relationship" is now supplemented by that of the "Thou opening to us"[29]; Theodor Litt's (1880-1962) conception of dialectical thought in *Individuum und Gemeinschaft* (1919-1926) that sees a new experience of the world from within an authentic dialogue;[30] or phenomenologist Karl Löwith's (1897-1973) *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen* (1928) whereby "[i]n the communication [*Mitteilung*] that communicates something one shares [*teilt*] oneself with another at the same time. The authentic meaning of the "with" of sharing [*"mit" der Teilung*] is found in the one-another [*Ein-ander*]."[31] But for Buber, Löwith's concern with "communication" falls short of providing a genuine account of I-Thou relationship. Although Buber does not expand on the reasons for his criticisms, we can assume they stem from Löwith's emphasis on the sociality and culturality of human practices that always precede their individuality, thus unavoidably imposing a determining orientation on the experience instead of a true "dialogue."

In Buber's critique, Eberhard Grisebach's (1848-1904) *Gegenwart* (1928) equally misses an important element for his relational philosophy to be considered as an authentic I-Thou philosophy. Grisebach's demand for the "practice of the hearing of the otherness of the other" can only overlook "the unfolding of something that is to be regarded in common."[32] Again, it is really the rampant unidirectional dimension of the experience

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[25] Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 257.

[26] Leopold von Ranke, *Über die Epochen der neueren Geschichte* [On the epochs of the new history] (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1971 [1880]), 59-60.

[27] Nishida Kitaro,「続思索と体験」[Thinking and experience, continuation], 1931, NKZ 12, 50 / Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2020, 59.

[28] Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 257. See Gogarten's *Glaube und Wirklichkeit* [Faith and reality], Jena: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1928.

[29] Karl Heim, *Glaube und Denken* [Faith and thought], Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1931.

[30] Theodor Litt, *Individuum und Gemeinschaft* [Individual and community], Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1919-1926.

[31] Karl Löwith, *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen* [The individual in the role of fellowman] (München: Drei Masken Verlag, 1928), 109, quoted in "Hearing the Other: Communication as Shared Life," by James Risser, *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics* 2019, Article 8, 1-17 (2019): 5.

[32] Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 259. See Eberhard Grisebach, *Gegenwart* [The present] (Halle-Saale: Max Niemeyer, 1928).

that Buber criticises. Karl Jaspers' (1883-1969) *Existenzerhellung* and *Metaphysik* (1932) obviously reflect the same inter-personal concerns as Bubers' for understanding the human condition in relation to the divine.[33] Buber, however, is critical of Jaspers' conception of the nature and role of "transcendence" whose connection, Buber asserts, "with the concrete is treated by it as arbitrary; the advance to the boundlessness of the Thou is, in effect, annulled."[34] In other words, "philosophical existence" for Jaspers needs not the "infinite Thou," i.e. the God, as an absolute necessity even partially determining as in the case of the genuine dialogue. Any revelation for Jaspers is mediated by "signs": ""Signs happen to us incessantly, to live means to be addressed... What encounters me is an address to me. As that which encounters me, the world happening is an address to me."[35] Put differently, the advents of the I, the finite fellow Thou, and the infinite transcendent Thou are always mediated fundamentally as messages. Most importantly, transcendence "comes into this world as an alien power from its distant meaning and speaks to existence: it approaches it without ever showing more than a cipher."[36] And, to seek direct connection with the all-encompassing divine not only hampers "communication" between human beings but also becomes "paralyzed" and "degraded."[37]

Finally, Buber's last target, so to speak, regarding what he held as genuine understanding of I-Thou philosophy and attitude is Karl Barth's (1886-1968) "Doctrine of the Creation" (1948).[38] Barth's conception of "basic form of humanity" is certainly articulated in I-Thou terms and around the relational fundamental of "meeting," but Buber sees in Barth's endeavour a Christian appropriation of such worldview. For Barth, similar ideas are found in other thinkers from other traditions whether theist or not, such as Confucius, Feuerbach, and indeed Buber. But "how far", Barth asks, are these "wiser men" able to "follow us in the final and decisive consequences of this conception"?[39] For Barth, those wiser men outside of Christianity do not give room to "that freedom of the heart between man and man as the root and crown of the concept of humanity."[40] The problem for Barth is when the humaneness of human beings is "willingly" chosen. Against this claim, Buber refers to what he is familiar with: Hasidism whereby "the freedom of the heart" remains "the ground of grounds." A profound illustration for Buber is "how the Hasidim dance the freedom of the heart to the fellowman."[41] The "willingness" in the I-Thou relationship becomes for Buber almost irrelevant; and it is certainly not a sufficient condition for such a relationship to become genuine whether in its inter-personal or person-to-divine dimension.

Other major Western thinkers who could legitimately qualify as philosophers of I-Thou, directly or indirectly, should be added to the list. Joshua Royce (1855-1916), for example, for whom individual, society, and nature cannot be conceived as discrete

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[33] Karl Jaspers, *Existenzerhellung* [Illumination of existence] and *Metaphysik* [Metaphysics] in *Philosophie II & III* (Berlin: Verlag von Julius Springer, 1932).
[34] Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 260.
[35] Karl Jaspers, quoted by Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 260.
[36] Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 261; Jaspers, *Metaphysik*.
[37] See translations in *The Worlds of Existentialism: A Critical Reader*, ed. Maurice Friedman, New York: Random House, 1964, 264-9.
[38] See Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Part Two, "Doctrine of the Creation," Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelisher Verlag, 1948.
[39] Karl Barth, quoted by Buber in "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 263.
[40] Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 263.
[41] Buber, "The History of the Dialogical Principle," 263

entities for they form a relational whole.[42] Royce articulated the ethical dimension of the relationship in terms of "loyalty" – a philosophy that influenced both Gabriel Marcel and Nishida. In the Catholic tradition, Marcel, of course, occupies a significant place (although he did not consider his philosophy to be specifically "Catholic" and was keen to keep his religious belief apart from his philosophy). His *Journal métaphysique* (1927), among others, brings the I-Thou relationship to the core of understanding human nature.[43] Just as in Buber the eternal, spiritual Thou cannot be reduced to an "it." Typically, in Marcel, freedom constitutes a primal element of the relational experience of I and Thou. Other central figure of French Personalism from the 1930s, Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950) conceives person-formation in relational terms that include other fellows and the community in his attempts to offer an alternative to modes of collectivism and individualism such as communism, fascism, and even radical liberalism.[44]

Catholic philosopher Maurice Nédoncelle (1905-1976) developed his personalist philosophy centred on the concept of "reciprocity of consciousness" (*la réciprocités des consciences*). Human relations are indeed central for Nédoncelle. In *La réciprocité des consciences* (1942) such relations find their incarnation in the Christian conception of love (ἀγάπη) that is at the heart of the unfolding of "being." The "I" is no discrete entity outside of the "we" which itself can only exists through its relation to a God. Human relations and the divine constitute the matrix of our world.[45] Even Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), who was influenced by Personalism in his early philosophical life describes the formation of "selves" in terms of our primordial embodied relationship with the world and other selves. In "*Autrui et le monde humain*" (1945) Merleau-Ponty reflects on the identity formation of "ourselves" and "other selves" by considering communication, our bodily existence and the objectifying gaze.[46]

Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) in *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990), is arguably one of the philosophers who comes as close as can be to a genuine spirit of dialogue involving a sense of reciprocity between I and Thou. *Soi-même comme un autre* is basically an argument against the "philosophies of the subject" that privilege the noetic poles. He suggests instead a "hermeneutics of the self" contrasted with Descartes' standpoint of the thinking self (*ego cogito*) that overlooks the determining complementary nature of the "other." Ricoeur unfolds instead a relational philosophy whereby "self" and the "other" are mutually self-determining in a fashion, should it be noted at this point, similar to that

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[42] See Joshua Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty*. New York: Macmillan, 1903; *The world and the Individual*. New York: Macmillan, 1901.

[43] Gabriel Marcel, *Journal métaphysique.* Paris: Gallimard, 1927.

[44] See Emmanuel Mounier, *Le Personnalisme*. Paris : Presses universitaires de France, 1949 / trans. P. Mairet, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004; in particular: "Personalism opposed to individualism"; "Community or collectivity"; and "Concerning the unity of persons," 17-19, 25-29 & 29-32. Other relevant works by Mounier include *Manifeste au service du personnalisme*. Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1936; *Qu'est-ce que le personnalisme ?* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1947; and *Communisme, anarchie et personnalisme*. Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1966.

[45] The corpus of Maurice Nédoncelle's Personalist work spans the following titles : *La réciprocité des consciences* [Reciprocity of consciousness], Paris : Aubier, 1942 ; *La personne humaine et la nature* [Human person and nature], Paris : Aubier, 1943; *De la fidélité* [On fidelity], Paris : Aubier, 1953; *Vers une philosophie de l'amour et de la personne* [Towards a philosophy of love and the person], Paris: Aubier, 1957; *Explorations personnalistes* [Personalist inquiries], Paris: Aubier, 1970; *Intersubjectivité et ontologie : le défi personnaliste* [Intersubjectivity and ontology : the personalist challenge], Louvain: Nauwelaerts 1974.

[46] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "*Autrui et le monde humain*" [Other selves and the human world], in *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris : Gallimard, 1945 / trans. C. Smith, *Phenomenology of Perception* [Phenomenology of perception], London: Routledge, 1962, 346-365.

of Nishida's non-dualistic conception of the relationship between I and Thou but with "transcendence" as background instead of "nothingness." Key concepts include "self-consideration" (*estime de soi*), consideration of the "other," and "otherness at the heart of selfhood,"[47] echoing again Nishida's non-dualistic relational conceptions of "self-love" (*jiai*自愛) and "love of the other" (*taai*他愛).[48] In Ricoeur "self-consideration" and "love of the other" operate on a footstep of mutually edifying equality that precisely allows differences to flourish. Importantly, to love and show consideration for the "other" implies another fundamental concept: "recognition" (*reconnaissance*), of which Ricoeur demonstrates the vital importance in *Parcours de la reconnaissance* (2005).[49] The mutual formation of I and Thou, or rather in the context of Ricoeur's study, "self" and "other," depends on the threefold nature of "recognition": "identification" (of "objects" or "persons"); "self-recognition" (*reconnaissance de soi*); and mutual recognition through "gift" (*don*) as opposed to "struggle."

In a similar vein, French phenomenologist Jean-Louis Chrétien remains an important representative of I-Thou philosophy through his reflection on and description of the experience of "call and response" (*l'appel et la réponse*). Such conceptions are developed in *L'appel et la réponse* (1992) and *Répondre, figures de la réponse et de la responsabilité* (2007). Chrétien's phenomenologies of relational experiences such as "listening," "speaking," "looking," "calling," and "responding" bring the centrality of "responsibility." One telling example is that of "beauty" in aesthetic experience that can be the source of an I-Thou relationship through the dynamic of "calling" and "response" whereby "responsibility" is born by both the artist and the perceiver.[50] However, similar to the previously mentioned thinkers albeit to lesser degrees, this apparent non-hierarchical treatment of the relationality between the different parties involved can be hindered when in the background looms the idea of a transcendent infinity that calls for a response.

Arguably the thinker from the "Western" tradition who came as close as can be to a non-discriminatory non-dualistic conception of the I-Thou relationship is literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975).[51] His "philosophical anthropology" that transpires through his aesthetics places the dialogue at the centre of the process of self-formation, not in the sense of a dialectics at work whose *telos* results in unification by means of an ultimate abstraction. Rather, the dialogue is endless life-formation, culture-formation, meaning-formation, or value-formation. The I, which in turn can become a Thou, cannot be conceive without the latter; self-formation relies on "transgredient" elements and the I can only find itself outside of itself, as an "exotopy."[52] This not to suggest that the I-Thou dialogue aims at identifying, comprehending, or controlling alterity – even though Bakhtin's conception suggests that identity constitutes a necessary albeit temporary

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[47] Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris: Seuil, 1990 / trans. Kathleen Blamey, *Oneself as Another*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, 302-318.

[48] See Nishida Kitaro, 自愛と 他愛弁証法 (*Jiai to taai benshoho*, Self-love, love of the Thou, and dialectics), NKZ 6, 1932, 260-299 / trans. Jacynthe Tremblay, « Amour de soi, amour de l'autre et dialectique » in *L'Éveil à soi*, Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2003, 71-94.

[49] Paul Ricoeur, *Parcours de la reconnaissance* [The course of recognition], Paris: Editions Stock, 2004 / trans. David Pellauer, *The course of Recognition*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

[50] Jean-Louis Chrétien, *L'appel et la réponse* [Appeal and response], Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1992; and *Répondre, figures de la réponse et de la responsabilité* [Responding : figures of response and responsibility] Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007.

[51] See Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

[52] See Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhaïl Bakhtine. Le principe dialogique*, Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1981.

element in the dialogical principle. In the eyes of the I the Thou must remain an ungraspable other for the life of the dialogue to endure, and this not as a transcendent abstraction but as a concrete reality. At this point, Bakhtin's I-Thou relational philosophy provides us with a smooth transition to East Asian conceptions and relevant aspects of the Kyoto School and Zen Buddhism in particular.[53]

I-Thou Philosophy and Zen Buddhism

It would hard to dispute that the dialogical fundamental of I-Thou common to thinkers from unalike cultural horizons also betray profound differences. Nishida's relational philosophy of I-Thou belongs to a tradition that can partly be traced and expressed in Japanese Zen Buddhism. Self-awakening plays indeed a central albeit not unique role in his philosophy insofar as it is articulated with other conceptions sourced from other schools of thought and traditions such as Taoism, Confucianism, Pure Land Buddhism, or German idealism. When commenting on Buber's *Ich und Du* (1923), Jacynthe Tremblay stresses that the standpoint most Western phenomenologists adopt is that of the *I* who affirms its *being* as a fundamental of existence.[54] As evidenced in Nishida's 私と汝 (*Watakushi to Nanji*, I and Thou, 1932),[55] and generally the works of Kyoto School thinkers, the universal and necessary condition of the affirmation of the I and by extension "being" is the *emptied I* or *no-I*.

The I-Thou relationship, however, remains that of reciprocity and even in-betweenness at the root of self-formations, whether of the person, communities, culture, or the historical world. The different modes of formation of I and Thou that we came across in Judeo-Christian philosophies as well as phenomenology are akin to what Nishida calls *self-determination* (*jiko gentei* 自己限定) whether of the perceiver, interpreter, or creator, which is affirmed through "contradictory" (*mujunteki*矛盾的) relationships to a "place" (*basho* 場所) that can be a personal or spiritual Thou as much as a field, *topos*, or whatever context. In the Nishida of the 1930s – contrary to his more foundational noetic inclination of his earlier periods – these formative relationships are reciprocal albeit not simply following a dialectical principle of Hegelian inspiration. These *contradictory self-identities* (*mujunteki jiko doitsu* 矛盾的自己同一) mutually affirm themselves through the negating or more precisely emptying movement of the relationship, which becomes the ultimate or absolute place (*basho* 場所) of entity formations.

What ensue are different degrees of mediation of the relational experiences. Interestingly for the sake of subsequently understanding what has become the nature of relationships in the context of present-day globalisation, the more mediated the relationship is (e.g. in inter-personal of artistic experiences) the more "concrete" self-awakening (*jikaku* 自覚的) and the affirmation of the self or the I are; the more unmediated (e.g., in

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[53] For a topical comparative reflection on both Bakhtin's and Nishida's conceptions of I-Thou principle, see Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, "The 'I' and the 'Thou': A Dialogue between Nishida Kitarô and Mikhail Bakhtin," in *Place and Dream. Japan and the Virtual*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004, 84-107.

[54] See Jacynthe Tremblay, « *La relation je-tu dans la philosophie de Nishida* », in *Religiologiques*, 29, printemps 2004: 117-152 ; James Heisig , "Non-I and Thou: Nishida, Buber, and the Moral Consequences of Self-Actualization," *Philosophy East & West*, 50(2), 2000: 179-207.

[55] Nishida Kitaro, 私と汝 [*Watakushi to nanji*, I and Thou], 1932, NKZ6, 341-427 / trans. Jacynthe Tremblay, « *Je et tu* » in *L'éveil à soi*, Paris: CNRS Éditions 2003, 95-144.

spiritual or religious experience) the more "absolute" the affirmation of the Thou or the God (*zettai mu* 絶対無, absolute nothingness) is.[56] Nishida's conception of I-Thou is of course highly ethical as in all thinkers we previously mentioned and who reflected on the topic and related issues. The relationship must be reciprocal, mutual, dialectical, and even dialogical. In Nishida self-affirmation is an act of self-negation that can only take place *in relatio*: one must "negate" oneself in the light of the Thou. Specifically, the enlightening moment of self-awakening is an affirmation that owes to its relationship with who or that which is outside of the self. But Nishida introduces another dimension as his relational philosophy is also topological. The I-Thou relationship itself cannot take place without a "place" to make it possible. For Nishida, there is no possible I-Thou reciprocal relationship if not unified externally, namely within a unifying external place.[57] This conception is of the essence for any understanding of the impact globalisation as the place of our experiences can have on our modes of existence in the contemporary world.

Equally noteworthy is Nishitani Keiji's reflection on I-Thou thought in Zen Buddhism. His text "On the I-Thou Relation in Zen Buddhism" (*Zen ni okeru ware nanji kankei* 禅における我-汝関係, 1961) begins with a reference to the encounter between Kyozan and Sansho expressed in a famous Zen koan recorded in *The Blue Cliff Records*: "Kyozan Roars with Laughter."[58] For Nishitani this encounter illustrates what a "true" encounter between two persons is supposed to be like. Nishitani asks what makes an encounter between different persons possible given the degree of alterity involved. For him, the answer does not lie in the acknowledgment in some "personal dignity" as in Immanuel Kant nor in the Christian idea of the communion. Even Buber's account overlooks a fundamental dimension at the heart of the I-Thou relationship. What Nishitani refers to is what we have already come across with Nishida: every "I" or "Thou" is "one expression of absolute subjectivity," and at the same time each are "absolutely relative." This, Nishitani argues, is something that only Zen can see. In Judeo-Christian philosophy relational experience of the individual is always understood through a universal (e.g., the state and its laws, morality, or "the Absolute Other"). The result is that individuals are always partly subordinated to a universal incarnating thus a sense of "imperfect freedom." The individual ends up being "relativised" and loses its "absoluteness." Conversely, "sameness" established through universals is also "imperfect." As a matter of fact, neither "absoluteness" nor "relativism" can absorb each other at the risk of falling into, respectively, "anarchism" or "a natural state" (or what Marcel would call "the catacombs" of meaning), and what Nishitani calls "totalitarianism" in the broad sense of the terms (viz. not only in the political sense).

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[56] See the way Tosolini contrasts Nishida's "absolute nothingness" (*zettai mu* 絶対無) with Levinas' "*infini*" in "Infinity or Nothingness? An Encounter between Nishida Kitaro and Emmanuel Levinas", 209-228.

[57] Nishida Kitaro, 私と汝 [*Watakushi to nanji, I and Thou*], 1932, NKZ6, 341.

[58] For a comprehensive analysis, see Bret Davies, "Encounter in Emptiness: The I- Thou Relation in Nishitani Keiji's Philosophy of Zen," *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Philosophy*, (ed.) Michiko Yusa, London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 231-254. The study highlights the importance of I-Thou relationship in Nishitani's philosophy from 宗教とは何か (*Shukyoo to wa nanika,What Is Religion?,* 1954-55) to 我と汝としての人間関係(*Ware to nanji to shite no ningen kankei*, The Human Relation as "I and Thou", 1969) via 禅における我-汝関係, *Zen ni okeru ware nanji kankei* (I-Thou relationship in Zen, 1961) / trans. N. A. Waddell, "On the I-Thou Relation in Zen Buddhism," *The Eastern Buddhist*, 2(2), 1969: 71-87.

The answer for Nishitani is, again, akin to Nishida's conception of I-Thou relationships whereby the individual's "absolute affirmation is simultaneously absolute negation."[59] This can only be found in the Zen paradigm of "absolute nothingness," "non-being," and "absolute emptiness." Only this paradigm allows for "freedom and equality" to "co-exist" at the same time. In other words, the "absolute affirmation" of the self takes place through its "absolute negation." This is Nishitani's Zen conception of "true freedom." Buddhist logic is clearly at work here: the self owes its absolute nature as much as to its relativeness.[60] At the level of the lives of selves encountering each other, the paradox expresses the "Suffering" that makes up the Buddha's conception of "the way of the World." In the example of dialogue Nishitani took, "[t]he *I* is the *Thou,* the *Thou* is the *I.*"[61] This "absolute non-differentiation" echoes Plotinus' (204-270) "oneness" (ἕνωσις) in the *Enneads* (c. 270)[62] or F.W.J. von Schelling's (1775-1854) "absolute identity" (*absolute Identität*).[63] The distinction between I and Thou, or self and other, or between persons dissolves. Or, to remain within the logic of the *Diamond Sutra* (Sk. *Vajracchedika-prajñaparamita-sutra*, c. 4th century A.D.): "The I-Thou relation is an I-Thou relation because it is not an I-Thou relation." There is "absolute opposition" through "absolute non-differentiation" – and vice versa.[64] In other words, put again in another way, I is I and Thou is Thou because I is non-I (i.e., Thou) and Thou is non-Thou (i.e. I). The non-I (or non-self, *muga* 無我) is the emptied I illustrated through Sansho swapping his name for Kyozan's. Negation becomes harmony through "other-centric" modes of selfhood – what Nishitani identifies as a form of "love" – but obviously neither *eros* nor *agape* (neither restricted to *of God* or *from God*). At the heart of suffering is then "discrimination" itself between "self" and "other" and therefore "self-attachment" to one's own self, to which, following Nishitani's Zen interpretation of the I-Thou problematic, one could add "non-discrimination" in the sense of "order of sameness" and by extension "communion". The "true" I-Thou is *both* non-discriminatory and self-sided.

Concluding Remarks

The aforementioned philosophies and texts that made the I-Thou paradigm a significant if not central tenet of their approaches or reflections is obviously not exhaustive – not to mention Western pre-modern philosophies, other Asian philosophical traditions, and African thought. They nonetheless represent some of the most important and relevant works achieved in the field. Arguably, what these Western modern thinkers from Jacobi to Chrétien via Jaspers and Marcel, including Buber himself, fail to consider in their conceptions and practices of the I-Thou principle is the standpoint of the "opposite" side

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[59] Waddell, "On the I-Thou Relation in Zen Buddhism," 75.

[60] For a clear account of Buddhist logic derived from Nagarjuna's (c. 150-250) pointing to the "self-contradictory character of all means of acquiring knowledge," see S.R. Bhatt, "Logic and Language in Buddhism," in *Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy,* 372-390. For a very detailed account of Buddhist logic, see F. Th. Stcherbatsky's classic two-volume *Buddhist Logic*. New York: Dover Publications, 1962.

[61] Nishitani, "On the I-Thou Relation in Zen Buddhism," 80.
[62] Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. George Boys-Stones et al., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, VI 9.
[63] For an overview of Schelling's philosophy of identity, see Andrew Bowie, "Identity Philosophy," "Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2023): https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schelling/#IdenPhil. Accessed 01/04/2024.
[64] Nishitani, "On the I-Thou Relation in Zen Buddhism," 81.

of transcendence, of the all-encompassing, or of fulness, that is, "nothingness" – or even "emptiness," that conception at the very heart of the fundamental of "immanence." Japanese thinkers such as Nishida and Nishitani, by including aspects of Zen Buddhism and to a lesser degree Pure Land to formulate their conception of the I-Thou principle paved the way for such considerations.

However, if we were to find a common denominator to all such philosophies of I-Thou, it would be that of an attempt to articulate the relational paradox of non-discrimination and self-sidedness, or commonality and authenticity as a fundamental for a meaningful existence. Of course, and as we saw, each philosophy and conception put different emphases on the parties and elements involved in the relational matrix. As an address to the global self, the message is that *all* parties and elements of the I-Thou relationship play a vital role in the shaping of a meaningful existence: the self, the other, and the place. Clearly, the context of globalisation does not offer a favourable ground for such differential, complementary determinations to unfold *in relatio*. The question of authenticity is a case in point. Today's techno-globalised world has made "authenticity" an anachronism as much as an irrelevance stained with dangerous ideology.[65] Any culture of authenticity is certainly potentially dangerous as evidenced by history and current movements reacting against the excesses of disinterestedness and standardisation imposed by globalisation. But any order of "sameness" is equally a threat to the meaningful existence in a relational world. To redeem ways of thinking the I-Thou principle and its place to guaranty the conditions for a civilisational liveability seems to have become not only an urgency but a vital need.

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[65] For an apropos conception of "authenticity" as part of a dialogical life, see Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.

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