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Letter from Martin Buber to Mahatma Gandhi

– by Martin Buber



My dear Mahatma Gandhi,

He who is unhappy lends a deaf ear when idle tongues discuss his fate among themselves. But when a voice that he has long known and honoured, a great voice and an earnest one, pierces the vain clamour and calls him by name, he is all attention. Here is a voice, he thinks, that can but give good

counsel and genuine comfort, for he who speaks knows what suffering is; he knows that the sufferer is more in need of comfort than of counsel; and he has both the wisdom to counsel rightly and that simple union of faith and love which alone is the open sesame to true comforting. But what he hears – containing though it does elements of a noble and most praiseworthy conception, such as he expects from this speaker – is yet barren of all application to his peculiar circumstances. These words are in truth not applicable to him at all. They are inspired by most praiseworthy general principles, but the listener is aware that the speaker has cast not a single glance at the situation of him whom he is addressing, that he neither sees him nor knows him and the straits under which he labours. Moreover, intermingled with the counsel and the comfort, a third voice makes itself heard, drowning both the others, the voice of reproach. It is not that the sufferer disdains to accept reproach in this hour from the man he honours. On the contrary, if only there were mingled with the good counsel and the true comfort a word of just reproach, giving to the former a meaning and a reason, he would recognise in the speaker the bearer of a message. But the accusation voiced is another altogether from that which he hears in the storm of events and in the hard beating of his own heart: it is almost the opposite of this. He weighs it and examines it – no, it is not a just one! And the armour of his silence is pierced. The friendly appeal achieves what the enemy's storming has failed to do; he must answer. He exclaims, "Let the lords of the ice inferno affix my name to a cunningly constructed scarecrow; this is the logical outcome of their own nature and the nature of their relations to me." But you, the man of goodwill, do you not know that you must see him whom you address, in his place and circumstance, in the throes of his destiny?

Jews are being persecuted, robbed, maltreated, tortured, murdered. And you, Mahatma Gandhi, say that their position in the country where they suffer all this is an exact parallel to the position of Indians in South Africa at the time you inaugurated your famous "Force of Truth" or "Strength of the Soul" (*Satyagraha*) campaign. There the Indians occupied precisely the same place, and the persecution there also had a religious tinge. There also the constitution denied equality of rights to the white and the black race including the Asiatics; there also the Indians were assigned to ghettos, and the other disqualifications were, at all events, almost of the same type as

those of the Jews in Germany. I read and re-read these sentences in your article without being able to understand. Although I know them well, I re-read your South African speeches and writings, and called to mind, with all the attention and imagination at my command, every complaint you made therein, and I did likewise with the accounts of your friends and pupils at that time. But all this did not help me to understand what you say about us. In the first of your speeches with which I am acquainted, that of 1896, you quoted two particular incidents to the accompaniment of hisses from your audience: first, that a band of Europeans had set fire to an Indian village shop, causing some damage; and, second, that another band had thrown burning rockets into an urban shop. If I oppose to this the thousands on thousands of Jewish shops destroyed and burned out, you will perhaps answer that the difference is only one of quantity and that the proceedings were of almost the same type. But, Mahatma, are you not aware of the burning of synagogues and scrolls of the Law? Do you know nothing of all the sacred property of the community – some of it of great antiquity – that has been destroyed in the flames? I am not aware that Boers and Englishmen in South Africa ever injured anything sacred to the Indians. I find only one other concrete complaint quoted in that speech, namely, that three Indian schoolteachers, who were found walking in the streets after 9.00 p.m. contrary to orders, were arrested and only acquitted later on. That is the only incident of the kind you bring forward. Now do you know or do you not know, Mahatma, what a concentration camp is like and what goes on there? Do you know of the torments in the concentration camp, of its methods of slow and quick slaughter? I cannot assume that you know of this; for then this tragi-comic utterance “of almost the same type” could scarcely have crossed your lips. Indians were despised and despicably treated in South Africa. But they were not deprived of rights, they were not outlawed, they were not hostages to a hoped-for change in the behaviour of foreign Powers. And do you think perhaps that a Jew in Germany could pronounce in public one single sentence of a speech such as yours without being knocked down? Of what significance is it to point to a certain something in common when such differences are overlooked?

It does not seem to me convincing when you base your advice to us to observe satyagraha in Germany on these similarities of circumstance. In the five years I myself spent under the present regime, I observed many

instances of genuine *satyagraha* among the Jews, instances showing a strength of spirit in which there was no question of bartering their rights or of being bowed down, and where neither force nor cunning was used to escape the consequences of their behaviour. Such actions, however, exerted apparently not the slightest influence on their opponents. All honour indeed to those who displayed such strength of soul! But I cannot recognise herein a watchword for the general behaviour of German Jews that might seem suited to exert an influence on the oppressed or on the world. An effective stand in the form of non-violence may be taken against unfeeling human beings in the hope of gradually bringing them to their senses; but a diabolic universal steamroller cannot thus be withstood. There is a certain situation in which no "*satyagraha*" of the power of the truth can result from the "*satyagraha*" of the strength of the spirit. The word *satyagraha* signifies testimony. Testimony without acknowledgment, ineffective, unobserved martyrdom, a martyrdom cast to the winds – that is the fate of innumerable Jews in Germany. God alone accepts their testimony God "seals" it, as is said in our prayers. But no maximum for suitable behaviour can be deduced from that. Such martyrdom is a deed – but who would venture to demand it?

But your comparison of the position of the Jews in Germany with that of the Indians in South Africa compels me to draw your attention to a yet more essential difference. True, I can well believe that you were aware of this difference, great as it is, when you drew the exact parallel. It is obvious that, when you think back to your time in South Africa, it is a matter of course for you that, then as now, you always had this great Mother India. That fact was and still is so taken for granted that apparently you are entirely unaware of the fundamental differences existing between nations having such a mother (it need not necessarily be such a great mother, it may be a tiny motherkin, but yet a mother, a mother's bosom and a mother's heart) and a nation that is orphaned, or to whom one says, in speaking of his country, "This is no more your mother!"

When you were in South Africa, Mahatma, 150,000 Indians lived there. But in India there were far more than 200 million! And this fact nourished the souls of the 150,000, whether they were conscious of it or not; they drew then, as you ask the Jews now, whether they want a double home where

they can remain at will? You say to the Jews: If Palestine is their home, they must accustom themselves to the idea of being forced to leave the other parts of the world in which they are settled. Did you also say to the Indians in South Africa that if India is their home, they must accustom themselves to the idea of being compelled to return to India? Or did you tell them that India was not their home? And if – though indeed it is inconceivable that such a thing could come to pass – the hundreds of millions of Indians were to be scattered tomorrow over the face of the earth, and if the day after tomorrow another nation were to establish itself in India and the Jews were to declare that there was yet room for the establishment of a national home for the Indians, thus giving to their diaspora a strong organic concentration and a living centre, should a Jewish Gandhi – assuming there could be such – then answer them, as you answered the Jews, that “this cry for the national home affords a plausible justification for your expulsion”? Or should he teach them, as you teach the Jews, that the India of the Vedic conception is not a geographical tract, but that it is in your hearts? A land about which a sacred book speaks to the sons of the land is never merely in their hearts; a land can never become a mere symbol. It is in the hearts because it is the prophetic image of a promise to mankind. But it would be a vain metaphor if Mount Zion did not actually exist. This land is called “holy”, but this is not the holiness of an idea; it is the holiness of a piece of earth. That which is merely an idea and nothing more cannot become holy, but a piece of earth can become holy just as a mother’s womb can become holy.

Dispersion is bearable. It can even be purposeful if somewhere there is ingathering, a growing home centre, a piece of earth where one is in the midst of an ingathering and not in dispersion and from where the spirit of ingathering may work its way out to all the places of the dispersion. When there is this, there is also a striving, common life, the life of a community that dares to live today because it hopes to live tomorrow. But when this growing centre, this increasing process of ingathering is lacking, dispersion becomes dismemberment. On this criterion, the question of our Jewish destiny is indissolubly bound up with the possibility of ingathering, and this in Palestine.

You ask, “Why should they not, like other nations of the earth, make that country where they are born and where they earn their livelihood their home?” Because their destiny is different from that of all other nations of

the earth. It is a destiny that in truth and justice should not be imposed on any nation on earth. For their destiny is dispersion – not the dispersion of a fraction and the preservation of the main substance, as in the case of other nations. It is dispersion without the living heart and center, and every nation has a right to demand the possession of a living heart. It is different, because a hundred adopted homes without one original and natural one render a nation sick and miserable. It is different, because, although the wellbeing and the achievement of the individual may flourish on stepmother soil, the nation as such must languish. And just as you, Mahatma, wish that not only should all Indians be able to live and work, but that also Indian substance, Indian wisdom, and Indian truth should prosper and be fruitful, so do we wish this for the Jews. For you, there is no need to be aware that the Indian substance could not prosper without the Indian's attachment to the mother soil and without his ingathering there. But we know what is essential. We know it because it is just this that is denied us or was, at least, up to the generation that has just begun to work at the redemption of the mother soil.

But this is not all. Because for us, for the Jews who think as I do, painfully urgent as it is, it is indeed not the decisive factor. You say, Mahatma Gandhi, that a sanction is "sought in the Bible" to support the cry for a national home, which "does not make much appeal to you". No – this is not so. We do not open the Bible and seek sanction there. The opposite is true: the promises of return, of re-establishment, which have nourished the yearning hope of hundreds of generations, give those of today an elementary stimulus, recognised by few in its full meaning but effective also in the lives of many who do not believe in the message of the Bible. Still, this too is not the determining factor for us who, although we do not see divine revelation in every sentence of Holy Scriptures, yet trust in the spirit that inspired their speakers. What is decisive for us is not the promise of the Land – but the command, whose fulfilment is bound up with the land, with the existence of a free Jewish community in this country. For the Bible tells us – and our inmost knowledge testifies to it – that once, more than three thousand years ago, our entry into this land was in the consciousness of a mission from above to set up a just way of life through the generations of our people, such a way of life as can be realised not by individuals in the sphere of their private existence but only by a nation in the establishment of its society: communal ownership of the land, regularly recurrent levelling

of social distinctions, guarantee of the independence of each individual, mutual help, a common Sabbath embracing serf and beast as beings with equal claim, a sabbatical year whereby, letting the soil rest, everybody is admitted to the free enjoyment of its fruits. These are not practical laws thought out by wise men; they are measures that the leaders of the nation, apparently themselves taken by surprise and overpowered, have found to be the set task and condition for taking possession of the land. No other nation has ever been faced at the beginning of its career with such a mission. Here is something that allows of no forgetting, and from which there is no release. At that time, we did not carry out what was imposed upon us. We went into exile with our task unperformed. But the command remained with us, and it has become more urgent than ever. We need our own soil in order to fulfil it. We need the freedom of ordering our own life. No attempt can be made on foreign soil and under foreign statute. The soil and the freedom for fulfilment may not be denied us. We are not covetous, Mahatma; our one desire is that at last we may obey.

Now, you may well ask whether I speak for the Jewish people when I say "we". I speak only for those who feel themselves entrusted with the mission of fulfilling the command of justice delivered to Israel of the Bible. Were it but a handful – these constitute the pith of the nation, and the future of the people depends on them. For the ancient mission of the nation lives on in them as the cotyledon in the core of the fruit. In this connexion, I must tell you that you are mistaken when you assume that in general the Jews of today believe in God and derive from their faith guidance for their conduct. Jewry of today is in the throes of a serious crisis in the matter of faith. It seems to me that the lack of faith of present-day humanity, its inability truly to believe in God, finds its concentrated expression in this crisis of Jewry. Here, all is darker, more fraught with danger, more fateful than anywhere else in the world. Nor is this crisis resolved here in Palestine; indeed, we recognise its severity here even more than elsewhere among Jews. But at the same time we realise that here alone can it be resolved. There is no solution to be found in the life of isolated and abandoned individuals, although one may hope that the spark of faith will be kindled in their great need. The true solution can issue only from the life of a community that begins to carry out the will of God, often without being aware of doing so, without believing that God exists and this is his will. It may be found in this

life of the community if believing people support it who neither direct nor demand, neither urge nor preach, but who share the life, who help, wait, and are ready for the moment when it will be their turn to give the true answer to the inquirer. This is the innermost truth of the Jewish life in the Land; perhaps it may be of significance for the solution of the crisis of faith, not only for Jewry but for all humanity. The contact of this people with this land is not only a matter of sacred ancient history; we sense here a secret still more hidden.

You, Mahatma Gandhi, who know of the connexion between tradition and future, should not associate yourself with those who pass over our cause without understanding or sympathy.

But you say – and I consider it to be the most significant of all the things you tell us – that Palestine belongs to the Arabs and that it is therefore “wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs”.

Here I must add a personal note in order to make clear to you on what premises I desire to consider this matter.

I belong to a group of people who, from the time when Britain conquered Palestine, have not ceased to strive for the achievement of genuine peace between Jew and Arab.

By genuine peace, we inferred and still infer that both peoples should together develop the Land without one imposing his will on the other. In view of the international usages of our generation, this appeared to us to be very difficult but not impossible. We were and still are well aware that in this unusual – even unexampled – case, it is a question of seeking new ways of understanding and cordial agreement between the nations. Here again, we stood and still stand under the sway of a commandment.

We considered it a fundamental point that in this case two vital claims are opposed to each other, two claims of a different nature and a different origin, which cannot be pitted one against the other and between which no objective decision can be made as to which is just or unjust. We considered and still consider it our duty to understand and to honour the claim that is opposed to ours and to endeavour to reconcile both claims. We cannot

renounce the Jewish claim; something even higher than the life of our people is bound up with the Land, namely, the work that is their divine mission. But we have been and still are convinced that it must be possible to find some form of agreement between this claim and the other; for we love this land and we believe in its future, and, seeing that such love and such faith are surely present on the other side as well, a union in the common service of the Land must be within the range of the possible. Where there is faith and love, a solution may be found even to what appears to be a tragic contradiction.

In order to carry out a task of such extreme difficulty – and recognising that we have to overcome an internal resistance on the Jewish side, as foolish as it is natural – we are in need of the support of well-meaning persons of all nations, and we had hope of it. But now you come and settle the whole existential dilemma with the simple formula: “Palestine belongs to the Arabs.”

What do you mean by saying that a land belongs to a population? Evidently you do not intend only to describe a state of affairs by your formula, but to declare a certain right. You obviously mean to say that a people, being settled on the land, has such an absolute claim to the possession of this land that whoever settles in it without the permission of this people has committed a robbery. But by what means did the Arabs attain the right of ownership in Palestine? Surely by conquest and, in fact, a conquest by settlement. You therefore admit that, this being so, it constitutes for them an exclusive right of possession; whereas the subsequent conquests of the Mamelukes and the Turks, which were not conquests with a view to settlement, do not constitute such in your opinion, but leave the former conquering nation in rightful ownership. Thus, settlement by force of conquest justifies for you a right of ownership of Palestine, whereas a settlement such as the Jewish one – whose methods, it is true, though not always doing full justice to Arab ways of life, were, even in the most objectionable cases, far removed from those of conquest – do not in your opinion justify any participation in this right of possession. These are the consequences that result from your statement in the form of an axiom that a land belongs to its population. In an epoch of migration of nations, you would first support the right of ownership of the nation that is threatened

with dispossession or extermination. But once this was achieved, you would be compelled – not at once, but after the elapse of a suitable number of generations – to admit that the land belongs to the usurper.

Possibly the time is not far removed when – perhaps after a catastrophe whose extent we cannot yet estimate – the representatives of humanity will have to come to some agreement on the re-establishment of relations among peoples, nations and countries, on the colonisation of thinly populated territories as well as on a communal distribution of the necessary raw materials and on a logical intensification of the cultivation of the globe, in order to prevent a new, enormously extended migration of nations which would threaten to destroy mankind. Is then the dogma of “possession,” of the inalienable right of ownership, of the sacred status quo to be held up against the men who dare to save the situation? For surely we are witnesses of how the feeling, penetrating deep into the heart of national life, that this dogma must be opposed is disastrously misused. But do not those representatives of the most powerful States share the guilt of this misuse, who consider every questioning of the dogma as a sacrilege?

And what if it is not the nations who migrate, but one nation? And what if this migrating nation should yearn toward its ancient home, where there is still room for a considerable section of it, enough to form a center side by side with the people to whom the land now “belongs”? And what if this wandering nation, to whom the land once belonged, likewise on the basis of a settlement by force of conquest – and which was once driven out of it by mere force of domination – should now strive to occupy a free part of the land, or a part that might become free without encroaching on the living space of others, in order at last to acquire again for itself a national home – a home where its people could live as a nation? Then you come, Mahatma Gandhi, and help to draw the barriers and to declare, “Hands off! This land does not belong to you!” Instead of helping to establish a genuine peace, giving us what we need without taking from the Arabs what they need, on the basis of a fair adjustment as to what they would really make use of and what might be admitted to satisfy our requirements!

Such an adjustment of the required living space for all is possible if it is brought into line with an all-embracing intensification of the cultivation of

the whole soil in Palestine. In the present, helplessly primitive state of fellah agriculture, the amount of land needed to produce nourishment for a family is ever so much larger than it otherwise would be. Is it right to cling to ancient forms of agriculture, which have become meaningless, to neglect the potential productivity of the soil, in order to prevent the immigration of new settlers without prejudice to the old? I repeat: without prejudice. This should be the basis of the agreement for which we are striving.

You are only concerned, Mahatma, with the “right of possession” on the one side; you do not consider the right to a piece of free land on the other side – for those who are hungering for it. But there is another of whom you do not inquire and who in justice, i.e., on the basis of the whole perceptible reality, would have to be asked. This other is the soil itself. Ask the soil what the Arabs have done for her in thirteen hundred years and what we have done for her in fifty! Would her answer not be weighty testimony in a just discussion as to whom this land “belongs”?

It seems to me that God does not give any one portion of the earth away so that its owner may say, as God does in the Holy Scriptures: “Mine is the land”. Even to the conqueror who has settled on it, the conquered land is, in my opinion, only loaned – and God waits to see what he will make of it.

I am told, however, that I should not respect the cultivated soil and despise the desert. I am told that the desert is willing to wait for the work of her children. We who are burdened with civilisation are not recognised by her anymore as her children. I have a veneration of the desert, but I do not believe in her absolute resistance, for I believe in the great marriage between man (adam) and earth (adama). This land recognises us, for it is fruitful through us, and through its fruit-bearing for us it recognises us. Our settlers do not come here as do the colonists from the Occident, with natives to do their work for them; they themselves set their shoulders to the plough, and they spend their strength and their blood to make the land fruitful. But it is not only for ourselves that we desire its fertility. The Jewish peasants have begun to teach their brothers, the Arab peasants, to cultivate the land more intensively. We desire to teach them further; together with them, we want to cultivate the land – to “serve” it, as the Hebrew has it. The more fertile this soil becomes, the more space there will be for us and for

them. We have no desire to dispossess them; we want to live with them. We do not want to rule; we want to serve with them.

You once said, Mahatma, that politics enmeshes us nowadays as with serpent's coils from which there is no escape, however hard one may try. You said you desired, therefore, to wrestle with the serpent. Here is the serpent in the fullness of its power! Jews and Arabs both have a claim to this land, but these claims are in fact reconcilable as long as they are restricted to the measure that life itself allots, and as long as they are limited by the desire for conciliation – that is, if they are translated into the language of the needs of living people for themselves and their children. But instead of this, they are turned through the serpent's influence into claims of principle and politics, and are represented with all the ruthlessness that politics instills into those who are led by it. Life with all its realities and possibilities disappears, as does the desire for truth and peace; nothing is known and sensed but the political slogan alone. The serpent conquers not only the spirit but also life. Who would wrestle with it?

In the midst of your arguments, Mahatma, there is a fine word which we gratefully accept. We should seek, you say, to convert the heart of the Arab. Well, then – help us to do so! Among us also there are many foolish hearts to convert – hearts that have fallen prey to that nationalist egotism which only admits its own claims. We hope to achieve this ourselves. But for the other task of conversion, we need your help. Instead, your admonition is addressed only to the Jews, because they allow British bayonets to defend them against the bomb throwers. Your attitude to the latter is much more reserved. You say you wish the Arabs had chosen the way of non-violence, but, according to the accepted canons of right and wrong, there is nothing to be said against their behaviour. How is it possible that, in this case, you should give credence – if only in a limited form – to the accepted canons, whereas you have never done so before! You reproach us that, having no army of our own, we consent to the British army preventing an occasional blind murder. But, in view of the accepted canons, you cast a lenient eye on those who carry murder into our ranks every day without even noticing who is hit. Were you to look down on all, Mahatma, on what is done and what is not done on both sides – on the just and the unjust on both sides – would you not admit that we certainly are not least in need of your help?

We began to settle again in the Land thirty-five years before the “shadow of the British gun” was cast upon it. We did not seek this shadow; it appeared and remained here to guard British interests and not ours. We do not want force. But after the resolutions of Delhi, at the beginning of March 1922, you yourself, Mahatma Gandhi, wrote: “Have I not repeatedly said that I would have India become free even by violence rather than that she should remain in bondage?” This was a very important pronouncement on your part; you asserted thereby that non-violence is for you a faith and not a political principle – and that the desire for the freedom of India is even stronger in you than your faith. And for this, I love you. We do not want force. We have not proclaimed, as did Jesus, the son of our people, and as you do, the teaching of non-violence, because we believe that a man must sometimes use force to save himself or even more his children. But from time immemorial we have proclaimed the teaching of justice and peace; we have taught and we have learned that peace is the aim of all the world and that justice is the way to attain it. Thus, we cannot desire to use force. No one who counts himself in the ranks of Israel can desire to use force.

But, you say, our non-violence is that of the helpless and the weak. This is not in accordance with the true state of affairs. You do not know or you do not consider what strength of soul, what satyagraha has been needed for us to restrain ourselves here after years of ceaseless deeds of blind violence perpetrated against us, our wives, and our children, and not to answer with like deeds of blind violence. And on the other hand, you, Mahatma, wrote in 1922: “I see that our non-violence is skin deep... This non-violence seems to be due merely to our helplessness... Can true voluntary non-violence come out of this seemingly forced non-violence of the weak?” When I read those words at that time, my reverence for you took birth – a reverence so great that even your injustice toward us cannot destroy it.

You say it is a stigma against us that our ancestors crucified Jesus. I do not know whether that actually happened, but I consider it possible. I consider it just as possible as that the Indian people under different circumstances should condemn you to death – if your teachings were more strictly opposed to their own tendencies (“India,” you say, “is by nature nonviolent”). Nations not infrequently swallow up the greatness to which

they have given birth. Now, can one assert, without contradiction, that such action constitutes a stigma! I would not deny however, that although I should not have been among the crucifiers of Jesus, I should also not have been among his supporters. For I cannot help withstanding evil when I see that it is about to destroy the good. I am forced to withstand the evil in the world just as the evil within myself. I can only strive not to have to do so by force. I do not want force. But if there is no other way of preventing the evil destroying the good, I trust I shall use force and give myself up into God's hands.

"India," you say, "is by nature nonviolent." It was not always so. The Mahabharata is an epos of warlike, disciplined force. In the greatest of its poems, the Bhagavad Gita, it is told how Arjuna decides on the battlefield that he will not commit the sin of killing his relations who are opposed to him, and he lets fall his bow and arrow. But the god reproaches him, saying that such action is unmanly and shameful; there is nothing better for a knight in arms than a just fight.

Is that the truth? If I am to confess what is truth to me, I must say: There is nothing better for a man than to deal justly – unless it be to love. We should be able even to fight for justice – but to fight lovingly.

I have been very slow in writing this letter to you, Mahatma. I made repeated pauses – sometimes days elapsed between short paragraphs – in order to test my knowledge and my way of thinking. Day and night I took myself to task, searching whether I had not in any one point overstepped the measure of self-preservation allotted and even prescribed by God to a human community, and whether I had not fallen into the grievous error of collective egotism. Friends and my own conscience have helped to keep me straight whenever danger threatened. Weeks have now passed since then, and the time has come, when negotiations are proceeding in the capital of the British Empire on the Jewish-Arab problem – and when, it is said, a decision is to be made.

But the true decision in this matter can come only from within and not from without.

I therefore take the liberty of closing this letter without waiting for the result in London.

Sincerely yours,
Martin Buber

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/letter-from-martin-buber-to-gandhi>
Jerusalem, February 24, 1939

– About the Author

Martin Buber (1878–1965) was a prolific author, scholar, literary translator, and political activist whose writings—mostly in German and Hebrew—ranged from Jewish mysticism to social philosophy, biblical studies, religious phenomenology, philosophical anthropology, education, politics, and art. Most famous among his philosophical writings is the short but powerful book *I and Thou* (1923) where our relation to others is considered as twofold. The I-it relation prevails between subjects and objects of thought and action; the I-Thou relation, on the other hand, obtains in encounters between subjects that exceed the range of the Cartesian subject-object relation. Though originally planned as a prolegomenon to a phenomenology of religion, *I and Thou* proved influential in other areas as well, including the philosophy of education. The work of Martin Buber remains a linchpin of qualitative philosophical anthropology and continues to be cited in fields such as philosophical psychology, medical anthropology, and pedagogical theory. Buber's writings on Jewish national renaissance, Hasidism, and political philosophy made him a major twentieth-century figure in Jewish thought and the philosophy of religion. Buber's extensive writing on the political dimensions of biblical historiography and prophetic literature not only made contributions to the history of religion but also to contemporary discussions on political theology with an anarchistic bent. His translation, with Franz Rosenzweig, of the Hebrew Bible into German remains a classic in the German language.