Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Martin Buber and Albert Camus

by

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Abstract

The dissertation provides a discussion and comparison of the ideas of Martin Buber and Albert Camus regarding human connectedness and solidarity, ethics and politics. The aim of the dissertation is to examine the ways in which these thinkers dealt with the possible tension between human solidarity and connectedness on the one hand, and the need for ethical restraints on the other.

The dissertation begins with a presentation and comparison of certain aspects of Buber’s and Camus’ respective biographies. It then examines and compares the thinkers’ views regarding human relationship, especially given the loss of the traditional existential and moral anchors in the wake of modernity. At the centre of the comparison stands the difference between Buber, a believer who understood connectedness and dialogue between human beings and with God to be a primordial and inherent need that could and should be fulfilled; and Camus, who was secular in his personal beliefs, and discussed a concept of solidarity which is largely based on rebellion against oppression and shared human experience in the face of the absurd – the bold acknowledgement of human beings’ inability to fully achieve harmony and meaning.
The second part of the dissertation discusses the conceptual ethical mechanisms the two thinkers developed in order to prevent connectedness or solidarity from devolving into destructive social and political behaviour. It presents the possible ethical problems that arise from Buber’s account of spontaneous, unmediated connectedness, and critically discusses the solutions that he offers to address these problems. Buber’s views are then compared with those of Camus, who confronts the potential problem of destructive solidarity most of all by placing ethical considerations at the basis of his concept of solidarity.

The final chapter discusses the two thinkers’ different positions regarding political phenomena and events of their time, positions which reflect their respective calls for connectedness and solidarity on the one hand, and the need to restrain collective political action on the other. In particular, the chapter presents the thinkers’ views on political efforts to achieve redemption and utopia, and Buber and Camus’ respective approaches toward the Jewish-Arab conflict and the conflict in Algeria.
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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Martin Buber (1878-1965) and Albert Camus (1913-1960), two thinkers who made major contributions to Western thought in the 20th century, discussed ways to overcome the experience of existential alienation in the modern world and the moral and political nihilism that may result from it. The two thinkers discussed the importance of human connectedness and solidarity as ways to deal with this sense of alienation, since they provide a sense of existential and moral grounding. Yet human solidarity and connectedness can become a problem in themselves, if they are too extreme. Therefore, both thinkers had to deal with the ethical and political problems that could result from the lack of boundaries and restraints that are needed to enable criticism and prevent collective political action from deteriorating into fanaticism, especially in the case of groups that struggle to achieve a radical or revolutionary aim.

Buber and Camus discussed the importance of human relationships from different points of view. Buber viewed reality as based on an aspiration for harmony and dialogue among all of the human and non-human entities with each other and with God. He saw the quest for connectedness and dialogue as a primordial and inherent need, and the most essential and basic element of the human condition. Camus’ discussion on human relationship, on the other hand, was based less on an inherent primordial need, and more on a shared rebellion and struggle against injustice. In other words, Buber stressed the importance of human connectedness, while Camus stressed the importance of human solidarity. The concepts of human connectedness and solidarity that the two thinkers developed include
significant common elements, but reflect the differences in their perspectives and led to different conceptual and political understandings.

The centrality of human connectedness and solidarity in the thought of Buber and Camus, respectively, necessitated the development of conceptual mechanisms that would prevent these from deteriorating into unrestrained social and political action. This phenomenon became all too common during the 20th century, when major ideological “messianic” movements – nationalist, Communist, and others – which called passionately for collective action in order for individuals and their communities to achieve justice, freedom, and meaning and identity, nonetheless ended up leading to violence, fanaticism, injustice and oppression. Buber and Camus were well known as intellectuals engaged in political affairs during their lifetimes. Indeed, in times of harsh political conflicts, each tried to provide a moral compass in order to restrain extreme political actions.

The different solutions that Camus and Buber provided to the problem of unrestrained political action are related to their respective concepts of solidarity and connectedness. Camus devoted much thought and provided a direct response to the question of how to ensure that rebellion and the solidarity it involves would not lead to injustice and destructive nihilism, precisely because his concept of solidarity was based first and foremost on ethical values of justice and freedom that must be maintained. Buber’s discussion of the topic was more problematic and complicated. In contrast to Camus, Buber, who emphasized the importance of connectedness and dialogue in themselves, did not make the issue of ethical restraint in itself an explicit central theme of his work (although this theme was intertwined with his dialogical thought). He saw dialogue and connectedness as in themselves implying
proper ethical behaviour. Because Buber’s idea of connectedness is based on the inherent human need for dialogue and unity, he faced a greater challenge in articulating conceptual mechanisms of restraint, in order to ensure that the emphasis on deep connectedness within a certain group would not lead to destructive action towards others, or intolerance towards dissenting members within the group. Yet he was not unaware of the possibility that connectedness could deteriorate into fanatical behaviour. For this reason, the conceptual mechanisms that he did offer to deal with this problem are important precisely because they could be implemented by groups for whom ideas of connectedness, unity and harmony are at the basis of their existence.

The aim of this study is to discuss the thought of Camus and Buber on the question of human relationship and ethical boundaries, and to examine how their writings help us to understand the tension between human solidarity and connectedness, on the one hand, and the need for ethical boundaries, on the other. As noted above, Buber’s ideas on this matter seem more problematic; his thought will therefore stand at the centre of this study, while Camus’ discussion will serve largely as a means to criticize or appreciate Buber’s thought on this topic. I will first compare the two thinkers on the theme of human connectedness, mainly as a response to the modern sense of alienation or homelessness. In the scholarly literature thus far, a comparison of Camus and Buber on the theme of ethical restraints has not yet been provided. In the central part of the thesis, I will provide a critical comparative examination of the ways in which Buber dealt with the tension between the importance of connectedness or solidarity, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the ethical restraints that would allow for proper conduct. I will also compare Buber’s approach to the ways in which Camus treated these matters. In the final part of this study I will discuss how – in keeping with their
theoretical ideas regarding collective political action and the need to restrain it – the two thinkers were involved in some of the political phenomena and questions of their time.

**Basis for the Comparison between Buber and Camus**

At first sight, Buber and Camus may hardly seem comparable, since they came from very different personal and intellectual backgrounds. Buber was a Jew whose deep faith in God was very significant for his ideas. He was born in Vienna and lived most of his life in Germany, before moving to Mandatory Palestine in 1938, and was greatly influenced by the two cultures in which he lived. The first was the Central European culture, which emphasized the importance of the passionate and emotional aspects of the human psyche and the importance of belonging to a community for the individual’s wellbeing and identity. The second was the rich Jewish culture to which he was exposed from an early age, and to which he greatly contributed as a scholar of Hasidism and as a Zionist thinker. Both elements – Central European and Jewish – led Buber to value the importance of cultural and ethnic affiliations. This was most evident in his rich discussion about the uniqueness of the Jewish people, their special metaphysical destiny and special role among the nations.

Albert Camus, on the other hand, was secular, even an atheist. He was born to a poor family of *Pied Noir* – the French settlers’ community in Algeria – and moved to France during World War II. The education Camus received was marked by the humanistic, secular and modern legacy of France. He was also highly influenced by ideas of social and political justice, which were reinforced by his personal experience of a member as an underprivileged social class on the one hand, and as a member of the privileged French minority in Algeria on the other. As opposed to Buber’s emphasis and positive view of ethnic particularism, nationalism, and cultural particularism played hardly any role in Camus’ thought. This is
understandable due to his French educational background, which, being based on the values of the Enlightenment, largely rejected the idea of ethnic particularism in favour of civic nationalism and universal humanism. In personal terms, as a Pied Noir, he could not identify with the Muslim Algerian nationalism of his home country. At the same time, to some extent he also felt like a stranger in France.

Yet, despite their different backgrounds, the two thinkers shared similar intellectual interests and political concerns, and these will provide the basis for the comparison between them. In particular, as will be discussed below, both thinkers were existentialist thinkers, where each in his own way criticized modernity, and each responded to a number of political phenomena that occurred in their time; in particular, the rise of Marxism and nationalism, as well as events such as World War II and the conflicts with the local Muslim population in Mandatory Palestine and Algeria, respectively.

**Buber and Camus as Existentialist Thinkers**

Both Buber and Camus have been considered existential thinkers – even though Camus himself rejected this title, especially when he compared his thought to the existentialist philosophy of Jean Paul Sartre;¹ and although Buber also distanced himself from this label.²

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² When Buber was asked to define himself as an existentialist, he said “I would prefer that people look directly at my works rather than ask me to place myself within a category like that.” “I am rather more different than the same as Sartre and other existentialists”. (Jeanine Czubaroff and Maurice Friedman, “A Conversation with Maurice Friedman,” *The Southern Communication Journal* 65, no. 2–3 [2000]:246.) Maurice Friedman, who described Buber as a “dialogical existentialist”, claimed that existentialism was not a presupposition of Buber’s
They both rejected the dichotomy between reason and experience stressing the importance of dealing with actual living experiences rather than abstract formalism. They both tried to examine what they understood to be the most fundamental and basic human needs and experiences, and developed their political and social ideas based on their respective understandings of these experiences and needs. In particular, Buber pointed to the essential and inherent human needs for connectedness and dialogue, and Camus pointed to the call for freedom and justice. Both thinkers discussed political issues not merely in terms of rational decision making, technical allocation of resources or petty party politics, but according to the ways in which political issues and considerations related to the most fundamental human needs: the quest for justice, how people understand their identity, the need for connectedness with others, and also (especially in the case of Buber) people’s faith and relationship with God.

Buber and Camus represented two alternative paths of existential thought: one religious, and one secular. To a large extent, Buber followed the path of religious existentialist thinkers such as Kierkegaard and Jaspers, and Camus was close to secular ones like Sartre. This difference between the two thinkers had significant implications for their political discussions, since Camus dealt with the issues faced by secular political movements, while Buber’s discussion is more relevant for religious ones. Yet, despite their differences, both thinkers shared an important element: each focused on human concerns, hopes and needs. Camus focused on the human realm because he thought that the metaphysical-divine realm (if it exists at all) could not be reached; therefore people could only try to fulfill their

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lives within the mundane realm, while acknowledging its (and their own) unavoidable limits. Buber, for his part, rejected the dichotomy between the mundane and the metaphysical realms, since these two realms should stand in constant dialogue with each other. He focused on the existential drama that takes place in the temporal world: the quest for dialogue and harmony among all elements of creation. At the same time, it should be noted that both thinkers did not totally disregard the metaphysical element. This is clear when discussing Buber, whose belief in God was fundamental for his thought. However, this is true to some extent also for Camus, who, despite his personal secular views, discussed the sense of void that was left after the “death of God” in modernity, and criticized the effort to fill this void by political projects that aim to achieve social or national “redemption.”

Buber and Camus’ respective discussions of the possible tension between human connectedness or solidarity and the need for ethical restraint is also connected to the existential – and modern – character of their teaching. In pre-modern times, questions regarding one’s identity, place, and the meaning of one’s life were largely irrelevant since they were determined *a priori* by one’s religious and socio-political affiliations. Modern existential thought, by contrast, often stressed the wish to fulfill one’s “authentic self” (as an individual or member of a defined collective), emphasizing the individual’s subjective experiences and search for meaning, hope, and identity. This emphasis stands, at least potentially, in tension with social and ethical limitations and boundaries, and could even lead to efforts, on the personal and collective-political levels, to overcome existing ethical

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4 Maurice Friedman also claimed that the distinction Sartre made between atheist and religious existentialism is not the most significant distinction in existential thought, and that Buber was closer to Camus than Camus was to Sartre (Czubaroff and Friedman, “A Conversation with Maurice Friedman,” 246).

boundaries in order to fulfill the quest for meaning and self-realization. Buber and Camus addressed themselves to this modern theme. Buber discussed the sense of meaning, identity, and destiny that emerges from individuals’ connection to their particular groups, and the unique, authentic identity and divine mission of the Jewish people. Camus discussed the oppressed who become aware their miserable situation, refuse to accept it, and empower themselves through a shared struggle against their oppressors. The two thinkers’ respective discussions with regard to the tension between connectedness and solidarity, as well as the need and methods to restrain them, is therefore a manifestation of this fundamental problem in existential thought.

**Buber and Camus as Critics of Modernity**

The second basis for the comparison between the two thinkers is their respective critiques of modernity. Buber and Camus, each in his own way, discussed the experience of modernity, which includes a sense of estrangement, homelessness, loss of meaning, and moral confusion that may lead to dangerous nihilism. Both thinkers pointed to the limits of the remedies that modernity tried to offer for these miseries by relying on science and technology, and claimed that the latter could not really solve the former, and in fact often exacerbated them. Both thinkers argued that the main solution to the crisis of modernity to be based on a re-discovery and advancement of human solidarity or connectedness.

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6 Thus, for example, Nietzsche discussed the need to overcome and break free from the mediocrity of society in order to fulfill one’s will, and Kierkegaard discussed Abraham’s need to overcome conventional ethics, even to sacrifice his own son, in order to be loyal to his faith. Indeed, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche represent two branches of existentialism: one religious, which saw a belief in God as the solution to the search for meaning; and one secular, which looked for meaning and a solution to this problem in a godless world. As mentioned, to a certain extent, Buber and Camus belonged, respectively, to the religious and secular streams of existential thought. For a related discussion of the concept of authenticity, including in the thought of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Camus, see Jacob Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus*, Problems of Modern European Thought (London; New York: Routledge, 1995).
This similarity between the two thinkers also points to the differences between them. Buber’s emphasis on what he saw as the primordial need for connectedness and dialogue between human beings and with God, indicates that his entire thought is a reaction against modern ideas regarding the autonomy of the individual and the compartmentalization of faith within a confined social-political sphere. Indeed, Buber pointed to pre-modern times as a source of inspiration, looking as far back as the biblical period, when, according to him, there was a genuine attempt to create such dialogue and unity among human beings, and between them and God. Camus, on the other hand, accepted many of the values of the modern West, including the values of secularism, human empowerment, and defiance of religious authority. He espoused the modern emphasis on the actual, tangible present rather than any mythical, meta-historical national identities. As such, he criticized modernity largely from within, and drew inspiration from his contemporary Mediterranean and the ancient Greek cultures, which, as he interpreted them, emphasized moderation and political action based on common sense rather than destructive ideological fanaticism. Buber’s theoretical critique of modernity was, then, much more radical than that of Camus.

Buber and Camus’ critique of modernity is important for this study also because the ethical and political restraints that they offered were different from those offered by the liberal thought common in the West today, which emphasizes rational, formal, and legal discourse as the preferred method to protect people’s rights and adjudicate between different interests. By stressing the importance of intuitive and passionate faculties, not only the rational ones, Buber and Camus called for a more comprehensive perception of human beings and political life. The discussion and comparison between the two thinkers is an opportunity to look at alternatives to the common Western order, in the sense that they
emphasized the importance of dialogue rather than a political order based on a zero-sum game. What is more, Buber and Camus each offered ethical mechanisms to restrain social and political action, which could be implemented precisely in those places whose political culture is based on passionate collective action rather than on formal regulations and legal rights.

Buber and Camus’ Political Involvement

Buber and Camus’ were not detached intellectuals: their respective ideas about human solidarity and connectedness and the need to restrain these were not merely theoretical and abstract concepts. In particular, these thinkers were each involved in three historical phenomena and events, to which their discussions about the tension between collective action and ethics were highly relevant.

The first of these were the intense debates regarding Marxism and Communism, and the often violent efforts of those who followed those ideologies to put them into practice. Both Buber and Camus were affiliated with the political Left in their countries – or, more accurately, shared a strong objection to the political Right. At the same time, both of them were very critical of revolutionary Marxism. Buber rejected the Marxist ideas that view class struggles as the fundamental element of human history, and supported utopian Socialism, the creation of a community that would be based on direct communication and dialogue between its members. He saw the Zionist Kibbutz as an admirable attempt to create such a community. Camus identified with the Left’s call for social justice and concern for the underprivileged, but rejected the violent and fanatical aspects of the Marxist revolutionaries and harshly criticized the tyranny of the Soviet regime (a criticism that led to bitter conflicts between him and with many of his friends in the French Left). The rejection of revolutionary
Marxism and Bolshevism – in conjunction with their criticisms of the injustices of Western capitalism – also led both thinkers, after World War II, to call to follow neither the United States nor the Soviet Union.

Interestingly, both thinkers also shared a fascination with anarchistic movements, but emphasized different aspects of these movements, in keeping with their different social and philosophical ideas. Buber emphasized the utopian element in anarchistic social frameworks that replaced formal regulation with harmony, spontaneity, and dialogue. Camus focused on the ways in which revolutionary anarchists dealt with their wish to conduct violent struggle on the one hand, and their wish to remain morally innocent on the other.

The second historical event that both thinkers faced was the rise of Nazi Germany and the horror of World War II, which both thinkers personally experienced: Buber as a prominent Jewish intellectual who lived in Germany until 1938; Camus as a member of the French Resistance against the Nazi occupation. The magnitude of the tragedy left a very significant mark on the lives and the respective ideas of the two thinkers. Indeed, as they observed, Nazism was the ultimate example of a political movement that totally disregarded any ethical considerations in the name of solidarity, belonging and connectedness to one’s Volk, and an aspiration to achieve a false political “messianic” aim.

An important element for the discussion in this study – reflected in the thinkers’ critique of Marxism and radical nationalism – is that both thinkers pointed to the dangers of secular political messianism: namely, the wish of Marxist and nationalist movements to achieve an absolute solution to the problems of humanity, to be achieved through following dogmatic doctrines and ideologies; and by calling for a radical revolutionary movement in
order to implement them. This point is significant also because, again, both thinkers did not reject the hope for social and political changes and were far from being conservatives. Camus refused to accept the social and economic gaps between rich and poor and between the Algerian natives and settlers. Buber strongly believed in the Zionist aim that called for a radical change in Jewish life, and his thought included significant Jewish nationalistic and messianic elements, as well as a call for a renewal of people’s lives by rejuvenating the idea of dialogue. Their critique of political messianism, therefore, were not made with the aims to preserve the existing political and social orders. Their criticisms were intended to direct and restrain movements that called for political and social changes that they also supported. As we shall see, Buber’s discussion of this topic is particularly interesting – but also problematic – since he criticized secular political messianism, but did not really reject religious messianism (the latter would become dominant in Israel after his death). In any event, the fact that both thinkers acknowledged the need to solve the problems of the existing order during their time, while criticizing the secular messianic way to achieve this solution, makes their insights interesting in themselves, and useful to understand and criticize similar phenomena today.

The third political element that both thinkers experienced was the violent encounters between the Arab-Muslim native populations against those whom they considered to be illegitimate foreign invaders: namely, the Jewish-Arab conflict to which Buber was deeply connected as a Zionist thinker and activist, and the conflict in Algeria that Camus faced as a French-Algerian. Although Camus’ explicit involvement in the Algerian conflict was much smaller in comparison to Buber’s intense involvement in the Jewish-Arab conflict, each of

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7 Although Camus was criticized by more radical Left wing thinkers as not being assertive enough in his struggle against social and political injustice.
them offered a unique and important call for understanding between the different conflicting groups, and rejected the demonization of one side by the other. Both Buber and Camus were harshly criticized for their positions, which their critics considered to be too moralistic and unrealistic. Buber’s identity as a Zionist Jew and Camus’ affiliation with the Pied Noir led those who supported the Arabs’ struggles to dismiss these thinkers’ political views. Moreover, both of them largely failed to achieve their political aims: in Palestine, both Jews and Arabs rejected Buber’s call for a bi-national state and the violent conflict between them is still far from solved today. In Algeria, the terrible war between the Muslim population and the French led to the end of the French-Algerian community there, shortly after Camus’ death. These failures may signify the limited ability of moral discourse to determine political events. Yet the fact that both Buber and Camus were respected as prominent thinkers during their times (and are today), points to their ability to influence the political discourse in their respective countries, regardless of the actual historical outcomes of the events they discussed.

In sum, although the two thinkers came from very different personal and intellectual backgrounds, the major elements that are common to both provide grounds for the comparison between them. Indeed, I have chosen to study Buber and Camus precisely because their works address the subject of the dissertation – the importance of solidarity and connectedness alongside the need to restrain it – from different cultural and intellectual perspectives. Camus’ views, which criticized the quest for political utopia and saw solidarity as based on justice, can help us to challenge Buber’s call for a human (and national-cultural) connectedness that is based on a deep inherent need and a quest for all-encompassing harmony. At the same time Buber can help us to appreciate a view of reality that is based on
deep connectedness and dialogue. The differences between the two thinkers can therefore serve as tools to examine their ideas, rather than obstacles.

**Previous Comparative Works on Buber and Camus**

Although Buber and Camus did not provide detailed accounts of their views on each other’s teachings, we have evidence of some of their appreciation for each other’s works. In a brief correspondence between them, Buber, who was deeply impressed by Camus’ *The Rebel*, suggested that he have it published in Israel. In his polite response, Camus expressed his admiration of Buber’s *I and Thou*.\(^8\) Maurice Friedman has noted that the two thinkers also referred to each other’s views on religion. Buber expressed his view that one should not speak of Camus as an atheist.\(^9\) Camus, for his part, said that he “would not mind being called religious in the sense of Buber’s I and Thou relationship.”\(^10\)

In the secondary literature much research has been published on Buber and on Camus as individual thinkers, but there have been only a few studies that discussed them together or compared them. An article by Dominique Bourel presented the short letter exchange between them.\(^11\) Maurice Friedman’s book, *To Deny our Nothingness*,\(^12\) contains a chapter which discusses the two thinkers and largely presents both of them as dialogical thinkers. David Ohana, who wrote about the subject of modern political messianism (in general and in

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9. Ibid. We may note, however, that this statement does not clarify the extent to which Camus was fully aware of the centrality and meaning of faith in Buber’s dialogical thought.

10. Bourel, “Albert Camus, Martin Buber et La Méditerranée.”

Zionist thought in particular), discussed Camus and Buber, the fact that they were both highly critical of secular political messianism, and also mentioned the correspondence between them. In an article by Aidan Curzon-Hobson the author discusses how elements of Camus’ book *Exile and the Kingdom* are related to questions of pedagogy and education. The article includes some comparison between Camus and Buber, focusing on the importance of dialogue and connectedness instead of adhering to objective knowledge and doctrines (an attitude that in context of education, should be implemented between the teacher and students). Lastly, Carl Goldberg, who discussed the concept of curiosity in the context of clinical psychology, mentioned Buber and Camus’ respective discussions of human connection.

The significant comparative works of the two thinkers that were found are three unpublished graduate theses that will be described below. To some extent, my study corresponds and continues the discussions in these previous works. In his doctoral dissertation (Temple University, 1972), George Ladd discussed what he called “the tragic contradiction” in the thought of Buber and Camus. Taking a Christian perspective, Ladd examined the differences between the two thinkers in terms of how their thought accorded with two basic Christian ideas: the acknowledgment of the inherent guilt in the sinful soul of every human being, and the willingness to maintain meaningful relationships with the

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transcendent. For Ladd, Buber is a positive thinker who discussed the importance of connectedness with God, even when it is impossible to reconcile with Him; while Camus, who called for a metaphysical rebellion and rejected the idea of inherent sin and guilt (at least before he wrote *The Fall*) represents for Ladd the negative model of a “tragic thinker.” Ladd elaborated upon the difference between the thinkers and the way they perceive questions about good and evil, but did so from a religious perspective that emphasized the relationship with the transcendent more than the social and political questions of solidarity and human relationships. My study, on the other hand, will discuss religious (and anti-religious) elements in the thought of the two thinkers only to the extent that these will be useful to explain the problems of relationships between people and between political groups. My study will also focus on questions regarding ethical boundaries and restraints, in a way that Ladd did not approach.

Jonathan Woocher’s dissertation (Temple University, 1976)\(^\text{17}\) focuses on the two thinkers as developing a “politics of dialogue,” and their efforts to implement it in their respective countries. Woocher provides a discussion of the thinkers’ ideas as a response to the crisis of modernity, and their effort to find a new existential and political reference point in order not to fall into a nihilist vacuum. Woocher presented a detailed description of the thought, views, and political activities of the two thinkers, discussing the similarities between their political attitudes at length, in order to show that they both called for “politics of dialogue.” This would serve as a new “anthropology” and “myth” to provide meaning and an order within which political ends could be pursued. Such a politics would provide an alternative, or at least as a crucial supplement, to the prevailing modern political approaches.

are based on power relations, with their resulting struggles between conflicting political interests. My study shares with Woocher (and others, such as Funk and Friedman) the idea that an important basis for the comparison between Camus and Buber is the sense of alienation and exile that many experienced in modernity, and the importance of dialogue as a way to deal with this crisis. However, because he wished to present the two thinkers as advocates of a shared “politics of dialogue,” Woocher’s dissertation does not provide a thorough discussion about the differences between the two thinkers. Nor does Woocher provide a thorough discussion of the tensions between connectedness and ethics in his discussion about Buber, as I intend to do in the present study. We can say that Woocher focused on the first two tiers of the analytical trajectory of the thinkers’ thought: the problems of alienation in modernity, and the thinkers’ call to solve it by turning to solidarity, dialogue and connectedness. In addition to these first two common tiers of thought in Buber’s and Camus’ writings, my study will focus on a third tier: the conceptual mechanisms that both thinkers provided in order to prevent collective action from deteriorating into unrestrained fanaticism. In addition, as opposed to Woocher’s view, I do not see the two thinkers as founders of solid and useful order, based on connectedness and dialogue, that could serve as an alternative to the existing Western political order or would necessarily solve the crises of modernity. Instead, I am more interested in the conceptual restraints that Buber and Camus developed in order to prevent those political cultures and movements that are already collectivistic from deteriorating into fanaticism.

Both Ladd and Woocher take a relatively “Buberian” perspective in their discussions and comparisons between the two thinkers. Ladd explicitly supports Buber’s ideas and approach as more satisfactory than those of Camus, whom he considers “a tragic thinker.”
Woocher emphasizes the importance of dialogue in the two thinkers, which is the most central element of Buber’s thought, though it is less so in Camus’ thought. As such, it could be argued that Woocher reads Camus largely through Buberian eyes. These views allow Ladd and Woocher each to develop interesting discussions of the two thinkers. In my study, I emphasize the distinction between Buber’s ideas of connectedness and dialogue and Camus’ solidarity. Additionally, I focus on the importance of ethical boundaries to connectedness and solidarity, which are dominant and articulated in Camus’ thought more than in Buber’s (but with which Buber also had to deal).

The third significant comparative work on Buber and Camus was written by Charles Funk, whose M.A. thesis discusses the concept of alienation in Camus and Buber (Florida State University, 1964). Funk provides a comparative analysis of this concept, and also discusses the thinkers’ respective understandings of other concepts such as feeling, intellect and freedom. Funk focuses on two works: Buber’s *I and Thou* and Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus*. My study will rely on these and other primary sources. Unlike Funk, whose focus was on the concept of alienation itself, I will discuss the thinkers’ possible solutions to the problem of alienation. I will also focus on the possible tensions between solidarity and ethical concerns in the works of the two thinkers and the ways in which each tried to reconcile these tensions.

In sum, similar to the works mentioned above, the basis for the comparison between the two thinkers is that both Buber and Camus searched for a solution to the problem of estrangement and nihilism in modernity. In addition, my aim is to contribute a perspective to the comparison that has not yet been offered: that is, to focus on the ways in which the

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18 Charles L Funk, “Alienation in Camus and Buber” (Florida State University, 1964).
tensions between connectedness, solidarity and ethics are treated by the two thinkers, and the conceptual restraints they developed to address these tensions.

**Structure of the Dissertation**

The study will consist of three major chapters. The first chapter will begin with a discussion of certain aspects in Buber’s and Camus’ respective biographies that are significant for comparing their thought. This will be followed by an examination of Buber’s ideas regarding the importance and nature of connectedness, which I will then compare with Camus’ concept of solidarity. Particular attention will be given to their discussion regarding who is included or excluded from the circles of connectedness and solidarity – a theme that has important ethical and political implications.

This chapter will set the stage for the second one, in which I will compare and critically examine the ethical mechanisms the two thinkers developed – ethical mechanisms that could be used to set boundaries that would prevent the connectedness or solidarity they called for from devolving into destructive or intolerant social and political behaviour. Although the chapter will discuss the thought of both thinkers, a large part of it will be dedicated to the ways in which Buber tried to deal with this problem, since his emphasis on harmony, unity and connectedness rendered his discussion of the need for ethical boundaries more challenging and less straightforward than that of Camus.

The last chapter will discuss the positions of the two thinkers with regard to political phenomena and events of their time. These positions are connected directly to their call for connectedness and solidarity, on the one hand, and the need to restrain collective political action, on the other. In particular, this chapter will discuss Buber’s call for “redemption” and
utopia alongside his criticism – one he shared with Camus – of secular political messianism. The chapter will also discuss and compare the thinkers’ views on anarchism. It will conclude with a comparative discussion of Buber and Camus’ involvement in the political conflicts between Jews and Arabs in Mandatory Palestine, and between the Muslim and French populations in Algeria, respectively, as these conflicts were also closely connected with their ideas regarding connectedness, solidarity, and ethical behaviour.

**Genesis of the Project**

Different readers of Buber and Camus have found in their writings the elements that resonated with them most, which are often those elements missing from their own social and political realities. Many who live in the West and feel uncomfortable with its tendencies to individualism and formal legalism, finding it too atomistic and overly bureaucratic, have found the two thinkers’ call (especially Buber’s) for passionate solidarity and connectedness very appealing. While this is a valid concern from their perspective, coming from Israel I was actually attracted to the thinkers’ discussions regarding the restraints that should be placed upon passionate collective action in order to keep it, as much as possible, on a proper ethical path.

Israel was established on an ideological basis, and the constant external threats and internal conflicts it has faced since (and before) its establishment, added even more fuel to its ideological passion and internal debates. The different sectors and ideological groups in Israel – Jews and Arabs, religious and secular, political Left and Right – have harshly contested each other in a struggle to shape the identity of the state and its future direction. It is a country whose political culture emphasizes ideological and political commitment, where much of the political discourse takes place in the form of arguments in the streets rather than
in regulated and formal debates in parliamentary sessions. This has led to a valuable sense of
group solidarity, deep involvement in public life, and the genuine concern that many Israelis
feel towards each other and towards public affairs. However, passionate ideological
commitment could also lead to a dangerous tendency to fanaticism, intolerance towards
others and towards inner criticism, and destructive behaviour in the name of various
ideological goals.\(^{19}\)

Moreover, both secular and religious Zionist ideologies included strong “redemptive”
or “messianic” elements – not necessarily in the sense that they held out the hope for the
appearance of an actual Messiah, but in the sense that they called for political action that
would fulfill a utopian dream.\(^{20}\) Many secular Zionist thinkers called not only for a political
solution to the problems and miseries of the Jewish people through the establishment of a
modern Jewish nation state; they also called for a radical transformation of Jewish life, and
the creation of an entirely new society, which would serve in turn as a model for the entire
world and would lead to a new, “redeemed” future. Those on the Left within this secular
Zionist ideological spectrum, the Labour Zionists, called for the creation of a secular and
socialist “new Jew”, who would be liberated from what they saw as the religious, weak and
humiliated Jewish character of exile. Their efforts in this regard were most clearly manifested

\(^{19}\) For a critical discussion of the passionate character of Israeli society see Yaron Ezrahi’s criticism of
collectivistic political culture in his book, *Rubber Bullets: Power and Conscience in Modern Israel* (Berkeley:
University of California Press, 1998). Two more recent books, by Boaz Neumann and Eyal Chowers, discuss
the passionate element in the Zionist thought and culture and its implications. (Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire
in Early Zionism* [Waltham, Mass: Brandeis, 2011]; Eyal Chowers, *The Political Philosophy of Zionism:
Trading Jewish Words for a Hebraic Land* [Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012]). For a
discussion of the passionate element in the Zionist thought of Micha Josef Berdichevski, an important Zionist
thinker who was highly influenced by Nietzsche, see Revital Amiran-Sappir, “Zionism between Raw Force and
Eros: Berdichevski’s Passionate Relation to the Jewish Political Revolution,” *Israel Studies Forum* 23, no. 1

\(^{20}\) For discussions about the political messianic element in Zionism see Ohana, *Political Theologies in the Holy
Land*.; Israel Kolatt and Anita Shapiroa, “Zionism and Political Messianism,” in *Totalitarian Democracy and
After: International Colloquium in Memory of Jacob L. Talmon, Jerusalem, 21-24 June, 1982.*, ed. Yehoshua
the new model of community that they created: the Kibbutz, a utopian-Socialist form of settlement. Those on the Right within the secular Zionist ideological spectrum, Revisionist Zionists, while they rejected Socialism, espoused their own version of the “new Jew,” whom they portrayed as a strong, proud, assertive, and militaristic man, as opposed to the image of the “weak” and “submissive” character of the Jew in exile. Thus, both Left and Right secular Zionists called for a complete existential, cultural and social revolution, which would lead to a prosperous new future for the Jewish people.

Left and Right wing secular ideological movements were prominent during most of the 20th century, but their influence has declined in recent decades. Since the 1970s, a new kind of messianic Zionism has become very influential. Religious Zionist messianism sees the establishment of the State of Israel, together with its various military victories, as a divine redemption in the religious sense. Political “redemptive” ideologies included a positive hope to create a better, stronger, and healthier future for the Jewish people (and, in some cases, for the entire world). However, they could also lead to destructive behaviour and intolerance toward others, in the process of fulfilling their collective missions.

Buber and Camus’ respective discussions of the importance of ethical considerations in relation to collective political action are, therefore, very relevant to the Israeli-Zionist case. Camus’ own explicit reference to Israel was marginal. In a statement that he made in 1957, he expressed unequivocal support for the existence and independence of the State of Israel. He claimed that the establishment of the State of Israel was an act of justice following the deaths of millions of Jews, praised its social and economic achievements, and criticized the
positions that Arab leaders took against Israel. Although this was a rare direct reference to Israel, Camus’ political discussion contains elements that have been extremely relevant to the discussion of Zionism and Israel. Camus’ discussion of the importance of rebellion against oppression and injustice is relevant here, in that Zionism was a rebellion of the Jewish people against the persecution and oppression of anti-Semitism that the Jews experienced in exile. Similar to Camus’ discussion of the modern rebellion against tradition, Zionism was also a largely secular movement that defied the traditional Jewish view, which accepted exile as a punishment from God. Instead, Zionism called for the Jewish people to determine their future by themselves. As such, Zionism is a movement that put man-made history at the centre. Zionism has thus contained precisely those phenomena that Camus both called for and warned against. Camus supported the just rebellion against oppression, but warned against the quest for power, militarism, the sense of omnipotence, and the destructiveness that may result from unrestrained rebellion; and, as noted, he was highly critical about any form of political messianism. This is relevant to Israel in so far as it has dealt constantly, and not always successfully, with the tension between its just efforts to protect its legitimate rights (alongside its more controversial messianic-ideological aims), and the devastating effects that these actions had on others, especially the Palestinian population (which, on its part, also

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22 For a discussion about Camus’ relationship with Jews, the relevancy of Camus’ thought in the Israeli context and the different discussions of Israeli intellectuals about Camus’ ideas see Ohana, *Israel and Its Mediterranean Identity*, 65–75, 135–154.; in Hebrew: David Ohana, *Humanist Ba-Shemesh: Kami Veha-Hashraah Ha-Yam-Tikhonit [Humanist in the Sun: Albert Camus and the Mediterranean Inspiration]* (Jerusalem: Karmel, 2000), 78–103.; Ohana, *Ha-Kavul, He-‘akud Veha-Tsaluv: Alber Kami Ve-Gvulot Ha-Alimut [Bound, Sacrificed and Crucified: Albert Camus and the Limits of Violence]*, 233–304. Ohana’s discussion of Camus is connected to his idea that the Israeli society should be more attuned to and inspired by the Mediterranean culture, in order to alleviate some of its political and social problems.
used severe violence and aggression against the Jewish population before and after the establishment of the State of Israel).  

Buber was a prominent Zionist thinker. His discussion about Zionism, Israel and the Jewish people played a major part in his thought, and will be discussed in this study. His thought is important precisely because it includes messianic elements: Buber noted the importance of the messianic idea in Judaism, and had a positive view of some of the “redemptive” elements of labour Zionism (such as the establishment of the Kibbutz as a utopian society, and the wish to revive the Jewish people). At the same time, Buber was aware of the danger of an unrestrained secular political messianism that was unbound by ethical and dialogical – and, for him, religious – restraints and considerations. Buber’s insights could be especially useful in dealing with the radicalization of religious Zionism that have taken place during the last few decades. These religious Zionist groups have believed in an ideology that integrated religious values regarding spiritual renewal and religious messianic redemption with the existence of a sovereign modern nation state for the persecuted Jewish people. Since the 1970s, the combination of religious messianic aspirations with concrete political action has led some religious Zionists to radical religious fundamentalism and to overlook legal and moral restraints in the name of their higher redemptive goals. This historical development took place after Buber’s time. However, the religious nature of Buber’s thought, and his discussion of the particular uniqueness of the Jewish people – an idea that many religious Zionists today share – together with his call for

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23 Two other groups were negatively affected by the dominant Zionist ethos, especially in the years shortly before and after the establishment of the State of Israel. The first were the traditional Jews who emigrated and expelled from Arab countries and were expected to adjust themselves the secular-European culture of the Israeli-Zionist leadership. The second were Jews who came from Eastern Europe and were expected to suppress or even abandon their Yiddish language and culture, which the Zionist leadership considered to be a symbol of the obsolete, exilic mentality that the Jews had to overcome.
dialogue with others and proper ethical conduct, may serve as an alternative religious and political model to the one that such radical groups have followed. During Camus and Buber’s lifetime the main threat in the world originated from different forms of secular political messianism. Today, many of the political threats in the world (and in the Middle East in particular) originate from political religious messianism and different radical fundamentalist religious groups. The ways in which Buber, a believer who called for collective action, dealt with this problem of how to restrain such fundamentalism, is more important today than ever before. For this reason, Buber’s thought will stand at the centre of this study.

My personal interest in Buber and Camus, therefore, lies not only in the fact that they represented a meeting point between European and Mediterranean cultures, or in their particular involvements in the conflicts in Algeria and Israel/Palestine during their time. It stems mainly from the general efforts that both of them made to mark the proper limits for collective action and political passions, without losing sight of the importance and value of solidarity and human connectedness. In a country like Israel, which experiences passionate struggles regarding identity and ideology that are not likely to be solved in the foreseeable future, conceptual ethical mechanisms that could channel such passions away from destructive political behaviours are desperately needed.

Beyond these concerns that pertain to Israel and the Middle East region, the problems that Camus and Buber discussed are relevant to a large extent also today. Historical circumstances have, of course, changed since the 1950s. Modern thought has been challenged by postmodernism. Secular political radicalism has largely been replaced by religious radicalism. The questions regarding colonialism, communism and nationalism dominant during the time of Camus and Buber, do not exist today in the same way. The relationships
between world powers have also changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War. Yet many of the problems Buber and Camus dealt with – the need to fight against radicalism, ideological fundamentalism, and political fanaticism, and the need to developed restraints preventing political passions from deteriorating into violence, oppression, and terror – are relevant today. So are many of the insights that they offered to these problems.
Chapter 2 – Buber and Camus’ Biographies

Before examining the ideas of the two thinkers, it will be helpful to introduce some important milestones in their respective biographies. Different life experiences, family backgrounds, formal educations, and social and intellectual environments influenced their worldviews and thought. The aim of this chapter is not to present a comprehensive account of Buber and Camus’ respective biographies, but to highlight a few major points that will allow us to better understand the backgrounds that informed the thinkers’ ideas, and how these related to their social and political concerns.

Buber – Biography

Martin Buber was born in Vienna in 1878 to a relatively wealthy Jewish family. His mother left him and his father when he was three years old, and his father sent him to live with his grandparents in Lvov, where he grew up until he was fourteen. Buber was exposed from an early age to the two influences that determined his cultural and intellectual life, the Jewish and the German: his grandfather, Solomon Buber, was a prominent Jewish scholar who wrote critical editions of the *Midrash*, and his grandmother was very interested in German

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24 A comprehensive biography of Martin Buber, in three volumes, was written by Maurice Friedman (Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber’s Life and Work* (London: Search Press, 1982). Two major biographies were written about Albert Camus in recent decades: one by Herbert Lottman (Herbert R. Lottman, *Albert Camus: A Biography* [Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 1997]) and by Olivier Todd (Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus: A Life*, trans. Benjamin Ivry [New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1997]).

25 Salomon Buber’s editions of the *Midrash* were considered for many years to be the authoritative writings in this field (Friedman, *Martin Buber’s Life and Work*, 1:11). As a scholar, Solomon Buber was an example of the *Haskala* (the Jewish Enlightenment) movement of Eastern Europe, a social and cultural Jewish movement that tried to integrate into modernity and break the walls of the traditional pre-modern Jewish religious community, while at the same time did not lose its affiliation with Jewish culture and heritage. In many ways, his grandson Martin continued this approach.
language and literature. Buber received a comprehensive early education, first from private teachers, then from the age of ten in a Polish school.\textsuperscript{26}

Buber later studied at the Universities of Zurich, Vienna, and Berlin – the Central European cultural and intellectual hubs at the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century – focusing on philosophy, the history of art, and other subjects, and mastered several languages. During his late teens and early twenties he was interested in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche. As a student Buber became close to the “George Circle.” This group was led by the German poet Stefan George, who called for the establishment of a new “kingdom” that would be spiritual in character. Buber’s early intellectual life was marked by an interest in mystical religious experiences, in which he focused on the immediate connection and immersion of the individual into the divine realm. During World War I, Buber’s interest in the mystical elements of religion was replaced by an interest in the dialogical relationships among human beings, and between them and God, as constituting the basic elements of existence.\textsuperscript{27} This second, dialogical period of his thought was best articulated in his famous book \textit{I and Thou} (\textit{Ich und Du}) in 1923, which is considered the cornerstone of his mature philosophical enterprise, and of the social, religious and political thought that followed it.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 1:13.
\textsuperscript{27} Buber recalled a particular event that took place during World War I as a reason for this shift: a young student, who was later killed in the war, came to speak with Buber. Buber was not attentive enough to him, and only later realized that the young man came to take his advice about a fundamental decision he had to make (perhaps on whether he should join the army). According to Buber, this incident led him to reevaluate his intellectual interests and to focus on interpersonal dialogue rather than mystical experiences (Martin Buber, “Dialogue,” in \textit{Between Man and Man}, trans. Robert Gregor Smith [London and Glasgow: Collins, 1973], 31). Another event that probably led Buber to re-evaluate his ideas in these matters was a letter that was sent to him by his friend, the anarchist Gustav Landauer, in which Landauer reproached Buber for supporting for the war as a means to express and experience human passion and will and as a way to uplift the human spirit. Landauer reminded him of the horrors of the war, and caused Buber to re-evaluate his ideas. For a discussion of the two stages in Buber’s thought, see also Dan Avnon, \textit{Martin Buber: The Hidden Dialogue} (Lanham Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 33–42.
Alongside Buber’s strong personal, cultural, and intellectual affiliation with Germany, he was also extremely connected to Jewish culture and concerned about the condition of the Jewish people. Like many other German Jews of his time, he constantly treaded the border between the two cultures. Buber’s connection and contribution to Jewish thought became manifest in three main areas: his attitude to the Bible, his study of Hasidism, and his Zionist thought and activity. Buber, whose faith in God was strong and solid and played a major role in this thought, saw the Bible as the primary and ultimate example of the dialogue between God and man, and the Jewish people in particular. In his books, *Kingship of God* (1936), *The Prophetic Faith* (1950) and *Moses* (1945), he described the Bible as an account of the constant efforts of the ancient Israelites to achieve a genuine dialogue with God, and to establish a community that was ruled directly by Him, through the mediation of the biblical prophets. Indeed, Buber also rejected *Halacha* – the post-biblical Jewish law – which he saw as an obstacle to direct dialogue with God. Buber understood the Bible to be a divine call to humanity in general, and, together with the German-Jewish thinker Franz Rosenzweig (with whom he also worked at “The House of Jewish Learning”) re-translated it into German. Their effort in this tremendous project was to provide a translation that would be closer to the meaning of the original text as it had been spoken and heard in the original Hebrew.

Buber’s study and fascination with Hasidism, the spiritual Jewish movement established in Eastern Europe since the late 18th century, were central to his work. In 1906 he translated the legends of the *Baal Shem Tov*, the founder of the Hasidic movement, into

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28 Buber and Rosenzweig started to translate the Bible from Hebrew to German in 1925. Buber continued the project after Rosenzweig’s death in 1929. Tragically, the enormous project was completed only in the late 1950s, not long after the mass murder of European Jewry, the nation whom the project was intended to benefit.

German. Later he published collections of Hasidic legends,\(^{30}\) and the novel *Gog U-Magog* (1943). The latter included, in literary form, Hasidic wisdom, legends, and history. As opposed to other scholars such as Gershom Scholem, who conducted a critical academic study of Hasidic thought and history, Buber stressed the spiritual, existential, and dialogical character of Hasidism: that is, the spontaneous connection between man and God and the creation of a tightly bound community around the Tzadik (the Hasidic leader). Buber saw this as an example of a dialogical community that facilitated true connection between its members, its leader, and God, and as a model for other communities to follow.

Buber’s engagement with the question of Jewish heritage and identity, and especially his three lectures on Judaism that he delivered in Prague in 1909-1911, had a strong effect on Jewish youth in Central Europe at the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century. This was significant especially since during that time many German Jews viewed assimilation into the general non-Jewish society as an appealing choice. They tried to distance themselves from the *Ostjuden* – the poor traditional Jews of East Europe – as well as from the traditional Jewish culture that they considered to be outdated.\(^{31}\) Buber’s deep concern about the fate of the Jewish people also led him to the Zionist movement, which he joined in 1898, a year after the first Zionist Congress took place. He was affiliated with the cultural stream of Zionism, led by Ahad Ha'am and others, who saw the Zionist enterprise as an opportunity to revive Jewish culture and its “spiritual national identity” in Palestine, rather than focusing on the establishment of a modern nation state.

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At the personal request of Theodore Herzl, the leader of the Zionist movement, Buber became the editor of the Zionist newspaper Die Welt.\footnote{Glatzner and Mendes-Flohr, The Letters of Martin Buber: A Life of Dialogue, 73–74.} For a short time, Buber and Herzl worked closely together. However, Herzl and Buber had very different views on the direction that the Jewish people should take. Whereas Herzl’s aim was the establishment of a modern political nation-state for the Jewish people, Buber saw the Zionist enterprise as an opportunity to fulfill what he saw as the divine mission of the Jewish people: the creation of a just, dialogical community under God. This disagreement led them to part ways with each other.

Buber witnessed the rise of Nazism in Germany in the 1930s, and experienced the persecution of the Jews first hand. Like other Jews in his profession, he lost his teaching position after the Nazis came to power. Buber established The Central Office for Jewish Adult Education, in order to teach Jewish thought and heritage, precisely during a time when Jews were labeled and persecuted as members of an “inferior race.” His deep commitment to the German Jewish community and his personal identity as a German Jew may explain the fact that, despite his vigorous involvement in the Zionist movement and the growing persecution of the Jews in Germany, he did not leave Germany until it was almost too late.\footnote{Buber even tried to visit Germany in Summer 1939, a couple of months before the war, but was stopped by the Swiss police who warned him not to cross the border into Germany (Hayim Gordon, The Other Martin Buber: Recollections of His Contemporaries [Athens: Ohio University Press, 1988], 26).}

Buber married Paula Winkler, a German novelist who converted to Judaism, and they had a son and a daughter. He left Germany and moved to Jerusalem in 1938, at the age of 60, and entered a teaching post at the Hebrew University. Despite his identification with some of the aims of the Zionist movement, Buber often criticized the leadership of the Yishuv – the Jewish Zionist community in Palestine – for its emphasis on political sovereignty and
military strength. Before, but especially after, his immigration to Mandatory Palestine, Buber became known for his call for dialogue between Jews and Arabs—at a time when the conflict between the two groups was reaching its climax. Buber saw the Zionist enterprise first and foremost as a moral project, and argued that it should be judged also according to its attitude towards the Arab population in Palestine. He published numerous articles about these political affairs, and joined the small movement Brit Shalom (“Alliance of Peace”), and later on Ichud (“Unity”), whose members were mostly Jewish-German intellectuals who called for the establishment of a bi-national Jewish-Arab state. Buber continued calling for peace and justice towards the Arab population after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, though by that time he was less politically active.

Although the vast majority of the Israeli public and leadership dismissed his political views, Buber was (and still is) admired by many in Israel and around the world as an important intellectual and inspiring humanist. He died in Jerusalem in 1965, at the age of 87.

Camus – Biography

Albert Camus was born in Algeria in 1913 to a family that belonged to the Pied Noir, the French population in that country,\textsuperscript{34} and grew up in a poor working-class neighbourhood in Algiers. His father was killed in France during World War I, when Camus was only one year old,\textsuperscript{35} and his mother, who worked as a cleaning lady, was mentally weak, deaf, and illiterate. In his primary school, Camus received a secular education that emphasized, among other

\textsuperscript{34} Camus’ family did not originate from France. Like many other Pied Noir, his ancestors came from Spain and Palma de Majorca. However, they had lived in Algeria for several generations, and the Pied Noir were considered to be French in their culture, citizenship, and identity, regardless of their actual place of origin.

\textsuperscript{35} It seems that the death of Camus’ father did not have major implications for Camus’ adult life or thought. Camus’ novel The First Man (an unfinished literary work that was based on his own autobiography), starts with a search for his father’s grave and identity, but this is used as a means to discuss the story of the Pied Noir in Algeria in general, rather than a personal search for his own identity.
things, the French culture and its imperial pride. His exceptional intelligence and talent were detected by one of his school teachers, who encouraged him to continue his studies. This was an unusual step for a boy who came from such a poor working-class family, since most children from this background went to work as soon as they could in order to support their families.

Camus’ childhood environment – the Mediterranean sea and sun, the busy and colourful streets of Algiers, and the hard-working people who struggled to make their livings – left a lasting mark on his life and was reflected in his writing as a novelist and thinker. They would become apparent in two important aspects of his writings. The first was his social and political concern for the under-privileged and their struggle against exploitation. The second was his effort to present Mediterranean culture, which is based (as he saw it) on simple earthly common sense, as an alternative to the dangerous European emphasis on ideology and myth.

Camus engaged in social and political affairs from an early age, as a writer, journalist, actor, and director in a social theatre. Although he did not accept the Marxist ideological and revolutionary dogmas, he came close to Communist circles, even joining the Algerian Communist Party for a short period in the mid-1930s. He was expelled from it after claiming that the party, which followed the political line dictated to it from Moscow, was not concerned enough about the needs of the local Muslim population.

Camus’ early literary writings were more lyrical rather than political or philosophical, and often described the beauty of nature and life. From the late 1930s, Camus started to discuss the topic of the absurd, which became the cornerstone of his philosophical thought.
This refers to the crisis that follows the realization that life has no intelligible meaning, and the nihilist consequences that such realization involves. This subject was evident in his play *Caligula* (1939, published in 1944), and was especially prominent in the novel *The Outsider*, and its parallel philosophical essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, both published in 1942, which made him famous almost overnight.

Camus moved to France during World War II. He joined the French Resistance movement in Paris, and became the editor of one of its major clandestine newspapers, *Combat*. After the war, Camus, by then a famous author and dominant intellectual figure in Paris, published numerous articles and several plays. In 1947 he published the novel *The Plague*, which described a city facing a plague and the reaction of different people to this calamity. The novel was an allegory on the Nazi occupation, but also included important insights concerning human solidarity in difficult situations in general. In 1951, Camus published the book *The Rebel*, in which he critically described how the rebellion against God and political tyranny in modernity, though itself justifiable, led to the rise of tyrannical movements and regimes. Camus’ critique of the Soviet Union in this book led to bitter arguments between him and many on the French Left, with which he was affiliated, including with his close friends, the philosophers Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. His last major literary work published during his lifetime, *The Fall* (1956), describes the reflections of a man who longs for meaningful and authentic human connection after realizing that his former life as a successful but vain person was lacking in real meaning.

Although Camus did not return to live in Algeria, he was very concerned about its future and the violent conflict between the French and Muslim populations there. Camus was torn between his identity as a *Pied Noir* and his concern for justice. He was very concerned
about the ongoing injustices toward the Muslim population, including the violence that was committed by the French authorities in order to suppress their revolts. At the same time, he also strongly rejected the terror and violence committed by FLN, the Algerian liberation movement; and he personally identified with the \textit{Pied Noir} community he came from. Probably because of this inner conflict, Camus made relatively few public statements regarding the situation in Algeria (and this relative silence alienated him even further from his friends in the French Left). Nevertheless, Camus did call for a truce that would at least spare the lives of civilians on both sides, and initiated a meeting between representatives of the \textit{Pied Noir} and the Algerian Muslim communities for that purpose, although neither of these was successful. A moving description of his childhood in Algeria and his reflections about the conflict there also appeared in his last, unfinished novel \textit{The First Man}.

Camus received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1957. He was married twice and had twin children from his marriage to his second wife. He was killed in a car accident in 1960, at the age of 47.

\textit{Comparison of the Thinkers’ Backgrounds}

Several personal elements in the thinkers’ biographies are relevant for the comparison between them. First, both thinkers belonged to ethnic minorities, although here the difference between the two thinkers is clear. Buber belonged to the Jewish minority that was well aware of its inferior status, and faced discrimination that grew worse until it reached its climax in Nazi Germany. Camus belonged to the \textit{Pied Noir} minority. However, the \textit{Pied Noir} were a privileged minority, who did not think of themselves as a minority group at all, since Algeria was considered to be an integral part of France. As we shall note, their respective affiliations become more relevant when one compares Camus’ involvement in the conflict in Algeria.
Buber and Camus share another commonality in this regard. Although the reasons for the destructions of their respective communities were, of course, extremely different, both belonged to communities that did not last; and their writings serve as a commemoration of those lost communities. Buber witnessed the destruction of European Jewry. The Central and Eastern European culture and heritage that he admired and wrote about were gone, and he himself was to become a living symbol of the tragic effort to create a meeting point between the German and the Jewish cultures. Camus died shortly before the mass exodus of the French from Algeria in 1962, but he already saw the disintegration of the Pied Noir community, and described it in his last novel, *The First Man.*

It should further be noted that both thinkers went through an immigration experience: Camus moved to France; Buber, to Mandatory Palestine. Both thinkers were also able to criticize their respective environments precisely because they were familiar with alternative ones. Buber, who was familiar with the Jewish heritage of Eastern Europe, criticized the German Jews for their effort to distance themselves from the *Ostjuden.* He also re-introduced German Jews to the East-European Hasidic spiritual and cultural heritage that many of them had rejected. After his immigration to Mandatory Palestine, he criticized the secular and militant tendencies of the *Yishuv.* Camus, for his part, had a unique view of the Algerian conflict due to his own French-Algerian background and identity. He criticized the demonization of the Pied Noir by his colleagues on the French Left. He also rejected the sympathy expressed by some members of the French Left toward the FLN’s terrorism.
A second point of comparison in their respective biographies is that Buber came from a relatively wealthy family, whereas Camus experienced poverty in his childhood. This may explain why, although both Buber and Camus called for social and economic justice to remedy the problem of poverty, Buber gave relatively little attention to the problem of economic scarcity in his utopian political thought, whereas Camus’ discussion of this problem was much more explicit. He discussed the existential and psychological effects of poverty, and the shared struggle of the poor against social injustice. He also supported syndicalism and the Popular Front in France, and, as noted, he was for a time a member of the Communist party.

The last point of comparison regarding the thinkers’ personal lives is that both Buber and Camus had dysfunctional mothers. It is true that one should be cautious when speculating on possible psychological connections between a thinker’s childhood experience and his or her adult thought. Yet, as we shall discuss later, each gave the connection between mother and child an important place in his social and even political thought. That is, Buber put spontaneous human connection and interdependence at the centre of his social and political

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36 As Camus wrote in *The First Man*: “[P]oor people’s memory is less nourished than that of the rich; it has fewer landmarks in space because they seldom leave the place where they live, and fewer references points in time throughout lives that are gray and featureless. Of course there is the memory of the heart that they say is the surest kind, but the heart wears out with sorrow and labor, it forgets sooner under the weights of fatigue. Remembrance of things past is just for the rich. For the poor it only marks the faint traces on the path to death. And besides, in order to bear up well one must not remember too much, but rather stick close to the passing day, hour by hour.” (Albert Camus, *The First Man*, trans. David Hapgood [New York: Vintage Books, 1996], 80).

At the same time, Camus also discussed the “positive” side of poverty – the hardship that allows one to focus on the beauty of life: “One can, with no romanticism, feel nostalgic for lost poverty…For rich people, the sky is just an extra, a gift of nature. The poor, on the other hand, can see it as it really is: an infinite grace… it is in this life of poverty…that I have most certainly touched what I feel is the true meaning of life” (Albert Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1942*, trans. Philip Thody [New York: Knopf, 1963], 3–4).

37 This was a theme in stories such as *The Voiceless*. Albert Camus, “The Voiceless,” in *Exile and the Kingdom*, trans. Carol Cosman (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 49–65.
thought. For Camus, his mother was a symbol of the innocence and human compassion that must take priority over political aims and interests, and that would help to restrain them.

Two contrasts that immediately stand out are related to the thinkers’ intellectual and cultural backgrounds. The first is Buber’s religious background as a grandson of a prominent Jewish scholar and as a man of deep faith, to which Camus’ secular upbringing stands in contrast. The second is Buber’s Central European cultural affiliation, which emphasized an essentialist view of community as a nation that has a unique spiritual identity and destiny, on the one hand, and, on the other, Camus’ French and Mediterranean cultures, in which such metaphysical, nationalist ideas did not come to the fore. These different intellectual and cultural backgrounds, together with the thinkers’ reactions to the social and political questions of their time, will be discussed in the following chapters. More generally, the comparative examination in this study – Buber and Camus’ respective discussions about human connectedness, solidarity, ethics and politics – will take into account different aspects of the thinkers’ biographies.

Friedman argued that Buber’s emphasis on dialogue is connected to the loss of his mother (Friedman, Martin Buber’s Life and Work, 1:5).
Chapter 3 – Buber and Camus on Human Relationship

The aim of this chapter is to examine Buber’s ideas of connectedness and solidarity, and to compare them with that of Camus’ views on this topic. This discussion is important not only in itself, but also as an introduction to the examination of the tension between connectedness and ethical and political considerations, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

The discussion of the ideas that these thinkers presented is connected with two elements. The first is Buber’s and Camus’ views regarding the extent to which human beings by their nature aspire to dialogue, harmony, and unity – views which also affect their ethical and political thought. The second is their different understandings of a concern that was shared by them to a certain extent: the sense of homelessness and existential crisis that people experience in the modern era, following the collapse of the traditional religious, social and political order, which had provided a sense of coherent meaning and belonging in the past. Although the discussion of both thinkers may be read as a reaction to modernity and its problems, Buber understood reality to be based primarily on dialogue and connectedness, and the modern sense of homelessness or loneliness to be a deviation from that path. Camus, on the other hand, perceived the sense of alienation to be the basic element of reality, and tried

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39 For other comparative discussions of Camus and Buber that start from this shared concern, see Woocher (Woocher, “Martin Buber and Albert Camus”) and Funk (Funk, “Alienation in Camus and Buber”). Sagi also noted that the problem of alienation is a concern for both thinkers. (Avi Sagi, Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd, trans. Batya Stein [Amsterdam - New York: Rodopi, 2002], 8). It should be noted that Buber discussed the difference and distinction between the modern and pre-modern eras much more explicitly and extensively than did Camus. This is related to a point made earlier, that Buber criticized modernity much more strongly than Camus, who, as a secular modern figure, accepted many of its ideas.
to create a concept of solidarity that would take this condition into account and provide for a human response to it.

**Buber’s Concept of Connectedness**

In his most famous book, *I and Thou*, Buber writes the following statement: “In the beginning is the relation – as the category of being, as readiness, as a form that reaches out to be filled, as a model of the soul; the *a priori* of relation.”⁴⁰ This quote points to the basis of Buber’s thought: the idea that human beings – and every other element in creation – are dialogical by nature, and that reality consists of an aspiration to fulfill the endless possibility for connectedness and dialogue. Buber’s views on human relationships, as well as his accounts of ethics and politics derive from this idea.⁴¹

At the basis of this study stands an ethical and political concern. The discussion of Buber’s dialogical thought (as well as Camus’ idea of solidarity that will be followed) would serve mainly as an introduction to discuss the ethical and political question that will be included in the next two chapters. The three most important elements of Buber’s dialogical

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⁴⁰ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter A. Kaufmann (New York: Scribner, 1970), 78. This quote refers to the way in which Buber described the situation among those he called “the primitive people,” yet it also reflects his general world view. It is worth noting the Christian connotation of this quote: the word “logos” or “word” in the Gospel (John 1:1) is replaced here with “relation.”

⁴¹ Buber’s interest in questions of connectedness and unity were evident from the early stages of his writing. Before developing his dialogical teaching, Buber focused on the ecstatic experience of the individual and one’s mystical connection with God. The following discussion, however, will focus on the second, dialogical, stage of Buber’s thought. There is a question about the extent to which Buber’s ideas actually shifted and transformed from mysticism to dialogue, since both are bound up with the experience of connectedness. Both the view that this signifies a major change, and the view that emphasizes the similarities between the mystical and dialogical periods in Buber’s thought, are relevant for the discussion about Buber’s approach to connectedness and ethics, and for comparison between Buber and Camus in this study. On the one hand, Buber’s transformation to an emphasis on dialogue and interpersonal relationship led him to discuss ethical and political themes that were not relevant when dealing with the ecstatic experience of the individual and connectedness with God. On the other hand, in his dialogical stage, Buber did not reject altogether some elements that are often related to mystical and ecstatic experience, such as the search for spontaneity, harmony, and unity, and the rejection of formal regulation and boundaries that stand at the basis of conventional ethics.
thought for this purpose are the intensity and depth of Buber’s concept of dialogue, its connection to faith in God, and the difference between his thought and common modern views as reflected in his critique of modernity.

I-You and I-It

Buber’s basic idea regarding the dialogical nature of human beings and reality as a whole is introduced in the first sentences of his famous work, I and Thou, in which he made a fundamental distinction between what he referred to as the “I-It” and the “I-You” modes of relationality.42

The I-It mode of relationality refers to the common cognitive and emotional way in which people usually perceive reality. In this mode, the subject puts him or herself at the centre, and views the different human and non-human entities around him or her as objects that he or she can examine, control, use, like or dislike, and so on. The I-It mode of relationality stresses the boundaries and the separation between the subject and the objects around it. It also stresses the distinction between the different objects, by placing them in a context of space and time. This is a common stance toward the world. All objective

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42 The German term Ich-Du that Buber used has often been translated as I-Thou. Yet, as Walter Kaufmann explains, the term Du in German is actually much more informal than the word Thou in English, and used by close friends. Buber called for spontaneous, unmediated relationships between people, and therefore Kaufmann chose to use the term You and not Thou for his translation of the term Du, apart from the title of the book. (Walter A. Kaufmann, “I and You: A Prologue,” in I and Thou, by Martin Buber [New York: Scribner, 1970], 14-15). For this reasons, I also use the term I-Thou to refer to Buber’s book, but in my discussion I use the English “You” and not “Thou.”

43 “The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude… One basic word is the word pair I-You. The other basic word is the word pair I-It.” (Buber, I and Thou, 53).

It should be noted that Buber’s dialogical thought (as well as his ideas about faith and religion and his critique of modernity discussed in this chapter) stand at the centre of his philosophy, and were discussed extensively by many, including Hugo Bergman, Maurice Friedman, Walter Kaufmann, Malcolm Diamond, Dan Aynon, Admiel Kosman, as well as those who previously compared between Buber and Camus: Woocher, Ladd and Funk.
knowledge of the world is based on this mode of relationality.\textsuperscript{44} Indeed, the mode is manifested each time people speak \textit{about} something or someone.\textsuperscript{45} Through this mode, people are able to analyze and understand their environment: they can organize it by using clear categories, applying logical causal explanations for the different phenomena they encounter.\textsuperscript{46} Thus the I-It mode enables people to achieve a relatively stable, coherent and comprehensible picture of the world.

Buber provided an example of the I-It mode of relationality by referring to one’s contemplation of a tree:

I contemplate a tree. I can accept it as a picture: a rigid pillar in a flood of light, or splashes of green traversed by the gentleness of the blue silver ground. I can feel it as movement: the flowing veins around the sturdy, striving core, the sucking of the roots, the breathing of the leaves, the infinite commerce with earth and air – and the growing itself in its darkness. I can assign it to a species and observe it as an instance, with an eye to its construction and its way of life. I can overcome its uniqueness and form so rigorously that I recognize it only as an expression of the law…I can dissolve it into a number, into a pure relation between numbers, and eternalize it. Throughout all of this the tree remains my object and has its place and its time span, its kind and condition.\textsuperscript{47}

In terms of relationships between human beings, the I-It mode of relationality marks an attitude in which people maintain their distance from each other. A clearly negative manifestation of this attitude occurs when people try to manipulate, exploit, or harm others in order to satisfy their own interests. However, there are other manifestations of the I-It mode.


\textsuperscript{45} Jochanan Bloch has noted the difference between speaking \textit{about} and speaking \textit{to} as one of the major differences between I-It and I-You modes of relationality (Jochanan Bloch, “The Justification and the Futility of Dialogical Thinking,” in \textit{Martin Buber: A Centenary Volume}, ed. Haim Gordon and Jochanan Bloch [New York: Ktav Publishing House, for the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 1984], 50).

\textsuperscript{46} See also Katz, “A Critical Review of Martin Buber’s Epistemology of I-Thou,” 44.

\textsuperscript{47} Buber, \textit{I and Thou}, 57–58.
of relationality that are more common and considered to be legitimate, at least in modern society. Examples include treating people according to general rules and regulations, without taking into account the unique personality of each given individual. Another common example is relating only to specific aspects of people’s lives that are relevant to a particular social context or professional role, such as in the exchange between a salesman and a customer, whose relationship is based solely on their commercial interests, or a physician and a patient, who deals only with the medical problem in question. Usually, such relationships are not considered negative or exploitative, since they may work for the benefit of those involved. Indeed, the entire economic system is based on such mutual interests of sellers and customers, and service based on objective standards and criteria is exactly what distinguishes fair and professional economic and bureaucratic systems from corrupt ones. Yet such relationships are still based on distance and separation between people – between a subject and those whom he or she relates to as objects – as distinct from viewing each person as a unique individual who has a complete personality. Buber did not deny that the I-It mode of relationality is necessary and unavoidable in many realms of life, precisely because it is the common, intuitive way in which people perceive the world and engage in daily life. However, he claimed that this mode of relationality cannot lead to self-fulfillment or proper moral conduct.

The preferred mode of relationality is what Buber called the I-You mode, which is based on a genuine dialogue. What stands at the centre of this mode or relationality is not the

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48 Hugo Bergman noted that Kant’s categorical imperative, which queries whether a particular action should become a general rule in order to check its moral validity, is an example for such I-It mode of relationality. This is because it puts at its centre an abstract and general notion of a person, rather than dealing with a particular person and his or her particular action at a given time (Shmuel Hugo Bergman, “Ha-Hashiva Ha-Du Sichit Shel M. Buber [M. Buber’s Dialogical Thought],” in Besod Siach, by Martin Buber [Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1959], 24).
I – the subject – who treats others as objects, but the meeting itself between the interlocutors, and the way in which the interlocutors relate to each other in their uniqueness. As Buber describes it:

For each the two men the other happens as the particular other, that each becomes aware of the other and is thus related to him in such a way that he does not regard and use him as his object, but as his partner in a living event.⁵⁰

When a genuine I-You dialogue takes place, direct, spontaneous, and unmediated relations are created between the interlocutors. They enter into a shared single space that includes both of them, which Buber called the Between or the Interpersonal (das Zwischenmenschlich). This realm, which according to Buber has an essence of its own, is not only a neutral unity that encompasses the interlocutors, but a real dimension that only they can access.⁵²

The I-You mode of relationality touches the most fundamental aspect of reality, because, in Buber’s account, reality is dialogical by its very nature.⁵³ According to Buber, reality does not consist of independent, separate and fixed entities that exist only in themselves, but of a myriad of potential calls for relationship and dialogue, waiting to be answered and realized. He writes:

Signs happen to us without respite, living means being addressed, we would need only to present ourselves and to perceive... The signs of address are not something extraordinary, something that steps out of the order to things, they are just what goes on time and again, just what goes on in any case, nothing is added by the address. The waves

⁵¹ Avnon used a metaphor of an electric conductor that transfers an electrical energy between two objects (Dan Avnon, “The ‘Living Center’ of Martin Buber’s Political Theory,” Political Theory 21, no. 1 (February 1993): 57.
of the aether roar on always, but for most of the time we have turned off our receivers.\textsuperscript{54}

A statement that demonstrates this idea is Buber’s claim that “in truth language does not reside in man but man stands in language.”\textsuperscript{55} Language (in the sense of addressing each other, not in the sense of using a particular tongue) is not only a means to communicate and convey information between independent individuals, but is the basis of reality itself. Only by realizing their dialogical nature would people be able to fulfill their authentic selves.

A denial, rejection, or neglect of their inherent need for relationship and dialogue is a denial of their most fundamental character and aspiration. For this reason, approaching the world only through the I-It mode of relationality may enable one to experience the world, but not really to participate in it.\textsuperscript{56} In Buber’s words:

\begin{quote}
Whoever stands in relation, participates in an actuality; that is, in a being that is neither merely a part of him nor merely outside him…where there is no participation, there is no actuality… [T]he more directly the You is touched, the more perfect is the participation.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

This also explains the importance of the \textit{Between} – the realm that exists when a genuine dialogue takes place – where the individual really exists (“in actuality”) only in such genuine dialogue with others.

Another way to demonstrate the idea that genuine dialogue manifests relationships that exist \textit{a-priori}, as a potential that is waiting to be actualized and realized, is Buber’s idea that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Buber, “Dialogue,” 27–28.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Buber, \textit{I and Thou}, 89.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 56.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 113.
\end{itemize}
each person carries within him or herself an “innate you” of the other, and when a genuine I-
You dialogue takes place “the innate You is realized in the You we encounter.”  

As opposed to the I-It, in which the subject often relates only to a particular aspect of
the object that suits its needs or interests or its given context or as an object alongside other
objects, the I-You mode of relationality allows one to fully relate to the other and grasp the
other as a complete being:

When I confront a human being as my You and speak the basic word
I-You to him, then he is no thing among things nor does he consist of
things. He is no longer He or She, limited by other Hes and Shes, a
dot in the world grid of space and time, nor a condition that can be
experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities.
Neighborless and seamless, he is You and fills the firmament. Not as
if there were nothing but he; but everything else lives in his light.  

This quote also demonstrates how intense and profound Buber’s concept of relationship is. I-
You relationship creates an intimacy that is total, unique and exclusive, a relationship that
overshadows everything else.

The idea that, by participating in this shared dialogical realm, both interlocutors fully
acknowledge each other, leads to one of the most important elements in Buber’s dialogical
thought. In a genuine dialogue both participants retain some of their independence within the
relationship, and therefore each participant is capable of relating to the other in his or her
uniqueness, as a complete human being. In Buber’s words, such dialogue takes place
“where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their presence and
particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation

58 Ibid., 78.
59 Ibid., 59.
60 See also Katz, “A Critical Review of Martin Buber’s Epistemology of I-Thou,” 94.
between himself and them”. Indeed, the fine line (which is often extremely hard to determine) between maintaining one’s independence while participating in an intense dialogue with others has ethical and political implications, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

It should be noted that, for Buber, the dialogical condition, which is considered the most fundamental basis of reality, does not relate only to human beings – or, as we shall discuss below, to the dialogue between man and God – but also to non-human elements. In Buber’s words:

It by no means needs to be a man of whom I become aware. It can be an animal, a plant, a stone. No kind of appearance or event is fundamentally excluded from the series of the things through which from time to time something is said to me. Nothing can refuse to be the vessel for the Word. The limits of the possibility of dialogue are the limits of awareness.

With regard to dialogue with nature, Buber mentioned for example the way in which a house cat communicates through the look in its eyes, and a dialogical experience he had with a horse in his childhood. Buber also mentioned the ability to develop an I-You relationship with a tree: following the description of the I-It view of the tree, quoted above, Buber said that it is possible to be “drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an It”. Buber’s idea that it is possible to actually to experience dialogue with such non-human entities has drawn much criticism. He admitted that he had no experience that the tree has consciousness similar to a human one, which allows for real reciprocity. He later explained that, although the tree

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62 Ibid., 27.
63 Buber, I and Thou, 145.
65 Buber, I and Thou, 58.
66 Ibid., 57.
does not reply as an individual, “we find here not the deed of posture of an individual being but a reciprocity of being itself”. Being itself is dialogical, regardless of the ability of the particular natural element (a tree, in this instance) to participate in the dialogue in the way that a human being can. The important point regarding Buber’s claim that a genuine dialogue with natural elements is possible is the totality and the intensity of his dialogical thought, and his idea that all of reality is based on dialogue.

It should be noted that Buber also discussed the importance of dialogue with “spiritual beings”, which, as Hugo Bergman has explained, are to be understood as artistic projects. According to Buber, art is not only a product that is based on the subjective will of the artist, but a manifestation of the Between that existed between the artist and the image that appeared in front of the artist.

In order to better understand the concept of I-You, which many have found vague and unclear, it may be useful to compare it to other forms of relationship, and to point out what, according to Buber, does not constitute genuine dialogue. Buber noted that genuine I-You dialogue is different from a “technical dialogue,” which aims merely to convey certain information or to achieve objective understanding. Such communication is actually the common aspect of the I-It mode of relationality, since it consists of speaking about objects rather than a genuine dialogue that is based on speaking to the other. Genuine dialogue is

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67 Ibid., 173.
68 See Bergman, “Ha-Hashiva Ha-Du Sichit Shel M. Buber [M. Buber’s Dialogical Thought].” 22.
69 Ibid., 26. The meaning of “spiritual beings” is not altogether clear. Gregor Smith asked Buber about its meaning, and Buber replied that it means “spirit in phenomenal forms,” which is an expression that is still not clear enough (Smith, Martin Buber, 16).
71 Buber, “Dialogue,” 37. For a discussion about the differences between genuine dialogue, artificial dialogue, and monologue in Buber’s thought, see also Friedman, “The Existentialist of Dialogue: Marcel, Camus, and Buber,” 292–293.
based not only on reason, since reason is a limited faculty that cannot fully comprehend the other. Moreover, rational understanding is based on impersonal order, that is, on placing an object within a grid of space and time, which is the character of the I-It experience of the world.\textsuperscript{72}

The I-You mode of relationality is also different from sentiments such as love or hate, both because emotions can easily change, and because feelings are subjective: they take place in the soul of one of the interlocutors, rather than the objective, essential, realm that exists between them and includes them both.\textsuperscript{73} For the same reason, even sympathy, which is usually associated with genuine dialogue, is not what the genuine dialogue is based on. Sympathy is based on the subjective feeling of one of the interlocutors towards the other, rather than a mutual relationship\textsuperscript{74} or the objective and essential relationship that exists between them.\textsuperscript{75} Feelings may accompany the I-You relationship, but they do not constitute it.\textsuperscript{76} Moreover, Buber explains that the opposite of dialogue is not hate or anger towards the other, but indifference, which leads to a sense of estrangement and alienation.

Although Buber did not state this explicitly, it is plausible to claim that the I-You mode of relationality is also much deeper than respect in the common modern-Western use of the term, which implies politeness and certain distance from the other in order to acknowledge the other’s rights and autonomy. Buberian dialogue, of course, contains a strong element of concern for the other and acknowledgment of the other’s needs. However, genuine dialogue

\textsuperscript{72} Marcel, “I and Thou,” 43.
\textsuperscript{73} Smith, Martin Buber, 23.
\textsuperscript{74} Bergman, “Ha-Hashiva Ha-Du Sichit Shel M. Buber [M. Buber’s Dialogical Thought],” 18, 20.
\textsuperscript{75} Smith, Martin Buber, 27.
\textsuperscript{76} Marcel, “I and Thou,” 44.
puts at its centre the connectedness between people, while the modern sense of respect is often based on separation and safe distance that people keep from each other.

As Buber explained, genuine I-You connectedness cannot last long. In practice, every You must turn into an It at some point, since it is impossible to connect to the other fully in such an intense way. It is also impossible to overcome the natural tendency to view reality as consisting of separated objects around oneself as a subject. For example, every doctor or social worker, at some point, must see his or her patient or client as an object for treatment – as a medical or a welfare case – rather than a full human being, no matter how strong he or she may try to maintain a dialogical relationship with him.77 The I-You mode of relationality is also difficult to achieve in the first place. According to Buber, such a relationship happens “when will and grace are joined.”78 It may therefore require a certain intention to enter into such a relationship, that is, to imagine that such a relationship is possible and to tune oneself to realize this possibility. Even then, since grace is also required, it is not always possible to achieve this I-You mode of relationality. However, Buber calls for the acknowledgement of the possibility of the I-You mode of relationality and for striving to achieve it as much as possible.

To summarize to this point, the most important element in Buber’s dialogical thought, for the purpose of this study and the comparison with Camus, is the intensity of his dialogical idea. The distinction between the I-It and the I-You modes of relationality is based on the idea that genuine dialogue touches the core of human soul and, indeed, reality as a whole.

77 Bergman, “Ha-Hashiva Ha-Du Sichit Shel M. Buber [M. Buber’s Dialogical Thought],” 23.
78 Buber, I and Thou, 58. Buber went as far as to say that “the You encounters me by grace – it cannot be found by seeking, but that I speak the basic word to it is a deed of my whole being, is my essential deed” (Ibid., 62).
The following discussion, concerning Buber’s religious understanding, will add another important dimension to his dialogical account.

**God – the Eternal You**

According to Buber, the multitude of dialogues and genuine relationships between people accumulate and join together to form the ultimate dialogue – the dialogue with God, whom Buber calls “the eternal You”. Buber writes that, “Extended, the lines of relationships intersect in the eternal You. Every single You is a glimpse of that. Through every single You the basic word addresses the eternal You”. Buber’s discussion of God as the aim and anchor of all genuine dialogues provides a possible solution to what may be seen as a reality based on a flux of subjective encounters without a clear centre, thus providing for existential direction. This is important for Buber’s discussion concerning ethics, to be examined in the next chapter. It will also be germane to the comparison with Camus, who discussed the rebellion against God, and the way in which religion ceased to serve as a valid moral and existential anchor in modernity, for both good and bad.

Buber’s understanding of faith, then, is intertwined with his dialogical thought. God is the ultimate partner for dialogue because He is the only You who could never be reduced to an “It,” since He stands beyond any grid or context of space and time:

By its very nature the eternal You cannot become an It; because by its very nature it cannot be placed within measure and limit, not even within the measure of the immeasurable and the limit of the unlimited; because by its very nature it cannot be grasped as a sum of qualities, not even as an infinite sum of qualities that have been raised to transcendence; because it is not to be found either in or outside the

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79 Ibid., 123.
world; because it cannot be experienced; because it cannot be thought[.]

God therefore stands beyond all elements in space and time; but at the same time, He is also the sum of all dialogues in the world, and a partner in dialogical relationship with man. Since God cannot be related to as an It, His existence cannot be discussed in logical, scientific, or intellectual terms (because speaking about someone as an object means treating him as an It). Although God cannot be experienced or thought of as an object, He can be experienced as an interlocutor in a dialogue, as a You. Although God provides guidance, according to Buber, more than a commanding God, He is a dialogical one, who enters into a dialogical relationship – a covenant – with man. In this covenant, He is waiting for an answer, and people can turn to and respond to Him. Buber discusses this point particularly in regard to the relationship between God and the Jewish people. This relationship is based on a covenant between free parties who enter into a relationship that requires solid, ongoing, and exclusive commitment.

The making of the covenant comes about because the covenant lays the foundation of God’s rule and order. In place of a loose cultic relationship a solid one shall come, embracing the whole life of the people. Into this relationship only a liberated, free Israel can enter. Only by acknowledging YHVH as One, Whom they are willing to follow in doing and hearing, do they really become His people and YHVH Israel’s God.

Buber focuses his discussion on a concept of God who exists not only above and beyond the mundane world, but also in the meeting between heaven and earth, since for him, there is no separation between the divine and the temporal-mundane realms. The two

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80 Ibid., 160–161. See also p. 148.
81 Bergman, “Ha-Hashiva Ha-Du Sichit Shel M. Buber [M. Buber’s Dialogical Thought],” 37-39.
82 Martin Buber, Torat Ha-Neviʾim [The Prophetic Teaching], 2nd ed. (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1961), 24.
84 See in this regard Admiel Kosman, “Mavo Lemishant Buber [Introduction to Buber’s Teaching],” in Ani Ve-Ata (I and Thou), by Martin Buber (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2013), 196–217.
realms are intertwined, and stand in constant dialogue with each other. This point is significant for discussion that will follow regarding Buber’s political thought. On the one hand, Buber rejected the separation of the two realms that was advanced by secular political thought, which denied any social or political considerations based on faith. But he also strongly rejected any Gnostic notions suggesting a difference between this negative world that should be rejected and a better, alternative one that people should hope for. At the same time, he also rejected the Christian position that viewed mundane politics mainly as a tool to deal with mundane problems in a relatively insignificant temporal world. As opposed to these understandings, Buber called for a focus on this mundane realm, to strive for fulfillment in this world, but did so precisely because he thought that affairs in this world could be led and guided by God, if people were to turn their hearts and minds to engage in a proper dialogue with Him and each other.

As a believer, Buber hoped for some kind of redemption that would connect mundane and divine affairs. He also acknowledged the importance of the messianic element in the Jewish faith. However, his understanding of redemption was not of an apocalyptic event that would radically change the world order, nor the restoration of a glorious national past, as is the common messianic idea in Jewish thought. In the main, redemption would follow upon a conceptual change in people’s minds, which would be achieved with the (re)turn from an I-It to an I-You mode of relationality in all aspects of life, and the creation of social and

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85 See in this regard: Ohana, “Ambiguous Messianism: The Political Theology of Martin Buber.”
political frameworks conducive to such relationships, among people and between them and God, according to His guidance.\(^{87}\)

Given Buber’s emphasis on matters of faith, it is important to underscore his rejection of the Jewish *Halacha* (and any other institutionalized religion) because he saw its fixed dogmas as an obstacle for a direct and living dialogical relationship with God. The communication with God should not be achieved through dogmatic rules and regulations, but through the prophets, who convey the divine message. The dialogue, in this sense, is similar to the dialogue with any other element in creation: it should be spontaneous and direct, a part of the flux of dialogues in reality, which is made of unique dialogical occurrences, and not based on any fixed regulations.

Real faith…begins when the dictionary is put down, when you are done with it…Faith stands in the stream of “happening but once” which is spanned by knowledge. All the emergency structure of analogy and typology are indispensable for the work of the human spirit... [but] lived life is tested and fulfilled in the stream alone.\(^{88}\)

Buber, therefore, did not deny the human need for “dictionaries” – certain guidelines and regulations – in order to communicate with God. The problem, according to him, is that the over-reliance on regulated worship led to the establishment and advancement of institutional religion – a “cult,” as he characterized it – that took over the genuine communication with God.

\(^{87}\) To some extent, Buber’s idea is somewhat closer to the Protestant ideas that gave more religious significance to activity in this temporal world, as well as in his call for direct dialogue with God without institutional mediation. One can also find certain parallels between Protestantism and Hassidic thought (by which Buber was much influenced), in their stress on the divine presence within this mundane realm and the importance of direct communication with God. Yet there are, of course, major differences between Buber’s and Christian thought. Buber did not accept the fundamental principles of Christianity, including the divinity of Christ. Jesus was, for him, an exemplary model of genuine dialogical relationship between man and God, but he rejected his divinity as well as the Christian institutional tradition.

Man desires to have God; he desires to have God continually in space and time… Thus God becomes an object of faith. Originally faith fills the temporal gaps between the acts of relations; gradually, it becomes a substitute for these acts… God becomes a cult object. The cult, too, originally supplements the acts of relation, by fitting the living prayer, the immediate You-saying into a spatial context of great plastic power and connecting it with the life of the senses. And the cult, too, gradually becomes a substitute, as the personal prayer is no longer supported but rather pushed aside by communal prayer; and as the essential deed simply does not permit any rules, it is supplanted by devotions that follow rules.89

Indeed, the tragedy of institutionalized religion, according to Buber, was that God ceased to be perceived as the interlocutor in the ultimate and all-encompassing dialogue, and became merely an object for worship. The solution to this problem would be the renewal of the spontaneous dialogical attitude towards God (and towards other human beings). Thus Buber’s anarchistic ideas were applied to relationships between human beings and with God.

**Buber’s Critique of Modernity**

Buber’s concept of connectedness may well be considered a reaction to modernity. That is, it can be argued that Buber constructed a theory that describes an extremely intense dialogue and connectedness, precisely because it was a reaction to the sense of alienation in modern times.90 According to this view, such a deep and radical vision of connectedness and dialogue could not have been developed in earlier, pre-modern times, when people actually had a stronger sense of connectedness and belonging. In this way, Buber could be understood as a modern thinker, whose ideas about connectedness, though he presented them as being universal, actually belong to the particular historical era during which he lived. However, Buber himself presents his theory from the opposite perspective. For him, the aspiration for a

90 This was implied also in Rosenzweig’s critique of Buber’s dialogical concept, which will be discussed later. (See Bernhard Casper, “Franz Rosenzweig’s Criticism of Buber’s I and Thou,” in *Martin Buber: A Centenary Volume*, ed. Haim Gordon and Jochanan Bloch [New York: Ktav Publishing House, for the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 1984], 139–59).
dialogical I-You mode of relationship is the natural, inherent, human attitude. Modernity, according to this view, is a deviation from that natural, authentic path.

Buber’s idea of connectedness stands in direct contrast to the modern call for individuals’ autonomy and independence, as well as the wish to control and manipulate the natural and social environment. The entire modern trajectory is based on a wish to master one’s own skills and abilities, to be as independent as possible, and thus to emphasize the boundaries between people, and between them and nature. This was best articulated by Immanuel Kant, who used the image of progress in the individual’s life – from childhood to maturity – to demonstrate his idea, and saw the Enlightenment as the stepping up from “lifelong immaturity”, to develop one’s autonomy, independence, and the ability to think for oneself without being dependent on external guidance.

Buber used the same image of the individual’s growth, but from the opposite perspective – he looked for inspiration to the image of the child’s experience of connectedness, which seemed to him the more authentic image. Buber pointed to child development as evidence of his account. Human beings start their lives even before they are born, in the womb, in a state of perfect connectedness. Infants demonstrate a quest for connectedness and relationship with their environment, and create their sense of self and

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91 “Enlightenment is mankind’s exist from its self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. Self-incurred is this inability if its cause lies not in the lack of understanding but rather in the lack of the resolution and the courage to use it without the guidance of another. Sapere aude! Have the courage to use your own understanding! is thus the motto of enlightenment.” (Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?,” in What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions, ed. and trans. James Schmidt [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996], 58).

92 “How are we educated by children, by animals! Inscrutably involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity” (Buber, I and Thou, 67).
identity through these relationships with their environment. Only at a later stage do they accept things around them as separate objects. Nonetheless, the inherent quest for connectedness continues throughout man’s life.

It is not as if a child first saw an object and then entered into some relationship with that. Rather, the longing for relation is primary…the genesis of the thing is a late product that develops out of the split of the primal encounters.

Man becomes an I through a You. What confronts us comes and vanishes, relational events take shape and scatter, and through these changes crystallized, more and more each time, the consciousness of the constant partner, the I-consciousness. …Only now can the other basic word be put together... the detached I is transforms – reduces from substantial fullness to the functional one-dimensionality of a subject that experiences and uses objects.

Only at that point does the person begin to view things around him or her as separate objects, in the context of time, space, and causality.

The idea that the individual’s life starts in connectedness, and therefore modern man should be inspired by childhood, is also applied to collectives. In direct opposition to the

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93 “The prenatal life of the child is a pure natural association, a flowing toward each other, a bodily reciprocity; and the life horizon of the developing being appears uniquely inscribed, and yet also not inscribed, in that of the being that carries it; for the womb in which it dwells is not solely that of the human mother. This association is so cosmic that it seems like the imperfect deciphering of a primeval inscription…And as the secret image of a wish, this association remains to us…” (Ibid., 76).
94 Ibid., 78.
95 Ibid., 80.
96 In an early article about the Jewish people, Buber also used the idea of individual growth to make a point about the connection of the individual Jew to the Jewish people. He claimed that at first, the individual “finds himself in a cosmos constituted by his impressions, with the I contributing merely the feeling-tone.” He later learns to differentiate between different objects in his environment and to develop his identity. Buber claimed that many remain at this stage, but that others also discover that beyond the “physical I” they have a “spiritual I”, which is not bounded in time and which is connected to past generations. Such a person “perceives then what commingling of individuals, what confluence of blood, has produced him” and “senses in his immortality of the generation a community of blood, which he feels to be the antecedents of his I, its perseverance in the infinite past” (Martin Buber, “Judaism and the Jews,” in On Judaism, ed. Nahum Glatzner, trans. Eva Jospe [New York: Schocken Books, 1996], 14–15). What Buber presented here is not a return to earlier developmental stage, but an advancement to a “higher” one. Yet this higher spiritual stage is characterized again by unity and connection – in this case by the deep connection between the individual and his people. It should be noted that the use of the term “blood”, together with the organic nationalism that he described in this article with regard to the Jewish people, are disturbing. Buber wrote these lines in 1909, and would later explain that when he used the word “blood” he did not mean race (in the Nazi’s sense) but the chain of generations (Martin Buber, Te’udah Ve-Yi’ud [Testimony and Mission], vol. 1 [Jerusalem: Ha-Sifriyah Ha-Tsiyonit, 1984], 29).
modern idea of progress, which also includes emphasis on reason and reflection, Buber points to “primitive” peoples as examples of those who live in connectedness and unity:

Consider the language of “primitive” peoples...what counts is not these products of analysis and reflection but the genuine original unity, the lived relationship the elementary, spirit-awakening impressions and stimulations of the “natural man” are derived from relational processes – the living sense of a confrontation – and from relational states – living with one who confronts him.97

With this romantic view Buber expressed a wish to return to an unsophisticated natural and authentic existence that is based on unity and connectedness, to a time when people had a strong sense of belonging as well as an intimate and direct connection between themselves and with God.98 It also marks Buber’s criticism of the Enlightenment’s overemphasis on reason,99 as well as the aspiration to control and manipulate nature as well as social and political affairs, in order to minimize the dependency on fortune – a tendency that has characterized modernity at least since Machiavelli.100 In a way that may resemble Hegel’s view of the rise and decline of cultures, Buber claims that every great culture starts with a tendency for I-You dialogical relationships, “some original encounter,” and then declines and “freezes into the It-world”.101 Instead of finding meaning in the cosmos, it falls into the causality of the I-It mode (and thus loses its vitality). This is true especially for the modern West, where the emphasis is on reason, in which the I-It mode has taken over.102

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97 Buber, I and Thou, 69–70.
98 Is should be noted that Buber did not claim that in the past there was no violence or hardship, but just claimed that life was more real and authentic: “Primal man’s experiences of encounter were scarcely a matter of tame delight; but even violence against a being one really confronts is better than ghostly solicitude for faceless digits!” (Buber, I and Thou, 75.)
101 Buber, I and Thou, 103. Martin Buber, Te’udah Ve-Yi’ud [Testimony and Mission], vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Ha-Sifriyah Ha-Tsiyonit, 1984), 86.
102 “…in sick ages it happens that the It-world, no longer irrigated and fertilized by the living currents of the You-world, severed and stagnant, becomes a gigantic swamp phantom and overpowers man as he
This dynamic – the change from the real dialogical relationship with the world to the “It-world”, is not new. Indeed, Buber claimed that one of the major crises of the Jewish people took place in biblical times, when the ancient Hebrews decided to have a human king instead of being led directly by God, through His prophets. What Buber called for is not only a solution to the particular crisis of modernity, but a constant call to be attuned to dialogue instead of the I-It mode of relationality. Yet, in modernity the I-It mode of relationality became an ideal more than ever before, and the problems they raised became a mature philosophical one.

In Buber’s major essay “What is Man?” from 1938, he pointed to what he understood as the two main problems in modernity. The first is sociological: the decay of what he called “the old organic forms of the direct life of man with man,” such as the family or the community in the village and town, in which people stood in direct connection with each other and often felt that their connection stemmed from destiny or tradition. Buber acknowledged that this is the price that had to be paid for the political liberation in the French Revolution, but noted that it intensified human solitude and caused human beings to lose the feeling of being at home in the world.\(^{103}\) The second problem in modernity is the sense that people have lost control over the world: in the realm of industry and technology, the machines that people created as tools became stronger than people, who feel now that they are in the services of these machines. Technology became like the “golem” that got out of control.\(^{104}\) In the economic realm, the growing production in order to satisfy the growing demand seems as if it is not under human control, and in the political field the horrors and

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\(^{104}\) Ibid., 193.
scale of World War I demonstrated the extent to which human beings are subjected to forces that are much greater than they can master.\textsuperscript{105}

It should be noted that these problems were discussed by many different thinkers and artists who criticized modernity, especially at the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, claiming that the modern emphasis on reason, science, and progress failed to provide humans with a sense of meaning and fulfillment. For example, Ferdinand Tönnies discussed the distinction and turn in modernity from community (\textit{Gemeinschaft}) to society (\textit{Gesellschaft}).\textsuperscript{106} Marx had discussed at length the sense of alienation and lack of control that people felt following the industrial revolution. Alienation was also the subject of different artistic accounts.\textsuperscript{107} The critique of modernity reached its peak around World War I, due to its unprecedented scale and the major loss of life it caused, and because that lengthy war of attrition led to a sense of meaningless and chaos.\textsuperscript{108}

More generally, modern thought proudly embraced and developed the values that promote objective rational analysis of the world, and the conceptual division of the world into categories, in order to utilize, control and manipulate it. In the natural and social sciences modern thought promoted the objective examination and categorization (and thus the separation) of objects and phenomena in order to control and manipulate them. Socially and politically, modernity established rational law and bureaucratic authorities rather than

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 194.
\textsuperscript{107} See, for example, Fritz Lang’s film \textit{Metropolis} from 1927.
\textsuperscript{108} It should be noted that Buber actually saw the war positively in its beginning, as an opportunity for a change and movement that will help to renew the lost human spirit. This position led friends to criticize him (see Friedman, \textit{Martin Buber’s Life and Work}, 1:190–200). As noted earlier, this was one of the reasons that led Buber to move from the “mystical” to the “dialogical” stage in his thought.
promoting spontaneous and direct dialogue, and promoted life in alienating big cities rather than in small, intimate communities. Modern relationships in society, economics, and politics are largely based on the regulation of interests, which, in Buber’s terms, mean the maintenance and advancement of nothing but I-It relationships. The rational political and economic relationship that different modern philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke, and Mill saw as the key to creating a just, functioning, and peaceful society is for Buber precisely the cause of existential and moral disorientation and confusion. These ideas stood in tension with Buber’s emphasis on the inter-subjective experience of dialogue.109

Buber ascribed this sense of siege that many experience in modernity (and which was a very dominant element in Camus’ thought, as will be discussed later) to the modern tendency to think in terms of rational dogmas and to force reality into categories, instead of living life in its spontaneity and vitality, and enjoying the natural freedom of existence.

The biologistic and historiosophical orientation of this age...have combined to produce a faith in doom that is more obdurate and

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109 It should be noted that Buber did not reject modern scholarship altogether. Buber himself was a university professor, and appreciated modern scientific study, as long as it was aware of its limits (“I always have been [inclined] to admire genuine acts of research...when those who carry them out only know what they are doing and do not lose sight of the limits of the realm in which they are moving” [Buber, “Dialogue,” 28–29]). However, the content of his scholarship reflected his ideas and his rejection of neutral, objective and scientific analysis. This was most evident in his harsh critique of the secular-critical study of the Bible that used historical, philological and literary methods that disregarded its alleged divine or spiritual qualities. Most notable in this regard is Buber’s discussion about Hasidism: as opposed to scholars such as Gershom Scholem, who tried to analyze the theological origins and dynamics of Hasidic thought by using its theological texts, Buber focused on what he understood to be the existential and spiritual message of the Hasidic movements (as he understood it) by focusing on Hasidic legends and the spiritual messages of its leaders (Gershom Scholem, “Martin Buber’s Interpretation of Hasidism,” in The Messianic Idea in Judaism [New York: Schocken, n.d.], 1995).

It is interesting to note in this regard the argument that Buber had with Freud, precisely because Freud discussed matters of human existential emotional needs that were close to Buber’s interests. Buber criticized Freud for analyzing the human soul in a scientific and objective way. Buber’s ideas, which emphasize potential unity and harmony, also stand in tension with Freud’s emphasis on the inherent unsolvable conflicts between the different faculties of the human soul. Indeed, in many ways Freud represents strong elements in modern thought (alongside critique of the Enlightenment, since he discussed the importance of acknowledging the non-rational faculties of human being). Buber’s ideas are closer to the psychological thought of Jung, who discussed the shared universal primordial myth that stands at the basis of humanity. He is also closer to the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers who discussed the holistic nature of the human psyche.
anxious than any such faith has ever been...whether it is the “law of life” – a universal struggle in which everybody must either join the fight or renounce life – or the “psychological law” according to which innate drives constitute the entire human soul; for the “social law” of an inevitable social processes that is merely accompanied by will and consciousness; or the “cultural law” of an unalterably uniform genesis and decline of historical forms; or whatever variations there may be: the point is always that man in yoked into an inescapable process that he cannot resist, though he may be deluded enough to try...The medley idol does not tolerate any faith in liberation... one supposed to have nothing but the choice between resolute and hopelessly rebellious slavery.  

According to this view, modernity created a world of “its”, of deterministic categories and “laws” that do not have a basis in reality, and in which human beings are conceptually trapped, so long as they do not free themselves by turning to genuine dialogue.

A particularly destructive element of modernity, according to Buber, is its attitude towards religion. In the modern world, matters of religion have become compartmentalized, a separate sphere alongside others in social and political life, which could be accepted or rejected, rather than being the existential cornerstone that epitomizes unity and harmony in the world. Buber criticized the modern secular view that sees the belief in God as nothing but a false “thesis” used to explain reality, instead of viewing God as an interlocutor in a living dialogue. In other words, modernity tried to turn the eternal You into an It. In Buber’ words, “[D]ividing communal life into independent realms that also include ‘the life of the spirit’...would merely mean that the regions immersed in the It-world would be abandoned forever to this despotism, while the spirit would lose all actuality.”

Modernity or the thought of the Enlightenment largely perceived religion and faith as obstacles to human sovereignty, independence, and autonomy, striving to compartmentalize religion into a

111 Ibid., 99.
demarcated realm of the institutional Church and privatized belief (this was manifested also in the modern separation between Church and state). For Buber, the modern, secular rejection of faith as the most fundamental element of existence was both an outcome and a reason for the sense of alienation, homelessness, and confusion that characterizes the modern experience.

An element related to Buber’s discussion of faith was his attitude towards the concepts of myth. Buber criticized the modern distinction between myth and reality, and between subjectivity and objectivity, which was promoted as one of the major legacies of the Enlightenment. For Buber, the crucial element is not the search for scientific evidence or objective truth, but the experience that one undergoes when engaging in a true dialogue. Buber dealt with this subject at length in his discussion about the modern critique of the Bible. For Buber, myth is not the opposite of truth, but a memory of a real event that was internalized and understood as carrying a certain message within it, which is more important than the accurate historical description and validity of the events themselves. For this reason, he strongly criticized the modern scholarship of biblical criticism, which distanced itself from the text, and tried to scientifically deconstruct it and compare it to other ancient texts or archeological findings, in order to make a distinction between historically valid truth and imaginary myth.\(^\text{112}\)

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\(^\text{112}\) See Martin Buber, “Myth in Judaism,” in *On Judaism*, ed. Nahum Glatzner, trans. Eva Jospe (New York: Schocken Books, 1996), 95–107. Indeed, in his own translation of the Bible into German (together with Franz Rosenzweig), Buber tried to convey what he understood to be the original encounter of the reader with the biblical text. This point is also relevant for Buber’s own writings. Buber was blamed for distorting some of the Hasidic tales that he published. But, as Tamara Wright has explained, Buber felt that his empathy with the Hasidic masters gave him a license to distort their stories (Tamara Wright, “Self, Other, Text, God: The Dialogical Thought of Martin Buber,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 103). At the same time, this example demonstrates the problematic relation between Buber’s views as a dialogical thinker, and his responsibilities as a modern academic scholar.
As opposed to other thinkers who criticized modernity, Buber did not make a call to give up achievement in technology or science. Such an effort would be unnecessary and impossible. Instead, Buber called primarily for a conceptual change: the solution to the problem of modern alienation would be to renew awareness of the importance of dialogue, and of the sense that genuine dialogical relationships are possible. The way to achieve such awareness is both through education for dialogue, and through the creation of communities that would encourage and facilitate such dialogical relationships between their members. (These would serve as an alternative model to the modern alienating cities that promote political and economic interests and are regulated by formal laws.) In particular, Buber pointed to the Hasidic communities headed by spiritual leaders (the Tzadik) as models for a genuine community that would encourage I-You relationships between its members and with God, and he saw the Kibbutzim – the small, egalitarian Zionist collective communities in Palestine – as frameworks that would facilitate such genuine dialogical relationships.

**Critiques of Buber’s Dialogical Thought**

There has been much criticism of Buber’s account of dialogue and connectedness. Apart from the ethical and political implications of his dialogical ideas – which we shall turn to in the following chapters – it is important to note a few major critiques. Noting these can also help us to better understand Buber’s account of dialogue and connectedness.

First, Buber’s discussion has been often considered to be too vague. Buber’s description of the dialogical condition and his concept of I-You relationality often seem too abstract and unclear. Jochanan Bloch, who edited one of the major collections of essays about Buber’s thought, expresses this problem explicitly:
We do not know exactly what Buber means when he points to reality. We all know the names of this reality: I-Thou, relationship, dialogue, the interhuman… but each of us who has to explain to his students what those terms originally meant finds himself confronted with a problem which – we had better admit it – confronts us all: we are not certain what is the essence of the reality which we are discussing.\(^\text{113}\)

Walter Kaufmann, who translated Buber’s major book *I and Thou*, referred in his prologue to that edition to Buber’s vagueness and his intentionally difficult writing style:

Certainly, Buber’s delight in language gets between him and his readers. There might as well be a screen between them on which one watches the antics of his words instead of listening to him. The words do tricks, the performance is brilliant, but much of it is very difficult to follow. Obscurity is fascinating. One tries to puzzle out details, is stumped, and becomes increasingly concerned with meaning – unless one feels put off and gives up altogether. Those who persevere and take the author seriously are led to ask about what he could possibly have meant, but rarely seem to wonder or discuss whether what he says is true.\(^\text{114}\)

Yet, beyond Buber’s difficult writing style and what might seem to be his intentional vagueness, there is a more profound reason for Buber’s difficulty to explain his dialogical thought in clearer terms. That is, by its very nature the I-You mode of relationality is based on intuition and experience, which are very difficult to express in words, just as it is very difficult to provide a clear, complete and coherent description and analysis of other human experiences, such as passion, intimacy or faith, or feelings such as love, fear or hate. In fact, the attempt to speak *about* the I-You mode of relationality means treating it in the I-It mode, as an object for analysis. It is questionable if it is possible to fully explain the I-You situation using tools that properly belong to the mode that stands in opposition to it.

A second criticism of Buber’s dialogical thought has focused on the problematic dichotomy between I-It and I-You, for not reflecting the variety of human relationships.

\(^\text{113}\) Bloch, “The Justification and the Futility of Dialogical Thinking,” 45.
\(^\text{114}\) Kaufmann, “I and You: A Prologue,” 19.
Kaufmann pointed to several other possible kinds of relationship: some people hold “I-I” relations and do not wish to experience either I-You or I-It relationships. Such people are not inclined to develop deep dialogical relationships with others, but they also do not view others as objects of interest or things to be used, and do not wish to exploit anybody. Others may be considered to be taking an I-It stance, in the sense that they are extremely interested in a certain object (or, say, an intellectual problem), wishing to analyze and describe it. At the same time they would not place themselves at the centre, and therefore they do not fit into Buber’s I-It mode of relationality.

Indeed, Kaufmann reminded his readers that many people do not experience a strong “I” at all. There are also people who have not fully developed their individuality and tend to speak in terms of We rather than I. Another human condition that is well known sociologically and politically is the Us-Them mode of relationality, in which members of one group differentiate themselves from another group, a situation that often leads to competition, animosity, and aggression between different groups. Finally, Kaufmann notes that there might be many different kinds of I-You relationships. For example, Kant’s call to treat people as ends and not as means, may also be considered a form of I-You (although his thought is very different from Buber’s in many important respects).

Another critic of Buber’s dichotomy between I-You and I-It relations was Buber’s close friend, Franz Rosenzweig. Rosenzweig disagreed with Buber’s idea that fulfillment and true reality can only exist in the I-You mode of relationality. He noted that Buber’s

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115 Ibid., 11.
116 Ibid., 12.
117 Ibid., 13.
118 Ibid.
120 Casper, “Franz Rosenzweig’s Criticism of Buber’s I and Thou,” 139.
negative view of the “It world” reflects only the conditions during the last 300 years; in other words, it is based too much on the critique of modernity. Rosenzweig noted that it is possible to find in the Bible instances of genuine, positive It, for example when people speak about God in third person in order to praise Him, even if they do not speak to Him.\footnote{Ibid., 140. The example he gives is Hannah’s words “He Killeth and reviveth” in Samuel I, 2:6.}

Another critique of Buber’s dichotomy between the I-It and I-You modes is that they are unavoidably intertwined. Jochanan Bloch claimed that there is an element of I-It even within I-You relations, because even in such a dialogical relationship (which according to Buber takes place beyond place and time) the interlocutors meet an actual, concrete person and often discuss actual concrete information about other objects together.\footnote{Bloch, “The Justification and the Futility of Dialogical Thinking,” 48–50.} Steven Katz also claimed that it is impossible to avoid objectifying concepts altogether during a meeting, since one must take full cognizance of the other person’s character and personality in order to genuinely approach and communicate with him or her.\footnote{Katz, “A Critical Review of Martin Buber’s Epistemology of I-Thou,” 102–105.}

This last point is related to another problem in Buber’s dialogical thought: the idea that the I-You mode of relationality has no content. At the centre of Buber’s dialogical thought stands the meeting in itself rather than the content of the meeting. The Between that includes the interlocutors is but a form.\footnote{Bloch, “The Justification and the Futility of Dialogical Thinking,” 47.} This is problematic for two reasons. First, as discussed above, it is very difficult to explain what exactly the concept of the Between is, since it is very hard to provide an accurate and comprehensive description and analysis of a form that has no content. Second, the distinction has ethical implications, since (as will be discussed in
the following chapters) it is very difficult to find a solid ethical anchor and guidance based on foundations that consist of form and not of content.  

A third critique of Buber’s dialogical thought is that although Buber presented a theory that may be coherent in itself, it is based on assumptions and premises that often seem detached from reality. The most salient idea in this regard is Buber’s claim that it is possible to develop an I-You relationship with non-human subjects, such as trees and stones. This criticism also touches a wider problem of Buber’s dialogical thought: the idea that dialogue and connectedness are the authentic and natural condition of reality is presented as an axiom and a given fact that he did not even try to prove. For example, the fact that human beings start their lives as embryos in a perfect state of unity with their mothers, or that children are naturally attached to their parents, cannot serve as evidence that this connection continues or should continue in adult life, or that society as a whole should also follow a model of dependency or aspiration for unity. In fact, if one wishes to draw a parallel between individual growth and collective social order, it is much more plausible to claim the opposite: that society should progress from dependency to independence and from immaturity to maturity, just as individuals do as they grow up. 

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125 In his critique of Buber’s dialogical thought, Gabriel Marcel argued that there must be some kind of co-belonging, or a shared concern, which is based on a shared history or destiny, in order to have genuine meeting or a community. Marcel provided a simple example of this, probably modelling it on a situation that Buber describes. Buber’s refers to two people who sit side by side as they travel, and silently create dialogue or connection between them (Buber, “Dialogue,” 19–20). Marcel argued that in order for the two people to develop a dialogue, they must have a shared concern (one that would arise, for instance, were the train to suddenly stop) (Marcel, “I and Thou,” 46).

126 An example of the way in which Buber felt that objective evidence was not necessary to make his point is provided by Smith, who approached Buber with a question about his concept of the eternal You: “It was not clear to me how the eternal Thou was to be understood as implicated in each relational event. How could this be proved? ‘Proved?’ [Buber] replied. ‘You know that it is so.’” Smith added that “Now, long afterward, understand that this knowing of which he spoke was a trustful, believing knowing. And trust of this kind may be affirmed, it may even be confirmed as bearing ultimate meaning; but it cannot be demonstrated” (Smith, Martin Buber, 22).
Another, related problem in Buber’s theory, to which he actually referred directly in his writings, is the claim that his idea of connectedness is too lofty and spiritual and could not be practically implemented in daily life. In his response, Buber rejected this claim and argued that his theory deals with the mundane life.

Dialogue is not an affair of spiritual luxury and spiritual luxuriousness, it is a matter of creation, of the creature, and he is that, the man of whom I speak, he is a creature, trivial and irreplaceable.127

Buber’s response is connected to his view that there is no separation between the divine and the mundane realms. The I-You mode of relationality could and should be implemented by any person in his or her daily life. Yet, Buber’s response does not answer the main problem, which is how he could reasonably expect people to develop an intense extraordinary sense of dialogue and connectedness, to the extent that each would feel the need of the other as if they were each other’s own. Buber noted that his dialogical idea could and should be implemented by everybody, but did not try to prove his idea or explain sufficiently how exactly this could be done in practice.

The complexity of Buber’s dialogical thought, together with the vagueness of his discussion, has led some scholars to ask if it is even possible to prove the existence of the I-You relationship, and to try to solve its possible contradictions – for example, the fact that Buber called for a mundane actual meeting, but his concept of I-You stands beyond space and time. Jochanan Bloch examined this problem by using logical analytical tools. He claimed that it may be logically possible to hold the I-You relationship (which has no content and exists beyond space and time) in everyday life, precisely because it has no content, and

therefore does not contradict any concrete instance. Yet, this is a formal kind of logical analysis, and Bloch also claimed that this conclusion cannot prove that it is possible to actually hold an I-You relationship in practice.

Others, such as Admiel Kosman, claimed that the best way to understand Buber’s dialogical thought should be done first and foremost by using psychological explanations, rather than by using abstract logical or ontological analyses. According to Kosman, the I-It relationship is close to that of egocentrism, putting one’s ego and self-interest at the centre of the given relationship. I-You means first and foremost the willingness to seriously take the other’s needs and concerns into account. It is indeed possible to claim that rather than developing a complicated abstract epistemological discussion, Buber’s main aim was for people to treat others as full human beings, with dignity and respect, and not only instrumentally. This was evident, for example, in his writings about education, where he called for teachers to teach not only objective material, but to treat their students as complete human beings and to help them cultivate their personalities, curiosities and abilities.

It is important to note that although Buber dealt with political issues, and scholarly analyses of his political ideas do exist, in most of the scholarship he is treated mainly as a sociologist, theologian, anthropologist or existential thinker, rather than a political one. It is indeed not easy to view Buber as a political thinker, precisely because of the non- (and even anti-) political elements in his thought. An example of this is the idea that every You (apart from God) is doomed to become an It. Genuine dialogue is therefore a brief experience in

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129 Ibid., 59.
130 Kosman, “Mavo Lemishant Buber [Introduction to Buber’s Teaching],” 168–196.
131 Indeed, Buber was known for his writing about education. See in this regard also Curzon-Hobson, “Between Exile and the Kingdom.”
practice, rather than a stable and ongoing phenomenon, such as could be used to construct a solid social or political order. As mentioned, it is also unclear how the I-You relationship, which stands beyond time and space, is relevant for dealing with mundane political and social questions that are bound by time and space by their very nature.\(^{132}\)

It is correct that Buber called for a change in people’s personal attitudes from I-It to I-You, and that much of the discussion in this matter is personal rather than communal or political. However, Buber’s discussion does not stop at the interpersonal level between individuals. Buber also called for a creation of communities based on genuine dialogue, to be gathered around what he called “a living centre.” For that reason he was inspired by the Hasidic community and was impressed by the Kibbutzim that were established in Palestine, and which were created – at least as he understood them – in order to facilitate and encourage dialogical relationship. His entire Zionist thought, as well as much of his critique of modernity, dealt with political and communal questions regarding the establishment of the correct society. For these reasons, one should not underestimate the political and communal importance and relevance of his ideas.\(^{133}\)

Moreover, the examples that Buber provides for genuine dialogical relationship, such as the intense relationship between the Hassids and their Tzadik or between the Jewish

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\(^{132}\) A position that views the I-You as existing only as “nothingness” or as a “pure act,” because it stands beyond time and space, was suggested by Michael Theunissen (cited by Bloch). This position implies that the I-You mode of relationality has no ethical, political or social implications. Bloch rightly claims that Theunissen’s interpretation contradicts Buber’s intentions and thought, since for Buber the I-You relationship still takes place within an objective reality – in a concrete dialogue between concrete participants. The I-You relationship does not transcend the concrete dialogue but is integrated with and even identical to it (Bloch, “The Justification and the Futility of Dialogical Thinking,” 55–57).

\(^{133}\) Bernard Susser emphasizes that the I-You relation is a matter of grace, and therefore it is beyond human will, while at the same time, Buber discussed the importance of activism and realization in order to create a true communal life. Susser claims that these two elements reflect the two halves of Buber’s philosophical personality - one pole being mystical and subjectivist, the other Promethean, worldly wise and sober (Susser, *Existence and Utopia*, 34). Susser’s explanation serves as one more answer to the incorrect claim that Buber’s thought is necessarily a-political or a-social.
people and the Land of Israel, allow for examination of Buber’s ethical insights that are relevant to cultures and societies which encourage extreme and intense connectedness among their members. An important point in this respect is Buber’s connection with the philosophical and political-cultural stream of his time. As Buber’s critique of modernity clearly shows, Buber’s thought is affiliated with counter-Enlightenment ideas, and includes significant romantic elements. In this context, we can appreciate how Buber’s dialogical thought includes important insights that go beyond his work on the interpersonal relationship between individuals. As we shall discuss below, Buber’s thought points to ethical restraints and universal moral considerations that must be taken into account, while not losing faith in the value of connectedness and dialogue. As such, rather than trying to prove if and to what extent Buber’s dialogical thought could be implemented in practice (as much of the scholarship has tried to do), the main aim of this study is to examine the ways in which Buber’s thought could help societies in which values of extreme connectedness already exist.

To conclude, this discussion of Buber’s dialogical thought will provide a basis for our discussion, in the following chapters, of Buber’s ethics and politics. The main aim of this discussion has been to point out three elements of Buber’s dialogical thought. The first is the intensity of the I-You mode of relationality, which is connected to Buber’s idea that the reality is based on a flux of different actual and potential relationships rather than on fixed objects. The second is the central place of God – or the belief in God – in his thought, since God is both an interlocutor and the ultimate culmination of all dialogical connection. The third is the difference between Buber’s view of reality and the common Western-modern one that emphasizes separation and boundaries between objects and people, stresses the important of rational faculty, and has often dismissed the importance of myth and religious faith. These
three topics were chosen for the discussion not only because they seem to represent the most important elements in Buber’s dialogical thought, but also because they hold significant ethical and political implications. Buber had to find ways to ensure that these dialogical relationships, and the reliance on faith, intuition, and subjectivity would not deteriorate into fanaticism, blind faith, and unrestrained trust. For the latter often appear in closed, ideological societies that emphasize deep relationship over more objective and rational norms. Our discussion of Buber’s ethical and political thought in the following chapters, where we will also make comparisons with Camus’ thought, will revolve around this problem.

**Camus’ Idea of Human Connectedness and Solidarity**

Unlike Buber, who saw connectedness as the most fundamental need of human beings and the very basis of reality, Camus rejected the possibility of achieving total unity. He also focused on the human condition as it appears and is experienced in ordinary life. Camus emphasized the human need for connectedness, compassion, and care, but his concept of connectedness was less extreme than that of Buber. Moreover, Camus’ discussion of issues of connectedness was much more explicitly political than that of Buber, who focused on interpersonal relations. Finally, Camus’ account included a strong ethical dimension, which we shall discuss in chapter four.

For the purpose of the comparison with Buber, it is possible to point to two kinds of solidarity and connectedness Camus’ thought. The first, which is in many ways close to Buber’s idea of connectedness, stresses the importance of human connectedness in itself. The second, different from Buber’s concept, is based on the solidarity that human beings develop in the face of the absurd and metaphysical and political oppression, and as part of their shared
struggle against it. However, before discussing Camus’ idea of human relationship, it is important to discuss further his concept of alienation and the absurd, since this was the cornerstone of his thought.

**Camus’ Idea of the Absurd**

Both Buber and Camus discuss the sense of homelessness, moral confusion and meaninglessness that people experience in the modern era. However, Camus’ discussion focuses on this problem from a very different perspective. The fundamental element in Camus’ thought was not the call to achieve connectedness and harmony, but the awareness that a complete harmony would never be achieved.\(^{134}\) For Buber, the natural condition is connectedness and dialogue between people and with God, and the sense of alienation is an unfortunate deviation from that path. While Buber put concept of dialogue, or the lack of it, at the centre of this thought, Camus began his account of the absurd from the experience of the individual. For Camus, the absurd, with its sense of alienation, is an essential and primary experience. This experience constitutes the basis for his entire existential, social, and political teaching.

Camus articulated his understanding of the existential crisis of modernity in his philosophical essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and in the short novel *The Outsider*.\(^{135}\) The experience of the absurd is a modern phenomenon. It is the outcome of the modern rebellion against the pre-modern religious, social and political authorities – authorities who presented themselves as manifesting a coherent cosmic order, and provided a sense of existential and moral anchoring. The absurd, according to Camus, is the crisis that emerges from the

\(^{134}\) For a comparison of the concepts of alienation in Buber’ *I and Thou* and Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus*, see Funk, “Alienation in Camus and Buber.”

\(^{135}\) An early discussion of the topic can also be found also in the play, *Caligula*. 
inability to give meaning to the world and to reconcile its many paradoxes. It emerges from the fact that people seek unity and harmony in order to provide meaning to the world and their own existence, but – given their limited capacities – can never find it.\(^{136}\) For Camus, the experience of the absurd is not a conceptual mistake, illusion, or misunderstanding of reality, but a given, unsolvable situation. It is the real context in which human beings are doomed to live and of which they must be fully aware, if they do not wish to lie to themselves. It is the unavoidable price that must be paid in order to be free from the false illusion that complete unity or harmony is attainable.

To face the absurd is the single most important existential problem and challenge. Since there is no comprehensible meaning, and it is impossible to live a meaningless life, the ultimate question – and the only meaningful one – is, why not commit suicide? Camus’ challenge, then, was to find reason for life – and, therewith, to point to a moral compass – in a world that is unintelligible and meaningless. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus’ ultimate answer to the problem is to accept the absurd as given and to find meaning within the absurd itself, in particular, through struggling against it, no matter how frustrating and futile this struggle is. As Camus puts it, “One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”\(^{137}\) One should not commit suicide – either literally, or spiritually – in the face of the absurd, because suicide is an escape from the absurd rather than a brave confrontation with it. And only such a confrontation might provide meaning to life.

\(^{136}\) As examples for this, Camus referred both to logical paradoxes, but also to the fact that people constantly look forward towards their future, although they should actually mourn its coming because it brings them closer to death. (Albert Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus,” in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brian [New York: Vintage Books, 1955], 10–11).
\(^{137}\) Ibid., 91.
In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus criticized two modern solutions that have been proposed in response to the problem of the absurd. The first is offered by modern science – the great rational enterprise of the Enlightenment – which has tried to understand reality by rational means. However, science could not sufficiently address the experience of reality, and has inevitably reverted to poetic abstractions – such as the descriptions of electrons circling around a nucleus – which serve only to increase the human inability to understand reality and our sense of alienation. Camus’ critique of modernity is thus not far from that of Buber, who was also critical of modern science’s ability of modern science to provide real meaning for life. The second solution that Camus criticizes was suggested by some existential philosophers, such as Karl Jaspers and, before him, Kierkegaard, who acknowledge that the absurd exists at the basis of one’s encounter with reality, but find consolation in a “leap” to an imaginary concept of a metaphysical coherence and unity that somehow exists above and beyond it. Camus called such a leap “philosophical suicide” because in attempting to make it one refuses to face the reality that the absurd as an inherent and unsolvable problem.

Camus did not mention Buber in this context and it is quite unlikely that he was aware of Buber’s writings at the early age when he wrote the *Myth of Sisyphus*. But one can argue that Camus would have considered Buber to be one of those thinkers who committed “philosophical suicide”. From a Camusian perspective, Buber was aware of the crisis of modernity but could not face it and cope with it. He therefore constructed a detailed picture of connectedness, unity and coherent, that has no grounding in reality. Indeed, it is the case that Buber’s theory finds it extremely difficult to cope with paradoxes and conflicts. For

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138 Ibid., 15.
139 Ibid., 31. Camus stated that the term “philosophical suicide” is not judgmental but descriptive: it merely describes the false negation of the absurd. However, his entire discussion is critical of this view that refuses to accept the fundamental reality of the absurd.
Buber, almost every paradox and conflict could be resolved by reference to a coherence and harmony that exists on a higher level. Indeed, as we saw, for Buber nothing is to be exempted from the overall aspiration to – and the fundamental reality of – unity and harmony.

The difference between Buber and Camus becomes clear when one notes their respective calls for people to turn from their usual perceptions to an experience of reality. Buber calls for the individual to turn his heart and open himself to dialogue, and to realize that the life he has become accustomed to has been based on I-It perceptions that cannot lead him to fulfill his human potential. Camus, on the other hand, explains that, although the absurd is a fundamental and real existential crisis in modernity, a real awareness of it is not common. Most people live their ordinary lives and their routine, largely overlooking or denying its constant contradictions:

The absurd world more than others derives its nobility from that abject birth. In certain situations, replying “nothing” when asked what one is thinking about may be pretense in a man…But if that reply is sincere, if it symbolizes that odd state of soul in which the void becomes eloquent, in which the change of daily gestures is broken, in which the heart vainly seeks the link that will connect it again, then it is as it were the first sign of absurdity.

It happens that the stage sets collapse. Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm…But one day the “why” arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement…Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness…What follows is the gradual return into the chain or it is the definitive awakening. At the end of the awakening comes, in time, the consequence: suicide or recovery.\(^\text{140}\)

\[^{140}\text{Ibid., 10. This point was also expressed in the novel }\textbf{The Plague}.\text{ In a city that was stricken by a plague – which is a metaphor of the Nazi occupation in France, but also for the absurd in general – people live, at least in the beginning, in a state of denial, and hold on to their routines and habits, even though it becomes clear that they must begin to face a very serious problem. “[T]hey were wrong, and their views were called for revision. Still, if things had gone thus far and no farther, force of habit would doubtless have gained the day as usual”}\]
The change takes place when people the inability to achieve meaning in life. At such moments, people bravely refuse to live a life based solely on inertia, or to accept false ideas of metaphysical unity and harmony that would alleviate the pain of acknowledging the absurd. These are moments of a bold, honest, genuine (and emotionally devastating) understanding of the human condition as it really is.

Although the thinkers did not discuss explicitly the term “authenticity,” the concept is significant for both of them, in that each called for people to be aware of a certain truth about the human condition, and to live according to it. For Buber, one should return to the I-You world that has given way the I-It mode of relationality. For Camus, one should be disillusioned of the aspiration for unity that is unachievable. In Buber’s thought what existentialists call authenticity would mean reconnecting to an inherent attitude that has been overlooked, in order to behave as we “really are”, and by so doing to realize our “true selves.”

For Camus, this concept would entail a call not to lie to oneself, and to acknowledge reality as it is. A point that demonstrates this difference is Buber’s view regarding myth. As explained above, Buber accepted the importance of myth – such as biblical stories or Hasidic tales – because it directs people to live a better dialogical life, regardless of their objective accuracy of such tales. Given his emphasis on authenticity understood as incredulity before what is false – and, not least, the need to face the miseries and ugly aspects of reality – Camus would reject such an approach to existence.

(Albert Camus, The Plague, trans. Stuart Gilbert [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976], 22). In the novel The Outsider, Camus also points to the difference between Meursault, the protagonist, who acknowledge the absurd, and the people around him who do not.

141 This runs parallel, to some extent, to the teaching of the Jewish thinker A.D. Gordon (whom Buber appreciated very much), who called for human beings in general and the Jewish people in particular to return to nature as a way to rejuvenate and revive themselves.
As we noted in the discussion above on Buber’s account of I-You relationality, he has been criticized for overemphasizing the idea of connectedness and dialogue in a way that is detached from reality. But Camus could be criticized for the opposite problem: his description of the existential distress in modernity and of the absurd is often exaggerated. Indeed, it can be argued that Camus tended to describe extreme situations – plague, siege, war – because these conformed to his view of reality. Yet, Camus’ writings in this regard are somewhat more balanced than Buber’s who downplayed and often dismissed elements of conflicts. Camus on the other hand did mention moments of joy, happiness and humor even in his writings on some tragic situations (such as in *The Plague*).\(^{142}\)

It should be noted that although Buber also called attention to the lack of control that people feel in modernity (especially with regard to technology, mass production or the political forces that subdue them) his discussion on the crisis of modernity (as well as the solution that he offered to it) focused mainly on one particular aspect: the sense of homelessness, detachment, and loneliness, “egos” fighting each other in order to satisfy their interests, and the inability to fulfill a desire for connectedness. In Camus’ discussion of the absurd, he includes other elements, some of which stand in contract to Buber’s thought: such as the inability to solve logical paradoxes.\(^{143}\) By pointing at this, Camus may have challenged the modern scientific aspiration to explain the world (a point that Buber would also share with him). Buber would also share with Camus the idea that people wish to find unity and coherence in the world, in order to feel “at home”. However, Camus mentioned the existence

\(^{142}\) Camus himself was known as a relatively extrovert person who enjoyed life, despite the sense of distress and existential siege in his writings. Simone de Beauvoir mentioned that there was a significant gap between Camus’ ideas in this regard and his personal life, and described him as a cheerful and outgoing person (Ronald Aronson, *Camus and Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel That Ended It* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004], 50–51).

of such paradoxes in order to show that such unity and coherence are not achievable, and this is something that Buber would not be able to accept. Moreover, differently from Camus, Buber was not concerned about paradoxes and logical contradiction in the world of physics (that is, the I-It world) but about the lack of proper dialogue and I-You relationship in modernity.\footnote{Ladd, “The Tragic Contradiction: Dynamics of a Theme in Buber and Camus,” 53–54. Funk also notes that one of the differences between Camus and Buber, is that Camus did not see a connection between alienation and the functioning of the intellect, whereas Buber viewed the improper functioning of the intellect as the condition that constitutes alienation (Funk, “Alienation in Camus and Buber,” 66).}

Another example of the differences between the thinkers is demonstrated in Camus’ discussion about the experience of time in \textit{The Myth of Sisyphus}:

\begin{quote}
[A] day comes when a man notices or says that he is thirty. Thus he asserts his youth. But simultaneously he situates himself in relation to time. He takes his place in it. He admits that he stands at a certain point on a curve that he acknowledges having to travel to its end. He belongs to time, and by the horror that seizes him, he recognizes his worst enemy. Tomorrow, he was longing for tomorrow, whereas everything in him ought to reject it.\footnote{Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus,” 10–11.}
\end{quote}

This quote demonstrates important differences between Camus and Buber. While both thinkers dealt with the mundane world, Camus’ description of the absurd is more “one-dimensional” than Buber’s, in the sense that he described an experience that takes place within the boundaries of place and time. From this perspective – the life of the individual – the end of life is indeed a cause for major anxiety, and an effort to think beyond these boundaries is irrelevant and futile. Life is a road whose meaning is unclear and leads to an unavoidable end; This demonstrates Camus’ secular and modern views. Although Buber did not discuss any concept of afterlife, his dialogical discussion does include a strong element of national and collective mission and destiny (especially in his discussion about the Jewish people). Therefore, in comparison to Camus, the sense of tragedy of the end of an
individual’s life is somewhat alleviated by the idea that the individual takes part in a collective life transcending his or her own. Indeed, Buber rarely mentioned the topic of death, which is a subject that Camus repeatedly discussed. When Buber touched on this subject – for example when he described the death of the Tzadik in the last pages of his novel *Gog U-Magog*, Buber described a sad but peaceful death, rather than a tragic event accompanied by anxiety. Moreover, Buber’s idea that the I-You mode of relationality transcends time and place marks an effort not to be bounded by a view that sees life merely as constrained by mundane causality. From a Camusian perspective, Buber’s thought may seem to be detached from reality, as it denies the objective, painful truth about life and death. From a Buberian perspective, Camus’ discussion is ignorant to the fact that human beings are not only solitary individuals, and that there is more to life than just a mundane path from birth to death.

It is important to compare certain other differences between Buber’s and Camus’ respective accounts of the problems of modernity. As we discussed above, for Buber the problems of modernity are largely man-made, such as technology and an economic order that have gone out of control, or the horrors of World War I. As such, for Buber, it would possible to solve these problems (at least in theory), if people were to change their attitudes and ways of life. Camus, on the other hand, discusses the absurd as the sense of being trapped under forces that are genuinely out of human control: the inability to achieve unity, to find true, coherent and absolute meaning in life, and to avoid the death that awaits one at the end of the road. In turn, as we shall see, these different views affect also the thinkers’ different concepts of human solidarity and connectedness, as well as their ethical and political thought.

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Buber and Camus’ different accounts of the modern predicament become apparent in their respective discussions of the sense of “siege” experienced in modernity. Camus described this sense of existential siege as a condition that cannot be avoided, and must be acknowledged. Indeed, though most notably in *The Plague*, Camus’ writings contain constant references to the experience of siege; that is, reference to the discomfort and dilemmas that human beings are constantly confronted by, which can never entirely be erased or salved. This emphasis differs significantly from that of Buber, who, as we saw, ascribed this sense of siege to the modern tendency to use rational dogmas and artificial categories, instead of living life in its spontaneity. For Camus the problem is not the tension between “artificial” categories versus the “natural” freedom that these categories suppress, but an existential distress that is genuine, regardless of the categories created by modern thinkers. For Buber, as he put it in *I and Thou*, “to gain freedom from the belief in unfreedom is to gain freedom”.

For Camus, to gain an authentic and real picture of reality, is to understand that complete freedom (or rather, complete unity and harmony) are not attainable.

Camus’ ideas of the absurd as a sense of confusion and disorientation, a sense that nothing makes any coherent sense and that, therefore, nothing really matters, were different from Buber’s. Nevertheless, the two thinkers did discuss the sense of homelessness and sense of detachment, loneliness and disorientation as part of the existential crisis, and at that point the two thinkers agree with each other. Camus discussed these elements of detachment and loneliness in his later stories: *The Fall*, the short stories in the collection *Exile and the*

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Kingdom, and, most significantly, in his early novel The Outsider. The latter tells the story of a person named Meursault, for whom nothing has any significance or meaning, not even his own mother’s death. At the climax point of the story, Meursault murders another person for no reason that could make any sense. Meursault seems emotionally indifferent to the events around him also during his subsequent trial, and displays a strong emotional reaction only at the very end of the story, after he is condemned to death, when he expresses his feeling of helplessness in regard to the fate that awaits him. As Sartre pointed out, the main message of this disturbing and confusing novel is that Meursault is a person who acknowledges the absurd, manifesting it in his own actions. Nothing matters for Meursault, because in general nothing really matters except for life itself. This makes him a courageous person who is unwilling to follow social dictates and to express false emotions, in his understanding of what everyone else around him does not – that there is no comprehensible meaning to life, apart from that of mere life itself. At the same time, Meursault is a psychopath, unable to connect emotionally or even communicate with people around him, who murders without any rational reason, and unable, in short, to distinguish between right and wrong. The two competing interpretations of Meursault in fact complement each other: on the one hand the acknowledgment of the inability to find meaning in the world is a bold and heroic act, on the other it can also lead to nihilism and senseless murder. The emotional detachment that Buber also described (in his way) – the sense of loneliness,

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148 Curzon-Hobson provides a brief discussion of the sense of homelessness and detachment in Exile and the Kingdom, and which he briefly compares to Buber’s account of detachment and homelessness (Curzon-Hobson, “Between Exile and the Kingdom”).

149 The Outsider is similar, to some extent, to another famous book about the absurd – Jean Paul Sartre’s Nausea. There Sartre describes a person who discovers that the phenomena around him, including his own actions, do not have any meaning (Jean-Paul Sartre, Nausea, trans. Lloyd Alexander [New York: New Direction, 2007]). Camus briefly referred to this novel in The Myth of Sisyphus, and Sartre wrote an important article praising The Outsider and explaining its connection to the idea of the absurd.
A major difference between the two thinkers in their discussion about the crisis of modernity is to be noted in their different attitudes towards religion and the divine. Although Buber also focused on the mundane world (since he rejected any distinction between the metaphysical and the mundane), and although he criticized institutional religions (such as the Jewish Halacha or the Christian Church), he was a believer, and, again, his understanding of God played a major role in this dialogical thought. Camus, on the other hand, was secular in his personal beliefs. His strongly rejected the Church not because he saw it as an obstacle for a true connection with God, but because he viewed it as a manipulative and oppressive body. With the Christian Church this oppression took the form of preventing people from rebelling against injustice, precisely by presenting God as suffering himself. Camus writes in *The Rebel*:

> Each time a solitary cry of rebellion was uttered, the answer came in the form of an even more terrible suffering. In that Christ had suffered and had suffered voluntarily, suffering was no longer unjust and all pain was necessary. In one sense, Christianity’s bitter intuition and legitimate pessimism concerning human behaviour is based on the assumption that over-all injustice is as satisfying to man as total justice. Only the sacrifice of an innocent god could justify the endless and universal torture of innocence. Only the most abject suffering by God could assuage man’s agony.\(^{150}\)

Camus saw the rebellion against the Church in modern times as the most important turning point in Western history – a turning point that was positive as an act against oppression.

At the same time, it would be incorrect to claim that Camus was indifferent to matters of faith. Fundamental to his arch-concept of the absurd, is the void unearthed in the modern epoch, as people lost their faith. As Camus explained in *The Rebel*, modernity was initiated by a defiance against God, which had, in turn, necessarily presupposed a belief in God.

The history of metaphysical rebellion cannot be confused with that of atheism… The rebel defies more than he denies. Originally, at least, he does not suppress God; he merely talks to Him as an equal. But it is not a polite dialogue. It is a polemic animated by the desire to conquer.\(^{151}\)

Moreover, as we shall discuss later, Camus’ main critique of modern history argues that human beings tried to take God’s place by constructing historical ideologies promising to bring secular versions of religious redemption (in the form of Enlightenment, Marxism, or nationalism), which had devastating effects. For Camus, human beings cannot and should not try to replace God, or to completely fill the void that came to sight after they discovered his absence. God, then, does play a major role in Camus’ thought. But as opposed to Buber, who sees Him in positive terms (the eternal You which is both an interlocutor that provides direction and the accumulation of all dialogues), God largely plays a “negative” role in Camus’ thought: God’s absence is the factor that creates frustrating from inability to achieve harmony and unity.\(^{152}\) Matters of faith, therefore, played a role in the ideas of both thinkers.

\(^{151}\) Ibid., 25.

For Buber, rebellion is also an act of dialogue, since according to him, the opposite of dialogue is not hate but indifference. The first three sentences of this quote by Camus may serve as evidence for that: the rebellion against God is a form of dialogue. Yet, the last sentence of this quote shows that this dialogue is very different from Buber’s I-You mode of relationality: it is a “polemic animated by the desire to conquer,” i.e. one that leads to conflict, not mutual understanding.

\(^{152}\) For a discussion about the religious aspect of Camus’ thought, which presents the argument that Camus’ thought starts from a religious concern – the rebellion against God – and therefore is limited in its ability to effectively confront mundane political concerns, see David Cook, “The Political Thought of Albert Camus” (University of Toronto, 1978). Ladd (1972) put the willingness to acknowledge the existence of a metaphysical realm at the centre of his comparison between the two thinkers. As mentioned, Ladd pointed to Camus’ strong rejection of faith (especially in comparison with Buber), and points to *The Fall* as a turning point in Camus’ thought. In that novel, according to Ladd, Camus describes an urge for connectedness. While I agree with the idea that *The Fall* presents a strong call for connectedness, that this call is in some ways similar to Buber’s call
The different attitudes of the two thinkers regarding the question of religion are one of the cornerstones of the comparison between the thinkers, and between the different solutions that Buber and Camus provided to similar existential and political questions.

It should be noted that two of the rare instances when Buber and Camus referred directly to each concerned matters of faith. According to Maurice Friedman, Camus said that he wouldn’t mind being called religious in the sense of Buber’s I-Thou relationship. And Buber said, “Don’t speak of Camus as an atheist. He is rather one of those people who destroys the images that no longer do justice to God in order that the religious person can go through the darkness to a new meeting with the nameless Meeter”. It seems that Buber and Camus each pointed here to the fact that they both rejected institutional religion, which is indeed an important view they share. And Buber’s peculiar image of God as an interlocutor, as well as the sum and consummation of all dialogues in the world, is very different from the commanding and even tyrannical God that the Church presented and which Camus rejected in his call for rebellion and freedom. One might say that the fact that a secular thinker such as Camus claimed that he could be considered religious in Buberian terms serves to show the extent to which Buber’s idea of God deviated from the common religious one. Yet it seems that Camus did not appreciate the depth and intensity of the dialogical relationship that Buber referred to in his discussion in general, especially that of the dialogue with God. Buber’s

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153 Czubaroff and Friedman, “A Conversation with Maurice Friedman,” 246.
concept of God was inspired by the Jewish – and in particular the Hasidic – view that emphasized an intense faith and connectedness with the divine (most significantly through the concept of *dvekut* – a powerful mystical connection with God). Moreover, it is not clear whether Camus fully appreciated the extent to which, for Buber, God is still a commanding God. God, for Buber, provides direction and moral guidance, even if the dialogue with Him is to be spontaneous and direct rather than institutionalized. Buber, for his part, emphasized Camus’ rejection of the Church, in his claim that Camus helped to “destroy the images that do not do justice to God”. However, it does not seem plausible that Camus, a non-believer, rejected the institutional Church only in order to help religious people to find a new way to meet God. At most, Camus discussed the ambivalent position of people who wish for both rebellion and connectedness. In describing Camus as he does, Buber seems to have “appropriated” and adjusted Camus’ thought to his own religious and dialogical understanding.\(^{154}\)

The different approaches that Buber and Camus take with regard to the problem of alienation or the sense of homelessness is also connected to other main topics that the two thinkers focus on in their writings, and to their different writing styles. Buber focused on the importance of dialogue, harmony, the need to overcome conflicts, and the ability to create a utopian society that would facilitate spontaneous and harmonious connection between its members. Even in his novel *Gog U-Magog*, which described tensions and conflicts between different leaders in a Hasidic community, Buber often emphasizes the sense of wholeness

\(^{154}\) Cf. Woocher, “Martin Buber and Albert Camus,” 394-399, 438–444. Woocher tried to show that the two thinkers developed a similar concept of “politics of dialogue”, and suggested that in this respect, the differences between Buber and Camus in matters of religion were secondary.
and harmony experienced by the members of the Hasidic community. Camus’ writings are different from Buber’s, because he did not shy away from describing conflicts and struggles and, mainly, on account of his focus on extreme situations. In the novel, *The Outsider*, and in his plays, *Caligula* and *Misunderstanding*, Camus describes senseless murders. In *The Plague* he portrays a city under siege on account of a terrible plague that causes many people to die in agony. In *The Fall* he describes a person who leaves behind his former life after failing to prevent a woman from committing suicide; he then wanders through the streets of Amsterdam – a city that reminds him of Dante’s Inferno. Camus was also obsessed with the subject of capital punishment, which he discusses in several of his books, and did not spare readers a gruesome and detailed description of the dreadful act of execution in his essay, “Reflections on the Guillotine.” In his play, *The Just Assassins*, and in his major philosophical essay, *The Rebel*, Camus discusses (and admires) the Russian anarchists who were willing to be hanged for their acts of terror. This major difference in the focus of the two thinkers can, of course, be ascribed to their different literary interests, their different personalities, and also to the fact that Camus was first and foremost a passionate novelist, and Buber a rather introverted scholar. Yet, again, these differences also reflect a deep divergence of thought. For Buber, reality is – or should be – based on dialogue and harmony, and conflicts are largely considered a diversion from the correct path. For Camus, reality should be viewed primarily from an awareness of the absurd, and senselessness, meaninglessness,

\[155\tag{155}Another instance of this point in Buber’s writing is found when he described his own conflict with a former priest who spoke unjustly against Jews. Buber described the harsh exchange between them, but also described the final moments of the meeting: “he stood up, I too stood, we looked into the heart of one another’s eyes. ‘It is gone,’ he said, and before everyone we gave one another the kiss of brotherhood. The discussion of the situation between Jews and Christians had been transformed into a bond between the Christian and the Jews. In this transformation dialogue was fulfilled. Opinions were gone, in a bodily way the factual took place.” (Buber, “Dialogue,” 22.)

and even the cruelty that it involves, as well as the difficult, Sisyphean struggle to overcome it.\footnote{See also Jacob Golomb, \textit{In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus}, Problems of Modern European Thought (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 22–26.}

\textbf{Camus’ “Buberian” Solidarity}

The discussion of Camus’ critique of modernity, as compared with Buber’s, leads us to consider their respective views regarding human connectedness. As distinct from scholars who view Camus as, on the whole, a dialogical thinker, I think it is necessary also to present the differences between the two thinkers with regard to the topic of human connectedness.\footnote{Moreover, as distinct from Woocher’s view (see also Friedman and Curzon-Hobson), that Camus emerges from the comparison as, in the main, a dialogical thinker, I do not think that dialogue – at least in the way Buber understood this term – was the central element in Camus’ thought. Many of Camus’ writings, including \textit{The Outsider} and \textit{The Myth of Sisyphus}, do not contain an element of dialogue. Also, there is no doubt that Camus called for solidarity, but as we shall discuss below, much of his account of solidarity is quite different from Buber’s idea of connectedness.}

The differences between them will also be relevant for our analysis (in the next chapters) of their respective accounts of ethics and politics.

The aspect of the theme of connectedness in Camus’ thought that comes the closest to Buber’s idea of dialogue and connectedness is his appreciation of the individual’s need for connectedness with others. This idea or experience of human connectedness is evident in several points in his writings. It appears where he describes close and intimate relationships between people (especially as these take place in times of distress and need); in his discussion of the sense of belonging and the distress of homelessness; and in his early lyrical writings and his essay, \textit{Return to Tipasa} (1952).

Several points in Camus’ writings where he describes moments of deep and genuine friendship, mutual concern and dialogue, are similar in many ways to Buber’s idea of human
connectedness as a fundamental human need; to some extent, these even resemble Buber’s idea of the I-You mode of relationality.\footnote{See Ladd, “The Tragic Contradiction: Dynamics of a Theme in Buber and Camus,” 69–70.} For example, there are moments in The Plague, especially in the moving descriptions of the treatment of dying people by their loved ones. Another can be found in the play, The Just Assassins, in the description of the need for human connectedness and the sense of comradeship among the rebels, and in their need to experience human contact at that most terrible moment when they face their death.\footnote{Albert Camus, “The Just Assassins,” in Caligula and Three Other Plays (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), 233.}

Camus offered a very interesting reflection on human friendship and obligation to others in The Fall.\footnote{Albert Camus, The Fall, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Knopf, 1956).} Clamence, the protagonist, is a former Parisian lawyer who has cared for the poor and the needy, but came to realize that his actions there were fake and unauthentic, since his main aim was actually to be praised by others and to feel good about his actions – “the satisfaction of being right, the joy of self-esteem”\footnote{Ibid., 18.} – without making any real sacrifice or effort. The turning point in his life happened when he chose not to help a woman who was about to commit suicide, when he was alone and had to risk his life to save her. At that point, he realized that his former way of life was wrong, that it was not based on a real and authentic concern and commitment to others, and that at the end of the day he was self-centred. The story was considered a critique of Sartre and the Parisian intellectual circle to which Camus also belonged. According to this view, that circle discussed lofty matters of justice, solidarity, and concern, but at the same time their members did very little to help others in practical terms, and did not have to pay any real price for their views (a point that was significant in the context of Camus’ concern for the Pied Noir, in times when many
French intellectuals opposed them in the name of justice and solidarity with the Algerian Muslim population). More important for our purposes, the story may be read from a Buberian perspective as an account of a person who comes to realizes that his former life has been based on the misguided I-It mode of relationality, and the need to develop an I-You mode of relationality, especially in a world that is characterized by alienation and misery.

Even allowing for these similarities, however, these examples display two differences between Buber and Camus. First, as we have mentioned, Camus focuses on human connectedness particularly as it arises at points of extremity or crisis, whereas Buber discusses the importance of dialogue in everyday life. For Buber, the idea of dialogue and connectedness exists independently, as a value and an existential condition in itself. In *The Fall* – and in other writings, such as *The Plague* – Camus presents connectedness in the context of those who experience acute distress. Helping others in time of crisis is for Buber an offshoot of this fundamental condition and aspiration for unity. As we have seen, for Buber, connectedness is (and therefore ought to be) the fundamental human condition. For Camus the experience of siege and crisis most clearly demonstrate how reality is inherently founded upon the absurd, where people are unable truly to deny its difficulties and challenges.

The descriptions of care and compassion in Camus’ writings point to intuitive moments that people experience. They are not meant to establish, as Buber tried to do, that human connectedness or dialogue are human beings’ most basic and fundamental need. Nothing is (or should be) more intuitive than the urge to take care of a sick person in need. This, indeed, is one of the major differences between Buber and Camus: for Buber, human connectedness is not only a matter of responsiveness to a particular need, but the most fundamental element
of human condition and of reality in general. Here Camus’ “realist” position, as opposed to Buber’s “idealism,” views human compassion and solidarity as one component of human life, especially in times of need – but he also acknowledges the existence of solitude. A story by Camus that demonstrates this is *Jonas, or the Artist at Work*. It describes an artist who is socially and politically engaged, perhaps similar to Camus himself. After he retreads to his attic at home for a long time, a picture is found with a single word, but it is unclear whether the word is *Solitaire* or *Solidaire* (“independent” or “interdependent.”)\(^{163}\)

Further, Camus acknowledged that distress could also lead to indifference – not only to cooperation and mutual help – a phenomenon that he would have witnessed during the Nazi occupation of France, and which he describes in *The Plague*. Camus describes the behaviour of the people in the city, at least before they realize the severity of the situation, as follows:

[I]n this extremity of solitude none could count on any help from his neighbour; each had to bear the load of his troubles alone. If, by some chance, one of us tried to unburden himself or to say something about his feelings, the reply he got, whatever it might be, usually wounded him. And then it dawned on him that he and the man with him weren’t talking about the same thing. For while he himself spoke from the depth of long days of brooding upon this his personal distress, and the image he had tried to impart had been slowly shaped and proved in the fires of passion and regret, this meant nothing to the man to whom he was speaking, and who pictured a conventional emotion, a grief that is traded on the market-place.\(^{164}\)

Indeed, at another point, Camus went as far as to declare that human beings are not social animals.\(^{165}\)

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\(^{164}\) Camus, *The Plague*, 64.

\(^{165}\) Camus, “Reflections on the Guillotine,” 178. The element of personal alienation and pursuit of selfish interests was also evident in Camus’ play *Misunderstanding*, which tells the story of a mother and a sister who murder a guest who comes to their hotel and later on discover that he was their son and brother. It is also reflected in the characterization of the different characters in this play, who focus on their selfish own wishes.
Another important similarity between Camus and Buber’s ideas of human connectedness and dialogue is the central place Camus gives in his writings to the importance of home and the sense of belonging. As mentioned, Buber discusses the loss of the pre-modern communities in which people had a direct connection with one another. He also makes a general distinction between “epochs of habituation and epochs of homelessness,” when people feel detached and alienated. Home, for him, means not only a place of residence but, primarily, that sense of belonging and orientation which answers the inherent human need for connectedness. In Camus’ writing, once again, the distress of exile and homelessness is a central theme, precisely because of its connection to the idea of the absurd. Home is not only a physical place, but also a source of confidence in one’s existence and place in the world. The absurd, and the sense of alienation that it involves, manifest themselves most vividly in the experience of exile and homelessness. The literal search for a home, and the stress that absence of feeling at home causes, is mainly a symbol for the search for existential orientation. The topic of homelessness appears in many of Camus’ writings, such as The Outsider and The Fall. Exile and the Kingdom is a collection of short stories that deal intensively with the search for home and belonging and the sense of physical or emotional exile: such as in the story of a woman who feels lost and lonely in the Algerian desert, or in that of a Christian missionary who is trapped by the natives he came to “save.” The importance of home is also prominent in his autobiographical and sentimental book The First Man, where Camus describes the sense of belonging and home that he felt in

166 See Sagi, Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd, 8.
his youth, and the crisis that the *Pied Noir* underwent when they were forced to leave their homes during the Algerian War.

Precisely because this theme is so central in the writings of both Buber and Camus, where their accounts of it differ we may note differences fundamental to their entire understandings. For Camus, the sense of homelessness is an ongoing and existential one. It is an integral part of life in modernity, resulting from the mature encounter with reality as it is. The way to deal with it is twofold: the first is to develop a sense of nostalgia for the sense of belonging and home that has been lost. Camus evokes this sense in *The First Man*, and discusses it in *Return to Tipasa*. Such nostalgia could be useful as a source of inspiration, but could be problematic if used in order to avoid encountering the world as it really is. The other solution is to actively create human solidarity and connectedness that would provide a sense of belonging and direction (as limited as these may be) precisely because modern reality is unavoidably alienating. This is different from Buber, for whom the sense of homelessness and alienation is considered a diversion from the authentic human nature, and is based on a misperception of the world as it really is.

This last point is connected to another difference between the two thinkers: Camus’ ideas of homelessness, or at least the ways to solve it, are much more political than Buber’s. For Camus, the creation of political associations in the wider sense – such as revolutionary movements that work together to support their communities or to struggle for liberation and justice – are in themselves ways to create a sense of belonging and connectedness, however temporary, in a world which is otherwise alienating. For Buber, political frameworks are legitimate only in so far as they help people to return to their naturally authentic sense of spontaneous connectedness and belonging. The key element for Buber is intimacy, rather
than social or political relationship. In many ways, as we have noted, Buber’s dialogical thought can be seen as a reference to the symbiotic relationships between a parent and a child. Indeed, much of his discussion about the obedience of the Hasid to his Tzadik or the Jewish people to God may be compared to the relationship between a loving and guiding parent to his or her child. As mentioned, Buber’s entire dialogical thought, in its emphasis on connectedness and dependency, stands in tension with the modern idea of the Enlightenment, which has emphasized “maturity” and the idea that people should become autonomous, sovereign, and independent.

The third element that draws parallels in a certain way to Buber’s concept of connectedness is Camus’ search for harmony and wholeness in his early lyrical essays. These include romantic elements and often describe experience of simple sensations and the connection with nature. This sensibility is also evident, in his short reflective essay, Return to Tipasa.170 Camus describes a visit he made after World War II to Tipasa, the site of Roman ruins on the Algerian shore of the Mediterranean, which for Camus is a symbol of tranquility and lost childhood. The return to Tipasa is a return to nature, to a sense of tranquility and a lost childhood. Camus was hoping to find there a sense of the wholeness, harmony and innocence that were lost in the war. He discovered that the place had changed. It was surrounded by a barbed wire, which for him symbolized “tyrannies, war, police forces and the era of revolt.”171 Yet Tipasa for Camus remained a symbol of belonging, and reminder of his childhood and youth, which could lend him hope even in turbulent times.

Here I recaptured the former beauty, a young sky, and I measured my luck, realizing at last that in the worst years of our madness the

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171 Ibid., 140.
memory of that sky had never left me. This was what in the end had kept me from despairing. I had always known that the ruins of Tipasa were younger than our new constructions or our bomb damage. There the world began over again every day in an ever new light...In the middle of winter I at last discovered that there was in me an invincible summer.\textsuperscript{172}

This passage points to an important element of Camus’ critique of modernity: that is, one can find direction and guidance not only in progress towards maturity and independence, but also in a return to early experiences of connectedness and love. The sense of love and belonging that one experiences during childhood and youth are not to be overcome or rejected in order to achieve maturity as an adult. On the contrary, these memories and a sense of connectedness are crucial in order to become a responsible adult, one who fights against injustice, in order to achieve love. Since the aim of the struggle is to achieve peace and connectedness (as much as possible), it is forbidden to create new injustices in order to fight old ones.

From a “Buberian” perspective, these elements may be seen as symbols of unity, connectedness, dialogue and harmony, much like the I-You mode of relationality. Yet Camus’ discussion of Tipasa (as well as his reference to his mother, which will be discussed later), also shows the different contexts in which the two thinkers situate their respective understandings of connectedness. For Buber, connectedness and dialogue are the fundamental and ultimate bases of reality. Buber saw connectedness as an alternative that should be implemented instead of the “mature,” modern call for autonomy and separation. For Camus, Tipasa is a refuge in a world that largely consists of an ongoing struggle and conflict. For Camus, Tipasa is a place to visit and be reminded of the importance of human connectedness – which then serves as a source for the struggle for justice – although one

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 144.
must always return to adult life and its various struggles and difficulties. We can say that Camus wished to visit Tipasa – a place of love and connectedness – in order to be inspired by it, whereas Buber wished to stay there.

**Camus’ “non-Buberian” Solidarity**

Camus offers another version of human connectedness, which is different from Buber’s idea, though not necessarily opposed to it: that is, a connectedness based on the shared human experience of life in the absurd, and, in particular, on the struggle against metaphysical and political oppression.

As mentioned, Camus was involved from an early stage in political activities of the Left that called for solidarity and struggle against injustice: he was a journalist, a director and actor in a social theatre company, and a member of the Algerian Communist Party for a short time. However, the theme of solidarity and rebellion became the central to his writings mainly after World War II. This theme is clearest in *The Plague*, in his philosophical book, *The Rebel*, his play *The Just Assassins*, and in numerous shorter articles.

There are two, complementary, aspects to Camus’ idea of solidarity, neither of which was central to Buber’s thought. One points to the shared human existence in relation to the absurd. Another concerns the solidarity that results from the collective rebellion against it.\(^\text{173}\)

Camus’ concept of solidarity, as based on the idea that all human beings are trapped in the condition of the absurd, and on the struggle against it, is best articulated in *The Plague*. There Camus vividly describes the sickness and death that start suddenly, with no apparent reason, and that spread quickly, killing victims of all ages. He describes the residents’ various

reactions to the situation: the local priest who calls on the inhabitants to understand the
catastrophe as a punishment from God or as a sign to repent; the bureaucrats who debate
whether the calamity that has fallen on them fits the precise definition of a plague; those who
try to escape; and those who try to keep their daily routines despite the crisis. The dominant
role model in the story is the doctor Rieux, who does his best to aid the sick, organizing
teams of volunteers, all the while knowing well that he can not to stop the plague or save the
vast majority of its victims. Under these frustrating circumstances, all he can do is to try to
ease the pain of the sick, and to let them know that they are not alone in their suffering.

Published shortly after World War II, *The Plague* is an allegory of France’s situation
during the German occupation. However, the story is also an allegory of the human condition
in the face of the absurd – the sense of meaningless and suffering that all people feel in an
unintelligible reality that unavoidably leads to death. All that can be done under these
circumstances is to provide mutual support, to struggle together against death, trying to ease
the misery that exists in the world, to alleviate the pain and to find meaning and some
comfort in such efforts, even though it is clear that they cannot provide for any definitive
solutions.

This view of solidarity is connected to the secular character of Camus’ thought. In a
world without God, there is no metaphysical anchor to rely on, and therefore human beings
have to rely on each other as much as they can (while at the same time fully acknowledging
that they cannot do much to remedy their predicament). Indeed, the actions of Rieux in *The
Plague* are set in contrast to the local priest’s call for repentance, and his religious
explanation of the plague. For Camus, humans’ inability to negate the absurd, and the
imperative not to deny it, are the cause of both human suffering and the attempts, however
temporary and limited, to address it. In a world without any inherent comprehensible meaning of its own, all that people can do is hold on to each other, fighting together against death and injustice without losing sight of the limits of their human abilities.

Solidarity is not only based on the fact that people are trapped in difficult situations, but, as demonstrated by the example set by Rieux, also on their shared, humanistic rebellion against it. The two elements – solidarity in the face of the absurd and in the rebellion against it – are very much connected. However, the first does not necessarily lead to the second. As part of Camus’ effort to describe reality as it is rather than an idealistic picture of how human life and society should proceed, Camus made it clear that not all people are aware of the absurd – that most of them just continue to live their lives. Moreover, as mentioned, even the state of siege does not necessarily lead to solidarity or rebellion, but to a vast array of reactions, including isolation and indifference. Such was the case with most residents of the city in *The Plague* or French people under the Nazi occupation.

Yet, at least some people do rebel against oppression, whether it be “metaphysical” oppression – the sickness, death and sense of meaninglessness and hopelessness that exist in the world – or a concrete political, social, or economic oppression, and this rebellion leads to solidarity. In his discussion of the master-slave relationship in *The Rebel*, Camus describes how at some point the slave becomes aware of his situation and his silent obedience to his master.\(^{174}\) He rebels against his master, and his rebellion includes two complementary elements. On the one hand, he defies oppression and injustice by drawing a line which the master should not cross, a line that determines for the first time his own sense of self and provides him with autonomy, agency and power. On the other, his sense of solidarity is

connected to an acknowledgement of an inherent sense of the value of freedom that all people share, a value and wish that, during slavery, has been repressed and denied, and this leads the former slave to develop a sense of solidarity with others who share the same value.

If the individual, in fact, accepts death and happens to die as a consequence of his act or rebellion, he demonstrates by doing so that he is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of a common good which he considers more important than his own destiny. ...He is acting in the name of certain values which are still indeterminate but which he feels are common to himself and to all men. We see that the affirmation implicit in every act of rebellion is extended to something that transcends the individual in so far as it withdraws him from his supposed solitude and provides him with a reason to act. ... It is for the sake of everyone the world that the slave asserts himself when he comes to the conclusion that a command has infringed on something in him which does not belong to him alone, but which is common ground where all men – even the man who insults and oppresses him – have a natural community.\footnote{Ibid., 15–16.}

Camus explains that the rebel demands to be respected precisely because he belongs to a natural community that hold shared values of freedom. This solidarity is not only a matter of emotional identification with others who suffer, but also based on the realization that there are shared values at the basis of human connection. As an example of this, Camus mentions revolutionaries who were willing to commit suicide as a protest against the unjust punishment that their fellows received.\footnote{See Avi Sagi, \textit{Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd}, trans. Batya Stein (Amsterdam - New York: Rodopi, 2002), 109, 117–118.} Camus emphasizes that this idea of solidarity is intuitive, not based on utilitarian calculations.\footnote{Ibid., 17–18.}

How does Camus’ solidarity – based on the two main elements of responding to crisis, and the discovery of the shared value of freedom – differ from Buber’s idea of connectedness? One finds examples in Buber’s that remind one of Camus’ account. As we know, Buber saw the quest for dialogue as a permanent, fundamental condition. But it is
interesting to note that – as an example of an authentic, spontaneous, and clear moment of human connectedness, which is actualized even without verbal gestures – Buber refers to the image of identification experienced by people who are hiding in a shelter during an air strike. Buber also discusses the importance of Jewish solidarity in Germany in its most difficult time of crisis, after Hitler came to power. And he was personally active in establishing Jewish educational institutions during that time, which were erected not only because Jews had been expelled from German institutions, but also a clear act of Jewish solidarity and moral defiance.

Moreover, despite the differences between Buber’s idea of connectedness and Camus’ idea of solidarity, both Camus and Buber talk about a discovery of connectedness (Buber term) or solidarity (Camus term)\textsuperscript{178}, rather than its creation. Buber discussed at length the idea that human connectedness is the most fundamental human condition and need, and, although it has been repressed and neglected, all a person needs to do is to regain an awareness of it, and thus to overcome the harmful view that tends to look for separations and power relations between subjects. This will not only solve modern existential distress, but also moral problems, since the good will comes naturally by joining the path toward unity, and evil is nothing but a deviation from this path. Camus, for his part, discussed the insight that the slave intuitively gains when deciding to rebel against his master: the sense that he fulfills a fundamental need for the value of freedom, which stands beyond oneself, and that all those in his situation share it, meaning that it is the basis for solidarity.\textsuperscript{179}

\textsuperscript{178} Cf. Woocher, “Martin Buber and Albert Camus,” 372-373.

\textsuperscript{179} It should be noted that Camus’ view that solidarity is based on the discovery of a shared value stands in tension with his idea, expressed in \textit{The Plague}, that many people are indifferent to or try to deny the absurd. Rieux is considered to be a role model precisely because he initiates a struggle and acts upon his sense of solidarity, in a way that other people around him do not.
Yet what stands at the basis of Camus’ idea of solidarity is the concept of rebellion and conflict: the shared struggle for freedom and against oppression. This stands in clear contrast to Buber, for whom the world is based – ontologically and, in practise, at least potentially – on unity and harmony, and that human connectedness is an expression of this quest to fulfill this unity. For Buber, freedom would be achieved through entry into the I-You mode of relationality, not by rebellion and defiance. Buber explicitly criticized the modern political situation in which people gather together merely in order to achieve a certain political aim.\textsuperscript{180} Moreover, for Camus the first step toward solidarity is not connectedness, but rebellion and separation: the slave who says “No!” to his master, draws a line that his master should not cross, and by doing so ceases to be a slave, whereupon he joins forces with others in the same situation, together with whom he regains humanity and comes closer to, though he never completely achieves, self-fulfillment. Camus’ idea of solidarity is therefore based first of all on defiance and rebellion.\textsuperscript{181} For Buber, human connectedness (which may include a sense of solidarity and comradeship) is about regaining unity that has always been there and was erroneously ignored and neglected.

At the same time, it should be noted that Camus’ call for solidarity was not based only on defiance and rebellion, but also on a shared inherent value of justice, and the aversion people have when they witness injustice. Camus did not call people to gather together merely to achieve some interest that would benefit them (as in the modern phenomenon that Buber criticized). In that sense, the two thinkers are not very different from each other. Yet it is important to remember that the inherent values that Camus’ concept of solidarity are ethical

\textsuperscript{180} In Buber’s words: “In the view customary to-day, which is defined by politics, the only important thing in groups, in the present as in history, is what they aim at and what they accomplish” (Buber, “Dialogue,” 50).
\textsuperscript{181} Sagi writes that according to Camus, solidarity is meaningless unless based on rebellion, and at the same time rebellion is also meaningless unless it is embodied in solidarity. (Sagi, \textit{Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd}, 117).
in essence – a call for justice – while Buber’s concept is based on an inherent, primordial human dialogical condition that needs to be fulfilled, which is not predominantly ethical in nature.

It is possible to claim that Camus’ idea of struggle and rebellion does not altogether stand in opposition to Buber’s I-You mode of relationality. Since, as mentioned, the opposite of I-You relationality, according to Buber, is not hate or rebellion, but indifference. Rebellion and struggle are still forms of relationship, and include a dialogical element. Yet Buber’s idea that conflict is also a form of dialogue, and the effort that he makes to show that conflicts should be contained within a framework of relationships and dialogue, seem to reveal his difficulty to fully accept the fact that conflicts are an integral part of reality, precisely when one bears in mind his belief that reality strives for unity and harmony. Camus, on the other hand, emphasized the inability to achieve unity, and saw rebellion as a crucial and necessary element in order to achieve justice, solidarity, and dignity.

These differences between the two thinkers can be further clarified by looking at their respective discussions about the use of language, or the lack of it. In I and Thou Buber writes that communication can exist through language (between human beings), and also below language (with nature), or above it (with “spiritual beings”). Language, therefore, is only a means to fulfill the more important element of communication and dialogue, and sometimes silence suggests an even stronger form of communication, such as in the example mentioned above, about people who did not need to use spoken words in order to communicate their shared feelings during an air raid. Camus did not develop a significant discussion of language, but it is interesting to note that while Buber discussed the dialogical values of silence, Camus stressed the paralyzing silence of the slave during the time of his slavery.
...[h]e has at least remained silent and has abandoned himself to the form of despair in which a condition is accepted even though it is considered unjust. To remain silent is to give the impression that one has no opinions, that one wants nothing, and in certain cases it really amounts to wanting nothing.\textsuperscript{182}

To a large extent, both Buber and Camus made a Cartesian philosophical move, by trying to identify the essence of human beings. Descartes focused on the ability of the individual to think and reflect. Buber focused on the dialogical nature of the individual – and reality as a whole – and its aspiration for connectedness, harmony and unity. Camus, for his part, did not make a similar statement about the individual, since he acknowledged that the wish for solitude and independence exists in the human soul alongside the wish for connectedness. Yet, at least politically and rhetorically, Camus actually paraphrased Descartes when he said in \textit{The Rebel} “I rebel, therefore we exist.”\textsuperscript{183} He meant this, not in the sense that rebellion is necessarily the single most important thing that defines the individual, but in the sense that the rebellion and defiance are not only a political act, but also an existential one, and that the rebellion of the individual is based on a shared value that leads to

\textsuperscript{182} Camus, \textit{The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt}, 14. Camus also discussed the importance of using explicit words in order to maintain close relationships. He stressed the idea that a sense of connectedness and love can easily be lost if they are not actively maintained. This is reflected in \textit{The Plague} in the words of Grand, a clerk whose wife left him: “You get married, you go on loving a bit longer, you work. And you work so hard that it makes you forget to love…While we loved each other we didn’t need words to make ourselves understood. But people don’t love for ever. A time came when I should have found the words to keep her with me – only I couldn’t.” (Albert Camus, \textit{The Plague}, trans. Stuart Gilbert [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976], 69–70). This quote reflects Camus’ idea that connectedness should not be taken for granted.

It should be noted that there are other places in Camus’ writing where his discussion of language is closer to Buber’s. An example of this is his description in \textit{The Plague} of the difficulty to express in a telegram the deep emotions of love and longing: “People linked together by close friendship, affection, or physical love found themselves reduced to hunting for tokens of their past communion within the compass of a ten word telegram…long lives passed side by side, or passionate yearnings, soon declined on the exchange of such trite formulas as, ‘Am fit. Always thinking of you. Love’” (Ibid., 58).

Woocher, who tried to show that both Buber and Camus developed a “politics of dialogue,” claimed that Camus stressed the importance and necessity for modern man in general (and particularly in France after the war) to develop a clear language in order to promote justice and solidarity (Woocher, “Martin Buber and Albert Camus,” 193–196). Again, as mentioned above, I believe that there are major differences between Buber and Camus regarding the subject of language.

\textsuperscript{183} Camus, \textit{The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt}, 22. See also Sagi, \textit{Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd}, 120.
solidarity with others. Echoing Kant, who called human beings to think for themselves, and Hegel, Marx and others, who discussed the master-slave relations, Camus saw in rebellion an act of birth, fulfilling a person’s fundamental and essential human existence. In this sense, what stands at the basis of Camus’ social and political thought is a concept of power relations, not unity.

Although Buber was not a pacifist, in the world that Buber described, which is based on harmony and connectedness, rebellion, conflict and defiance are considered largely unnecessary, irrelevant, or harmful. For Camus, on the other hand, conflicts are part of the modern, secular reality, precisely because there is no absolute metaphysical basis that could serve as an anchor. At first sight, Camus’ thought may seem contradictory: on the one hand he discusses an aspiration (that can never be fulfilled) to achieve harmony and unity; and on the other hand he discusses the element of rebellion and defiance as the source of human solidarity. However, the solution to the contradiction is clear: precisely because it is impossible to achieve the positive goal of achieving complete harmony and unity, all people can do is to fight against injustice. The sense of injustice – the existence of disunity – and the struggle against it, are seen to be the fundamental to the human condition and the achievement of solidarity. It is not possible to overcome the absurd, but it is possible to fight against it and gain meaning from this struggle – as an individual and as a collectivity. To imagine that it is possible to achieve complete harmony and unity, as is the case with Buber, amounts to self-deception and betrayal of the truth. Or even worse: it is an unintentional collaboration with the oppressor, who presents himself as the source of unity (be it a secular authority or the Church). On the other hand, being totally passive just because it is impossible to solve the absurd and to achieve complete meaning and unity is also inappropriate, because
this may lead to extreme alienation, indifference, anarchy, and nihilism. Solidarity in the struggle against human political injustice (or “cosmic injustice,” in the forms of natural disasters, disease and death) allows for the discovery of meaning and eases suffering without reverting to delusions about attaining an impossible.

It is possible to label Buber’s and Camus’ ideas of human connectedness and solidarity as “positive” and “negative” ones, respectively. Buber’s idea of human connectedness is “positive” in the sense that it calls for unity and harmony and has a strong element of self-fulfillment and creativity. Indeed it can be connected to the tradition of *Lebensphilosophie*, which called for revival of the vital elements in human life. Camus’ idea of solidarity, on the other hand, is “negative” in the sense that it is largely based on defiance, on a call to struggle against injustice and oppression, and on the frustrating realization that complete victory in this struggle can never be fully or finally achieved.

At least to some extent, Buber’s unity and connectedness are perceived as an aim. The ultimate condition of the world is one that is based on harmony and unity, a condition in which all elements would stand in constant dialogue with one another. Or, at least, it is a world in which people would be fully aware of this unity and practice dialogical I-You relationship as much as possible. Such a world would also be a positive one in moral terms, since evil, according to Buber, does not exist in itself, but is merely a deviation from dialogue and the path towards unity. For Camus, on the other hand, the absurd is not only the fundamental element of the human condition, but also sets the boundaries that cannot and should not be crossed. Any human attempt to completely solve the problem of the absurd is doomed to fail and is a sign of hubris, which would lead to oppression and destruction (as
secular messianic political movements such as the Jacobins, the Bolsheviks and the Nazis
demonstrated).

The question, however, is to what extent solidarity is for Camus merely a means to the
end of struggling against oppression and achieving freedom? In one respect, solidarity is
indeed the means to fight for justice or against oppression as much as possible, whether a
metaphysical one (as in the example of the teams that are set up to fight disease in The
Plague), or a political one (such as the groups of anarchists who fought against the Tsar, as
described in The Just Assassins and The Rebel). In such instances the quest is to achieve
freedom and justice, rather than solidarity in itself. Acts of solidarity derive from such
struggles, and to a large extent depend on and are conditioned by it. Moreover, although life
under oppression is not a matter of choice, the active struggle against it can be a matter of
conscious decision and initiative that one person may take and many others may not (as
Camus described in The Plague, and as was indeed the case in France during the German
occupation).

Yet the fact that solidarity is for Camus often considered to be a means to achieve
justice, or is a secondary effect of the rebellion rather than an aim in itself, does not
necessarily mean that it is artificial, consciously constructed, or inauthentic. First, because
Camus did present a concept of human connectedness that is similar to Buber’s in many
ways, serving as a basis for action. Second, because the urge for human solidarity, and the
motive to fight for justice, stems from a genuine and intuitive feeling of a shared destiny and
values of justice and freedom that those who rebel – and, indeed, all human beings – share.
The Extent of Buberian Connectedness and Camusian Solidarity

The difference between Buber and Camus’ idea of human connectedness and solidarity – one that is based on the unity that encompasses the entire world and has to be re-discovered; and one that is based on a collective effort towards a shared horizon in the struggle against oppression and injustice – is also connected to the question of who is included and who is excluded from the kinds of collectives they discuss.

It is important to consider the matter of inclusiveness and exclusiveness in Buber and Camus’ thought not only in order to further understand their concepts of solidarity and connectedness, but also because this question has important implications for their ethical and political ideas that we shall discuss in the next two chapters. This question of who is included and who is excluded from the given collective determines its boundaries and, thus, the responsibilities of its members toward each other. This point is especially interesting because although both thinkers have been famous for their universal humanistic views, they both had to grapple with tensions between their commitment to universal responsibility and solidarity, and their affiliation to a particular nation, class or ethnic group (for Buber, the Jewish collective; for Camus, the French or the *Pied Noir* in Algeria).

Two points should be made regarding the comparison between the thinkers’ views in this regard. The first is the way in which both thinkers – each in his own manner – approached the need to focus on a certain aspect of reality (and, therefore, to exclude another) in order to orient oneself in the world. The second is what we may label Buber’s concept of concentric circles of connectedness, as distinct from Camus’ concept of lines of solidarity that may cross each other.
Buber’s idea of connectedness could not be more universal. In his view, the entire world aspires to unity and harmony. Reality is comprised of elements that call and respond to each other. In this way, nothing and no-one should be excluded from the circle of connectedness, dialogue, responsibility, and care. Exclusion from the circle of connectedness can only be self-imposed, by those who mistakenly turn their backs on dialogue and refuse to acknowledge and recognize the potential unity of the world.

This conceptual picture that Buber presents contains a possible problem: it portrays an endless and chaotic multitude of calls for dialogue that originate from all over. Such a view may not allow for one to orient oneself in the world (and it lacks the boundaries that would allow for proper ethics, as will be discussed in the next chapter). Connectedness with everything and everyone could only mean, in practice, connectedness with nothing and no one at all, or the inability to create meaningful dialogue. The calls for dialogue in such an anarchic environment would become cacophonous. Buber was not unaware of this problem, and articulated it as follows:

He who can be unreserved with each passer-by has no substance to lose; but he who cannot stand in a direct relation to each one who meets him has a fulness which is futile... If every concrete is equally near, equally nearest, life with the world ceases to have articulation and structure, it ceases to have human meaning. But nothing needs to mediate between me and one of my companions in the companionship of creation, whenever we come near one another, because we are bound up in relation to the same centre.  

Buber’s way to solve this problem is to explain that in every dialogue one focuses on a single interlocutor from the flux of possible encounters:

\[O\]ut of the incomprehensibility of what lies to hand this one person steps forth and becomes a presence. Now to our perception the world ceases to be an insignificant multiplicity of points to one of which we

pay momentary attention. Rather it is a limitless tumult, round a narrow breakwater, brightly outlined and able to bear heavy loads – limitless, but limited by the breakwater, so that, though not engirdled it has become finite in itself, been given form, released from its own indifference.\(^\text{185}\)

Yet what Buber describes here is a given situation, and not one resulting from a decision based in moral or ethical considerations.\(^\text{186}\) He does not attempt to draw out the theoretical or ethical implications of this example.

Buber’s second solution to the problem could be illustrated through the image of concentric circles of dialogue (although Buber himself did not use this image). As such, a dialogue between two interlocutors would form the inner circle. By replying to each other’s calls and by creating a “between” between them, the interlocutors will have separated themselves from the others who surround them.\(^\text{187}\) The surrounding circle would represent the community that could help to facilitate and encourage the dialogue between the interlocutors. In fact, Buber refers to the establishment of a community around a "living centre", such as the Hasidic Tzadik, which helps to encourage and facilitate dialogue among the members of the community, and between them and God.\(^\text{188}\) Buber also hoped that the Kibbutzim that were established in Palestine would also become true communities whose members would engage genuine dialogue. Within the next, wider circles, there are dialogues between different communities, between different nations, and the dialogue among all the elements of creation, human and non-human. These different layers of dialogue and connectedness would exist in and of themselves, but would also support and complement

\(^{185}\) Ibid., 40.
\(^{186}\) Ronald Smith mentions the idea that Buber’s dialogical thought is simultaneously exclusive and inclusive. It is inclusive because according to Buber the individual has an image of the entire world within him. It is exclusive because, as quoted passage illustrates, in each genuine dialogue the participants focus exclusively on each other (Smith, Martin Buber, 19).
\(^{188}\) Avnon, “The ‘Living Center’ of Martin Buber’s Political Theory,” 64–66.
each other. Finally, and all of them would lead to the ultimate dialogue with God, which would in turn constitute the dialogical foundation of the entire world.

This conceptual image of Buber’s account of dialogue illustrates how it contains the interplay of universalism and particularism, and between anarchy and order. The framework Buber presents would allow for a sense of particular connection between two interlocutors, a sense of comradeship in a particular community or nation, and, at the same time, for an overall participation in a universal whole. It would also provide for a sense of complete freedom, because Buber presents a world of endless opportunities for dialogue and connections. Every element in creation – human and non-human – calls for response, and nothing stands as an obstacle for this dialogue apart from one’s own denial, rejection or ignorance of such opportunities for dialogue. At the same time, this multitude of possible dialogues would not be accompanied by a sense of disorientation, but by a strong sense of grounding. One would be grounded in one’s affiliation to a particular nation, community, or in the particular dialogue in which he or she participates at a given moment, or by the “living centre” around which the community is built, and by the single point into which all dialogues accumulate: the dialogue with the eternal You. The interplay between the idea of freedom and grounding and between particularistic and universal elements in Buber’s dialogical thought are important for the discussion in the next chapters, on Buber’s ethical and political thought, and, in particular his understanding of the special “chosen” role that Buber ascribed to the Jewish people.

The image of concentric circles of connectedness stands in clear contrast with, and in reaction to, two elements of the Western liberal thought. One element is that liberalism emphasizes the boundaries separating individuals as bearers of rights, viewing them as
independent and autonomous rather than as participants in dialogical relations. A second element of the modern Western worldview is universal-cosmopolitanism, which downplays particularistic communal, cultural, and national affiliations.

Interestingly, Camus, discusses a similar theme – the need to focus on a single aspect of reality, to the exclusion of others – but from a different perspective. In his discussion of the creative arts in *The Rebel*, Camus writes the following:

> The artist reconstructs the world to his plan. The symphonies of nature know no rests. The world is never quiet…[its notes] carry sounds to us, occasionally a chord, never a melody. Music exists, however, in which symphonies are completed, where melody gives its form to sounds that by themselves have none, and where, finally, a particular arrangement of notes extracts from natural disorder a unity that is satisfying to the mind and the heart.\(^{189}\)

> The principle of painting is also to make a choice…The painter isolates his subject, which is the first way of unifying it...The painter of still life isolates in space and time things that normally change with the light, get lost in an infinite perspective, or disappear under the impact of other values. The first thing that a landscape painter does is to square off his canvas. He eliminates as much as he includes.\(^{190}\)

These endeavours are part of the rebellion against the absurd.\(^{191}\) The unity that the artist tries to achieve is one that allows him to have control over the situation, to design and organize it and to mould it into a controllable form, and thus to make it meaningful.

Thus both thinkers discussed the need to isolate a particular aspect of reality in order to engage with it in a given instance. Both wrote that this is needed in order to create “unity.” But the similarity is accompanied by the major difference between their theoretical and practical approaches. For Buber, the need to isolate and focus on a particular dialogue is necessary – and provides the opportunity – to create intimate and meaningful dialogue. But

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\(^{190}\) Ibid., 256.

\(^{191}\) Ibid., 255.
for Camus, the painter’s need to isolate a moment in time and space (or the composer’s, to organize music from the cacophony of all possible sounds) marks an act of rebellion against the absurd. For Camus, the artist maintains some of the beauty of the world by his exertions, while at the same time he tries to overcome the sense of helplessness that people feel in an unintelligible world.  

Another point of comparison between the two thinkers in regard to the question of exclusion and inclusion is connected to matters of ethics and politics, not merely to the problem of orientation in a possibly chaotic world. Here the difference between Buber and Camus’ concepts of inclusion and exclusion follows from the fundamental difference between what we have characterized as Buber’s “positive” orientation, and Camus’ “negative” orientation. As mentioned, it is possible to describe Buber’s general idea of connectedness as consisting of concentric circles of connectedness, from that of the I-You between two interlocutors, to the ultimate dialogue between God and creation. And Camus discusses how solidarity arises through the defiance of oppression. For Camus, the collective consists first and foremost of those who are oppressed by (or rebel against) a particular oppressor, or against the absurd. Since there are different situations of conflict, so oppressors and victims are different in one situation and another; different collectives come into being, and exist simultaneously. A particular slave is oppressed by his master; a particular nation may be oppressed by an occupier; workers are exploited by their employers; and the entire human race is oppressed by death, disease, or the sense of meaninglessness and absurdity in an unintelligible world. Camus’ understanding of exclusivity and inclusiveness is, therefore, mainly ethical, as it is based on the contingent need to struggle against injustice and

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192See Funk’s discussion of the different accounts of freedom in Buber’s and Camus’ thought (Funk, “Alienation in Camus and Buber,” 68–69).
oppression. The key point is that all of Camus’ relations of solidarity are based on the same fundamental concern – the inherent human need for freedom and justice – which is a fundamental value to fight for, even if the particular target of the struggle changes from one instance to another. For this reason, the lines of solidarity may run in parallel or intersect, and in such case, balance and restrain each other. For example, the exploited worker who rebels against his employer may also share with him the struggle against a particular political occupier, or the universal human struggle against disease and death.\(^{193}\) Indeed, such a balance of relations is significant for Camus’ ethical and political thought, as we shall discuss below.

These differences between the two thinkers on the theme of exclusivity and inclusiveness also reflect their different intellectual backgrounds. Despite his criticism of modernity, Camus’ thought is still in many ways to be thought of as part of the modern project. Camus’ account of exclusivity emphasizes the effort to take control over nature – to put the landscape in a frame, to make music by selecting from the infinite sounds of the world – in other words, to struggle against the inability to understand and find meaning in the world. Camus was wary of the loss of values that such struggle would lead to if it were to get out of control, and of the hubris of those who thought that they could totally overcome nature by human means. But he did not deny the main aim of secular modernity – to find unity, control and meaning in the world.

Buber’s account, on the other hand, is connected to his intellectual and personal Central European and Jewish background. Jewish thought through the ages has focused extensively on the idea of the connection with God. There are those who have had a special

\(^{193}\) in *The Rebel*, Camus writes that, “The community of victims is the same as that which unites victim and executioner. But the executioner does not know this.”(Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, 16. footnote 2.)
connection with God and, as such, have had a special spiritual role, serving as “living centres” for their communities—e.g., Moses or the Hasidic Tzadikkim. Judaism has also emphasized the particularistic uniqueness of the Jewish people. Further, as a thinker who was in many ways influenced by the Central European intellectual tradition, Buber was familiar with the view (first developed by Herder and the German Romantics) that each nation contained a unique character, and the rejection of cosmopolitanism.

To summarize, Buber’s concept of connectedness is much wider and often more comprehensive than Camus’ concept of solidarity. It is true that Camus’ idea of solidarity is based on rebellion against the absurd, and that the absurd stands at the core of the human meeting with reality. But Buber’s concept of connectedness is based on what he viewed as the most fundamental element of reality itself, not only of people’s solidarity as part of a given struggle, and it touches the most basic primordial inherent need that must be realized. Camus’ sense of solidarity is more limited, not in the sense that it is less emotionally intense, but because for Buber, dialogue is the cornerstone of reality, while for Camus solidarity is the result of another, more basic element – the rebellion against the absurd. Again, for Camus solidarity often manifests itself in a struggle to achieve a particular moral cause (such as the struggle against a particular instance of oppression), and he also acknowledges the indifference that often exists between people. Having discussed Buber’s and Camus’ accounts of connectedness and solidarity, we note again that these carry ethical and political implications, to which we shall turn next.

194 For a discussion of the “living centre”, see Avnon, “The ‘Living Center’ of Martin Buber’s Political Theory,” 67–70.
Chapter 4 – Ethics Based on Connectedness vs. Boundaries

As discussed in the previous chapter, both Buber and Camus, each in his own way, stressed the importance of human connectedness or solidarity as the solution to the sense of existential exile and meaninglessness in the modern era. However, human connectedness and the search for unity (which Buber advocated) or solidarity in rebellion against the absurd (which Camus discussed) are not devoid of moral and ethical problems. As history has shown, not least during the turbulent 20th century when both thinkers lived, collective action based on a strong sense of connectedness or solidarity – motivated by the wish to achieve unity or justice – can very easily deteriorate into violent and destructive fanaticism.

The ethical problems with which Buber and Camus dealt, especially the problem of nihilism, are modern ones. As many critics of modernity have pointed out, in pre-modern times people had a clearer moral anchor to follow, one that was based on tradition, religion, and political and social norms considered absolute and unquestionable. Adherents of modernity perceived the secularization processes and the break with the former social and political order as liberations from oppressive forces. This would mean the loss of obedience to divine dictates determining right and wrong, or at least that these could not be taken for granted any more, and this, according to critics of modernity, could potentially lead to

195 The terms “moral” and “ethical” are, of course, very wide and include many different aspects. The discussion in this study will focus mainly on the political sphere, and the ways in which both thinkers accounts pertain to the political problems of the modern era. Here again it is possible to see a difference between Camus and Buber: although both of them dealt with political and historical problems in theoretical terms and, to varying degrees, in practical terms, much more of Camus’ discussion deals directly with questions of political thought, whereas Buber tended to focus on interpersonal rather than political relationships. This difference is relevant to the present discussion, in that Camus discussed appropriate ways to conduct political action, while Buber tried to deal with political problems largely by bypassing the political dimension and linking them to that of interpersonal and social relations.
nihilism, to a lack of any moral or ethical direction. Indeed, the greatest challenge of modernity has been to find a source for ethics and morality that could serve as a new anchor, after the old anchors of tradition and religion have disappeared.

In this connection, Buber’s account may be especially problematic or challenging, since his idea of dialogue is not based on the maintenance of boundaries that protect people from one another, but on the quest for connectedness based on inherent, primordial need. Buber was aware of the problem of unrestrained collective action, and tried to provide solutions to it – explicitly and implicitly – by presenting alternative ethical tools. These would be based on dialogue and connectedness rather than on boundaries that protect people from one another. His ideas and insights about ethics are important for another reason: they may be useful for cultures and groups that hold similar views to his own regarding the importance of connectedness and unity (rather than the modern Western culture that stresses the autonomy of the individual and formal laws).

This chapter will examine the possible ethical problems in Buber’s dialogical thought. More specifically, I will discuss the ethical problems that would seem to arise from Buber’s account of connectedness. We shall also address the possible solutions that Buber tries to offer in order to address these problems. Finally, for comparative purposes we shall turn to Camus’ ethical stance, as he confronted the potential problem of fanatical collective action by making ethical considerations – the call for justice – integral to his account of solidarity.196

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196 The scholarship on Buber regarding these matters includes discussions about ethical and political problems and issues in his thought. However, to the best of my knowledge, a thorough comparison with Camus regarding these matters has not yet been attempted.
The Problem of Ethical Boundaries in Buber’s Thought

Buber addressed the problem of alienation, especially in modernity, by articulating the inherent need to re-establish the lost relationship between people, and the ways to establish communities that would be conducive to the creation and exercise of such dialogical relationships. However, as mentioned, it seems – at least at first sight – that by emphasizing the I-You mode of relationality and the inherent need for dialogue, Buber largely disregarded (and to some extent even objected to) the need for boundaries between people that could protect them from one another as well as help ensure that their relationships would not lead to unjust conduct. From a critical, modern perspective, the theoretical framework that Buber presented seems to call for “excessive” unity: a framework in which all of the participants in reality – non-human, human, and divine – stand in dialogue and connectedness with each other, aspire to closer unity, and hardly accept individuation or separation. A further criticism would be that, in such a condition, people may lose their ability to exercise independent moral judgment or to orient themselves ethically.

Indeed, several elements in Buber’s thought point to this problem. First, Buber defined the I-You mode of relationality, as opposed to the I-It mode, as having no clear limits and boundaries. The following four quotations may illustrate this point.

Whoever says You does not have something for his object. For whenever there is something there is also another something; every It borders on other Its; it is only by virtue of bordering on others. But where You is said there is no something. You has no borders.  

[In the I-You mode of relationality] He is no longer He or She, limited by other Hes and Shes, a dot in the world grid of space and time.

197 Buber, I and Thou, 55.
198 Ibid., 59.
The relation to the You is unmediated. Nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You, no prior knowledge and no imagination; the memory itself is changed as it plunges from particularity into wholeness.\(^{199}\)

Only as things cease to be our You and become our It do they become subject to coordination. The You knows no system of coordinates. But…an ordered world is not the world order.\(^{200}\)

Buber implies that the I-You mode consists of the flux (or flow) of an ever-changing relationship between entities that are not to be separated from one another, and that have lost their fixed position in time and space. For Buber, the proper world order is not an “ordered world” wherein objects are co-ordinated according to what he calls I-It relations. Buber’s understanding is descriptive but also contains a moral call: human beings should strive to create such dialogical relationships, through which they can overcome the boundaries separating them, and create a shared sphere with others. This is very different from conventional ethics, which is largely based on proper conduct between separate individuals (or groups) in a given context of time and place, who communicate and treat each other in a respectful manner. Buber not only calls for the need to be more considerate to others through dialogue (as an alternative reading of Buber may suggest), but for people to radically change the way in which they view and experience reality. One might ask how it would be possible to develop any ethical relationships with other people if they are not understood to be separate from oneself, and if the reality in which we participate is thus one of constant flux rather than being based on fixed others to which we can relate. The entire view of the world where separate entities stand in a cause and effect relation to each other is lost. In Buber’s words, “As long as the firmament of the You is spread over me, the tempests of causality

\(^{199}\) Ibid., 62.

\(^{200}\) Ibid., 81–82.
cower at my heel.” And with that world, would we not also lose the ability to hold on to fixed ethical guides, standards and regulations that would monitor and regulate our relations?

Buber mentioned the similarity between his idea and certain Buddhist teachings that reject the construction of the flux of elements into defined objects, claiming that human beings would achieve complete freedom and happiness were they able to acknowledge this flux. Yet a major challenge to this Buddhist view is that it, too, might not give a clear guidance in regard to ethical problems. The liberation and happiness that it offers are largely based on abolishing differences and conceptions, by transcending conventional distinctions, including that between good and evil. Buber’s faced a similar challenge when developing his thought.

The second ethical problem in Buber’s thought stems from his emphasis on the spontaneous, unmediated, and direct nature of the I-You relationship.

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201 Ibid., 59.
202 Indeed, Buber was very interested in Eastern religions, and made reference to this interest I and Thou. For a recent discussion on Buber and Buddhism, see Ya’akov Raz, “Egel Hatal Ve-Nitsat Ha-Afarsek: Buber, Buddhism Ve-Hamistikha Shel Hakonkreti [The Dewdrop and the Peach Bud: Buber, Buddhism and the Mysticism of the Concrete],” in Ani Ve-Ata (I and Thou), by Martin Buber (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2013), 125–48.
203 Buber had a mixed opinion about Buddhist thought: he views it positively as an alternative to the Western view that overemphasizes the concepts of objectification and separation. However, his main criticism was that there is no element of dialogue in Buddhist teaching, that – like other doctrines that call for “immersion,” it does not call for reciprocal-dialogical relationship between man and the world. Instead, it calls individuals to turn into themselves and search for the world in their own souls. “All doctrines of immersion are based on the gigantic delusion of a human spirit bent back into itself – the delusion that spirit occurs in man. In truth it occurs from man – between man and what he is not… Certainly, the world dwells in me as a motion, just as I dwell in it as a thing. But that does not mean that it is in me, just as I am not in it. The world and I include each other reciprocally” (Buber, I and Thou, 141). This may also have been his criticism of Jewish mysticism, in which he was very interested prior to the dialogical stage in his thought.

Buber’s distinction between the “You world” and the “It world” may also be compared to the ideas of the Polish-American scholar Alfred Korzybski, who pointed to the difference between reality as it is – an undescribed flux of elements – and the labels that are attached to them in order to turn them into fixed “things” to which people can relate (see Alfred Korzybski, Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics, 5 Sub edition [Lakeville, Conn.: Institute of General Semantics, 1995]).
204 Bergman, “Ha-Hashiva Ha-Du Sichet Shel M. Buber [M. Buber’s Dialogical Thought],” 232.
relationship should characterize society in general. Thus Buber rejects reliance on fixed doctrines. We see this in Buber’s rejection of the *Halacha* – the Jewish law – in keeping with his general view that reliance on religious doctrine is an obstacle to the spontaneous and direct relationships that should exist between human beings and God. Buber made an important distinction between “religiosity,” by which he meant spontaneous, dynamic faith, and “institutional religion” which is characterized by stagnation.

However, it is precisely the formal and institutional aspects of religion that can serve to restrain its more “enthusiastic” element, thus preventing religious anarchy. The fact that Buber rejected the *Halacha* was problematic, because by doing so he rejected one of the main ethical mechanisms developed by the Jewish people. Buber claimed that even the Ten Commandments should not be understood as legal dictates or rules, but in the context of the covenant and dialogical relation between God and the Jewish people. This does not mean that the commandments themselves are worthless: the call “Thou shall not kill”, for example, speaks to a universal human necessity, and therefore every human society follows it and has developed legal means to punish murderers. However, the Bible does not lay out a system of rewards or punishments to enforce the Ten Commandments (as Buber puts it, those who reject God would not be hit by lightning, and those who choose to follow him would not find

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205 Buber said that he does not object to those Jews who fulfill the *mitzvoth* – the religious commandments – because they feel that this is the way for them to live in the name of God and acknowledge the revelation. But he opposes those who blindly follow the religious law out of obedience to the authority of the collective Jewish will. (Martin Buber, “Herut: On Youth and Religion,” in *On Judaism*, trans. Eva Jospe [New York: Schocken Books, 1995], 165–166).

It is also interesting to note the difference between Buber and other Jewish scholars – secular or Reform – who rejected the Halacha. Secular and Reform Jews since the Jewish *Haskala* (the Jewish Enlightenment) in the late 18th century had rejected the *Halacha* or called for changes to it because it did not seem modern enough to them. Buber rejected the *Halacha* for the opposite reason: because he wanted to return to pre-*Halachic* biblical times, in which (as he saw it) people tried genuinely to establish direct and spontaneous connection with God, and live under His direct rule. As such, contrary to Jewish thinkers who stressed the contradiction between *Halacha* and modernity, Buber made a connection between the ancient Jewish *Halacha* and modernity: in both cases there is over-reliance on doctrines and regulations, rather than immediate dialogue.
any mundane treasure\textsuperscript{206}). In Buber’s account, the Commandments were given in the context of an intimate dialogue between God and Israel, not by an arbitrary, distant God who ordered his subjects what to do and what not to do. God showed Himself to be a partner to man in the effort to create unity and harmony, who called the on the Jewish people to develop an intimate-dialogical relationship with Him, and calls on them to follow His ways if they wish to take the right path.

This understanding would also solve what seems to be a tension between, on the one hand, Buber’s call for the creation of “the Kingship of God” – a community that would be based on the direct rule of God, rather than on a human political regime\textsuperscript{207} – and, on the other hand, the idea that God participates in a dialogical relationship with humans. God, according to Buber, is also the accumulation of all the I-You relationships that exist. Turning to God and following His ways and commands is merely a matter of joining and following the natural path toward harmony – a path that is also a moral one. In this sense, accepting God as the King means living a life of dialogue – or, rather, living in dialogue – in a connectedness that responds properly to the ever-changing and ever-present calls to dialogue, rather than following any particular doctrine.

It is possible to see here how close Buber is to anarchistic ideas. Indeed, politically, Buber advocated for an anarchistic view that calls on people to minimize as much as possible the role of the formal authorities and the law, and to allow society to be run through constant dialogue between its members. He believed that relationships between people should not be based on formal codes, doctrines and regulations “from above,” but on the people’s inherent

\textsuperscript{206} Buber, \textit{Te’udah Ve-Yi’ud}, 1984, 1:154–156.
\textsuperscript{207} We shall discuss this aspect of Buber’s thought further in the next chapter.
need for dialogue.\textsuperscript{208} In a world founded in dialogue, formal rules, fixed regulation, and formal human authority stand in the way as obstacles to the achievement of a healthy community. For this reason, Buber supported the creation of communities – such as the Hasidic community and the Israeli Kibbutz – that were based on spontaneous relationships rather than on formal authority and fixed and formal regulations.

At the same time, however, Buber largely overlooked the fact that the members of the Jewish Hasidic communities were committed to the \textit{Halacha}. It is true that Hasidic teaching injected much mystical and spiritual content into the \textit{mitzvoth} (the Jewish religious commands) and, more than other streams of Judaism, emphasizes the importance of the spiritual, emotional, and passionate elements in religious life. Yet all streams of the Hasidic movement took it for granted that the \textit{Halacha} must be observed. Buber also admired the kibbutzim – the communal settlement in Mandatory Palestine – which were founded on an ideological ideas that contained certain anarchistic and utopian elements, and whose members wished to create close, intimate communities. Yet, Buber largely disregarded the fact that the members of the Kibbutzim also created written codices – which their members drafted together – in order to regulate their communal life. These two examples show the gap between Buber’s thought and the need for formal regulations and doctrines, even in the cases of those movements that are more amenable to Buber’s ethic of relationality.

The third element in Buber’s thought that makes it different from conventional ethics, which are based on boundaries between people, is Buber’s call for the individual to enter into the I-You mode of relationality “with one’s entire being”.\textsuperscript{209} In Buber’s terms, this is the

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\textsuperscript{209} Buber, \textit{I and Thou}, 54.
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difference between I-You and I-It relationality. In the I-It relation, the subject relates only to one dimension or aspect of the other. In the I-You mode, the interlocutors are called to immerse themselves in the dialogue and the shared realm that they thus create. As a criticism of modernity and the sense of estrangement it involves, Buber’s call makes sense: the call to immerse oneself in the relationship is a call to get beyond an instrumental view of the relationship, in so far as in the latter mode one treats the other merely according to subject’s narrow self-interest. Yet, if Buber’s I-You relationship means entering into it “with one’s entire being” – i.e., as a positive requirement (and not only as a criticism of I-It relationality) – he seems not to have left sufficient room in his theory for people to criticize and judge their relationships with others, or to make sure that they do not lose themselves in the sort of relationship that would lead them morally astray. This problem is relevant especially in politics. Twentieth century history showed the most violent and destructive political actions committed by people who immersed themselves in ideological groups (whether secular or religious), who were carried away in no small part by their sense of belonging and connectedness, group solidarity and shared cause. In order to maintain moral conduct, it is crucial to maintain a certain distance and independence that would allow judgement and evaluation of one’s role in any given relationship. Indeed, fanaticism, by definition, suggests the entering into a relationship with one’s entire being. Moreover, in many cases there are individuals (or groups, such as criminal gangs, or racist political associations) with whom one should not enter into relationships to begin with, because this would provide legitimacy to their wrongdoings.

The problem of ethical boundaries in Buber’s thought should also be understood in the context of his transition from the early mystical stage in his early life to his focus on
dialogue. Mystical experiences usually aim towards immersion in the divine realm and a
negation – or at least temporary suspension – of mundane relationships. They are often
based on a longing to transcend or overcome conventional boundaries, in order to achieve
unity with the transcendent. Mysticism and conventional ethics, therefore, are inherently in
tension with each other. As we mentioned in summarizing his biography in chapter one,
Buber went through a major and conscious change in the focus of his thought and interests:
from an interest in mystical experiences that focused on the individual’s connection with
God, to a dialogical concern focusing on relationships between human beings (as well as
between human beings, God, and creation itself). When examining Buber’s call for dialogue
and connectedness, the concern that arises is whether Buber, who called for such a strong
concept of connectedness – to the point of entering the relationship “with one’s entire being”
– might have implemented many elements from his mystical period into his dialogical
thought.

The desire to transcend conventional boundaries and to immerse oneself in the
relationship – desires that do not have any social implications when they take place in the
confined realm of the mystical experience between man and God – could be extremely
harmful when put into practice in relationship between human beings. The intensity of
Buber’s idea of dialogue and connectedness and his emphasis on the essential “Between” that
the interlocutors create between them, makes this possible problem particularly acute.

There is another reason for which possible mystical elements in Buber’s dialogical
thought are potentially problematic with respect to ethical considerations. Mystical
experiences are often based not only on a rejection of the mundane world, but also on an
awareness that there is a dichotomy between the mundane and the metaphysical realms.
Respect for this awareness of dichotomy could solve, to some extent, the tension between mysticism and ethics. For the dichotomy points to the fact that mysticism and ethics deal with separate realms: one with the relationship with the transcendent; the other, with interpersonal relationships in the mundane realm. It is therefore possible for a person involved in mystical experiences to live according to conventional ethical norms in his daily life. But in the absence of such a dichotomy and separation between the two realms, the result could be that people try to live in the mundane world while following principles that are suitable to the metaphysical one. The result would be a melting away of the ethical boundaries that otherwise obtain in everyday life. Indeed, this is the situation with many political messianic movements, whose aim is to direct the mundane society and political association in religious-messianic terms, to achieve metaphysical and redemptive goals, with the result that ethical and political boundaries are disregarded. Buber rejects the dichotomy between the metaphysical and the mundane realms. For him, again, all elements should strive for unity, and God and man share the task and the effort to achieve this unity. Hence the common way to solve the tension between mysticism and ethics – by separating them – does not apply to Buber’s thought.

Buber’s understanding on Hasidism is highly relevant in this connection. According to Buber, the essence of Hasidic thought is to achieve unity between the divine and the mundane world, to find and raise the “sparks of holiness” existing in the mundane world, and thus to progress toward unity. It was on precisely this point that Gershom Scholem, the famous scholar of Kabbalah and Hasidism, focused his important criticism of Buber’s understanding of Hasidism. Scholem argued that Buber’s based his presentation and interpretation of Hasidism on his personal views regarding dialogue and unity. Scholem
reminds his readers that the followers of Hasidism were committed to the *Halacha*, arguing that, in its actual practices (at least in the past) the Hasidic movement stressed the difference between the divine and mundane realms. That is, the Hasidic movement did not focus on the “here and now,” but called on members to be concerned with and connected to the metaphysical realm – which they understood to exist beyond this world. As such, members were to distance themselves from this mundane world in order to become closer to God. In Hasidim, according to Scholem, the wished-for messianic redemption would change the world precisely at the end of days – it was not concerned with preparing for, or assuming the presence of, redemptive experience in the here and now. Indeed, it would be dangerous to suppose, prematurely, that redemption had been or would soon be achieved, precisely because this might lead to nihilism. Fundamentally, the idea of a redemptive unification of the world in Hasidism was contemplative, rather than – as Buber tried to present it – a matter of actual practice.²¹⁰ Hasidim, according to Scholem, was therefore also much less anarchistic than Buber presented it as being, and much more restrained in its redemptive call.²¹¹

Buber’s thought on this subject is very important in the context of his Zionist views. As we shall discuss later, Buber viewed Zionism in religious and redemptive terms. For him the modern return of the Jews to Palestine was an opportunity to fulfill the Jewish role of

²¹¹ It is important to note the development that has taken place more recently in Hasidic thought. In the last few decades, significant elements in certain Hasidic movements (especially *Chabad*) have become much more interested in redemption in the here and now, and in engaging in collective action in order to bring about redemptive unification. This was evident in *Chabad’s* campaign to view their leader as a Messiah, as well as their major contribution to messianic religious Zionism, particularly after 1967. In this sense, Buber’s view of Hasidism is more accurate now than it was during his lifetime, and therefore his insights regarding the ways to restrain the effort to achieve redemptive unity are relevant today more than before (as we shall discuss in the following chapter). For a discussion of messianic religious Zionism and the Chabad movement in particular, see Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).
creating a dialogical community, under the direct rule of God – not a modern political Jewish nation-state based on formal rules and regulations. Buber was somewhat close in this regard to religious messianic Zionist thinkers, such as Rabbi Kook, who viewed the Zionist political enterprise in messianic, mystical terms. Buber was aware, however, that he had to develop an ethical mechanism in order to restrain ethical and political action, within the framework of his call for dialogue, unity and connectedness.

In sum, the three problems we have considered – arising from the view of reality as based on a boundless flux of potential dialogues; the rejection of formal rules and regulation (or, at least, a rejection of their importance); and the call to enter into relationship with one’s entire being – suggest that there are serious questions about the ethical implications of Buber’s thought. As we have seen, it is difficult, at least at first sight, to see how a theory that based so extensively on the spontaneous and complete entry into relationships that are boundless and unrestrained can provide proper answers to important ethical questions.

**Buber’s Solutions to the Problem of Ethical Boundaries**

Buber was highly sensitive to ethical issues and moral dilemmas. He was not unaware of these problems and tried to provide answers to them, within his own account of dialogical relationality. His concern is not surprising, not only because his intellectual and human concerns for matters of justice, but also given his experience as a German-Jew directly affected by the colossal collapse of ethics and morality in Germany with the rise of Nazism. One characterization of Nazism, after all, is as a movement, albeit an exclusionary one, that was based on an unrestrained sense of passionate inner connectedness. His moral concerns were also evident in a different context – that of his Zionist activity and thought, which focused on the moral cause of the Zionist enterprise and the crucial need to develop just and
dialogical relationships with the Arabs. Moreover, Buber aimed for his thought to be comprehensive – to include all aspects of human life – and he therefore did not wish to overlook moral and ethical questions. For him, the dialogical world-view is not only existential, but also moral and ethical.

Buber did not wish to develop a systematic ethical scheme, and claimed that he was merely “pointing the way” rather than offering a coherent systematic guide for human behaviour.\(^{212}\) This was because he understood reality to be dynamic, and viewed any formal system as a misrepresentation of that reality. Developing a systematic ethical thought based on fixed ideas would therefore contradict his own principles.\(^{213}\) This does not mean, however, that his thought did not include ethical considerations. Indeed, justice and moral behaviour were an integral part of his call for connectedness, and the mechanisms that he presented are interesting precisely because many of them are based on connectedness, rather than the establishment of boundaries. These ethical mechanisms present an alternative to the modern (liberal and other) ethical order emphasizing objectivity, neutrality, and individualism; the modern ethical order is therefore based on providing clear boundaries in order to protect people from each other. What is more, Buber’s ethical mechanisms could provide useful tools to fight against injustice in cultures and societies that appreciate and live by values of unity and connectedness.\(^{214}\)

\(^{212}\) “No system was suitable for what I had to say… I must say it once again: I have no teaching. I only point to something. I point to reality, I point to something in reality that had not or had too little been seen. I take him who listens to me by the hand and lead him to the window. I open the window and point to what is outside.” (Martin Buber, “Replies to My Critics,” in The Philosophy of Martin Buber, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice S Friedman [La Salle, Ill., London: Open Court, Cambridge University Press, 1967], 693).

\(^{213}\) Wright, “Self, Other, Text, God: The Dialogical Thought of Martin Buber,” 111.

\(^{214}\) Modern liberal cultures could, of course, also benefit from Buber’s insights and his call to promote dialogue, mutual concern, and connectedness.
In this section we will look at the different solutions Buber provided for the lack of conventional ethical boundaries in his thought. But before turning to those proposed solutions, we should first note that Buber did provide some room in his theory for more “conventional” ethics, those based on relationships between independent and separate people or groups in given times and places. For although Buber preferred the I-You mode of relatedness, calling for people to orient themselves towards this mode and acknowledge and practice their inherent need for connectedness and unity, he also acknowledged the value of the I-It mode of relatedness. This mode enables orientation in space and time and the ability to function cognitively – and, therefore, ethically – in the world. As Buber put it: “Without It a human being cannot live.” At one point, Buber acknowledged that the I-It mode of relatedness is legitimate – including major institutions governed by that mode, such as the market and the state – that is, so long as it does not detach itself from “the spirit” – the aspiration for connectedness and dialogue.

Man’s communal life cannot dispense any more than he himself with the It-world – over which the presence of the You floats like the spirit over the face of the waters. Man’s will to profit and will to power are natural and legitimate as long as they are tied to the will to human relations and carried by it. There is no evil drive until the drive detaches itself from our being... the economy as the house of the will to profit and the state as the house of the will to power participate in life as long as they participate in the spirit.”

The problem, therefore, is not the I-It mode of relatedness in itself, which is unavoidable and has certain advantages, but the priority that is given to this mode of relatedness – especially in modernity – together with the neglect of the important path towards dialogue and connectedness.

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215 Buber, I and Thou, 85.
216 Ibid., 97–98.
Moreover, Buber noted explicitly that the I-It mode of relationality does entail a specific kind of ethics – one that is based on moral duty. A person in this mode of relationality is “burdened with responsibility for the actions of agents because he is wholly determined by the tension between is and ought”.\textsuperscript{217} This ethical stance may have less value than that which is based on the I-You mode of relationality, rooted in love and infinite responsibility, but it is still an important and valid form of ethics.\textsuperscript{218} Indeed, Buber claimed that he never rejected the existence of objective moral values.\textsuperscript{219}

It is important in this connection to recall a point mentioned briefly above: Buber’s acknowledgement that although people should aspire to the I-You mode of relationality, in practice, instances in which this mode can be fully experienced are rare, exceptional, and fleeting. Every You turns to an It.

This… is the sublime melancholy of our lot that every You must become an It in our world….As soon as the relationship has run its course or is permeated by means, the You becomes an object among objects… Every You in the world is doomed by its nature to become a thing or at least to enter into thinghood again and again. In the language of objects: every thing in the world can – either before or after it becomes a thing – appear to some I as its You.\textsuperscript{220}

Apart from God, any interlocutor unavoidably becomes – and views the other as – a separate object. For this reason the danger of losing oneself in the relationships, is also limited.\textsuperscript{221}

\textsuperscript{217} Ibid., 156.
\textsuperscript{219} Buber, “Replies to My Critics,” 719–720.
\textsuperscript{220} Buber, \textit{I and Thou}, 68–69.
\textsuperscript{221} This does not mean that the aim to overcome the I-It world should be deserted. Buber writes of I-You moments: “None are more evanescent. They leave no content that could be preserved, but their force enters into the creation and into man’s knowledge, and the radiation of its force penetrates the ordered world and thaws it again and again.” (Ibid., 82.)
Moreover, despite his call for unity and the importance of utopian views in his social and political thought, Buber acknowledged the necessity of compromising in order to implement his political and social ideas. This is evident in his concept of “the line of demarcation,” the line that marks the boundary between one’s absolute imperatives and aims, and the limited ability to implement them in practice. Buber explains that there are no fixed rules regarding this line of demarcation, which changes constantly according to the changing circumstances. Buber writes:

The statesman or businessman who serves the spirit...knows well that he cannot simply confront the people with whom he has to deal as so many carriers of the You, without undoing his own work. Nevertheless he ventures to do this, not simply but up to the limit suggested to him by the spirit; and the spirit does suggest a limit to him... what he does in communal life is no different from what is done in personal life by a man who knows that he cannot actualize the You in some pure fashion but who nevertheless bears witness of it daily to the It, defining the limit every day anew, according to the right and measure of that day – discovering the limit anew.

The line of demarcation demonstrates that Buber’s dialogical – and political – thought was not devoid of pragmatism. Further, Buber acknowledged that, in practice, life contains some measure of unavoidable injustice. For this reason, he was not a pacifist and was not altogether indifferent to the mundane trade-offs between conflicting aims and interests. Buber did not reject violence altogether, and acknowledged the right of nations (and probably also of individuals) to uphold their rights, but stressed that the crucial point is to stand up to

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222 Susser sees the “line of demarcation” (or the “narrow ridge”) as one of the most important elements in Buber’s thought, because it deals with the problematic synthesis between the utopian, idealistic vision and reality (see Susser, Existence and Utopia, 33–53). Indeed, the lack of such pragmatism, and the wish to implement ideal and utopian programs without taking into account existing circumstances, is precisely what defines radical and fanatic revolutionary movements.


224 Buber, I and Thou, 98–99.
the responsibility not to cause greater evil than is absolutely necessary in order to live – as well as to try to do the maximum possible in order to meet ethical or relational aims.\textsuperscript{225} Indeed, the concept of “the line of demarcation” played a very significant role in Buber’s involvement in the Jewish-Arab conflict: in his effort to promote his Zionist aims while also maintaining peaceful relationships with the local Arab population, and to minimize infringements on their rights, as much as possible.\textsuperscript{226}

Buber’s pragmatism is evident also in his claim that he did not try to achieve any “pure” revolutionary goals:

I am not concerned with the pure: I am concerned with the turbid, the repressed, the pedestrian, with toil and dull contrariness – and with the break-through. With the break-through and not with the perfection, and moreover with the break-through not out of despair with its murderous and renewing powers; no, not with the great catastrophic break-through which happens once for all (it is fitting to be silent for a while about that, even in one’s own heart), but with the breaking through from the status of the duly-tempered disagreeableness, obstinacy, and contrariness in which the man, whom I pluck at random out of the tumult, is living and out of which he can and at times does break through. Whither? Into nothing exalted, heroic or holy, into no Either or not Or, only into this tiny strictness and grace of every day… \textsuperscript{227}

Thus Buber was not interested in radical change in the political sphere. He did not call for revolutionary action in order to fulfill his ideas in their pure forms, but only for incremental change in the most daily aspects of people’s lives. A revolutionary radical change – “a great catastrophic break-through which happens once and for all” – is something that Buber totally rejects, to the point that he is not even willing to mention it. (The point is “to be silent about

\textsuperscript{225} Simon, \textit{Ḳaṿ ha-tiḥum}, 6.

\textsuperscript{226} This is also the reason Buber supported the moral right of the State of Israel to exist after it had been established, even though he rejected the idea of a political state in principle, and called for a bi-national solution to the Jewish-Arab conflict. In keeping with his concept of “the line of demarcation”, Buber claimed that under the contemporary historical circumstance, the state was legitimate, and that the ultimate hope and struggle for peace and the fulfillment of the Jewish divine mission should continue alongside it (Ibid., 39–41).

\textsuperscript{227} Buber, “Dialogue,” 55. See also Kosman, “Mavo Lemishant Buber [Introduction to Buber’s Teaching],” 217.
that, even in one’s own heart.”) It is possible to assume that here Buber tried to distance himself from the ideological revolutionary political movements that were ongoing during his time (Socialist, Nationalist and others) which called for a revolutionary radical change in order to solve economic and political problems “once and for all.”\textsuperscript{228}

It is worth noting that in his personal and professional life, as well as in his political engagement, Buber did not challenge the conventional institutional norms and regulations, and accepted them as legitimate. His Zionist political views were often considered controversial and radical, especially his call for a bi-national solution to the Jewish-Arab conflict, a position that set him and his fellows from Brit Shalom movement apart from both the Zionist and the Arab mainstreams. However, Buber did not challenge the existing social or political systems and the general order within which the Zionist debate took place. This is clear from his participation in the Zionist Congress, and his support of the State of Israel as a given fact after it was established despite the fact that it did not become a bi-national state based on utopian dialogue.\textsuperscript{229} There was also nothing in his personal behaviour that suggests any anarchic tendencies or unconventional behaviour. He was a distinguished scholar and public figure respected by his opponents as well as friends. In his personal life Buber could often be considered as courageous, and not anarchic.

It is possible, then, to claim that the lack of boundaries in the I-You mode of relationality does not pose any real problem from an ethical point of view, because in practice, these moments are rare and differ from the way in which people actually live their

\textsuperscript{228} As we shall discuss later, his statement should be weighed together with Buber’s own call for a social utopian change – the creation of dialogical societies under God – as part of his Zionist thought. The statement also bears comparison with Camus’ similar views.

\textsuperscript{229} Buber supported the Kibbutzim. As noted, they fit well into the anarchistic ideas of his thought. However, the Kibbutzim were also considered the spearhead of mainstream Zionist establishment, led by Labour Zionism.
lives, and because Buber called for the pragmatic implementation of his ideas. However, one may wonder about the extent to which the explanations described above serve to completely resolve the ethical problem of the lack of boundaries in Buber’s thought. For Buber still did place the wish for connectedness at the basis of his thought, and called for connectedness to be at the basis of human life. Moreover, although Buber distanced himself from the call for a radical revolutionary change in the political or the economic sphere, he did call for a radical change in people’s minds and hearts, so that they would turn to a life that is more dialogical. The fact that I-You moments are rare in practice, and that Buber was realistic in his statements about the limited ability to achieve them, does not erase the essential ethical problems that they pose. In particular, there is the problem that Buber’s espousal of the I-You mode of relationality means the downplay of the importance of formal rules and regulations. It also carries the risk that people would lose their independence and autonomy, without which they could not judge the relationship to make sure it follows the right ethical path, and it would lead to the loss of boundaries that are necessary to protect people from one another. Finally, we note that Buber’s explanations, detailed above, were given in order to deal with a question of “quantity” – i.e., “How much dialogical relationship could be actually achieved under given circumstances?” rather than of quality, i.e., the possible ethical problems that such a mode of relationality involves.

It is therefore important to look – beyond his willingness to accept some unavoidable element of I-It and conventional ethics based on boundaries – to the ethical “mechanisms” that Buber integrates within his own dialogical thought. For Buber claims that relationships based on the I-You mode of relationality are also ethical and should lead to better moral conduct. The mechanisms he articulates relate to two related aspects of I-You relationality.
First, there is the relationship between the interlocutors in the dialogue, which includes an acknowledgement of the other’s uniqueness and concerns. Second, there is the idea that any dialogue takes part and contributes to potential unity in the world, which is inherently moral and just.

First, dialogue, even in the common use of the term (and even more so in Buber’s thought), is a positive moral practice. It is a call for care and compassion toward the other, and identification with the other’s concerns and emotions. The constant effort to develop I-You relationships means constant recognition that one is not alone in the world and that he or she must take into account the interests of the other. As such, I-You dialogue is the most effective way to overcome the selfishness that could lead to injustice. Dialogue is thus an ethical tool in itself.

A particular element of the I-You mode of relationality that points to the intensity of this mode (and which differentiates it from the I-It mode) is the concept of “embracement” (Umfassung). “Embracement” refers to the ability or at least the effort to fully encompass and identify with the interlocutor in a dialogue, to be totally tuned in and attentive to the interlocutor genuinely feeling the other’s joy or pain. Buber also referred to the experience of “imagining the real” – the effort to enter with one’s entire soul “into the otherness” of the other, to acknowledge the other and affirm the others’ existence and uniqueness.230 This is what makes the I-You mode of relationality so different from the I-It mode, in which people do not even try to develop such understanding or identification with the other. In I-It

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230 Bergman, “Ha-Hashiva Ha-Du Sichit Shel M. Buber [M. Buber’s Dialogical Thought],” 225.
relations, “egos appear by setting themselves apart from other egos. Persons appear by entering into relation to other persons.”

Second, although Buber aspires to unity, the dominant element in his thought is not unity but dialogue. Dialogue and harmony do not amount to unity or uniformity. In a genuine dialogue the interlocutors do not lose themselves in the relationship, but take part in it. What makes dialogue a genuine one, is not a homogenous unity, but the creation of a “Between” between them: a shared interpersonal realm that allows each to fulfill himself or herself by realizing the inherent dialogical urge. In such a dialogue, the self of the subject is not lost:

What has to be given up is not the I, as most mystics suppose: the I is indispensable for any relationship, including the highest, which always presupposes an I and You. What has to be given up is not the I but that false drive for self-affirmation which implies man to flee from the unreliable, unsolid, unlasting, unpredictable, dangerous world of relation into the having of things.

Here Buber explicitly points to the difference between his dialogical thought and mysticism, where the aim is to erase the self in order to become immersed in God. Genuine dialogue effectively affirms the existence of both interlocutors, as one acknowledges the other interlocutor who shares the newly discovered dialogical realm with him. By entering into a genuine dialogue with the other, one affirms the other’s particular uniqueness, needs and existence; and, at the same time, genuine dialogue may also orient both interlocutors towards the right ethical direction. Thus a proper I-You relationship may save them from losing

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234 Buber emphasizes this in his discussion of Hasidism, where he mentions the Hasidic idea that each Hasid should be allowed to find his own way to develop a dialogue with God (Martin Buber, *Darko Shel Adam ‘al-Pi Torat Ha-Hasidut [The Way of Man According to the Teachings of Hasidism]* [Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1957], 16–17).
their unique identities or from moral confusion. In contrast, ethical systems are based on boundaries between people, though they may protect their identities, may also lead to alienation and directionless, egoistic behaviour.

Buber’s discussion of the importance of maintaining one’s own self and identity when entering into dialogical relationship is also evident in his discussion of the need for genuine dialogue between people who are different from each other; the interlocutors would thus acknowledge each other’s particular, unique character. This point pertains to Buber’s political ideas. He argues that conflict between nations in modernity takes place not because they are different, but, in fact, because they are too similar to each other: that is, they all strive for power and fight over similar resources. Acknowledging the differences and uniqueness of each nation (while maintaining dialogue between them) could, then, lead to peace.

Yet one may suspect that Buber’s discussion is too vague to effectively solve the problems that might result from the emphasis on connectedness instead of boundaries. For example, it is not clear how it is practically possible to point to the moment when a connection based on mutual concern turns into a power relation, where the stronger might exploit the weaker. It is also difficult to point to the moment when connection, especially admiration, between two people could lead one of them to lose himself in the connection, on account of "imagining the real," and identified with the other overmuch. From the Buberian perspective there is a major difference between developing an intense dialogical relationship with someone, and the mystical experience that would lead one to lose oneself in a relationship. However, from a modern Western perspective, the fact that the I-You

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235 Buber, Pnei Adam, Behinot Bantropologia Filosofit., 126–127.
relationship still calls for intense connection and that in it one tries to transcend the conventional relations, would seem to bring one too close to the danger of losing oneself in the relationship. Buber, in fact, admitted in the passage quoted above that the world of relation is unstable and dangerous, as opposed to the more solid, albeit less desirable, world of things. In the Western-liberal order, this problem would be addressed by emphasizing the boundaries that protect people from each other, although some would argue that, in its rampant atomism and materialism, the need for love, care and connectedness, are often dismissed. Buber, whose thought is based on a fundamental optimism regarding human nature, and whose discussion about relationship tends to be vague in regard to practical considerations, did not really provide a good practical solution to this problem. It is also not altogether clear whether maintaining one’s self and identity in the relation is to be understood in ethical terms; that is, there is a difference between maintaining one’s identity while contributing to a dialogue (which is what Buber calls for), and maintaining one’s identity in order to criticize the dialogue, as appropriate, while it takes place.

Yet another element that could serve as an ethical tool in Buber’s thought, especially (but not only) in regard to political contexts, is his concept of the “demonic You.” The “demonic You” seems to enter into I-You relationships, but actually is not interested in the people with whom he interacts, but sees everything, including himself and the people around him, as means to achieve a certain aim. In 1923, in *I and Thou*, Buber pointed to Napoleon as such a figure (although this term could also be used to describe Hitler, who came to power ten years later).

> All being was for him *valore*…there was nobody whom he recognized as being. ...The demonic You [is someone] for whom...

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nobody can become a You. This third type, in addition to the person and the ego…occurs in fateful eminence in fateful times: ardently, everything flames toward him while he himself stands in a cold fire. A thousand relations reach out toward him but none issues from him. ...he views the beings around him as so many machines capable of different achievements that have to be calculated and used for the cause. But that is also how he views himself...he treats himself, too, as an It. He does not even speak of himself, he merely speaks “on his own behalf.”

The “demonic You” does not see people as whole human beings, but merely as cogs in gigantic machines that are to be put in service. Indeed, Buber’s discussion of the “demonic You” reveals his rejection and repulsion of mass movements, where the individual is lost (a point that would be evident in the Nazi mass ideology and culture, which emphasized the organic connection and subordination of the individual to the nation and race). Buber’s description of the “demonic You” contributes to our understanding of his “genuine” You: in a proper I-You relation the interlocutor is perceived as a unique whole, whom one needs in order to fulfill her own need for dialogue, but is never reduced merely to a tool or a means to her own ends. By pointing to the “demonic You”, Buber tried to make clear a difference between the authentic dialogical relationship he called for – which involved mutual commitment and responsibility, and must therefore retain the interlocutors’ respective identities and personalities – and mass movements that erase the unique personalities of their members in the name of a false higher cause.

Yet here the problem is that Buber did not provide a clear method to distinguish between a “genuine” and a “demonic” You. Almost every leader presents himself as a person concerned about the people he rules. Many of those who followed Hitler did so because they

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237 Buber, I and Thou, 117–118.
238 As mentioned earlier, despite the major differences between Buber and Kant, there is a clear similarity between the two thinkers on this point.
genuinely felt that he also empowered them as individuals. Moreover, Buber’s idea that the “demonic You” views himself and others merely as means to an end overlooks the fact that many shared projects – including those who genuinely contribute to the welfare of the people involved in them – demand a certain level of sacrifice. This point becomes especially problematic in the context of Buber’s Zionist thought. For Zionism demanded a level of sacrifice, of giving oneself to a collective project. Buber’s discussion of the “demonic You” reveals his concern about the danger of improper relationship, but does not provide a clear way to respond to it.

Moreover, the discussion of the “demonic You,” because it pertains to false dialogue, does not really answer the possible problem of losing oneself in a “genuine” dialogue. An example of this is Buber’s discussion of the Tzadik, the leader of the Hasidic community. In his essays on this topic, and especially in his novel *Gog U-Magog*, Buber describes the admiration of the Hasidim for their leader, whom they perceive to be a living connection between themselves and God. Although conflict and rifts between different Hasidic leaders were not uncommon, criticism of the Tzadik by the Hasidim was rare, precisely on account of the metaphysical source of his authority. When we consider this account side-by-side with Buber’s discussion of the “demonic You,” we note that he make a distinction between “positive” and “negative” charismatic leadership. But Buber does not provide any objective tool to make this distinction (since charismatic leadership, by definition, is subjective and not objective).239

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Marvin Fox put forth a similar criticism of Buber’s ethical thought. Fox stresses that Buber was very concerned about ethical and moral questions, and that he understood human moral decisions to be connected to revelation — the relationship with God. Yet Fox argues that — because Buber does not present any objective criteria to distinguish between true and false addresses — it is unclear how, when making a moral decision, a person can be sure that he has actually heard the voice of God. Likewise, it is unclear from Buber’s account how it would be possible to prevent people from making wrong moral decisions if they are truly convinced that it is their absolute moral duty to take these decisions. Buber’s claim that one cannot do wrong when his entire being is engaged in dialogical relationality does not satisfy Fox, since it is not clear why a person cannot commit a crime with his or her entire being. Fox explains that this problem is connected to Buber’s claim that revelation is not formulated as laws that would serve to establish the relevant criteria, since he believed that every moment and every meeting is unique. This leads to a paradox: the individual must act according to an address that comes from the Absolute, but at the same time the decision of how to act takes place within the private individual (that is, between the individual and his God), since there are no fixed objective rules to guide him or her. Fox also asks how is it even possible to establish a community not based on fixed rules, where each member must make his or her moral decisions according to what he or she believes the divine address to be.

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240 Ibid., 151–170.
241 This problem has been significant also in the Israeli context. The insight contained in Fox’s criticism would pertain to radical religious Palestinian terrorists, who claim that they commit their attacks in the name of God. It would also help us to account for the several events where radical religious Jews have committed terrorist attacks on religious motivations, such as the massacre in the Cave of the Patriarchs in 1994, and the murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. For a discussion of the latter events, see Ehud Sprinzak, “Israel’s Radical Right and the Countdown to the Rabin Assassination,” in The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, ed. Yoram Peri (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 96–128.
In his response to Fox, first, Buber agreed that he does not present any system of ethics, but claimed that he does not reject the possibility that people can behave morally even if they are not connected with God. He states that “the ethical deed is also accessible to the autonomy understood to be godless.”\footnote{242 Buber, “Replies to My Critics,” 719.} He also explained that he never rejected the validity of general rules such as the command to “Honor thy father and thy mother.”\footnote{243 Ibid., 720.} This explanation is connected with Buber’s general principle, noted at the beginning of the chapter, that the necessity and importance of the I-It relationship should be acknowledged.

In his reply Buber also rejects the idea that he supports radical individualism. Buber also rejects Fox’s claim that, in his account, moral decisions are made by individuals, because, he states, the individual “must understand himself as standing every moment under the judgment of God.”\footnote{244 Ibid., 719.} But there are problems with Buber’s response. Fox did not accuse Buber of supporting radical individualism in principle or as an ideology, but merely claimed that Buber did not present objective ethical criteria to assess if the action one takes is ethically valid. In other words, one might say that according to Buber’s logic there would be no way to prevent a criminal, who is mistakenly but genuinely convinced that he follows the voice of God, from committing crimes.

Buber tries to provide a clear answer to this problem as follows:

This hypothetical instance is absurd, for then it would be a madman that one was talking of, who indeed might hold himself to be God? A man who is not mad can only believe that he is following the voice of God if he acts with his whole soul, i.e., if out of its corners no demonic whisper penetrates to his open ears. As I say ever again, however, one cannot do evil with the whole soul, i.e., one can only do
it through holding down forcibly the forces striving against it – they are not to be stifled.\textsuperscript{245}

Interestingly, then, the idea is that one acting with “one’s whole being” serves to promote positive moral behaviour, rather than being an obstacle to it. From a critical perspective, however, this reply does not solve the problems stated above. The notion that “a person cannot do evil with his whole soul” is vague, and may appeal only to the person who have already accepted Buber’s idea of connectedness. Buber’s response does not solve the potential difference between an individual’s subjective conviction that he or she is doing the right deed, and the objective moral validity of a person’s actions. Buber’s denial that such a gap could exist seems unsatisfactory. And the problem becomes more acute given that the language of “engagement with one’s entire being” could well lend itself to the psychological mechanisms of fanaticism.

Buber’s reply pertains to the issue of exclusion and inclusion. As noted, Buber considers the person who is convinced that he hears the voice of God, but does wrong, to be not only a criminal, but also a madman. Such an individual is therefore to be excluded from the bounds of normative reasoning about morality or ethics. But one could respond that by dismissing it as abnormal, Buber did not really grapple constructively with the possibility that negative ethical behaviour could stem from genuine subjective convictions.\textsuperscript{246} This may

\textsuperscript{245} Ibid., 720.

\textsuperscript{246} Buber’s reaction to the Nazis after the Holocaust may be relevant here. In a speech he made in Germany in 1953, Buber said of those Nazis who took part in the murder of the Jews: “I, who am one of those who remained alive, have only in a formal sense a common humanity with those who took part in this action. They have so radically removed themselves from the human sphere, so transposed themselves into a sphere of monstrous inhumanity inaccessible to my conception, that not even hatred, much less an overcoming of hatred, was able to arise in me.” (Malcolm Diamond, \textit{Martin Buber, Jewish Existentialist} [New York: Oxford University Press, 1960], 146). It is of course very difficult to wrong Buber, or any other decent person, for reacting in such a way towards those who committed the Nazi horrors. Yet, from a critical point of view, it is worth asking whether deeming those who commit extreme evil to have left the sphere of humanity is an appropriate or effective way to deal with evil. One may say that precisely because evil must be fought against, it
also be connected to the idea that Buber focused too much on what he understood to be the existential condition of human beings (that is, on how close they are to engaging in genuine dialogue) rather than to their actions in themselves, as is common in the modern view.

Another ethical consideration in Buber’s thought, apart from the idea that dialogue itself confirms the existence and needs of the interlocutors, is his idea that the unity that stands at the basis of reality, and which one joins by participating in dialogue, is necessarily just and moral. According to Buber, sincere I-You dialogues, of necessity, lead toward peace, harmony and justice, and every such dialogue contributes to the overall direction of the world toward a just and moral unity. Conversely, to commit injustice would mean turning away from the unity and harmony that stand at the basis of the reality we share.

The idea that loneliness and alienation could lead to crime and injustice is of course not new, and has been discussed by many. Buber, however, focuses on an existential understanding of such phenomena, in addition to the psychological or sociological understanding. The temptation to do wrong stems not only from loneliness or the lack of moral supervision by others, but, more so, from failing to participate in genuine dialogue and, therewith, the cosmic harmony of reality. The solution would therefore be to engage in a genuine dialogue, and thus join the trajectory leading to justice and harmony.

Buber’s understanding that genuine dialogue is inherently moral and just is connected to his account of evil, which is very different from the rational-modern (as well as the Camusian) one. For Buber, good and evil are not two opposite alternatives. Rather, to do

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247 Camus’ *Caligula*, also tells the story of a lonely, alienated king who engages in unrestrained murder. *The Outsider* presents another such discussion.

good is moving towards entering into dialogue with others, especially with the eternal You, participation in which would naturally lead one to the right way; whereas evil is nothing but the confusion one experiences when he does not respond appropriately to the call for dialogue, and thus lose his or her direction.\textsuperscript{249} Evil stems from indecision and confusion as to following the path of dialogue, rather than from a decision to commit injustice. Given this a point of view, it is not difficult to understand Buber’s rejection of the ethical system based on the rights of independent individuals, for the boundaries that would protect people from one another are not needed if one perceives reality to be a fundamentally unified, moral field. Such an understanding would seem to stand behind Buber’s claim that a person cannot do wrong with his entire being.\textsuperscript{250} Indeed, Buber connects wrongdoing with the I-It mode of relationality, precisely because in that mode people distance themselves from each other, and relate only to parts of each other, rather than to each other’s entire being. For this reason, engaging in dialogue “with one’s entire soul” cannot lead to confusion or fanatical admiration, as a critiques from a modern perspective would charge, but implies a form of ethics that would restrain one from doing wrong.

Buber’s ethical discussion is strongly connected with the Hasidic one, which he admired and discussed in his writings. According to the Hasidic view, evil does not exist in itself, but as a malleable form that can be corrected through connecting to the unity and harmony that already exist in the world.\textsuperscript{251} As such, good and evil – like the holy and

\textsuperscript{249} Bergman, “Ha-Hashiva Ha-Du Sichit Shel M. Buber [M. Buber’s Dialogical Thought],” 205; Buber, \textit{Pnei Adam, Behinot Bantropologia Filosofit.}, 339.

\textsuperscript{250} Buber, \textit{Pnei Adam, Behinot Bantropologia Filosofit.}, 366.

\textsuperscript{251} We may note that this view stands in tension with the thought of Freud, who discussed the different psychological mechanisms are used to restrain the destructive human urges. It should be noted that Buber, who had some correspondence with Freud, disagreed with Freud’s scientific approach to human psychology. Moreover, Buber rejected the psychological methods that focus on removing the sense of guilt that people feel, and called instead for genuine acknowledgment of one’s wrongdoings (Ibid., 361).
mundane – are not just opposites, but exist within a “unity of opposites,” and are similar to an energy that can be channelled in one direction or another. By turning one’s energy to engaging in good deeds, care, and compassion one could transform negative urges into positive ones. Hate could be turned into love and animosity into friendship. In the fundamental image of Hasidism, it is possible and necessary to find and foster the divine spark that exists even in the darkest mundane realm. Buber holds a similar positive view of reality, where the commission of injustice actually signifies the disruption world order, which is fundamentally good. Again, Buber reminded his audience that the moral anchor already exists – outside as well as inside the individual soul – and all that one needs to do in order to join it is to open one’s heart to genuine dialogue with the other.252

The account of dialogue as leading to justice and harmony shows how far it is from nihilism. Rather than a call for people to do as they wish by following their passions and ignoring moral imperatives, Buber claims that it is dialogue itself that directs – and, as a consequence, restricts – human behaviour. This is precisely the sense in which Buber can be understood to have presented an ethical system based on relationship and dialogue rather than on fixed rules.

It should also be noted that Buber’s call for spontaneous dialogue, not limited by fixed rules and regulations, should not be confused with total unrestrained anarchy, because it is not necessarily egalitarian. Indeed, in his discussion of education, Buber claimed that

252 The idea that dialogue and sharing opinions could lead to a correct decision in the moral and political sphere is, of course, not Buber’s alone. John Stuart Mill argued that a discussion bringing together many different opinions would lead to better decision-making. The difference between Mill and Buber, however, is clear: whereas Mill called for a rational decision-making process, Buber’s dialogical mode of relationality is existential and connected to all aspects of life.
freedom might be the starting point for education, but should not be its aim.\textsuperscript{253} The aim of the educator is to direct the student, through personal connection and dialogue, in order to make the right choices among the many that are available.\textsuperscript{254}

For Buber, there is no contradiction between the life based on dialogue, and the obligation to behave responsibly. Each encounter calls for the people involved to be responsive – and responsible – to each other. This is another reason for which formal rules, regulation, and fixed ethical principles are not needed.

[A] situation of which we have become aware is never finished with, but we subdue it into the substance of lived life. Only then, true to the moment, do we experience a life that is something other than a sum of moments. We respond to the moment, but at the same time we respond on its behalf, we answer for it. A dog has looked at you, you answer for its glance, a child has clutched your hand, you answer for its touch, a host of men moves about you, you answer for their need.\textsuperscript{255}

Precisely because reality is comprised of a flow of calls and responses, as distinct from fixed situations, ethical responses that are based on responding to the moment would be more adequate and effective.\textsuperscript{256}

In this way, Buber tried to solve the problem – one that would become even more acute with the development of postmodern thought – of the tension between a view of the reality as a flux of ever-changing situations and the need to uphold moral and ethical behaviour. Buber

\textsuperscript{253} Bergman, “Ha-Hashiva Ha-Du Sichit Shel M. Buber [M. Buber’s Dialogical Thought],” 244.
\textsuperscript{254} Ibid., 245. The need to maintain certain boundaries and distance in the relationship is important, according to Buber, also in relationships that are aimed to provide spiritual and psychological healing. “Healing, like education, requires that one lives in confrontation and is yet removed. The most striking example of the normative limits of mutuality could probably be found in the work of those charged with the spiritual well-being of their congregation: here any attempt at embracing from the other side would violate the consecrated authenticity of the mission” (Buber, \textit{I and Thou}, 179. See also Woocher, “Martin Buber and Albert Camus,” 38-39).
\textsuperscript{255} Buber, “Dialogue,” 35.
\textsuperscript{256} “The idea of responsibility is to be brought back from the province of specialized ethics, of an ‘ought’ that swings free in the air, into that of lived life. Genuine responsibility exists only where there is real responding.” (Ibid., 33–34).
accepts the idea that the world is based on ever-changing situations, that people should live in the moment, so as to engage in momentary encounters as much as they are able. But, at the same time, the encounter that one might open oneself to experiencing at every moment would also present an ethical demand towards the other with whom one would come into contact. Moreover, the different moments are not totally separated from each other, for all such moments of entering into dialogue share the same “meta-narrative” of Buber’s dialogical relationality (also manifested in the dialogue with the eternal You), which provides existential and moral direction to the flux.

Buber’s thought might promise extreme freedom (from the I-It world), but at the same time it might call for extreme responsibility and obligation, and in this sense it is not open-ended, but actually restrictive. As many collectivistic cultures show, moral guidance based on relationship and social expectations can often be more effective than one that is based on fixed and formal rules and regulations. Relationship creates a sense of obligation, responsibility, and commitment to others, rather than obedience to impersonal laws that one might feel less apprehensive about breaking. On the other hand, an ethical system that relies too much on relationship might aim to control people’s lives in their entireties, rather than to set up an ethical framework within which one is free to do as one likes.

257 “Of course, whoever steps before the countenance has soared way beyond duty and obligation – but not because he has moved away from the world; rather because he has come truly close to it. Duties and obligations one has only toward the stranger: toward one’s intimates one is kind and loving. When a man steps before the countenance… He can say You in one word to the being of all beings… He is not rid of responsibility: for the pains of the finite version that explores effects he has exchanged the momentum of the infinite kind, the power of loving responsibility offer the whole unexplorable course of the world, the deep inclusion in the world before the countenance of God. ethical judgement, to be sure, he has left behind forever: “evil” men are for him merely those commended to him for a deeper responsibility, those more in need of love; but decisions he must continue to make in the depth of spontaneity unto death – calmly, deciding ever again in favor of right action” (Buber, I and Thou, 156–157).
Buber’s strong emphasis on the dialogical nature of the world, which is also moral, is connected, of course, to his concept of God. As mentioned, for Buber all particular dialogues accumulate to the major dialogue between God – the eternal You – and His creation. This dialogue that stands at the basis of creation is also moral because God can never be reduced to an I-It mode of relationality. The dialogue with God, who stands beyond the limits of time and space, enables to function properly within the boundaries of time and space.

As noted, as distinct from the common view in Judaism and other monotheistic religions, for Buber, God is dialogical rather than commanding. He is the ultimate moral guide because He is the ultimate aim and the basis for the harmony, natural and moral, that exists in the world. For Buber, to follow the right moral path does not only mean obedience to a command from a metaphysical, divine source. Buber argues that the moral compass that people must follow stands at the most basic foundation of reality. One’s duty is therefore to constantly reveal this dialogue and put it into practice.\(^{258}\)

Moreover, alongside God’s importance as the centre and the direction of all dialogue, Buber also explained that a human-historical centre is needed – a “living centre,” such as the Hasidic Tzadik, around whom the community is created, in order to facilitate dialogue among the members of the community and with God.\(^{259}\) Indeed, the “living centre” serves as an important conceptual means to overcome the problem of anarchy and the endless flux of potential relationships, described above.

Buber’s understanding of God plays a major role in his response to the claim raised above, that entering into an I-You mode of relationality, and so identifying with the other,

\(^{258}\) Martin Buber, “Hashe’ela shehayachid nishal [The question of the single one],” in *Besod Siach* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1959), 193.

\(^{259}\) Avnon, “The ‘Living Center’ of Martin Buber’s Political Theory.”
may be an obstacle for criticizing the person (or people) with whom one is engaged. One might say that Buber puts too much emphasis on form – the need to be open to genuine dialogue – and does not pay enough attention to the content of the dialogue. Again, there may be a very strong sense of connectedness, care, genuine dialogue and solidarity among members of a criminal gang or a terrorist group. Buber’s response to such arguments could be found in an important article called “The Question of the Single One,” in which he insists that one’s relationship with others, especially one’s relations with his community, are conditioned on and directed by one’s relationship with the ultimate interlocutor – the eternal You. Rather than fixed religious rules, God should be the one to determine, at any given moment the extent to which one should continue to follow his or her group.\footnote{Buber, “Hashe’ela shehayachid nishal [The question of the single one].” 202.}

A person is responsible first of all to God, and one’s dialogue with God shows one the right way and helping lead the community toward the right moral direction. People have a religious duty to answer God’s moral demand, and the group should not prevent anyone from doing so.\footnote{Ibid., 192.}

The dialogue with God includes, by its very nature, an ethical dimension that should then be implemented in one’s relationship with his community.\footnote{For a discussion of the relationship between ethics and religion in different stages of Buber’s thought see Statman and Sagi, “Iyunim Be She’elat Hayachas Ben Dat ve-Musar Behaguto Shel Buber [Examination of the Relationship between Religion and Ethics in Buber’s Thought].”}

Indeed, Buber stresses the importance of the Biblical prophets, whose role was to criticize the kings according to the divine message.\footnote{Buber, Te ‘udah Ve-Yi’ud, 1984, 2:56.} The role of the prophets, according to Buber, is to translate the message from God into a human language. In fact, according to Buber one major problem of the modern world is that people have preferred to transfer their moral responsibility to leaders, mass movements, or political parties, and have thus betrayed their religious and moral
As mentioned, Buber himself provided a clear personal example of the kind of approach he called for when he criticized the attitudes of many Zionist leaders towards the Arabs in Palestine.

Buber’s argument in “The Question of the Single One” is probably the clearest manifestation of an ethics of connectedness, as distinct from one based on boundaries and formal regulations. The difference between this idea and the modern liberal view is clear. Ethics is not to be based solely on establishing boundaries that protect people from each other, since this would only perpetuate conflicts based on the different self-interests of each side. Instead, one should understand reality as grounded in connectedness, and aiming toward a single, coherent, and peaceful unity. The dialogue with God should direct, restrain, and correct one’s relationships with other people, including one’s closest friends. Since reality aims towards a single, unified whole, the concentric circles of connectedness, discussed above, do not only illustrate a an existential condition, they also mark the clear ethical imperative to be guided on the correct ethical path. Turning toward a dialogue with the eternal You, toward the compass that stands at the basis of reality – even if it leads one to disobey to the dictates of the group – means adjusting oneself to the moral character that stands at the basis of this unified reality. Thus, again, Buberian ethics is based on relationship and connectedness: instead of an ethical scheme based on ethical categories and fixed principles, Buber presents one that uses one relationship (the relationship with God) to restrain another (the relationship with one’s group), should it take a wrong moral turn.

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264 Buber, “Hashe’ela shehayachid nishal [The question of the single one],” 197.
265 It is also important to note the historical context in which Buber wrote this article. In 1936, Germans had been under the Nazis for three years. To have written an article calling for ethical conduct in the name of a higher connectedness with God, even where such conduct runs contrary to the norms and commands of society, was in itself an act of courage in that time and place.
266 Buber, Teʼudah Ve-Yiʻud, 1984, 2:103.
What Buber calls the dialogue with the eternal You is similar to a call to obey one’s consciousness instead of blindly following the norms of one’s group. Buber’s discussion in “The Question of the Single One” and in other writings reveals his concern for ethical considerations. However, at least from a modern secular perspective, it is questionable whether he offers an effective solution to the problem of ethical confusion. It may have been clear in a given context (such as for those who opposed the Nazis in 1936, when the article was written). However, Buber did not provide any clear and objective means to detect when a group decision is unethical or unjust, precisely because it is to be based on one’s intuition rather than on clear and objective guidelines. There is an interplay in Buber’s ethical discussion between a solid conviction in the existence of moral standards and guidance set by the eternal You, as well as the unity to which reality aspires, and a description of an arena that is devoid of fixed and formal ethical standards. One may claim that, despite his efforts, Buber did not effectively address the ethical problems.

Those who do not share Buber’s strong belief in the potential unity and harmony that would naturally lead to proper ethical conduct would see Buber’s thought as relying too much on spontaneous intuition as moral guidance, and thus displaying problematic anarchistic tendencies. On the other hand, Buber’s strong belief in the unity that exists beyond and contains all possible tensions, and his insistence that evil is largely a matter of deviation from the right path toward unity, might, in practice, lead to intolerance of different opinions – which are often needed in order to engage in constructive arguments. Such intolerance may be even more severe if it is based on spontaneous intuition and norms rather than on rules and regulations that could be debated, adjusted and changed. From this critical perspective, we can detect an interplay in Buber’s thought, between extreme anarchy and
extreme conservatism, and that it lacks the necessary tools that could balance and moderate them.

An example for the intolerance that might result from the wish for unity can be found in Buber’s writing on Zionism. Buber lamented the arrival of the Jewish refugees from Germany to Palestine in the 1930s, because, as he saw it, they were not devoted to the Zionist cause: that is, they did not try to establish a genuine dialogical community that would present a new model of a just community, but preferred to continue to live the familiar life they lived in Europe before arriving in Palestine. Buber used rather extreme words to express his disappointment in these people, claiming that many of them were “loose human matter without shape, which is very difficult to mould”; that “the wave [of immigrants] overflows and overcomes the selections.” And he called on the “authentic” Zionist pioneers who came to Palestine “to regain the authoritative status and action towards this unstable shell.”

Although these statements are rare and stand out in the context of Buber’s general call for dialogue and respect of each person’s uniqueness, that he made them – and that they are part of his Zionist thought – shows the slippery slope that can form in the midst of calls for unity and revolutionary change.

This is reflected in Buber’s discussion of the biblical concept of “El Kana” – “A jealous God” – which refers to the idea God command to the Israelites not follow any other

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267 Buber, Netivot Be-Utopyah (Paths in Utopia), 209.

It should be emphasized that despite this, Buber did not object to the arrival of the Jewish refugees from Germany. He himself was a refugee, and fully understood the necessity and importance of this immigration.

It should also be noted that the call to “transform” the Jewish refugees in particular, and the Jew of the diaspora in general, in order to create a “new Jew” was very dominant in the Zionist ideology during the first half of the 20th century. For a discussion about this see, for example, Oz Almog, The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Indeed, as will be discussed in the following chapter, Buber experienced a complicated relationship with mainstream secular Zionism: he rejected its call to establish a modern nation state, but did agree with some of its cultural elements.
god, and demands total devotion to Him. The complete connectedness and exclusive obedience to God may restrain and direct the connectedness that one has with other people, but when it comes to the relationship with God Himself, zealotry and complete dedication, even at the risk of death, is characterized in positive terms. In Buber’s words:

...the people feel already that a covenant with such a deity as this means no legal agreement, but a surrender to the divine power and grace.

...that element called YHVH’s “demonism,” the dread of which overcomes us whenever we read about YHVH meeting Moses, His chosen and sent one, and “seeking to kill him” ([Deuteronomy] 2,24)... the deity claims the chosen one or his dearest possession, falls upon him in order to set him free afterwards as a “blood bridegroom,” as a man betrothed and set apart for Him by his blood. This is the most ancient revelation of grace: the true grace is the grace of death, a gracing; man owes himself to the deity from the beginning.

Another example that comes to mind in this context is the story of the binding of Isaac. Indeed, an article from 1919, when Buber briefly mentions this story, he uses it as an example for the strong dedication to the covenant between God and man, and the mission to create a better reality: the story of the sacrifice reveals “that realization demands the ultimate stake and unconditional dedication.”

Buber does not criticize this story for being radical and, as many would say, immoral. From a Buberian perspective the presentation of God as jealous, and as demanding complete surrender as part of the covenant, is not problematic, since God cannot do wrong, but from a secular (and a Camusian) perspective, this is extremely problematic. Indeed, the word “Kana” has the same root in Hebrew for the modern word Kanaut – zealotry.

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Here we note again a point made earlier (and which Fox also mentioned): that Buber’s discussion does not provide for an effective mechanism to deter religious fundamentalists who genuinely believe that they follow God’s ways and commands when they commit terror and violence.

The problem becomes especially interesting given that even in the Bible God is not always presented as just. (Camus notes this when he states that “it is the God of the Old Testament who is primarily responsible for mobilizing the forces of rebellion.”271) This is evident in two examples: the story of Job and the story of Samuel and Agag. These examples indeed present a challenge for Buber, who relies on God of the Bible as the ultimate moral ethical guide. With regard to the story of Job, Buber claimed that the biblical story presents different attitudes to the question of why he suffers: the plots of God and of Satan against him; the view of Job’s friends that he must have sinned, since he received such punishment; or Job’s protest that his suffering is unjust. Yet, according to Buber, the most important explanation is that Job’s real frustration is less on account of the injustice done to him, and more because he is torn between his love for God and his need for justice. Rather than angry, Job felt frustrated, lonely and sad by the fact that God “hid his face” from him, and he kept trying to find the lost connection with God.

Now God draws near to him. No more does God hide Himself, only the storm cloud of his sublimity still shrouds Him, and Job’s eye “sees” Him ([Job] 42,5). The absolute power is for human personality’s sake become personality. God offers Himself to the sufferer who, in the depth of his despair, keeps to God with his refractory complaint; He offers Himself to him as an answer. …. It is not the revelation in general which is here decisive, but the particular revelation to the individual: the revelation as an answer to the

271 Camus, The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt, 32.
individual sufferer concerning the question of his sufferings, the self-limitation of God to a person, answering a person.\textsuperscript{272}

Buber, from the perspective of a believer, could offer such an interpretation.\textsuperscript{273} But a secular reader may view the story and Buber’s interpretation as an example for the common phenomenon where people keep seeking the love of the other who hurts them, instead of looking for the way to put an end to such injustice. Buber’s interpretation of the story itself also suggests that in some cases love overrules justice, and would thus point to the limits of his own account of ethics. Obedience to God may serve as a moral restraint that allows for dialogue and connection with other people, but it cannot allow for a rebellion against God, even when such rebellion seems morally justified.

Yet, Buber’s view of the story of Samuel and Agag, presents a different approach. The biblical story (Samuel 1, 15) tells that King Saul spared the life of Agag, the Amalekite king, despite the Prophet Samuel’s direction to kill him. Saul is punished for his disobedience and loses his crown, and Samuel kills Agag, who had been assured that his life was saved. In Buber’s discussion of the story of Agag, he describes how disturbing the story was for him when he read it as a boy:

How dreadful it had already been to me when I was boy to read this as the message of God…it horrified me to read or to remember how the heathen king went up to the prophet with the words on his lips, “surely the bitterness of death is past,” and was hewn to pieces by him. I said to my partner: “I have never been able to believe that this is a message of God. I do not believe it… I believe...that Samuel has misunderstood God”… Nothing can make me believe in a God who punishes Saul because he has not murdered his enemy.\textsuperscript{274}

\textsuperscript{272} Buber, \textit{The Prophetic Faith}, 195–196.
\textsuperscript{273} See also Ladd’s discussion of the subject, written from a Christian religious perspective (Ladd, “The Tragic Contradiction: Dynamics of a Theme in Buber and Camus,” 139–140).
In connection with his general framework, we could state that Buber was torn between his faith in God as provider of absolute moral guidance, on the one hand, and, on the other, what he saw as a clearly unjust and inhuman act of murder. The only way he could solve this dilemma was to declare – as he writes, with fear and trembling – that the prophet, and not God himself, was wrong.

**Camus’ Ethical Discussion**

Camus was concerned about problems of justice and morality from an early stage, as is evident from his activities as a journalist and political activist. His more methodical, philosophical discussion of ethics and morality, in relation to his understanding of the absurd, appear mainly at a later stage of his writings, and became the cornerstone of his discussion about the implications of the absurd and about human solidarity. Two related points should be discussed in this regard: firstly, Camus’ discussion about the problem of nihilism that results from the absurd and the effort to overcome it, and secondly, the importance of ethics as the basis for rebellion and ethical boundaries as a means to restrain it.

Questions regarding ethics and morality became especially significant when dealing with Camus’ thought about the absurd, since the absurd includes a problem of nihilism. In a world where it is impossible to find meaning, nothing matters, including moral questions. The traditional or conventional distinctions between good and bad, right and wrong, could become meaningless.\(^{275}\) Indeed, Camus’ major works regarding the absurd – *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Outsider* – may seem problematic in relation to matters of ethics. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus presents two ways to approach the absurd. The first is to gain as

\(^{275}\) For a discussion of authenticity, nihilism and ethics in Camus’ thought see also Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity*, 167–199.
many experiences in life as possible. As an example of this he points to Don Juan, who – aware that life is short and there is no intelligible aim to it or beyond it – tried to seduce as many women as possible, and did not feel guilty about doing so. For him, the quantity of relationships, rather than quality, was what mattered. For this reason, he did not feel guilty about his actions (he could thus be compared with Meursault in *The Outsider*). At most, he is willing to accept the consequences of his actions. Another example Camus provides in *The Myth of Sisyphus* is of stage acting, which for Camus symbolized the absurd: the sense that life, dramatic as it may be, is short and does not hold any intelligible meaning beyond itself.

Why should we be surprised to find a fleeting fame built upon the most ephemeral of creations? The actor has three hours to be Iago or Alceste, Phedre or Gloucester. In that short space of time he makes them come to life and die on fifty square yards of boards. Never has the absurd been so well illustrated or at such length.

The actor, similar to a traveler who experiences different places and moves on from one to the next, is aware of the fleeting nature of life, and has the opportunity to live the lives of many different characters on stage rather than living just his own. In the latter respect he may resemble Don Juan, in the focus on quantity rather than on quality, in order to make the most out of this short life.

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276 Although Buber did not mention Don Juan by name, he reflects on characters like him when he discusses the idea that Eros can be a monologue and not necessarily a dialogue: “There a lover stamps around and is in love only with his passion. There one is wearing his differentiated feelings like medal-ribbons. There one is enjoying the adventures of his own fascinating effect. There one is gazing enraptured at the spectacle of his own supposed surrender. There one is collecting excitement. There one is displaying his ‘power.’ There one is preening himself with borrowed vitality. There one is delighting to exist simultaneously as himself and as an idol very unlike himself. There one is warming himself at the blaze of what has fallen to his lot. There one is experimenting. And so on and on – all the manifold monologists with their mirrors, in the apartment of the most intimate dialogue!” (Buber, “Dialogue,” 49). Thus, as opposed to Camus, who (at this stage of his writing) saw Don Juan as a possible solution to the absurd, Buber viewed characters like Don Juan as part of the problem, and as a symbol I-It relationality.


278 Ibid., 58.
From an ethical point of view, this is a very problematic solution: Don Juan’s behaviour is not particularly noble or moral. And an actor does not make a moral distinction between the characters he plays: the heroes and villains are equal in their moral value from this perspective. Yet, it should be noted that Camus did not necessarily present these two examples as tools or means to cope with the absurd, or as providing serious models for moral or ethical behaviour. Rather, he presented them as examples of people who are aware of the absurd, and manage their life accordingly. Rather than interpersonal ethical values, the only real value that Camus discusses by way of these examples is loyalty to the truth by a refusal to deny the absurd.

The second way to cope with the absurd he presents is to find meaning in the absurd itself. As he famously puts it, “One must imagine Sisyphus happy.” In the absence of absolute external sources of meaning, it is the acknowledgement of the absurd, and the struggle to cope with it, that could provide meaning to people’s lives. Although this suggestion may not necessarily be immoral, it could be considered non-moral, in the sense that it deals with the individual’s way to cope with the absurd, and does not say much about interpersonal relationships that stand at the basis of any ethical discussion. Therefore, in itself, it cannot solve the problem of the ethical nihilism in the absurd.

Camus’ aim in *The Myth of Sisyphus* is to describe the existential condition of the absurd, and to suggest a way for the individual to cope with it, without escaping it by denial or suicide. But Camus did address himself directly to ethical questions in this essay, in his

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279 Ibid., 91.
280 See Sagi, *Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd*, 71–73. Sagi presents the view (with which he disagrees) that there are some values in accepting the absurd instead of denying it, those of honesty and integrity. Sagi claims, on the other hand, that in the Sisyphean world no values are possible, and notes that Camus himself declared that *The Myth of Sisyphus* ends in “scorched earth” with regards to ethical values.
introduction to the discussion about Don Juan and stage acting.\textsuperscript{281} It seems he did so precisely because he anticipated the ethical problems that this discussion involves, which stem from the challenge to find moral and ethical basis in a world that has no absolute final intelligible meaning. Camus argues that integrity has no need for rules. In other words, people do experience and follow some conscious, internal moral sentiments. But this actually leads to one of the major problems that those who are aware of the absurd face.

I start here from the principle of [the absurd man’s] innocence. That innocence is to be feared. “Everything is permitted,” exclaimed Ivan Karamazov. That, too, smacks of the absurd… I don’t know whether or not it has been sufficiently pointed out that it is not an outburst of relief or of joy, but rather a bitter acknowledgment of a fact. The certainty of a God giving a meaning to life far surpasses in attractiveness the ability to behave badly with impunity. The choice would not be hard to make. But there is no choice, and that is where the bitterness comes in. The absurd does not liberate; it binds. It does not authorize all actions. “Everything is permitted” does not mean that nothing is forbidden.\textsuperscript{282}

Precisely because people are innocent – in the sense that they wish to act morally – the fact that they cannot find intelligible absolute meaning and a moral code constitutes a large part of their crisis. They wish to find such absolute meaning, but there is no possibility for them to find one. This experience of nihilism is terrifying.

Camus did not provide a serious solution to this conflict between the human desire to do good and the fact that intelligible meaning is unavailable. At most, he claimed that “if all experiences are indifferent, that of duty is as legitimate as any other.”\textsuperscript{283} As such, he denies the conclusion that nihilism necessarily means doing wrong. But Camus did not prescribe a comprehensive solution to the problem, precisely because reality is based on an unsolvable

\textsuperscript{281} Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus,” 49–51.
\textsuperscript{282} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{283} Ibid.
absurd; the absurd, almost by definition, does not provide answers, only conflicts and dilemmas. Yet in Camus’ discussion there is room for human consciousness, not only the absence of absolute meaning. As we shall discuss later, the reliance on the inherent, intuitive wish for justice is an important element in Camus’ ethical understanding. And it shows, after all, that Camus did believe in some kind of inherent ethical foundation – that of human conscience.  

This question of nihilism becomes more acute in the novel *The Outsider*, where the realization and the sense of the absurd that Meursault, the protagonist, experiences are accompanied by acts that are clearly immoral – a murder of a person for no clear reason that stands at the centre of the novel as well as his willingness to assist a pimp who abuses a prostitute. Alongside these two instances, other elements in Meursault’s behaviour are considered immoral in conventional terms, although they may not be considered immoral in themselves – such as his failure to express any sadness at his mother’s funeral. In this sense, the novel presents two poles: Camus presents the hypocrisy of a society that is more upset by the fact that Meursault showed indifference to his mother’s death than by the murder he committed; on the one hand, and on the other hand Meursault’s own indifference to everything apart from his own life, to the point that he murders someone for no justified reason.
Indeed, as some scholars have noted, this short novel is confusing and disturbing precisely because it is possible to see Meursault both as a psychopath who is unaware of the suffering of people around him and as a hero who refuses to accept society’s false and artificial moral conventions and procedures because he is aware of a more authentic truth – that there is no comprehensible absolute meaning to the world, on which its moral values can stand. The novel ends with no solution to the question of whether Meursault is a hero or a criminal. The reader is left with a strong sense of aversion and horror at the senseless murder committed by Meursault, and at the calculated murder that the state is soon about to commit in executing Meursault.

*The Outsider* does not offer a solution to the problem of the absurd and nihilism. Camus does not explicitly condone nihilism in his book, but he does present it as a natural outcome of a bold and authentic understanding of reality. The novel closes as a “dead end,” and in paradox (and indeed, paradox is what stands at the basis of the absurd itself). That is, the reader intuits that one cannot do without ethics, but ethics is not based on an intelligible absolute source. The book points to the main problem that Camus would confront in his later writings: that in a meaningless world, there is no reason not to kill another person at random, and the only things that matter in such a world are immediate sensations and the wish to extend one’s own life (i.e., the only two things that Meursault cares about). If indeed the world has no intelligible meaning, nihilism makes perfect sense.

As distinct from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in *The Outsider* Camus does not offer any solution to the problem of the absurd, nor any constructive suggestions for coping with it. The reader is not counselled to “imagine Meursault happy,” and Meursault is not portrayed as a person who tries to accumulate as many experiences as possible (if anything, he is
portrayed as a grey and indifferent person, at least until the point of his passionate conversation with the priest at the novel’s end). Yet *The Outsider* does include a focus on the moral problem of nihilism that was not developed as much in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and points to how serious the problem of ethics and morality is.

Camus’ short discussion of ethics in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the senseless murder and indifference to evil in *The Outsider*, and, additionally, his play, *Caligula* – which describes the cruelty committed by the Roman emperor – reveal that Camus was aware of and concerned about the ethical implications of the absurd, even if he was not able to provide satisfactory solutions for these problems in his early writings.\(^{288}\) It would also be wrong to claim that Camus advocated nihilism in any way.\(^{289}\)

Yet the main question that he asked at this stage was, “Why not commit suicide?” given the absurd. The other question, “Why not murder?” was not raised in *Myth of Sisyphus*; and *The Outsider*, which describes a murder, did not provide serious ethical solutions. This question was raised by Camus in the play *Caligula* and mainly in Camus’ other philosophical book, *The Rebel*, where he discusses the “age of ideologies” – that of the Jacobins, the Bolshevik revolution and Stalinism, and the Nazis.\(^{290}\) Camus’ second stage, which begins in

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\(^{288}\) In this sense, the claim that Camus’ work had two distinct phases – one that deals with the absurd and its impact on the individual, and one that deals with ethics, politics and solidarity – is inaccurate.

\(^{289}\) The question of why not to commit murder in a nihilist world, where no value is superior to another, has been fundamental for those who have treated the problem of modern nihilism. It is prominent in works by Dostoevsky, who focused on this question in *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Crime and Punishment*. Indeed Camus discussed *The Brothers Karamazov* in *The Rebel*, and adapted Dostoyevsky’s novel *The Possessed* into a play.

\(^{290}\) “In the age of negation, it was of some avail to examine one’s position concerning suicide. In the age of ideologies, we must examine our position in relation to murder” (Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, 4).
The Rebel and his novels The Plague and The Fall,\textsuperscript{291} concerns questions of interpersonal ethics more, and tries to offer a clear solution to this problem.\textsuperscript{292}

Camus offered an answer to the question of why not to commit murder despite the absurd – an answer that is based on the absurd itself – without trying to escape it or deny its existence. In particular, Camus calls against killing for political or ideological reasons in modernity as carried out by certain revolutionary movements, such as the Jacobins, the Bolsheviks, and the Nazis. Camus saw this as a distorted effort to solve the absurd. Instead of accepting the absurd and human limitations as unavoidable, while trying to achieve the most within those limits, these movements tried to replace the previous existential and moral anchor of the divine order and the ancient regime, with a new coherent order based on overarching ideas such as reason, class, and race. The crimes they committed were fundamentally connected to a denial of the absurd and a futile and destructive effort to solve it.

Ethical concerns, therefore, stand at the basis of Camus’ thought. Camus had to point to the element that would not only show the existence of values in a world that seems

\textsuperscript{291} Sagi makes a distinction between Camus’ ideas in The Plague and in The Fall, which present what he called an “ethics of compassion,” based on immediate relations with concrete suffering; and The Rebel, based on “ethics of justice,” grappling with a more general, abstract and metaphysical call for solidarity and action. This may point to an important difference between Buber’s ethical thought and Camus’ ethical discussion in The Rebel. Indeed, Sagi claims that in The Rebel Camus goes beyond the dialogical relation, such as the one Buber presented. (Avi Sagi, “Alber Kami- Bein Etika Shel Hemla Le-Etika Shel Tsedek [Albert Camus: Between Ethics of Compassion and Ethics of Justice],” Alpayim 24 (2002): 20–27; see also Sagi, Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd, 159–172.

\textsuperscript{292} See Sagi, Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd, 107–116. Sagi explains that, despite the fact that both the Myth of Sisyphus and The Rebel deal with the problem of the absurd, the wish to rebel against it and to find meaning and order, there is a major difference and shift between the two books. The Rebel deals with solidarity, ethics, interpersonal relations, and active struggle against the absurd, while the Myth of Sisyphus deals with the way in which the individual tries to cope with the absurd by acknowledging its existence. Regarding Camus’ change from a discussion of the absurd to ethical discussions (as in The Rebel, The Plague and other writings), his critique of totalitarianism, and his development of an “ethics of limits” see also Ohana, Israele and Its Mediterranean Identity, 122–133.
meaningless, but also to make sure that the struggle to fulfill these values would not itself become nihilist, in the sense that it would become a single-minded, fanatical crusade.

It is possible to point to three related elements in Camus’ thought that restrain people from doing wrong, and thus solve the problem of moral nihilism. The first is the idea that an inherent urge for freedom, and against injustice, do exist. A related mechanism for restraint is the emotional aversion that people feel toward injustice. The second way in which we are to confront nihilism, according to Camus, is by demanding logical consistency: that is, by an awareness that the struggle for justice and the struggle against oppression would be self-defeating if the means to achieve them were itself to be destructive. Third, Camus places emphasis on the crucial place of non-social and non-political experiences and relations (by providing examples such as Tipasa, or the figure of his mother\textsuperscript{293}) – as markers of innocence, which help us see social and political action in their right proportions.

The first and most dominant ethical element in Camus’ thought, which he presents most of all in \textit{The Rebel}, is the idea that although there is no external absolute source of morality, one should pay attention to the inherent human urge for freedom and justice in order to rebel against oppression and injustice, and to channel frustration into an act of solidarity and mutual aid with all those who suffer and are trapped in the absurd. As such, the absurd itself becomes the source of ethics and morality.

Here it is important to note how, for Camus, ethics is based on boundaries. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Camus discusses how the slave becomes aware of his oppression, marks a line – a border – which the master should not cross, and thus makes

\textsuperscript{293} Ladd points to the figure of Rieux’s mother in \textit{The Plague} as a figure who helps him to fight the plague calmly and moderately, as opposed, for example, to Ahab’s role in \textit{Moby Dick} (Ladd, “The Tragic Contradiction: Dynamics of a Theme in Buber and Camus,” 187–188).
manifest his inherent need for justice and liberty. This line has also been drawn by man against God, or those who claim to represent him, during the modern secularization processes in the West. It can be drawn against misery, sickness, and the sort of death that is perceived as arbitrary, as Camus describes in *The Plague*.²⁹⁴ Or it can be a line drawn against social or political oppressors, such as the French revolutionaries, the Russians who rebelled against the Tsar, or the by French Resistance against the Nazi occupation, which Camus himself joined. In all of these cases, the individual or the members of the group find within themselves an urge for justice and freedom that they demand to have fulfilled.

In every act of rebellion, the rebel simultaneously experiences a feeling of revulsion at the infringement of his rights and a complete and spontaneous loyalty to certain aspects of himself…. up to this point he has at least remained silent and has abandoned himself to the form of despair in which a condition is accepted even though it is considered unjust… but from the moment that the rebel finds his voice – even though he says nothing but “no” – he begins to desire and to judge. The rebel, in the etymological sense, does a complete turnabout. He acted under the lash of his master’s whip. Suddenly he turns and faces him… Awareness, no matter how confused it may be, develops from every act of rebellion: the sudden, dazzling perception that there is something in man with which he can identify himself, even if only for a moment.²⁹⁵

Camus’ ideas about this subject reveal and reflect his secular and humanist view. It is secular because it rejects the existence of an absolute external source of morality. It is humanist because Camus locates the source of morality within the human soul, which includes inherent values of justice and freedom that are discovered and become manifest through the rebellion. Camus’ view of the absurd and the human inability to completely overcome it is balanced here with a positive and hopeful view of human existence – the belief that there is an inherent wish for justice.

²⁹⁴ This interpretation stands alongside *The Plague*, an allegory of the events following the Nazi occupation of France, and of the line that the Resistance in France drew in front of the Nazis.
The intuitive urge for justice and meaning often appears in Camus’ literary writings so as to evoke a strong emotional response.\(^{296}\) A clear example of this is the heartbreaking description of a little boy who struggles against disease and dies in pain in *The Plague*.\(^{297}\) The anger that arises from this description, the sense of injustice and helplessness of the child and of his doctors, which both the protagonists and the readers feel, demonstrate Camus’ deep faith that there is an inherent urge for justice that stands beyond any nihilistic idea. The emphasis on emotional reaction in the reader is also evident in Camus’ non-literary essays. A clear example of this is in Camus’ repeated discussion of capital punishment.\(^{298}\) Camus conveyed his message in his influential essay, “Reflections on the Guillotine,” not only by presenting a coherent rational argument against the death penalty, but also in his horrific description of the agony of the condemned awaiting his execution.

Paradoxically, it is the experience of absurd itself, with the accompanying sense of confusion and distress, that causes people to express their intuitive kindness. In a world without anchors to hold on to, people are required to find the resources to struggle against injustice, as well as kindness, and moral guidance within themselves.

This rejection of nihilism by reference to an intuitive sense of justice is also reflected in the fundamental distinction that Camus makes in *The Rebel*,\(^{299}\) between “rebellion” and “revolution.” Rebellion, for Camus, is the positive and justified struggle against oppression, by drawing a line that the oppressor should not cross (in the context, Camus provides the example of trade unions). Rebellion follows a bottom-up movement. The revolutions of the

\(^{296}\) This is significant because, as mentioned, Buber made an important distinction between the need for dialogue and sentiments. For Buber, the I-You mode of relationality is intuitive, and stems from a strong inherent need. Emotions on the other hand are changing and often do not last long.

\(^{297}\) Camus, *The Plague*, 175–177.

\(^{298}\) Simpson, “Camus, Albert.”

20th century, on the other hand, realized themselves as top to bottom movements, in that they tried to mould reality according to abstract ideas and used terror and violence for that purpose.

Camus’ main alternative to the European model was Mediterranean culture, which for him included both the ancient Greek and contemporary Algerian cultures. For him, the Mediterranean culture emphasized the importance of the common sense and simplicity that lead to moderation. Despite that inability to completely solve the absurd, and despite the complexity of the human soul, which can be cruel, human beings do have within themselves the tools to discover the inherent urge for justice. And that urge can be realized in the right circumstance, and must always serve as a guide, thus providing a solution to nihilism. In sum, relying on their moral intuitions could, at least to some extent, save human beings from deteriorating into nihilism.

Camus’ second approach to the problem of nihilism is more logical than emotional or intuitive, and is based on a demand for consistency in the struggle against oppression and the absurd. It is Camus’ call to restrain and to put limits on rebellion itself, to prevent it from deteriorating into a fanatical, destructive force. Camus’ argument entails using the struggle against the absurd as a means to restrain this very struggle. First, since the aim of the rebellion against the absurd is to overcome death and oppression, a rebellion that becomes a

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301 It should be noted that these reflections stand in tension with Camus’ comments that he does not think that man is by nature a social animal (Camus, “Reflections on the Guillotine,” 178), and his brief comment about the need for coercion, in The First Man: “Men pretend to abide by what is right and never yield except to force” (Camus, The First Man, 217).

302 See Sagi, Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd, 128–130. For a recent discussion about Camus’ call to restrain violence during political struggles see Ohana, Ha-Kavul, He-‘akud Yeha-Tsaluv: Alber Kami Ve-Gvulot Ha-Alimut [Bound, Sacrificed and Crucified: Albert Camus and the Limits of Violence].
new form of murder and oppression itself is self-defeating, and contradicts the entire enterprise. It contributes to oppression instead of trying to overcome it. It is logically impossible to be loyal to the struggle against oppression if the struggle itself becomes oppressive and is accompanied by terror and death. At most, murder as part of the rebellion against oppression is permitted only as an exception to the general rule.

Logically, one should reply that murder and rebellion are contradictory. If a single master should, in fact, be killed, the rebel, in a certain way, is no longer justified in using the term *community of men* from which he derived his justification... on the level of history, as in individual life, murder is thus a desperate exception or it is nothing... it is an exception and therefore it can be neither utilitarian nor systematic as the purely historical attitude would have it.\(^303\)

Indeed, Camus spoke positively about the Russian anarchists who were willing to kill the Tsar only if they would lose their own lives for their actions, in contrast to the mass and systematic oppression and murder that followed the French and Bolshevik revolutions (which held what Camus called a “purely historical attitude”).\(^304\)

A second, related point is that the absurd, according to Camus, is ongoing and can never be completely solved. Therefore any effort to completely solve the absurd is doomed to fail, and will cause more harm than benefit. Mankind must always be aware of its own limitations, of the inherent inability to solve all the paradoxes in the world. The destructive, self-defeating effort to completely overcome the absurd is the mistake of those who commit suicide (and, indeed, the aim of *The Myth of Sisyphus* is to explain why suicide is not a solution to the absurd). It is also the mistake of those who try to create a man-made absolute utopia that would lead to absolute happiness and “redemption,” and are willing to use terror


\(^{304}\) Woocher notes that Camus did not actually want every violent rebel to surrender himself for execution (he did not demand this, for example, from his friends in the French Resistance) but to remind his readers that there should be limits placed on rebellion (Woocher, “Martin Buber and Albert Camus,” 269).
and murder in order to achieve this – such as the Jacobins, who tried to create a political utopia based on the ideas of the Enlightenment; the Bolsheviks, who tried to create a social economic utopia; and the Nazis, who tried to sanctify the ideology of race.\textsuperscript{305}

For Camus, therefore, the deficiencies of life in the mundane world, the awareness and the limitation of human capabilities, and the acknowledgement of the absurd, lead to the creation of the boundaries that limit and restrain human action. The duty of human beings is to struggle and rebel against the absurd as much as they can, and at the same time to acknowledge the fact that they will never be able to completely achieve their goal. Any deviation from this is not only a betrayal of the truth, but may also lead to tragedy and destruction.

Therefore, and maybe paradoxically, the rebellion against the absurd is presented by Camus as the new moral anchor, to replace the old, traditional one.\textsuperscript{306} The absurd against which people rebel serves, in fact, as the only absolute anchor in the absence of a positive one. If the traditional (or the Buberian) metaphysical anchor is gone, in the void that is left, the constant search for unity and justice, becomes the new anchor.

Camus’ approach would be rejected by both the traditional view that cannot accept the absence of God or the rebellion against Him,\textsuperscript{307} and by certain moderns who believe in progress and the ability of human history to achieve a utopia. This may place his thought into an unusual position in the opposition between tradition and modernity. However, this

\textsuperscript{305} Camus sees Hitler as the worst of these examples, not only because of the scale of his murderous actions, but also because he represents the most extreme and total form of nihilism. He claims that a person who commits suicide at least holds the value of not destroying others. Hitler, on the other hand, dragged the entire world to death with him. (Camus, \textit{The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt}, 7).

\textsuperscript{306} See Sagi, \textit{Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd}, 128–130.

\textsuperscript{307}See for example Ladd, “The Tragic Contradiction: Dynamics of a Theme in Buber and Camus.”
position makes sense if we accept Camus’ idea that both tradition and the modern movements that he criticized are based on the same false principle – i.e., that it is possible to overcome the absurd completely and achieve complete “redemption.” It is this fallacy that often leads people to use violence and terror (or at least to keep silent about these) in order to achieve their hopes for secular or religious redemption. Murder can stem both from nihilism that leads to a lack of meaning (as in the case of Meursault in *The Outsider*) or from a “nihilist revolution” that ignores basic moral values in the hopes of achieving an ultimate political-utopian goal.

It seems that Camus’ rejection of nihilism followed from his constant effort to discuss reality as accurately as possible, including all its complexity, without an effort to present a better – or a worse – world than what really is, precisely because the mundane, human world is very rich and limited. As much as it is important to acknowledge and face the cruelty that exists in the world, or the indifference that many people sometimes feel towards each other (as described in *The Plague*), it is also important to acknowledge the inherent human need for justice and the solidarity that may result from this its pursuit. This point will be significant in the comparison with Buber, who often presented a more idealistic view of reality.

In connection with Camus’ account of ethical restraint, which is somewhat related to the intuitive one discussed above, is the ethical importance of the “Buberian” elements of connectedness that we discussed in the chapter three. These elements in Camus’ thought serve as reference points for ethical and political considerations. The three most salient examples are Camus’ reference to his mother in the context of the conflict in Algeria; in the
short story *The Guest*;\(^{308}\) and in his essay “Return to Tipasa” (mentioned earlier in a different context).

The image of Camus’ mother played a role in his literary, philosophical and political thought, and appeared in many of his writings, including *The Plague*, and of course in his semi-autobiography, *The First Man*. Camus’ depiction of his mother demonstrates both the importance of connectedness and the need to restrain political action. Camus’ mother, whom he loved very much, could hardly function. She was a weak woman, partially deaf, and had a severe speech impediment. She worked as a cleaning lady, and spent most of her free time sitting idly at home on the balcony (the house was run mostly by Camus’ assertive grandmother, for whom Camus had little affection). Camus’ references to his mother in his writings go beyond the common love or gratitude that a person feels toward his parents. For Camus, his mother was a symbol of compassion and of innocence that should not be affected by political events, and of what is in fact superior in value to political ends.\(^{309}\) Home and the sense of belonging – in the most intimate and personal ways – serve as reference points when engaging in public, social and political affairs. Camus’ references to his mother in his writings suggest an effort to separate the public realm from the private one, and a constant reminder that the private sphere – the connection one has with his relatives and friends – should not be sacrificed for political ends.

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\(^{309}\) In a note for his semi-autobiography, *The First Man*, Camus states: “I want to write the story of a pair joined by the same blood and every kind of difference. She similar to the best this world had, and he quietly abominable. She thrown into all the follies of our time; she passing through the same history as if it were that of any time. She silent most of the time, with only a few words at her disposal to express herself; he constantly talking and unable to find it thousands of words what she could say with a single one of her silences…Mother and son.” (Camus, *The First Man*, 310.)
The best example of this is Camus’ famous statement in 1957, following a question about his position regarding the war in Algeria, “I believe in justice, but the safety of my mother comes first”\textsuperscript{310}. In this statement, which attracted much criticism, Camus referred to the illegitimacy of the violence and terror then being used by the FLN against innocent civilians in their struggle. (It is safe to claim that he did not mean that personal connections should take precedence over justice in general, or should lead to injustice.) Yet this statement shows one of Camus’ most important messages – that political actions should be restrained by an awareness of the importance of human connection\textsuperscript{311}.

Camus’ important short story, \textit{The Guest}, tells the story of a French-Algerian teacher who is asked by the local policeman to keep an Arab prisoner at his home overnight and to bring him to the police station the next day. The story touches on many different aspects of colonial relations. It is not clear who is the guest – the prisoner in the teacher’s house, or the colonial teacher who lives in the prisoner’s native country; indeed, the French word \textit{l’hôte} could mean both host and guest. However, the most important element in the story is the tension between the personal and the political: between the duty of the teacher as a law abiding citizen to follow orders, and the human intimacy and concern he develops with the prisoner during his stay, despite their difficulties in communicating. In a way that is similar to Buber’s ideas, we learn that intuitive human connectedness, rather than formal regulations, should determine the appropriate action.


\textsuperscript{311} Dennis Sharvit has pointed out that this statement reflects Camus’ refusal to dismiss view the conflict in Algeria as a conflict between two sides, in which one is completely good and the other is completely evil (Dennis Sharvit, “Emdat Kami Be-Milchemet Algeria Ke-Hachra’a Musarit [Camus’ Position Regarding the War in Algeria as a Moral Decision]”, “Alber Kami Mul Ha-Historia [Albert Camus in Relation to History]” Conference, The Open University of Israel, June 28, 2010).
The other example is the short essay *Return to Tipasa*, which we discussed earlier. Camus describes there a visit he made after World War II to Tipasa, an archeological site in Algeria that he used to visit in his youth. In this lyrical text, Camus claims that love – not a struggle for justice in itself – should be the aim, and one must be reminded of that in order to prevent oneself from being drawn into destructive struggles. Tipasa is an isolated island of innocence and sanity in a world that is inherently unjust and often senseless, and precisely because of this, it should be used as a point of reference to guide human beings in their actions, and prevent them from losing themselves in struggle and taking the wrong moral path. Thus Camus was unwilling to support the terror of the FLN because this movement overlooked this crucial reference point, no matter how just the Algerian struggle for their rights might otherwise have been. Tipasa, for Camus, was a place to return to after a just struggle against Nazi evil and the horrors of that war to understand what he fought for: not only freedom and justice, but also to return to (what at least used to be) a place of harmony, connectedness, and innocence, as opposed to the senseless murderous world in Europe, that still echoed in his mind. It is this kind of reminder that provides a moral and political compass for and during the struggle for justice, helping one to avoid the despair of nihilism.  

312 In Camus’ words: “The long fight for justice exhausts the love that nevertheless gave birth to it. In the clamor in which we live, love is impossible and justice does not suffice. This is why Europe hates daylight and is only able to set injustice up against injustice. But in order to keep justice from shriveling up like a beautiful orange fruit containing nothing but a bitter, dry pulp, I discovered once more at Tipasa that one must keep intact in oneself a freshness, a cool wellspring of joy, love the day that escapes injustice, and return to combat having won that light. Here I recaptured the former beauty, a young sky, and I measured my luck, realizing at last that in the worst years of our madness the memory of that sky had never left me. This was what in the end had kept me from despairing […] In the middle of winter I at last discovered that there was in me an invincible summer. I have again left Tipasa; I have returned to Europe and its struggles. But the memory of that day still uplifts me and helps me to welcome equally the delights and what crushes.” (Camus, “Return to Tipasa,” 144.)
Camus’ ethical discussion, as we noted, reveals that he was not a pacifist. The crucial principle for him was that restraints and limitations are needed, but he did call for a constant struggle against injustice.\textsuperscript{313} It is restraint and defiance, rather than unity and connectedness, that stands at the basis of his thought. Indeed, Camus was willing to tolerate, to some extent, some forms of violence. The first kind of violence he was willing to tolerate is that committed by those who use it in order to rebel against oppression, but who also did all they could to avoid it and to restrain it. For they would have understood that by committing violence they would work against their own aim: to put an end to oppression, violence, and injustice. Camus’ two examples of such groups, which we will discuss later on, are the Russian anarchists at the turn of the 20th century who, according to Camus, were willing to kill the Tsar only if they would be executed for so doing; and by using this concept he tried to find a balance between the need to take life and acknowledging the sanctity of life itself. The second example is the French Resistance during World War II, in which Camus took an active part. He found the violence committed by the Resistance justified, but only as an exception in severe situations, and not as a rule.

The second, very different, form of violence that Camus tolerated, to some extent, was in the spontaneous popular street fights that he witnessed in Algeria.\textsuperscript{314} In his early writings, Camus presented a somewhat romantic view of these conflicts. For him, they represented an authentic, spontaneous urge for justice between two given people, and in this sense, they were relatively harmless. This view is connected to Camus’ general support of the

\textsuperscript{313} For this reason, I disagree somewhat with Woocher’s view that emphasizes the similarity between Camus’ and Buber’ calls for dialogue. It is correct that both thinkers called for political dialogue and rejected zero-sum game approach to politics, but the focus on dialogue may underestimate the fact that Camus called first and foremost for rebellion and struggle against injustice. For Camus, this struggle is important in itself and also in order to achieve meaning in a meaningless world.

\textsuperscript{314} Camus, \textit{Lyrical and Critical}, 71.
“Mediterranean culture” and its basis (as he saw it) on simple common sense rather than the intellectual (and destructive) ideological abstraction of modern Europe.

This last point is also expressed in the distinction Camus makes at the very beginning of *The Rebel* between “crimes of passion” and “crimes of logic.”

Heathcliff, in Wuthering Heights, would kill everybody on earth in order to possess Cathy, but it would never occur to him to say that murder is reasonable or theoretically defensible. He would commit it, and there his convictions end. This implies the power of love, and also strength of character. Since intense love is rare, murder remains an exception and preserves its aspect of infraction. But as soon as a man, through lack of character, takes refuge in doctrine, as soon as crime reasons about itself, it multiplies like reason itself and assumes all aspects of the syllogism. Once crime was as solitary as a cry of protest; now it is as universal as science. Yesterday it was put on trial; today it determines the law.  

“Crimes of passion” are acts of violence that are committed by following an intense and uncalculated emotional reaction, such as jealousy, hate, or love. Camus did not support such violence, but claimed that its harm is relatively limited, since such crimes are, and are perceived as deviations from normative behaviour. Crimes of logic, on the other hand, take place as part of a calculated philosophy or ideology. Such have been the crimes committed by totalitarian regimes since the French revolution, which killed millions in order to promote their ideological aims. These crimes were not merely accidents or deviations from the right path, but were planned and carried out as part of the given ideology itself, by men who often tried to justify their actions in “objective” “scientific” terms. Those who committed these crimes did not have any remorse or guilt, since they understood these crimes to be in the interests of civilization; that is, to be normal, rather than exceptional. For this reason that

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316 This can be compared to Buber’s claim, mentioned in footnote 98, that in pre-modern times, even violence was more genuine and authentic.
such crimes are so dangerous. In sum, although Camus did not support violence or crimes of passion, his main concern was about those crimes of logic in which people lost sight of the most basic values of justice and human dignity.

Camus’ discussion of ethics and violence could be challenged from several positions. The first is that Camus did not provide a clear and decisive indication of when violence is legitimate and when it is not – apart from common sense, which is subjective. Camus was strongly in favor of the struggle against the Nazi occupation in France, but in other cases, such as the anarchist struggle against the Tsar, or in the story The Guest, he prefers to point to unsolvable dilemmas rather than give a clear indication as to what is right and what is wrong to do. As such, Camus prefers the position of a reflective author who contemplates dilemmas over the leader or the politician who must come to a decision. His main contribution is that of criticizing existing injustices and problems rather than suggesting of how to solve them.

A second, related, criticism against Camus, is that he does not present conceptual tools to fight effectively against injustice. It is impossible to carry out an efficient struggle against forces that must be defeated, if one constantly thinks about the limitations and the different human aspects of the enemy. As almost every conflict shows, and as international law and just war theory thoroughly discuss, at some point one must unavoidably make a cruel choice

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317 A major theme in Camus’ thought, which appears at the beginning of The Rebel, is the search for innocence: in particular, the wish to remain innocent even during the rebellion against oppression and injustice (which, in this limited world, inevitably requires the use of force of some sort). This wish corresponds with the Christian perspective that views people as inherently sinful. Indeed, Ladd, who writes about Camus from a Christian perspective, emphasizes Camus’ refusal to acknowledge people’s inherent guilt. On the one hand, Camus defies this view. For him the idea that people are inherently sinful is one more form of oppression, since it causes them to depend on the Church as the only way to achieve salvation and redeem themselves. Yet the emphasis on innocence in Camus’ writings, and the use of the terms such as The Fall may suggest that he was not altogether disconnected from the Christian legacy.
to ignore the humanity of the other in order to defeat the enemy. A parallel criticism would come from the opposite position, by those who call for pacifism. As noted, Camus was against blind or excessive use of violence, but did not reject violence altogether and was not a pacifist. It is also not clear how and (mainly) to what extent the awareness of people’s humanity could be used effectively as a way to restrain violent political action, since in practice almost every legitimate violent political action involves a price that innocent people have to pay.

Another criticism of Camus’ ethics relates to the alternative that he presented in what he called “the Mediterranean culture,” based on simple common sense. It is not clear to what extent the romantic description of street fights and “simple common sense” could actually be a serious and effective model for normative behaviour. It seems that Camus presented this example as a way to criticize modern Europe, rather than as a serious alternative to it. It is also interesting that Camus, who called for reflection on the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of human beings, and refused to view people merely as enemies (as demonstrated in The Guest), called at the same time for people to be inspired by those whom he presented and praised as unsophisticated.

Nonetheless, Camus’ main contribution was not in his ability to present a clear and decisive ethical guide, but to develop ethical sensitivity that could lead people to restrain themselves, especially in times of conflict or a shared collective action. The important point, also for the purpose of the comparison with Buber, is that for Camus, ethical concern – the struggle against injustice – leads to solidarity and serves as its basis. No less important is the

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318 This criticism is raised by Francis Jeanson (Francis Jeanson, “Albert Camus Ou L’Ame Revoltee,” Le Temps Modernes 79 [May 1952]: 2070–90), and will be discussed in the last chapter of this study in relation to Camus’ position regarding the conflict in Algeria.
idea that ethics in the thought of Camus is connected to the idea of boundaries that separate and protect people from one another. However, these are different both from those of modern liberal thought – where boundaries are central, but where connectedness and solidarity are largely overlooked – and from the Buberian position, where connectedness is the central concern, to the neglect of the need for boundaries between people.

**Comparison of the Thinkers’ Ethical Thought**

The differences between Buber and Camus with regard to questions of ethics are evident. Buber, a believer who put dialogue at the centre of his thought, tried to create ethics based on connectedness to be manifested in the quest for dialogue on all levels. Camus, on the other hand, based much of his idea of solidarity on ethical considerations – the quest for justice that is often manifested in rebellion. It should also be noted that Camus’ discussion is much more political than Buber’s, who emphasized interpersonal relationship. Indeed, much of Buber’s discussion of dialogue seems closer to relationships between intimate friends than to issues of social and political behaviour. In this sense, the two thinkers would address themselves to two different spheres of human social experience. Yet, because they share some important elements and concerns, the ideas of each thinker can help to evaluate, criticize and also contribute to the ideas of the other. Such a discussion is relevant especially for Buber, since Buber’s discussion about ethics seems to be less conventional and more challenging than Camus.

Both Camus and Buber develop ethical mechanisms that are based, in the first instance, on intuition. For Buber, the intuitive element is the inherent need for dialogue, which also leads to affirmation of the other. For Camus, it was the intuitive call for justice that should also restrain the struggle to achieve it, and therefore questions of ethics are much more
dominant in his thought than in Buber’s. Although, for Buber, dialogue does entail ethical considerations and practices, it is fundamentally an existential condition, not a means to achieve a moral end. For Camus, people join together in order to achieve a more just and moral reality. For Buber, people join together in dialogue and, in doing so, attain to justice. These thinker’s respective ideas might not be mutually exclusive, and could be seen to complement each other: members of a group who struggle together to achieve justice might also experience a strong sense of connectedness (as Camus discussed, for example, in *The Just Assassins*). Yet these two concepts would seem to stand in significant tension with each other. A rebellion, by definition, requires defiance and conflict. It would be difficult to integrate such actions into Buber’s account of ethics, given his call for unity and harmony.

Buber and Camus each tried to offer a response to the problem of nihilism. They both claimed that, at least to some extent, nihilism is connected to modernity. Both thinkers were of course aware that there were harsh conflicts and violence in pre-modern times; though it is interesting to note that both thinkers seem to have regarded pre-modern violence as having been less problematic than the modern sort. Camus discussed it in connection to “crimes of passion,” caused by rage, which are less pernicious than modern “crimes of logic”. Buber, for his part, admits that there was violence in the past, but claims that at least such conflicts took place within real relationships, as distinct from those that occur in the alienating world of modernity.

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319 This became evident in our discussion of inclusiveness and exclusiveness (in chapter three) which, in turn, is relevant to the two thinkers’ ethical accounts. Camus’ account of inclusion and exclusion in the act achieving solidarity is based on the ethical principle of the shared resistance to oppression. Buber’s conceptual model of circles of connectedness, on the other hand, is not based on ethical criteria. What constitutes those circles are one’s identity, affiliation, and belonging (such as in the dialogue with a partner, with a community, etc.). Buber therefore had to explain how ethical mechanisms would be integrated into his concept of connectedness.

320 A point that was made also by Curzon-Hobson (Curzon-Hobson, “Between Exile and the Kingdom”).

321 See footnote 98.
Although both Buber and Camus discussed the problem of modern nihilism, this concern played a smaller role in Buber’s thought, in comparison with the major place it takes in Camus’ writings. The reason for this is that Camus wrote within the tradition of modern thought, even when he criticized modernity. For him it is easy to see how the temptation to nihilism would follow from the experience of the absurd. If it is impossible to find an absolute meaning for life, there is no reason to follow any moral dictates. Camus’ major effort, then, was to show that nihilism should be overcome and rejected, even in the absence of external sources of absolute meaning or redemption. For Buber, on the other hand, the absurd is itself an illusion of modern making and, although nihilism is a real danger, one should reject it together with the modern way of world-view from which it stems. Nihilism is dangerous only because people mistakenly think that the world is meaningless, and the way to solve it is to help them realize that they are mistaken. Thus, although the two thinkers agree on the problem – the danger of nihilism in modernity – they take very different ethical approaches in responding to it, and these approaches are connected to the core assumptions of their respective general and ethical accounts.

Buber’s discussion of God as the eternal You who provides moral guidance, demonstrates another major difference between him and Camus. Although Camus’ writings evoke a strong wish for unity and meaning (that will never be achieved), the belief in God and the authority of the Church are often presented as sources of oppressions against which people should rebel. Much of the discussion in The Rebel is dedicated to the metaphysical rebellion that has been waged against the Church since the 18th century. An important point demonstrating the difference between Camus and Buber in this regard, is the way in which the two thinkers view the Bible. Camus prefers the Old Testament to the New Testament.
This is because the former provides an account of human beings’ repeated efforts, ever since Cain, to rebel against God. The New Testament, by contrast, presents God the Son as one who himself suffered, which prevented any possibility of rebellion against the metaphysical realm.\footnote{Camus, The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt, 32.} Buber, on the other hand, understood the Hebrew Bible to describe the ancient Israelites’ repeated failures to connect with God and to establish a community ruled by God alone. Buber also views Jesus positively precisely because, as Buber understands him, he makes an effort to connect with God. For Buber, then, faith and dedication to God are the solutions to ethical problems. For Camus, excessive faith in God, and a demand for complete and unequivocal connectedness with Him, is part of the problem that allows for oppression to exist. Yet, there may be a meeting point between Camus and Buber on this question, insofar as that when Camus discusses the rebellion against God, he has in mind a commanding God, not a dialogical one; whereas Buber’s God is genuinely dialogical, being the sum of all dialogues that exists. As we noted earlier, Camus himself stated that he wouldn’t mind being called religious in the sense of Buber’s I-You relationship.

Camus’ emphasis on rebellion against injustice and the need for ethical restraints demonstrate that, at least to some extent, he accepted Thomas Hobbes’ concept of the “state of nature,” and the ethical consequences that follow from that condition. Political action, when it is not restrained, can easily become destructive. Precisely because Camus accepted and supported the modern call for independence and rebellion, and is concerned by the possible deterioration of rebellion to unrestrained nihilism, he insisted on acknowledging the cruelty and evil that exist in the world. Buber has a much more positive view of human nature, and therefore emphasizes spontaneous connectedness rather than discussing
mechanisms that would control or supervise it, although he had first to ensure that his call for interdependence would not lead to destructive obedience and blind trust.

Enlightenment rationalism was to replace the old traditional moral code. Despite the differences between them, both thinkers rejected the reliance on reason as the sole basis for moral guidance. For Camus, human reason cannot explain reality properly (hence, it cannot solve the absurd), and it *alone* cannot serve as a basis for moral guidance. For Buber, the reliance on rational, objective and disinterested observation – together with creation of formal and abstract rules in order to deal with ethical and moral problems – is a major source of alienation and misery in modernity, a manifestation of the I-It mode of relationality, which this stance only reinforces. As we have noted, Camus, in contrast, accepted many of the elements of modernity. His critique of modernity in general – and about the place of reason in particular – is, likewise, less extreme than Buber’s. A central element in Camus’ ethical account is the logical conclusion that those who wish to achieve justice should not contradict themselves by committing injustice themselves. Buber would probably not object to such argument, but nor does he place it at the centre of his thought.

A related point is that both thinkers rejected the reliance on fixed doctrines, principles and regulations as guides for proper ethical behaviour. Yet, there is an important difference between them. Buber rejected doctrines (whether modern or traditional-religious ones), because they stand against his idea that the world is made of an ongoing flux of calls and potential meetings. People should respond – and be responsible – to the other whom they meet at the present, rather than adjusting themselves to fixed rules. Buber had to develop

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323 Curzon-Hobson also mentioned this similarity between the two thinkers (Curzon-Hobson, “Between Exile and the Kingdom”)
ethical mechanisms that would replace the conventional ethical schemes that are based on rules and regulations. As discussed, he described a dialogical concept that would guide the interlocutors to moral and ethical behaviour – for him, dialogue that does not lead to justice is not a genuine dialogue. For the same reason, Buber discussed the idea of “existential guilt” – the guilt that one (should) feel when he or she is not connected enough in dialogue with others and especially with the eternal You. Camus, on the other hand, did not reject formal rules, regulations and ethical principles by themselves, as much as Buber did. He was more concerned with unrestrained fanaticism that could follow an effort to implement doctrines or ideologies, in such a way that would contradict common sense or would lead to destruction (as demonstrated in his concept of “crimes of logic”). His concept of guilt is also different from Buber’s. In the *Myth of Sisyphus* and in *The Outsider* the notion is that there is no real sense of guilt, just acceptance of the consequences of one’s actions (in other writings, like in *The Fall*, guilt does play a significant part).\(^{324}\) Again, as a thinker who criticized modernity from within, he did not reject altogether its ethical mechanisms.

When comparing Buber to Camus in this regard, it seems that Camus’ thought stands between Buberian and modern-liberal thought. Camus rejected reliance on formal rules and regulations alone, and his thought stressed the emotional and intuitive aspect – the feeling of frustration and anger – that leads to the struggle for justice. The strong identification that people feel with each other in their joined struggle for justice, which may go as far as a willingness to sacrifice themselves in order to support each other and to achieve their cause, is much closer to Buber’s idea of connectedness than to the modern Western reliance on

\(^{324}\) This comparison between Buber’s concept of “existential guilt” and Camus’ position in this matter stood at the centre of George Ladd’s comparison between the two thinkers (Ladd, “The Tragic Contradiction: Dynamics of a Theme in Buber and Camus”).
This similarity between Buber and Camus also stands behind the weaknesses of their ethical thought, if one examines it from a modern perspective: both Buber and Camus could not develop effective ethical mechanisms, precisely because they relied too much on intuition and subjective perception. Camus’ nostalgic connection to Tipasa or to his mother may be a source of inspiration, but cannot serve as a serious ethical standard or tool to deal with real life issues with all their complexities. Even more problematic is Buber’s reliance on myth and on the questionable inherent need for extreme connectedness and dialogue, which often has no basis in practice.

At the same time, Camus, as a thinker who criticized modernity from within and accepted many of its ideas regarding individual autonomy and sovereignty, did not call for a radical change to I-You relationships in all aspects of life like Buber, and as a secular person, mysticism (which could have been a source of inspiration for Buber even during his dialogical stage) was not a model Camus thought one should follow. Indeed, it is very difficult for a theory that puts rebellion at its core to accept the “Buberian” concept of all-encompassing dialogue, harmony and unity.

In sum, despite the similarities between the two thinkers, there are major differences between them. Many of each thinker’s ideas would not be relevant to the other. In order to accept Buber’s solution to nihilism, one must accept assumptions that are often alien to modernity, such as the existence of an ultimate goal to which all genuine dialogues are directed leading to harmony and unity that is also morally good. From this modern or Camusian perspective, Buber’s ethical thought seems detached from reality and is too close

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Footnote: An example of this is the description of the Meursault trial in The Outsider. The cold bureaucratic procedure that is described there stands in direct contrast with the emotional weight of the murder that was committed, and the execution of Meursault that followed it.
to myth, and one cannot and should not base ethical systems on myth. From a Buberian perspective, Camus, who calls for dialogue but refuses to acknowledge the existential metaphysical direction with which any genuine dialogue is connected, overlooks an essential part of reality, and therefore cannot pose a complete ethical solution to the problem of nihilism.

And yet there are a few ideas in each thinker’s thought that could contribute to the other, which are based on elements that they both share. Buber’s idea could help those who follow Camus to be even more aware of the ongoing importance of dialogue and connectedness, beyond the ad-hoc circles of solidarity established to achieve certain moral or political aims. Camus’ ideas, on the other hand, could help those who follow Buber to understand the importance of boundaries even within one’s group, and – more importantly – the idea (which Buber already acknowledged to some extent) that struggle and conflict are not necessarily negative values, if they are carried out for a just cause.

More importantly, Buber and Camus conveyed and articulated different discussions of similar concerns and values – connectedness or solidarity accompanied by ethical restraints – to different audiences. In the main, Camus addressed the modern secular audience, while Buber addressed the religious and more collectivistic societies. In this sense, the missions of the two thinkers complement each other, even though their views are often different.
Chapter 5 – Political views – the Kingship of God and the Limits of Man

Both Buber and Camus were engaged intellectuals who made significant contributions to the political discourse in their respective countries. As such, both of them have often been held up as models of involved intellectuals who point to a proper moral path, especially in times of major political turbulence, violence, and confusion.

Buber was active in the Zionist movement from its establishment in the mid-1890’s and became a respected Zionist thinker. Camus was involved in the politics of the Left in Algeria since his youth, took part in the Resistance movement against the Nazi occupation in France, and was involved (though to a lesser extent) in the war in Algeria. Despite their political involvements, Buber and Camus were thinkers rather than political leaders and as such their ability to determine or influence actual political events was limited. Nonetheless, each played a role in framing the conceptual understanding of political problems during his time. The fact that both of them presented non-conventional views – especially in regard to the ethnic conflicts in Mandatory Palestine and Algeria, respectively – made their political contributions even more significant. Most importantly, both Buber and Camus continually advocated the principle that political activity should not be detached from morality and that it must therefore be restrained.

The most important political viewpoint they both shared – and which is relevant for this study about the possible tension between connectedness and ethics – is that both rejected political fanaticism in general, and secular political messianism in particular. They were both
very concerned by the rise of revolutionary movements (nationalist, socialist, anarchist, and others) that sought to radically change politics, society, economics, and the human condition itself. Many of these movements lost the proper balance between their wish to achieve justice, meaning, and solidarity on the one hand, and the need to safeguard ethical principles on the other.

Here, again, Buber’s view is more problematic than Camus’ since, although he rejected secular messianic political movements, he actually supported the religious effort to achieve utopian and redemptive aims through social and political change. However, precisely because of this, his ideas regarding the proper ethical boundaries that could restrain messianic revolutionary action can be useful for religious messianic political movements.

The aim of this chapter is not to discuss all of the political involvements in which the two thinkers were engaged over many decades, but to examine and compare how the tension between connectedness and ethics – which we have discussed in the previous chapters – come to light in their respective ideas on political events and phenomena. We shall do this by highlighting several themes that demonstrate the similarities and differences between the two thinkers in this regard. In particular, we shall discuss their critical evaluations of the quest to achieve utopia by using political means; their respective understandings and responses to anarchism; and how Buber and Camus each addressed the respective ethnic conflicts in Mandatory Palestine and Algeria.

**The Quest for Redemption and Utopia**

Both Buber and Camus agreed that any effort to achieve redemption or utopia through modern mundane political action is impossible and can lead to terror and destruction. As
Camus’ *The Rebel* explains, the Jacobins, Bolsheviks, and Nazis, each in their own way, made this point all too clear.\textsuperscript{326}

Yet Buber and Camus differed on the idea of redemption. For Camus, as we discussed in chapter four, there is no realm apart for the mundane secular one, and therefore the way to restrain political action is by constant reminder of human limits and realization that the absurd cannot be completely solved. Buber did not give up the wish to achieve utopia – the creation of communal life based on justice, unity and peace – precisely because of his positive (far too positive, in the Camusian or modern view) perception of human nature. According to Buber, creating such a utopia should be the most important mission of the human race in general, and the Jewish people in particular. Indeed the collective mission of the Jewish People in the Land of Israel has been to begin the realization of this utopia and to set an example for the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{327} The way to achieve such utopia, or at least to strive for it, includes three elements: the establishment of small, intimate communities, a reliance on dialogue with God as the source of guidance, and the need to avoid as much as possible conventional politics that is based on power relations and formal regulations.

One may criticize this understanding not only for its being infeasible, but also for the danger it poses, precisely because the connection it makes between strong reliance on faith and mundane communal life, in order to achieve utopia. Buber’s messianic ideas may seem, 

\textsuperscript{326} See Ohana, “Ambiguous Messianism: The Political Theology of Martin Buber,” 57. Ohana discusses Buber’s critique of secular messianic Zionism as it would pertain to Ben Gurion and others, however, he does not discuss at length Buber’s attitude towards religious messianic Zionism, such as Rabbi Kook would represent. Ohana’s analysis reflects the fact that the dominant branch of messianic Zionism during Buber’s time was the secular rather than the religious one. At the same time, a central claim of my study will be that there are lessons to draw from Buber’s writings with regard to religious political messianism, precisely because Buber’s own thought contains political religious and messianic elements. For a discussion of Buber’s and Camus’ rejection of secular utopian messianism see also Woocher, “Martin Buber and Albert Camus,” 393-394.

\textsuperscript{327} Buber, *Te’udah Ve-Yi’ud*, 1984, 2:103.
at least at first sight, close to religious fundamentalism, although this was not as dominant in his lifetime as it is today. The question is whether his ideas, which were developed as a critique and response to modern secular politics, contain enough conceptual mechanisms to prevent deterioration into political religious zealotry.

In order to understand Buber’s utopian-messianic and anarchistic thought, it would be useful to examine the discussion in his book *Kingship of God*. In this book, Buber claimed that in the past, the Jewish people “proclaimed [God] as [their] direct and exclusive folk-king,” and saw the Bible as a testimony of the repeated failed efforts to establish such a community under the rule of God alone; it narrates the debate between those who called for the kinship of God – whose message was delivered in the Bible mainly by the prophets – and those who wished to have a human king, like the other nations. In his interpretation of the Bible, Buber pays special attention to the Book of Judges, where he sees this debate most clearly. In this book he located the turning point from the quest for a divine rule to a call for a human one. According to Buber, the different judges described in this book were not rulers, but merely functionaries who acknowledged that the real king is no one but God alone. These judges performed their roles for limited times, such as when circumstances required a military commander. Thus, Yiftach (Jephthah), for example, was nominated to be a judge in conflicts, not a king, and Gideon, who was admired as a military commander, explicitly reminded his followers that their king is God. Buber argued that this was an era of “organic folk unity,” (although it included instances – which he labelled “laziness and

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329 Ibid., 83.
330 Ibid., 75.
obstinacy” – when communities put their selfish interests first). According to Buber, the wars between the Israelites and their enemies described in this book are presented as struggles between a people for whom God is their king, and other nations led by different kings. Buber clarified that what he means by the term “Kingship of God” is not a theocracy: not the rule of priests who may have interests of their own and constitute a fixed establishment, but the rule of God himself, conveying His message through His prophets. This also relates to his rejection of the Halacha and the authorities of the rabbis, which stand as an obstacle to dialogical, spontaneous relationships between man and God as previously mentioned.

According to Buber’s interpretation, as a result of the weakness of the ancient Israelites and their wish to imitate the other nations, they demanded to have a human ruler. This led to the crowning of a human king despite the reluctance of the prophet Samuel. By doing so, the ancient Jews abandoned their mission to have an active dialogical community under God. However, Buber claimed that the wish and the mission to establish such a community was not abandoned altogether. It was maintained in the teachings of the prophets (this in turn led to a conflict between them and the ruling kings). It was then maintained by those Jews who passed on this notion from one generation to the next, and it manifested itself again in the Hasidic movement, where communities were established under the leadership of a Tzadik, the spiritual leader who mediates and facilitates the dialogue between the community members and God. Therefore, according to Buber, alongside the trajectory of historical events led by political leaders, there is another, a-historical and much more authentic trajectory of the Jewish people, who carried the message to establish a dialogical life under

331 Ibid., 78.
332 Ibid., 76.
God. Buber understood Zionism to be an opportunity to restore and fulfill this mission, by creating dialogical communities in the Land of Israel. In that community they would strive for peace and justice, and their community would serve as a model for the entire world, thus fulfilling the messianic redemptive mission of the Jewish people.

The narrative Buber constructed shows his effort to walk the fine line between connectedness and unity on the one hand, and an ethical account that stems from a community that stands in direct relation with the eternal You. For Buber, as we discussed in the previous chapter, the connection with God would naturally lead the community to justice, peace and harmony. Buber’s narrative clearly differs from the modern perspective, and from Camus’ view, especially in regard to two points. The first point for comparison between Buber and Camus in this regard is the element of collective action aimed at achieving utopia. As we have seen, Buber rejected the idea that there is a separation between the mundane and divine realms. For him, they are connected: God should be the king, and people stand in direct dialogue with him. Buber acknowledged the fact that such connectedness may be difficult to achieve (again, the Bible is a chronicle of the failed attempts to achieve this goal). Yet, for Buber the constant effort to achieve this aim is what gives purpose for the Jewish people, and should provide meaning for the entire world.

The integration of heaven and earth and the need to achieve utopia or redemption in the mundane world, for which Buber advocated, was what Camus was concerned about, and the basis of his criticism against the revolutionary movements since the French revolution. Camus’ main claim in The Rebel is that the just rebellion in modernity against the Church as

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333 Avnon, Martin Buber, 81–118.
well as oppressive monarchs lost its direction and proper moral value when the rebels perceived themselves as instruments of a new idea of redemption; that is, to replace the longing for divine redemption, they offered one based on man-made history. History, based on human reason, was perceived in terms of progress towards utopia in which all human beings would be free of oppression. The faith in the ability to achieve such a utopia led to mass murder under the Jacobins and the Marxist revolutions (as well as the Nazis, who understood history less in terms of reason, and more in terms of the advancement of the race). Murder was committed according to a simple logic: since progress would lead to utopia, anyone who is unwilling to take part in the shared project towards it proved to be an obstacle to its progress and had to be removed. The rebellion that was supposed to lead to freedom, became instead a new form of slavery. Secular messianism, like the religious one, could easily lead to fanaticism and a loss of moral restraints. Camus, therefore, called on human beings to avoid the hubris that would make them feel they could achieve a complete or absolute solution to the problems of the world. It is precisely the separation between the mundane and the divine realms, if indeed the latter exists, that makes people who they are – limited creatures who try to make the best they can of a reality that is full of unsolvable contradictions.

Buber agreed with Camus about the problem of secular fanaticism. Indeed, the agreement between the two thinkers on this topic was expressed explicitly, when Buber wrote to Camus to ask him for permission to publish The Rebel in Hebrew, because, in his

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335 Camus was not the only one who developed these ideas and critique of the modern revolutions. One of the most important books about this subject is The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy by Jacob Talmon, who thanked Buber in the introduction for his friendly criticism of the book (Jacob Talmon, The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy [New York: Frederick A. Prager, 1960], vii).
words, “[it is] of such importance for human life at this hour.” Buber’s discussion of the “demonic You” discussed in the previous chapter deals with figures like Napoleon and Hitler, who presented themselves as dialogical and acting for the people while in fact leading them to destruction, treating them as nothing but tools to achieve a political aims. Buber explained that the problem of modern mass movements is that instead of promoting internal communal dialogue, they act to fulfill an external cause:

Collectivity is not a binding but a bundling together: individuals packed together, armed and equipped in common, with only as much life from man to man as will inflame the marching step. But community, growing community… is the being no longer side by side but with one another of a multitude of persons. … The modern zeal for collectivity is a flight from community’s testing and consecration of the person, a flight from the vital dialogic, demanding the staking of the self, which is in the heart of the world.  

The solution that Buber’s thought offered to the problem that Camus described in *The Rebel*, was that the quest for utopia cannot be destructive if it is indeed guided by God and by the true I-You relationships between the people involved. For Buber, it is the secular character and the I-It mode of relationality that may lead to destruction, not necessarily the quest for utopia or redemption in itself. Three elements in Buber’s redemptive idea differentiate it from the secular one that he and Camus rejected. First, Buber, who came from a religious perspective, did not call to make human history a divine one, but the opposite – he called on human beings to fulfill a divine mission. As we discussed in the previous chapter, a community that truly participates in genuine dialogue among its members and with God, cannot do wrong. Secondly, that utopia that Buber described was not a political one, in the sense that it is led by God, which is not to be based on human rule and I-It relationships.

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337 Buber, “Dialogue,” 51. Buber claimed that there is no place for collectivism (of such kind) in the Jewish religion, and went as far as calling it “idol worship” (*Avoda Zara*). He claimed that the (Jewish) religion, by its nature, must take a critical position against it (Buber, *Te‘udah Ve-Yi‘ud*, 1984, 2:238).
Third, such a utopian community would not be based on dogmas and ideologies (as in the case of secular revolutionary movements), but on spontaneous, ongoing connectedness. An important point in this regard, is that according to Buber, Jewish eschatology is “prophetic” and not apocalyptic. Redemption for Buber is an ongoing condition in which people constantly turn themselves to dialogue with each other and with God, not a one-time solution after which good overcomes evil for eternity. Buber claimed that for the Jews “God’s redeeming power is at work everywhere and at all times, but that a state of redemption exists nowhere and never.” Buber explained that there is no dualism between good and evil forces in Judaism, which means that an apocalyptic redemption in which the good overcomes evil is foreign to the Jewish faith. For these reasons, Buber could call on the Jews to fulfill what he saw as their divine mission, while at the same time enthusiastically support Camus’ discussion in *The Rebel*.

Buber may have solved the problem according to his own understandings and assumptions, but his political ideas are still problematic from the Camusian or other modern-secular perspectives. This is because Buber, in his way, still tried to connect mundane politics with metaphysical ideas. Buber called for a real and actual political action – the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel in order to fulfill their divine mission of establishing a dialogical community.

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338 Curzon-Hobson, points to the rejection of fixed ideologies and dogmas as one of the elements that Buber and Camus shared (Curzon-Hobson, “Between Exile and the Kingdom,” 369–370). Woocher also discusses the two thinker’s call of for pragmatism, although my own comparison of the two thinkers differs from his on several points (Woocher, “Martin Buber and Albert Camus,” 363 380-382).


340 Buber, “The Two Foci of the Jewish Soul,” 36.
In order to understand why Buber’s position may be problematic, it would be useful to compare his approach with that of other Zionist religious thinkers who wrote about similar questions. The first thinker would be Buber’s close friend Franz Rosenzweig. He, like others, rejected Zionism because he understood the message of Judaism to be a spiritual, ethical and universal one dealing with the relationship between God, man and the world. This mission and message, according to Rosenzweig, should not be compromised, confined to or affected by a concrete political action. For Buber, again, the establishment of a concrete Jewish community in the Land of Israel, with some level of autonomy, was crucial in order to fulfill what he understood as the Jewish divine mission.

Buber’s religious Zionism was also different from that of Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines, the founder of the religious-Zionist Ha-Mizrahi movement. Reines argued that Zionism has no messianic or redemptive purpose whatsoever, since its aim is merely the establishment of a mundane political shelter for the persecuted Jewish people. Thus, according to him there is a clear separation between mundane political action and religious redemption.\(^\text{341}\) Buber’s Zionism, on the other hand, was a redemptive and messianic one, at least in the sense that he saw it as an effort to achieve dialogical utopia that would serve as a model for the entire world. He rejected the notion of Zionism as a political shelter in the form of a modern nation-state, since such a state would be just one more actor in the world’s arena, based on I-It relationality.\(^\text{342}\)

On the other hand, Buber’s ideas are similar to some extent to those of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the founder of messianic religious Zionism. Rabbi Kook and his son Rabbi Zvi

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342 Buber, of course, accepted the idea that the Yishuv would be a shelter for Jewish refugees given the need for German Jews to find such shelter, but for him this was a compromise.
Yehuda Kook\textsuperscript{343} saw Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel as the first step toward Messianic redemption and a fulfillment of the divine connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel.\textsuperscript{344} As opposed to secular Zionism and the \textit{Ha-Mizrahi} movement under Rabbi Reines,\textsuperscript{345} Rabbi Kook believed that there is a strong connection between the divine and mundane realms, and that the secular Zionist pioneers who established the infrastructure of the future Jewish state were unknowingly fulfilling a divine role and contributing to the progress towards redemption.

The similarity between Buber and the followers of Rabbi Kook with regard to the integration of redemptive mundane action, becomes even clearer given the importance of Eretz Yisrael – the Land of Israel – for both thinkers. In his essay \textit{Between a Nation and Its Land}\textsuperscript{346} Buber discussed the connection between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel as it was perceived during the ages. He argued that God chose the Jewish people and the Land of Israel “in order to lead this nation, which is His [elected] nation out of all nations, to this land, which is his [elected] land out of all lands, and connect them together.”\textsuperscript{347} The mission of the Jewish people according to Buber – to establish a holy and just community – is what connects the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. Neither of the two can realize itself to the fullest without the other.\textsuperscript{348} Buber, therefore, did not only make a connection between human

\textsuperscript{343} It should be noted that there are differences between Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and his son, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook. The latter is often described as more radical than his father, and called for a (non-violent) resistance against the state if its action was to go against the path towards redemption, while his father (who died before the State of Israel was established) was known for his efforts to cooperate with the secular Zionist movement and authorities.

\textsuperscript{344} For a comprehensive discussion about the topic see Ravitzky, \textit{Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism}, 79–144.

\textsuperscript{345} The ideas of Rabbi Kook became dominant in the Mizrahi movement only after Israel’s victory in the Six Days war, which was perceived by Rabbi Kook’s followers as further evidence of the redemptive essence of the State of Israel.

\textsuperscript{346} Martin Buber, \textit{Ben ʻam Le-Artso [Between a People and Its Land]}, 2nd ed. (Tel Aviv: Shoḥen, 1984).

\textsuperscript{347} Ibid., 10.

\textsuperscript{348} Ibid., 12.
history, metaphysics and a mission to create utopia, but also made an explicit connection between history (that of the Jewish people) and nature (the Land of Israel). He stated that the realms of nature and history, which are separated in the people’s consciousness, must unite for the sake of this enterprise. Buber referred to Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook in this essay, and claimed that “no one understood the uniqueness and the eternity of the relationship between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel as he did.” He expressed appreciation for the way in which Rabbi Kook understood that “the mystery constantly teaches to unite the holy with the profane.”

The comparison between Buber on the one hand and the ideas of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and his son Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook on the other, is important especially because of the problem of ethical boundaries in the thought and actions of some of the followers of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook. These followers established in the early 1970’s (already after Buber’s death) the “Block of the Faithful” under Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook’s spiritual leadership. This religious Zionist messianic movement has stressed the idea that a major step toward redemption is the creation of settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza strip, often while challenging the Israeli and international law.

Although the vast majority of religious-messianic Zionists are law abiding citizens who are an integral part of Israeli society, its radical margins pose a severe challenge to the

\[349\] Ibid.
\[350\] Ibid., 163.
\[351\] Ibid., 164.
\[352\] For a recent discussion of the settlers and their ideological conflict with the Israeli mainstream, see Gadi Taub, *The Settlers and the Struggle Over the Meaning of Zionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). It should be noted –and emphasized – that the majority of those who affiliate themselves with the Block of the Faithful, and the vast majority of the settlers in the West Bank, are law abiding citizens, and are not radical in any way. It should also be noted that “The Block of the Faithful” has ceased to exist as an organization in recent years, and its leadership was integrated into “Yesha Council” – the ideological body that represents most of the settlers in the West Bank.
mainstream ethical and political norms in Israel. This becomes evident with the appearance of the “Hilltop Youth” (*Noar Hagvaot*), since the 2000s, which is the common name for different groups of young religious-Zionist radicals who live in illegal outposts in the West Bank.\(^\text{353}\) In certain aspects, the discourse of these groups is similar to that of Buber. They too believe in the divine uniqueness of the Jewish people, and stress their connection as Jews to the holy Land of Israel, and the importance of settling there in order to fulfill what they considered to be the Jewish mission to bring redemption. They too reject the alienating way of life in modern cities, looking to a model of pure, simple and authentic life, continually striving to give spiritual meaning to their existence and actions. Like Buber, they are inspired by Hasidic teachings that call for an authentic and intense connection with God. Further, the relationships between some leaders of these groups and their followers bear certain resemblances to the model of charismatic leadership Buber described in his account of the Hasidic Tzadik. Moreover, the “Hilltop Youth” often reject the authority of Israeli law, not only because they stand in conflict with the law given their illegal activities, but also out of genuine desire to privilege devotion and pure faith over the laws and regulations of the larger secular society. They are convinced that their efforts to realize what they see as the unique holy mission of the Jewish people is far more important than the mundane law which is, they think, based on foreign and false international standards.\(^\text{354}\) The combination of radical nationalism, passionate faith and anarchistic tendencies has led some members of these “Hilltop Youth” to violent clashes with the local Arab population in their surroundings, as


\(^{354}\) It should be noted that, as opposed to Buber who rejected the *Halacha*, since it seemed to him a fixed doctrine that hinders the direct and spontaneous dialogue with God, the “Hilltop Youth” are observant Jews.
well as with the Israeli authorities, whom they often see as representing an alien, secular government detached from what they see as the true redemptive mission of the Jewish people.

Despite these similarities between these religious Zionist extremists and Buber, there are two decisive differences between Buber’s ideas and those espoused by the “Hilltop Youth” as well as radical elements within the “The Block of the Faithful.” The first is that although Buber was not a pacifist, he strongly rejected violence and called for co-existence between Jews and Arabs (we shall discuss Buber’s position in this matter below). The second is that despite Buber’s call for the establishment of communities with the purpose of fulfilling a divine mission, Buber rejected the modern nation state, which for him was connected with the I-It mode of relationality. Indeed, as opposed to mainstream Zionism, Buber called for the creation of a just and dialogical Jewish community in the Land of Israel, not a sovereign nation state. The danger of violence and fanaticism that has characterized the extreme elements in the “Block of the Faithful” and the “Hilltop Youth,” by contrast, stems from their effort to fulfill a divine mission by using the means of coercion of a modern nation state. Indeed, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (who died in 1937, before the State of Israel was established) supported the establishment of a Jewish state that would be based on spiritual idealism (although he rejected the modern Western state based on a contract between individuals).355 Those who have followed his ideas to the present do not reject the state, at least to the extent that serves the path toward redemption. Buber, on the other hand, rejected

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the idea of a modern political state for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel, precisely because of its coercive and non-dialogical elements.\textsuperscript{356}

Buber, who died in 1965, did not witness the rise of the “Block of the Faithful” or the “Hilltop Youth”; but there is no doubt that he would have strongly objected to their political aims and methods, because they strayed from the divine mission by using the means of the coercive state (in the case of “The Block of the Faithful”) or just unrestrained violence (in the case of the “Hilltop Youth”). In Buber’s terms, it is impossible to fulfill a mission of creating a community based on I-You relations through means of coercion, exploitation and exclusion that ignore the rights of Arab-Palestinian inhabitants of the land. Indeed, these are precisely the characteristics of the I-It mode of relationality.

Nonetheless, again, similarities between the radical settlers and some of Buber’s ideas do exist,\textsuperscript{357} and in practice there is a danger that the line that separates them might be crossed. A call for national particularism and the fulfillment of a divine mission, anarchistic rejection of formal law, and an emphasis on the mythology of an inherent metaphysical connection between people and land – all these could deteriorate into political radicalism, if not restrained. But the similarities between Buber’s teachings and the attitudes of contemporary radical settlers in the West Bank also suggest that Buber’s ideas could provide important ethical and political restraints, that is, precisely because he spoke in the language of

\textsuperscript{356} Again, it should be noted that Buber was not a pacifist, and made it clear that he does not object to the use of force under certain circumstances.

\textsuperscript{357} Tomer Persico describes the neo-Hassidic trend in Israel in recent years, arguing that Buber was one of the first to promote this phenomenon in presenting Hasidic existential ideas to the general public. Rabbi Ginsburg, one of the main spiritual leaders of the “Hilltop Youth” is another, different example of this neo-Hasidic trend. Thus, despite the major differences between Buber and Ginsburg, they can be viewed as presenting two instances of the same religious-cultural phenomenon. (Tomer Persico, “Neo-Hasidic Revival: Expressivist Uses of Traditional Lore,” \textit{Modern Judaism} 34, no. 3 [October 2014]: 287–308.)
redemption, divine mission and profound connectedness, that may appeal to radical groups such as these.\textsuperscript{358}

**Attitudes toward Anarchism**

Both Camus and Buber, each in his own way, discussed anarchism and anarchistic movements, a subject that is important for our discussion precisely because anarchism downplays and sometimes even rejects formal regulation and boundaries.

Buber discussed anarchism in the context of utopian socialism – the connectedness between people that makes formal rules and regulations unnecessary and even harmful. Buber’s entire social or political thought could be considered to be anarchistic, in the sense that he rejected the necessity of formal and fixed regulations as the basis for human conduct. As discussed above, Buber saw the Bible as a call to establish a society based on the direct rule of God, rather than a political state based on human rules and regulations. He also saw the Jewish *Halacha* as an obstacle to spontaneous dialogue between man and God, stressing the distinction made by his teacher, Georg Simmel, between religion (which refers to the institutionalized and formal aspect of faith) and religiosity, which is the natural connection to faith unconditioned by formal institutions.\textsuperscript{359} Buber admired the Hasidic community, which emphasized the idea of *dvekut* – the close, mystical connection between man and God, and the strong personal connection between the Tzadik and his community (indeed, a possible

\textsuperscript{358} It should be noted that groups and thinkers who hold ideas that are similar to Buber’s do exist in contemporary Israel, also among the settlers in the West Bank. The most notable examples are the movements called Eretz Shlaom (“Land of Peace”) and “Yerushalom”, which were led by the late Rabbi Menachem Froman or inspired by his ideas. These small movements call for dialogue and coexistence with the local Palestinian population, while stressing the deep religious connection of the Jewish people to the land of Israel (see Linoy Bar-Gefen and Meron Rapoport, “Not All Settlers and Palestinians Want Each Other to Disappear,” *Haaretz.com*, January 21, 2010, http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/magazine/not-all-settlers-and-palestinians-want-each-other-to-disappear-1.265748).

criticism against Buber is that he did not pay much attention to the fact that the Hasidim did observe the Jewish Halacha).

It is especially interesting to see Buber’s utopian and anarchistic understanding in secular, rather than religious matters, especially with regard to his idea that the human community should be based on spontaneous, direct relationship, rather than on institutionalized political systems. This is prominent in his Zionist thought. In his essays collected in the book called Paths in Utopia, alongside a theoretical discussion of the importance of utopian-socialism, Buber developed the idea that in order to fulfill its mission, the Zionist enterprise should not focus on establishing a modern state, but on the creation of a network of intimate close-knit dialogical communities. These communities would not be administered by formal and coercive authorities, but by functionaries who would only help to facilitate the dialogical relationship within the communities. In other words, Buber called for the replacement of the political organization based on I-It relations, with a social-communal system based on the I-You mode of relationality. Buber admired the Kibbutzim – the small, egalitarian Zionist communities established in Israel, despite the fact that their members were mostly secular. He considered the Kibbutzim, like the Hasidic communities, to be “genuine communities” that facilitated and encouraged dialogue and connectedness. Buber’s discussion regarding the kibbutz again revealed his deep faith in the idea that human beings are dialogical by nature, that moral behaviour is an inherent part of their connectedness, and that an external authority is, therefore, not needed.³⁶⁰

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It would be interesting to compare Buber’s relation to anarchism with Camus’ discussion on the topic. Camus was fascinated by the Russian anarchists who were active during the turn of the 20th century writing about them in *The Rebel* and in a play called *The Just Assassins*. However, the anarchists that he discussed were not those who called for utopian socialism, but violent rebellion. Standing at the basis of their action was not (only) passionate friendship and a sense of connectedness, but passionate rebellious aims, that could easily lead to murder and fanaticism, precisely because there were no formal rules that could stop them. According to Camus, some of these Russian revolutionary anarchists engaged in profound ethical debates, and had to find their internal moral compass. Camus tells of how some of them claimed that they were willing to kill the Tsar only if they would be executed for doing so. They were thus willing to pay the highest price for taking someone else’s life, even if it was just and necessary, and by doing so they showed the most impressive effort to rebel against authority without deteriorating into nihilism and arbitrary murder.\(^{361}\)

The different attitudes Buber and Camus had toward anarchism is connected to their different concepts of freedom. For Camus, freedom means liberty from external oppression. Buber’s concept of freedom is mainly the freedom that people would experience in dialogue. It is the freedom of escaping from the causality of the I-It world. Camus’ concept of freedom is much more modern and much more political than Buber’s. This difference in their concepts of freedom carries political implications. Camus called for liberation from tyranny and for safeguards to make sure that the struggle for liberation does not itself become tyrannical. Buber called on people to bypass politics as much as possible, and to focus on the

creation of dialogical communities that would allow for the inner sense of freedom gained by connectedness.

Buber and Camus seem to be opposed to each other on this topic, since they discussed two different kinds of anarchism – one that is peaceful and calls for utopian socialism, and one that is militant and rebellious. Buber, who largely rejected violence, explicitly distanced himself from the militant revolutionary anarchists, and quoted his close friend, Gustav Landauer, who said that revolution is based on rebellion and negation and cannot solve social problems by political means. Instead, Buber advocated utopian socialism. For him, utopian socialism and the anarchism it involved were examples of the I-You mode of relationality standing at the core of his thought. Camus shared with Buber the idea that violence should be avoided as much as possible. However, for him, conflicts and rebellions are unavoidable parts of reality, at least for those who do not wish to live in the illusion of denying the absurd or live under oppression. As such, utopian socialism would seem to him detached from reality. Instead, he focused on the restraint that should exist within a given group of anarchists, who wish to engage in the struggle while restraining it as much as possible. The moral debates of the Russian revolutionary anarchists demonstrated the wish not to lose their moral compass, in a world where one must rebel in order to overcome oppression.

The same could be said about the anarchist’s rejection of formal law. Both Camus and Buber criticized the over-reliance on formal law and regulations. But Buber called on people to avoid them almost altogether. Camus, who lived within the confines of modern thought,

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362 Buber, Netivot Be-Utopyah (Paths in Utopia), 67.
did not deny the need for a measure of authority, and merely called on people to make sure to restrain anarchism and to make sure it would not deteriorate into injustice.

**Existence vs. Action**

The parallel discussions of the two thinkers on the topics of anarchism, utopia, and political redemption reveal a deeper difference between them, which could be labelled as the difference between “being” and “doing”, or “existence” and “action”. For Buber, being in a state of I-You relationality would naturally solve all possible moral problems. The aim of the individual – as well as the nation and the entire human race – is to reach that state of being: to become dialogical by turning his or her own heart to dialogue. Buber’s political idea was, indeed, a call to establish communities that would encourage this form of dialogical existence, where formal rules would be replaced by spontaneous dialogue. Although Buber stressed that this aim is based on an ongoing, eternal process rather than a one-time change that would permanently alter the human condition, he still wished to achieve a different order of relation, and a new existential state of being for the Jewish people and humanity as a whole. What Camus demanded, on the other hand, was a deed, an action – a rebellion against oppression and injustice (as long as the rebellion does not deteriorate into nihilism). He took this stance precisely because he believed that in a world that is inherently absurd, there is no possibility of reaching “redemption” – a complete satisfactory state of existence that is different from the one in which people usually live.

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364 This is reflected, for example, in Buber’s claim against those who hold dogmatic religious ideas: “For to you God is the One who created once, and then no more; but to us He is the One of whom people profess that He ‘renews the work of creation each day.’ And He truly does renew it, within us and through us, desiring to enter by our means into a new reality” (Buber, “The Holy Way: A Word to the Jews and to the Nations,” 137).
Camus’ call was much more modest than Buber’s, because he acknowledged the limitation of human abilities in an unredeemed, absurd world. In Isaiah Berlin’s terms, all Camus asked for was negative freedom – the freedom from oppression – and not the positive freedom to create a radical change or to establish a different social or political form of existence. Buber, on the other hand, did try to present a new, “redeemed” utopian existence. His way to solve the ethical tension that it involves was, first, to present it as a state of existence that potentially exists as an alternative to be achieved in the present; and, secondly, to show that the dialogical state of being is ethical and moral, and therefore harmless. This distinction also brings out different criticism directed against each thinker. Camus was criticized for his emphasis on ethical and political restraints and his idea that reality is inherently based on unsolvable contradictions, because his views would not allow for any major revolutionary change. Indeed, Sartre and others who were affiliated with the Marxist revolutionary Left, blamed Camus for being too conservative in his objection to radical political change, because he was over-concerned about the price it would demand. Buber, as we have discussed, claimed that he did not wish to create any radical political revolution but only to inspire people to make incremental changes in their perception towards a more I-You relationship. However, he came dangerously close to radical revolutionary ideas, precisely because what he wanted to achieve was a new form of existence, and not only incremental changes toward justice. In this sense, Camus’ main discussion in *The Rebel*, where he warns against the danger of the revolutionary effort to achieve a new condition of being, may, to some extent, be directed against those who would follow Buber’s call for change, without taking into account the ethical restraints he called for.
The Jewish-Arab Conflict and the Conflict in Algeria

Buber’s involvement in the Jewish-Arab conflict in Mandatory Palestine, and Camus’ involvement in the conflict in Algeria, directly pertain to their accounts of connectedness, solidarity and ethics. Both presented a humanist call for peace and dialogue,\(^{365}\) a call that was uncommon during their time, and which led to harsh criticisms against each of them.\(^{366}\)

Buber became famous for his call for peace between Jews and Arabs, at a time when the conflict between the two groups led to harsh violence on both sides. Buber’s concern was deeply connected to his dialogical thought, which emphasized respect, affirmation, and acknowledgment of the other and his needs. However, it is interesting to note that Buber’s discussion of the Jewish-Arab relationship in Mandatory Palestine was based not only on his universal call for peace and dialogue, but was also deeply connected to his view that the Jewish people had a divine mission.

We can gain some insight into Buber’s perception of the unique character of the Jews and their place in the world by considering a traditional tale that he recounts in his article “the spirit of Israel and the world of today”:

There is a Jewish tradition about seventy angels known as princes who are set in charge of the seventy nations of the world. Each of these princes supervises his own nation, acting as its spokesman before the throne of glory. When their respective nations are embattled, they too become involved against each other. The princes are the real victors and the real vanquished; and their wars, victories and defeats, their ascents and descents on the mighty ladder, are what historians characterize by the name of history. Each of them has a

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\(^{365}\) The two thinkers’ call for dialogue in general, and in the context of the conflicts in Mandatory Palestine and in Algeria in particular, stood at the centre of Woocher’s comparative discussion of Buber and Camus.

\(^{366}\) It should be noted that there were also other political positions that the two thinkers shared, such as their position against the Cold War and their effort to distance themselves from both the Western and Soviet blocks, their affiliation with the moderate Left in economic issues, and their objection to the death penalty even for Nazi criminals (Camus supported the death penalty for Nazi collaborators after the war, but changed his mind and returned to be a vocal opponent of it).
purpose and function of his own; and so long as the prince does his part, so long as he accomplishes his purpose and fulfils his function, he is entrusted with power. But he is responsible to his Master, and is required to render an accounting to him. Therefore, when he becomes so intoxicated with power as to forget who he is and what his function is, arrogantly assuming himself to be the lord and master – then the hand of his Sovereign falls upon him… Now, it is said that the Jewish people, too, have a prince appointed over them; but there are those who assert that the children of Israel refused to accept the yoke of any angel, rejecting all yokes except that of the Kingship of God and all authority save that of the very Godhead.\footnote{Martin Buber, \textit{Israel and the World, Essays in a Time of Crisis.} (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), 183–184.}

The tale reflects Buber’s own thought: there is room for a plurality of nations, and all nations are unique in their respective ways. However, this does not mean that all nations are of equal status. The Jewish people are exceptional because they hold a direct, unmediated, connection with God, the Master of the world. As Buber put it, “the source of the people of Israel is to be found not in that world of multiplicity…but rather in the world of the one truth.”\footnote{Ibid., 184.}

Moreover, history, according to this tradition, is the common term for the conduct of the different nations (or, in the idiom of the tale, their respective angels), “their wars, victories and defeats.” The Jewish people, according to Buber, are unique also in that they stand beyond conventional history, since they stand in direct connection with God. Their course in the world is different from that of conventional kings and rulers, because theirs is an altogether different mission: the establishment of the Kingship of God on earth. The inability of the Jewish people to govern themselves in their ancient land might hinder, to some extent, their ability to fulfill their divine, exceptional mission since their autonomy is a pre-requisite for fulfilling the mission,\footnote{Ibid., 172.} but it cannot cancel or change it. In fact, Buber argued that the
real reason for anti-Semitism in the world, is the frustration of the nations that the Jews are not willing to give up their divine truth.\textsuperscript{370}

This view informs Buber’s position on the Jewish-Arab relationship in Mandatory Palestine. Buber called for the creation of a bi-national commonwealth, in which the two communities would live in peace. But it should be noted that Buber did not call for the creation of a neutral state governing all of its citizens as individuals, as in the Western liberal model, but for a commonwealth that would be based on co-existence and dialogue between the two distinct groups – Jews and Arabs – in which each group would retain its uniqueness. Moreover, alongside his genuine concern for peace and justice in the relationship between Jews and Arabs, Buber’s call for dialogue with the Arabs was based on his concern regarding the Jews themselves: for him, the main aim of the Zionist project should be to create a just society, and therefore the Jews would betray their divine mission if they would not conduct themselves in a peaceful and just manner towards the Arabs. The election of Israel is precisely the reason for its moral obligation towards the Arabs.

Buber’s position stood in contrast to that of liberal Jews who understood the idea of the Jewish people’s election as obsolete and irrelevant, an idea that should be left behind and overcome. On the other hand, Buber’s view also contrasted sharply to that of radical Jewish nationalists who viewed the idea of the election of Israel as a justification to infringe on the rights of others.\textsuperscript{371} Buber’s view was also different from that of David Ben Gurion and others who claimed that the State of Israel should be a “beacon for the nations,” in the sense that it

\textsuperscript{370} Ibid., 190.
\textsuperscript{371} This group includes many of the “Hilltop Youth” discussed above. Many of the Hilltop Youth support the ideas of Rabbi Meir Kahane, who viewed the conflict between Jews and Arabs as a holy war. For a discussion of Rabbi Kahane, see Aviezer Ravitzky, \textit{Roots of Kahanism: Consciousness and Political Reality} (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Shazar Library, 1986).
should strive for mundane achievements and not a creation of a dialogical community under
God. In fact, Buber criticized this view precisely because he rejected the idea of secular
political messianism, as we have discussed above.\footnote{372}

Buber’s call for a bi-national state in Palestine was not merely a political compromise
for a conflict between two ethnic groups over the same territory. Paradoxically, it was a
rejection of political considerations, and a reflection of his view of the unique, particularistic
mission of the Jewish people. For Buber, as described above, the inherent connection
between the Jewish people and the land of Israel was clear and unquestionable, and relied not
only on historical facts but on a divine mission.\footnote{373} Since the mission of the Jewish people is
to establish a just, dialogical community in the land of Israel, all that the Jews needed in
order to promote their mission was the freedom to immigrate to Palestine, to purchase land,
and have their right of self-determination recognized.\footnote{374} He rejected the need for a modern
nation state or any kind of sovereignty, since that would only reinforce I-It relationships and
power relations, which are precisely what the new Jewish Zionist communities should
overcome.\footnote{375} Buber also rejected the demand, expressed by many Zionists, to create a Jewish
majority in Palestine. He did so because he saw demographic competition between Jews and

\footnote{372} For a discussion of Buber’s rejection of Zionist secular political messianism see Ohana, “Ambiguous
Messianism: The Political Theology of Martin Buber”.

\footnote{373} Buber made this clear in the book Ben ‘am Le-Artso, and in a famous letter he wrote to Mahatma Gandhi,
after Gandhi claimed that the solution for anti-Semitism should be found in Europe, not Palestine, since
Palestine belonged to the Arabs (Buber, Te’udah Ve-Yi’ud, 1984, 2:163–174).

\footnote{374} Martin Buber, Erets Li-Shene ‘Amim (A Land of Two Peoples), ed. Paul R Mendes-Flohr (Jerusalem:
Sho’ken, 1988), 177.

\footnote{375} For a discussion of Buber’s rejection of the modern nation state see Manuel Duarte De Oliveira, “Passion for
Land and Volk: Martin Buber and Neo-Romanticism,” The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook 41, no. 1 (1996): 239–
60. Oliveira discusses the similarities and difference between Buber’s nationalism and the German idea of Volk,
especially his idea that the Jewish people’s mission is one of universal humanism, not only ethnic particularism.
In this context, Oliveira presents the argument between Buber and Herman Cohen, who rejected Jewish
nationalism because, according to him, the Jews have a universal religious mission, which Jewish nationalism
would cause them to abandon while focusing on mundane concrete concerns. Cohen’s position was thus
different from Buber’s, who wanted to integrate the Jewish people’s universal mission with national project in
the Land of Israel.
Arabs as just another dimension of the unnecessary and harmful conflict between them; and because the only Jews who should immigrate to Palestine are those who are devoted to contribute to the Jewish divine mission.

Buber took part in the consolidation – some would say the construction – of modern Jewish nationhood. As Ernest Gellner and others have explained, ethnic nationalist state formations have been common in the modern era, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, where the dominant form of nationalism was along ethnic lines. The consolidation of ethnic nationalism necessitated the articulation of a unique (and possibly divine) sense of national heritage, destiny and “national spirit”. Buber’s central European background, where ideas of ethnic nationalism were common, complemented in this case with the Jewish heritage that articulated the uniqueness and election of the Jewish people long before modernity. Many national movements, including ethnic ones, accepted the idea that other nations or ethnic groups exist next to them, precisely because each nation or ethnic group is unique and different and can thus exist side by side with others. But Buber’s nationalist thought is interesting and exceptional for the way in which he integrated the concern for the Arabs into the construction of the Jewish national ethos itself. That is, the Arabs’ presence in

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Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006). It is important to stress that as distinct from other nations, the Jewish people had a very strong national identity long before modernity. In this sense, the theories that Gellner and Benedict Anderson developed regarding the modern construction of nations can be applied to the Jewish case only partially. A theory that is more suitable to understand the consolidation of modern national Jewish identity was developed by Anthony Smith, who discussed how pre-existing ethnic groups developed their modern national identities (Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (New York, NY: B. Blackwell, 1988). For a discussion of this subject in the context of Zionism, see Gideon Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology* (Hanover: Brandeis, 1995), 4–20.

Ethnic nationalism is distinct from civic nationalism, which is based on the idea that all those who live in a given territory and obey the same rule are considered equal citizens, regardless of their ethnicity. For a discussion of this distinction see Hans Kohn, “Western and Eastern Nationalism,” in *Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 162–65. Kohn was a colleague of Buber and a member of *Brit Shalom* movement, but left the movement and became critical of Zionism, since according to him the tension between Jewish nationalism and the call for peace with the Arabs was too strong. The tension between ethnic and civic nationalism within the Zionist movement should also be noted. Thinkers such as Ahad Ha'am emphasized the Jewish national spirit, whereas Herzl and Klatzkin focused on the establishment of a liberal nation state for the Jewish people.
Palestine was an essential part of the Jewish people’s mission, for by establishing a proper dialogical relationship with the Arabs, they would prove that conflicts between different nations are avoidable.\(^{378}\) As such, Buber was able to present a rather extreme picture of Jewish particularism and connectedness, while at the same time to stress the ethical boundaries that could prevent it from becoming aggressive and chauvinistic.

Buber therefore called for a solution to the Jewish-Palestinian conflict not by offering a political compromise, but by rejecting the political element altogether, and replacing it with the social-dialogical one. Indeed, he objected to the Partition Plan for Mandatory Palestine offered as a solution to the conflict, but for reasons opposite to those of the Arabs and of those Jews who objected to it. Most of the Jews and Arabs who rejected the Partition Plan wished to keep the entire territory under their exclusive sovereignty. Buber rejected the plan because, for him, sovereignty was not needed at all, and claimed that the two communities could live side by side, under a shared authority that would facilitate technical-administrative matters.\(^{379}\) At one point, Buber did not oppose the idea that the bi-national state in Palestine could become an autonomous member in a Syrian confederation.\(^{380}\) Moreover, Buber suggested that both Arabs and Jews should be part of the dialogical society in Palestine. Again, their existence together would set an example to the world – which suffers from exploitation and zero-sum political conflicts – that a community based on dialogue is possible. Buber, therefore, wished to see the Arabs as part of the Jewish-universal mission.

\(^{378}\) Avnon, *Martin Buber*, 182.

\(^{379}\) Buber’s discussion of “the line of demarcation” – the limit to one’s legitimate ability to harm the other in order to fulfill one’s own legitimate needs – should also be understood in this context. For mainstream Zionism (both Labour on the Left and Jabotinky’s Revisionism on the Right), this concept has implied accommodation of Arab demands only to the extent they do not offend the Jewish claim for sovereignty and security. Buber, again, did not wish for a modern sovereign state for the Jews.

\(^{380}\) “Palestine: Can Deadlock Be Broken?,” *Picture Post*, July 12, 1947.
Again, this is not to say that Buber’s call against violence stems only from a particularistic concern about the mission of the Jewish people. Indeed, Buber’s dialogical thought was universal, not only Jewish, and according to him, at the core of this particularistic mission stands a universal concern: the Jewish people’s mission is to set an example of justice and dialogue which the entire world should follow. Yet, the way Buber dealt with the Jewish-Arab conflict reveals the interplay in this thought between universalism and particularism. It is also connected to his account of ethics based on relationships between different circles of connectedness, rather than the boundaries that separate nations. Buber’s discussion is interesting – and important – because it shows that national particularism does not necessarily lead to national chauvinism, but can also lead to dialogue and peace.

Buber’s ideas have been criticized from different perspectives. Politically, he was criticized by the leadership of mainstream Zionism, including Theodor Herzl and David Ben Gurion (who appreciated Buber’s intellectual contribution and Zionist passion despite their different political views), since Buber rejected their aim of establishing a secular modern sovereign nation state, whose purpose would not differ from that of any other nation in the world. Moreover, mainstream Zionism emphasized the need for a state as a shelter from anti-Semitism, but this aim played only a relatively minor role in Buber’s Zionist thought. This led to criticism of Buber during his time, and by contemporary scholars.

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381 Herzl’s wish to establish a modern Jewish nation state was evident in his fundamental Zionist manifesto from 1896, *The Jewish State*, which described in detail the argument and plan for establishing such a state (Theodor. Herzl, *The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question*, trans. Sylvie D’Avigdor [London: Pordes, 1972]). Herzl’s modern political views, and his lack of concern for the spiritual and cultural dimensions of the Jewish people, were the focus of Asher Grinberg’s (Ahad Ha’am’s) critique of Political Zionism (Asher Zvi Hirsch Grinsberg, “The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem,” in *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg [New York: Atheneum, 1972], 262–69).

382 In The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel’s Soul”, Yoram Hazony presents one such harsh critique. Hazony claims that Buber withdrew from Zionism at an early stage in his life, and called instead for an amorphous spiritual ideal that he referred to as “Zion of the soul”. As evidence of his claim, Hazony focuses on the speeches Buber delivered in the Prague Bar Kochba society, in 1909, in which he did not even mention
A more conceptual criticism would be that Buber did not give much consideration to the issue of scarcity. In practice, political, financial and natural resources are limited, which inevitably leads to conflicts. This idea, which stands at the basis of Camus’ thought, is largely ignored in Buber’s utopian solution to the conflict, and this reflects Buber’s attempt to bypass the conflict rather than deal with it in such terms. Camus emphasized the idea that human beings are not necessarily benevolent and accepted that conflicts are inevitable in a limited world. Buber acknowledged this to some extent, but his ideas may be criticized as relying too much on benevolence, and largely ignored the need for power and the scarcity that exist in practice, which inevitably leads to conflict. Moreover, Buber’s solution, as well as his entire dialogical thought, requires mutuality and good will on both sides. Such mutuality did not exist at that time. Very few Arabs responded positively to Buber’s call, and only a few Jewish Zionists supported it. In the midst of war and violence, a willingness to engage in Buberian dialogue was extremely unlikely. Tragically, Buber, the philosopher of dialogue, did not find many people who were willing to listen to him.}

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Zionism. Hazony stresses that Buber called for a subjective transformation of the Jewish individual so that he could feel united with the Jewish people, rather than the objective transformation that Zionism tried to achieve through the establishment of a nation state (Yoram Hazony, *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel’s Soul* [New York: Basic Books, 2000], 181–193. Although Hazony is correct to some extent in his argument that Buber was too lofty and overemphasized the subjective experience, in my opinion his claim that Buber should not be considered a Zionist is false. First, Buber did identify with many of the aims and practices of mainstream Zionism, especially the importance of immigration to Palestine and settlement there. Second, the term Zionism is much wider than the narrow interpretation that Hazony seems to give it. It seems that for Hazony the only Zionism is the political one. Buber’s Zionism, which is spiritual, cultural, and utopian, should also be considered a branch of Zionism and integral to the Zionist idea. Buber’s Zionist ideas are not very different, for example, from those of A.D. Gordon, who is widely considered to be an important Zionist thinker.

383 It should be noted that Buber did correspond with some Arab intellectuals (see Buber, *Erets Li-Shene ʻAmim* [A Land of Two Peoples], 229–232). He also had some contact with Arabs on the personal level. He lived in Abu Tur, a neighborhood in Jerusalem that was predominately Arab, and enjoyed warm relationships with his Arab neighbours. In fact, he refused to leave the neighbourhood when the hostilities began, despite the pleas of the Jewish authorities, and left the neighbourhood only just before the war started. His house, which included his huge library, was protected by some of his Arab friends during the war (Susser, *Existence and Utopia*, 170). A somewhat different view has been presented by Ernst Simon, who took part in the *Brit Shalom* movement together with Buber, and said that they did not make a serious attempt to build political relationships with Arabs. Yet, Simon also mentions a brief encounter between Buber and Prince (later King) Hassan of Morocco.
In sum, at the centre of Buber’s thought stands a contradiction. Buber tried to present a theory in which the Jews (and Arabs) were to create a national political entity – a commonwealth in Palestine/Eretz Israel – while at the same time lacked the most basic element of modern nationalism, namely, the idea of sovereignty. Buber called for the replacement of the political with the social: to create a community that would be based on dialogical relationship rather than on political power struggles. Buber’s idea may be inspiring in its call for dialogue, and as a conceptual tool to restrain collectivistic and nationalistic movements. It could provide a conceptual, theoretical alternative in order to criticize the common political order. But at the same time, Buber’s political ideas, which are so abstract and detached from concrete reality, could not serve as a viable and implementable political program.

Camus’ involvement in the war in Algeria was much more limited in comparison with Buber’s involvement in the conflict in Mandatory Palestine, but it was also connected with his ethical thought. He called for restraint on both sides in a conflict, in which each had some valid claims. Camus left Algeria for France during World War II, and although he went back to visit, he did not return to live there. He died in 1960, before the end of the Algerian war and the mass exodus of the Pied Noir to France. In 1956, he decided to keep silent about the conflict.  

His involvement in the conflict prior to that was marked by organizing a peace conference, which failed, and his famous comment in 1957 concerning the violence

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384 Hargreaves, “Camus and the Colonial Question in Algeria,” 164. This could be compared, to some extent, to Buber’s decision to largely withdraw from intensive political involvement after the State of Israel was established.
committed by the FLN ("I believe in justice, but the safety of my mother comes first").\textsuperscript{385} He also started to write \textit{The First Man}, a sentimental description of his childhood in Algeria and the crisis that the \textit{Pied Noir} had gone through.

As opposed to Buber, who promoted the idea of Jewish nationalism (as he understood the term), Camus’ concerns lay far from nationalism. He rejected the Muslim-Algerian idea of national liberation, since this notion did not leave room in Algeria for French-Algerians like himself. As a French-Algerian who did not live in France until World War II, and given his affiliation with the Left, he also felt uncomfortable with French nationalism. To a large extent, Camus saw nationalism as one more destructive ideology developed in modernity, as part of the false promise to bring secular redemption as a replacement for the hope of the metaphysical one that was lost. The ideas of ethnic essentialism and particularism, which were dominant in Central and Eastern Europe, were alien to him.

Yet it is interesting to note that this very idea – the rejection of European nationalism – is taken up by Camus in his attempt to construct a collective identity, that of the “Mediterranean culture.” In a speech he delivered in 1937,\textsuperscript{386} as well as in \textit{The Rebel},\textsuperscript{387} Camus described the Mediterranean culture as one that respects life and presented it as an alternative model to the European one. He points to the ancient Greek culture with its acknowledgement of the capabilities and limits of man instead of the desire to achieve absolute metaphysical aims. He also pointed to his contemporary Mediterranean society as composed of hard working people who live a simple life based on common sense, rather than

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\textsuperscript{385} Ibid., 166.
\textsuperscript{386} Camus, “Native Culture. The New Culture of the Mediterranean.”
\textsuperscript{387} Camus, \textit{The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt}, 297–301.
\end{flushright}
succumbing to intellectual abstractions and national myths that could lead them to fanaticism and destruction.

Thus, both Buber and Camus presented their cultures (the Jewish and the Mediterranean, respectively) as alternatives to modern secular nationalism. Each of them also tried to present his advocacy of moderation and peace as integral to his own culture. Yet there are clear differences between the two thinkers on this score. Camus described the Mediterranean culture as connected to a simple, authentic and therefore moderate life rather than to abstractions and ideologies or metaphysical aspirations. Buber, on the other hand, described the metaphysical and divine connection of the Jewish people. This account is connected with his criticism of the Western form of European nationalism. While Buber’s critique was aimed mainly toward Western European culture, which emphasizes individualism and mundane I-It relations, Camus’ critique was aimed mainly towards Central and Eastern Europe, which was swept up by messianic political ideologies. But Camus’ “Mediterranean” critique could also have been directed, to some extent, towards Buber. After all, it is fair to say that Buber’s national ideas were inspired in part by Central European nationalism, which Camus rejected.

Camus was torn between the two sides of the Algerian conflict. On the one hand, he acknowledged the oppression and suffering of the Muslims in Algeria. This was evident in a series of articles that he published, where he described the terrible living conditions of the Muslims in Kabylie. He was also expelled from the Algerian Communist party after he claimed that it was not concerned enough about the problems of the Muslim population. This

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388 It should be noted that from a critical view, both Buber’s discussion of the Jewish people and Camus’ discussion of the Mediterranean would be considered problematic, since both thinkers tried to construct an essentialist image of a culture that is made up of different people and subgroups.
idea is also reflected in *The Plague*. When the journalist Rambert asks Rieux about the living condition of the Muslim population in Oran, Rieux’s answer is characterized as follows:

[T]he language he used was that of a man who was sick and tired of the world he lived in – though he had much linking for his fellow-men – and had resolved, for his part, to have no truck with injustice and compromises with the truth.\(^\text{389}\)

At the same time, Camus belonged to the French settlers’ community in Algeria. Politically, Algeria was considered a part of France, no less than Paris. However, the *Pied Noir* largely saw Algeria as their homeland.\(^\text{390}\) In his literary writing, Camus also described the unique identity of the *Pied Noir*: the French culture and language, and (an often uncomfortable) co-existence with the Muslim population.

Camus’ ethical account, which we have discussed, is relevant to his attitude toward the conflict. Human reality is based on the existence of the absurd; there will always be conflicts, and any effort to solve them once and for all would lead to greater evil, destruction and the loss of innocent people’s lives. According to Camus, in any struggle against injustice or oppression, no matter how just this struggle is, there should be constant deliberation and reflection about the price that innocent people might have to pay. The solidarity based on the shared humanity connecting all human beings should restrain and direct the rebels against their oppressors. For this reason, no one should be presented merely as an oppressor or victim. Indeed, Camus tended to describe people in his literary works as trapped within an impossible situation (which is that of the absurd itself). Part of the experience of the absurd is


people’s desire to keep their innocence, although they sometimes realize that they have committed – or must commit – injustice.\textsuperscript{391}

While Buber was criticized politically mainly by Jewish nationalists for rejecting the wish for a modern Jewish nation state, Camus stood in opposition mainly to figures on the Left, who saw his concern for the colonial settlers as an obstacle for the struggle against colonialism. Although they wrote mainly after Camus’ lifetime, the views of Franz Fanon, Edward Said, and Albert Memmi are the best examples of this latter perspective. Fanon developed the idea that decolonization was a conflict between two forces – the colonized and the colonizers – that must end with total victory of the colonized. They should use all means – including violence – to do so, precisely because the colonial world is a “Manichean one” in which one side dehumanizes the other.\textsuperscript{392} Said claims that Camus saw French colonialism as fundamentally benevolent, and therefore failed to take seriously the Muslims’ suffering, since

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\textsuperscript{391} This element is presented in one of the most impressive chapters in \textit{The First Man}, which describe a dialogue with a French settler: “Last year, when they had to evacuate, it was a real free-for-all. Life in that region had become intolerable. You had to sleep with a gun. When the Raskil farm was attacked, you remember?”

“No,” said Jacques.

“Yes, the father and his two sons had their throats cut, and mother and daughter raped over and over, then killed…in short… the prefect was unfortunate enough to tell a meeting of farmers that they would have to reconsider colonial issues, how they treated the Arabs, and that now a new day had come. Then he had to listen to the old man tell him no one on earth was going to lay down the law about his property. But from that day on he didn’t open his mouth. Sometimes at night he would get up and go out. My mother would watch him through the blinds and she’d see him walking around his land. When the order to evacuate came, he said nothing. His grape harvest was over, his wine was in the vats. He opened the vats, and he went to a spring of brackish water that he’d diverted long ago, and he turned it back to run into his fields, and he equipped a tractor with a trench plow. For three days, at the wheel, bareheaded, saying not a word, he uprooted the vines all over this property. Think of it, that skinny old man bouncing around on his tractor, pushing the accelerator lever when the plow wasn’t getting a vine that was bigger than the others, not stopping even to eat, my mother bringing him bread, cheese, and sobrasada, which he ate calmly, the way he had done everything, throwing away the last chunk of bread and accelerating some more, all this from sunrise to sunset, without even looking at the mountains on the horizon, nor at the Arabs who’d soon found out and were watching him from a distance - they weren’t saying anything either. And when a young captain, informed by who knows who, arrived and demanded an explanation, he said to him, ‘Young man, since what we made here is a crime, it has to be wiped out.’” (Camus, \textit{The First Man}, 179–180.)

\textsuperscript{392} Frantz Fanon, \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}, Grove Press (New York, 1968), 41. For a comparison of Fanon and Camus see Carroll, \textit{Albert Camus, The Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice}, 115–122.
his main concern was to justify and maintain colonial rule. Albert Memmi discussed the figure of the benevolent colonizer, who understands that the oppressed natives are right, and claimed that the right choice for him would be either to leave the colony altogether, or to leave his community and join the oppressed natives in the struggle. Such was indeed a decision that Camus refused to make, precisely because he refused to see one side as purely benevolent and the other as simply evil.

However, there are three elements in the Muslim Algerian struggle that Camus refused to accept. The first was the demand for complete independence from France, which he objected to, both because he genuinely believed in the French colonial mission to bring welfare to the natives in Algeria, and because he claimed that independence would lead to unrestrained, militant Arab nationalism. The second element he rejected was the use of terror on both sides (including the use of torture and excessive violence by the French authorities). Indeed, the main aim of the failed conference he organized was to call for the end of violence against innocent civilians. The third element that he could not accept was the demonization of the Pied Noir, both by the FLN and by his friends in Paris. The First Man, as well as his story The Guest about a French teacher who lives in a remote place in order to teach Muslim children, are the best evidence of that refusal to demonize them. It was important for him to describe the Pied Noir as many of them were – modest people who came to Algeria in order to escape poverty and who created a vibrant society of hard working people.

Camus’ affiliation with the Pied Noir, as expressed in his writings, was also criticized by Conor Cruise O’Brien, who accused Camus of having internalized the racist attitudes of

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394 Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized (London: Earthscan Publications, 2003), 63–70. It should be noted that Camus was impressed by Memmi’s semi-autobiographical novel Pillar of Salt about the life of a Jewish boy in Tunis, and wrote the introduction to this book.
the French colonialists towards the native Muslim population. O’Brien points to different elements in Camus’ writings that reflect this, such as with the murder of an Arab in *The Outsider*, or his description of the trial that follows. O’Brien claims it is unrealistic to depict, in colonial Algeria, a fair trial after a Frenchman murdered an Arab.\(^3\)\(^9\) He pointed to the fact that although the plot of the *The Plague* takes place in the Algerian city of Oran, it ignores the Muslim population of this city (apart from the brief dialogue quoted above). Likewise, *The Plague* is an allegory of the German occupation of France, but Camus ignores the idea that for the Arabs, according to O’Brien, “the French were in Algeria in virtue of the same right by which the Germans were in France: the right of conquest.”\(^3\)\(^9\)\(^6\)

O’Brien’s criticism of Camus’ attitude towards the French colonial rule in Algeria relates to a wider, more theoretical, criticism. In a famous article by Francis Jeanson that was published in *Le Temps Modernes* and led to a bitter conflict between Camus and Sartre (who was the editor of *Le Temps Modernes* at that time), Jeanson criticized Camus’ *The Rebel*.\(^3\)\(^9\)\(^7\) Jeanson’s major criticism against Camus is that his discussion of revolutions is too lofty, “metaphysical” and “moralistic”, and largely overlooks historical and economic elements. Camus praises the rebel who acts against metaphysical suffering such as death and sickness, but looks negatively at the revolutionaries (especially the Marxist ones) who struggle against historical, political and economic injustices. The result, according to Jeanson, was that Camus rejects any serious historical and political action that could affect the structure of political and socio-economic injustice, and points only to the negative and destructive aspects of these revolutions. For Camus, as for many theologians, it is enough to feed the hungry,

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\(^3\)\(^9\)\(^6\) Ibid., 48.
\(^3\)\(^9\)\(^7\) Jeanson, “Albert Camus Ou L’Ame Revoltee.”
rather than change fundamentally the deep-rooted systems that create their misery. Jeanson, implies that by doing so, Camus collaborates with these systems, and encourages quietism. Camus accepts the bourgeoisie systems as given, and thus helps to sustain them instead of pointing out their guilt. The only socialism that Camus accepts is the Scandinavian syndicalism, which is in fact non-revolutionary. As such, because of his effort to be morally pure and noble, Camus helps to sustain injustice.

Both Jeanson and O’Brien took firm Marxist and anti-colonial positions against Camus. Camus’ call to acknowledge the different sides in the conflict (a call that was admired by many and shared by Buber)\textsuperscript{398}, was seen as an obstacle to the effort to find a real and effective solution to the conflict. However, both Jeanson and O’Brien did not do full justice to Camus. Although Camus rejected the Muslim’s demand for exclusive sovereignty, in comparison to other \textit{Pied Noir}, he genuinely cared about the condition of the Muslim population in Algeria. As a thinker whose entire thought was based on a call to thwart injustice and oppression, he supported the legitimate claims of the Muslims for dignity and freedom. It was also problematic to accuse him of being indifferent to material and historical injustices, given his personal background as a person who came from a poor family and as a

\textsuperscript{398} Camus’ effort to see the human side of those involved in conflict was evident in his reflections during World War II. Towards the end of the war, he published (anonymously) a series of articles under the title “Letters to a German Friend,” where he bitterly confronted the Germans for their cruelty, but also blamed them for choosing the wrong path in the \textit{shared} human rebellion against the absurd: “I shall remember that you and we started out from the same solitude… caught in the same tragedy of the intelligence. And, despite yourselves, I shall still apply to you the name of man” (Albert Camus, “Letter to a German Friend,” in \textit{Resistance, Rebellion and Death}, trans. Justin O’Brien [New York: Vintage Books, 1960], 30). Yet it should be noted that the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust posed a serious challenge to both thinkers. Camus supported the death penalty for collaborators with the Nazis, despite his general opposition to the death penalty. (He would change his mind in this matter and regretted his support of the death penalty for these collaborators, following the criticism he received from Francois Moriac.) Buber’s dialogical thought, which looked positively on human nature and hoped for dialogue, was also challenged by the unprecedented horrors of the Holocaust. We noted that one of Buber’s ways to deal with the cruelty of the Nazi regime was to declare that those Nazis who chose evil disengaged themselves from the human sphere (Diamond, \textit{Martin Buber, Jewish Existentialist}, 146). This indeed marked the limit of Buber’s concept of inclusiveness.
member of the French Resistance. Moreover, it may be argued that Jeanson, who had an ideological Marxist view, saw Camus as presenting a counter ideology (explicitly or implicitly) that would support reactionary forces. Yet, Camus’ entire aim was to avoid grand ideologies and to deal with injustices for what they are. From this perspective, Camus supported peace and tried to fight against injustice on both sides, rather than taking a side in the conflict and supporting the *Pied Noir* over the Muslim population.

Yet O’Brien and Jeanson asked a very important and valid question. While Camus discusses the limits that should be placed on revolutionary action and the anti-colonial struggle, Jeanson and O’Brien ask what limits should be placed on Camus’ ideas. Where is the point at which one should struggle against evil even if it means sacrificing the lives of innocent people? Camus dealt with this question repeatedly (for example, in his discussion about the Russian anarchists), but he did not present a clear answer to it. At most, he claimed that the answer to this question should depend on the given context, rather than on any abstract ideological premises.  

Both Buber and Camus called for care and concern towards both sides of the respective conflicts. Both of them did so not only out of universal concern, but also out of deep connection with their own particular group’s existence and moral conduct. Both thinkers tried to promote dialogue in the midst of conflict, and by doing so showed their intellectual and personal courage. Yet, there are significant differences between them. First, Buber, like all Zionists, did not see the Jews as a colonial power but as natives returning home. For this

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399 For an important discussion of the tension between the need to do good and the price that this may require, which makes reference to Camus’ ideas, see Michael Walzer, “Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2, no. 2 (1973): 178–180.
400 The idea that both thinkers called for “politics of dialogue” is central to Woocher’s comparison of the two thinkers.
reason, he did not feel a need to apologize for the Jewish existence in Palestine, but tried to offer a solution in which both native people – the Jews and the Arabs – would live side by side as two distinct collectives and hold dialogical relationships between each other. Camus on his part was well aware of the power relations between the Pied Noir and the Muslim population, and his way to deal with the problem was to emphasize the human, non-political, aspect of human experience: in the love of the French-Algerians for Algeria; the teacher’s claim in The Guest that he would not feel at home in any other place on earth; and the moving description of the vibrant daily life of the French Algerian community that he describes in The First Man. In short, Camus dealt with the problem by trying to separate the personal from the national or the political.

It is interesting to note that both thinkers tried to distance themselves from Europe, and presented their home identity as an alternative to the modern European one. Apart from his call for Jewish-Arab co-existence, Buber claimed that the Jews and other Asian cultures share an understanding of the importance of connectedness, as opposed to the Greek (and probably also the European culture that followed it) that views the world as a separated object to be mastered and conquered.401 Again, Camus discusses the Mediterranean culture that focuses on concrete life rather than European ideological abstractions. These analyses (regardless of their objective accuracy) show not only the thinkers’ critique of modern culture. It also displays their urge to articulate the depth of their connection and commitment to their respective countries, and their effort to distance themselves from Europe, especially in the context of the wars in Mandatory Palestine and Algeria, in which Jews and French-

Algerians, respectively, were labelled by the Muslim populations as nothing but alien European invaders.

At the same time, despite Camus’ call and practical effort to create a dialogue between the FLN and the *Pied Noir*, and despite Buber’s call to restrain the violence committed by both sides, the differences between the two thinkers remain. Buber called for ethics within and through connectedness and the search for utopia. Camus called for restraint precisely because utopia is not achievable, and people are trapped in a reality that is full of paradoxes that can never be solved. Thus Buber tried to offer a utopian solution to the conflict, and Camus offered a political compromise. Both Buber and Camus failed to achieve their political aims. But Buber failed largely because his ideas were too abstract, metaphysical, and detached from mundane reality; whereas Camus failed to achieve his aims because the political forces in opposition to his position were stronger at that point from those who supported it.

There is another important difference between Buber’s and Camus’ respective approaches. Buber tried, at least in theory, to find a permanent solution to the Jewish-Arab conflict. This, indeed, is the meaning of his utopian and redemptive idea. Camus, however, saw human reality as an endless, unsolvable Sisyphean struggle against the absurd. It is a constant, ongoing effort to fight against evil, in the political realm as in others. A search for a complete solution is therefore irrelevant and could even be harmful. What is needed is not a permanent solution, but effective restraints that help to minimize the unavoidable damage that results when conflicting sides struggle against each other.
The call for moderation, restraint and concern for the rights of the other, especially in times of conflict – and even more so, when both sides are convinced that they are right – are very important and often influential. In this sense, Camus’ views have been a source of inspiration despite his failure in the Algerian case. In a hypothetical discussion between Buber and Camus regarding these cases, Buber would not disagree with Camus’ position on the need to set boundaries and restraints on political action. However, Buber would add another, metaphysical, dimension to the problem that Camus did not and could not accept.

402 In many ways, Camus’ views regarding the need to respect the humanity of the other, even if the other is the enemy, are shared by many in the Israeli Zionist Left. Indeed, similar to Camus’ predicament, the Zionist Israeli Left is criticized both by people on the Israeli Right for what they see as its being overly-concerned about the rights of the Palestinians, and by many Palestinians for its Zionist views. A notable example (among many) of an intellectual who tries to follow a similar path in regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the prominent author, David Grossman (who actually mentions Camus in his novel, *The Smile of the Lamb*). Grossman, a Zionist Israeli, often discusses the importance of moral and ethical conduct, and his human concerns about the Palestinian population.
Chapter 6 – Conclusion

Despite the major differences between them, Buber and Camus shared important concerns: the wish to overcome the possible danger of nihilism in the modern era, and the wish to articulate an existential and ethical approach that would provide meaning and a moral compass. Buber pointed to this meaning and moral compass in what he saw as the inherent human need for connectedness. Camus found it on the opposite side of the same coin, that is, not in unity itself, but in the constant Sisyphean search for meaning and the rebellion against oppression and injustice. Thus, despite the fact that Buber was a believer and Camus secular, and despite their different personal and intellectual backgrounds, they both dealt with similar concerns.

The two thinkers’ shared quest for a solution to the problem of homelessness, alienation, and confusion in modernity leads to another question regarding the place of ethical boundaries and restraints in their respective ideas. One may say that this question may fit Camus’ thought more than Buber’s, who put connectedness rather than limits at the basis of his thought. Indeed, Buber’s thought faces a much greater challenge in this regard, since he did not develop an explicit, clear, and coherent ethical system. The search for ethics based on boundaries is alien to Buber’s dialogical thought, as much as a search for metaphysical or mystical connectedness may be alien to the Western liberal thought, or to Camus’ thought. Yet, it is precisely for this reason that Buber’s ethical discussion is relevant: it demonstrates ways in which to develop ethical mechanisms based on connectedness, rather than on separation and boundaries. The comparison with Camus, who inherited the understandings of late modern thought – with its skepticism about the ability to achieve harmony and
benevolence, and a separation between the mundane and metaphysical realms – is important in itself. It has also helped us to evaluate the ethical mechanisms that Buber developed.

Both thinkers were politically engaged intellectuals, and both of them largely failed to achieve their declared political aims. The Arab Jewish conflict is not over. The Algerian war terminated with the end of the Pied Noir community and the death of many lives on both sides. Buber’s political ideas were far too utopian and idealistic, and did not take into account the desires of both sides for political empowerment and self-determination. His call to fulfill what he viewed as the eternal mission of the Jewish people seemed too strange to the secular Zionists who wished to create a modern nation state. Camus’ call to acknowledge the humanity of one’s enemy and to restrain the struggle accordingly, and his respect and sympathy for both sides in the Algerian conflict, were lost in that cruel war, where people expected to support one side and oppose the other. These political failures are not merely a result of the difficulty to understand their views. Buber’s and Camus’ respective theories were considered too idealistic to be implemented.

Yet, Camus’ and Buber’s strength is not so much in the practical alternatives they offered (to the extent they actually offered practical alternatives), but in the critiques they offer for the purpose of evaluating and reflecting on current affairs. An important principle that they both shared is the idea that the human (for Buber, the interpersonal) dimension should not be neglected even when dealing with political issues. For Camus, abstract ideology should not precede the concrete awareness and intuitive sense of justice. Buber went even further and largely dismissed the modern-political sphere, and called for its replacement with social conditions that would allow for spontaneous dialogue. They shared
the idea that human beings should do their best to achieve their aims for connectedness or for freedom and should not be reduced to faceless components of a political system.

Buber’s and Camus’ accounts on the topic of connectedness, solidarity and ethics often stand in tension with one another. However they could be used to address the needs of different audiences. Camus’ political insights and ethical consideration could help to criticize and guide secular political movements and actions from deteriorating into fanatical actions in the name of some ultimate secular “messianic” goal. Buber’s thought could help to restrain and guide religious groups from deteriorating into violent anarchism in the name of their faith. In the first half of the 20th century, when the two thinkers were active, secular revolutionary fanaticism was considered the main problem. Today, religious fanaticism poses the main danger, and therefore Buber’s insights are relevant more than ever before.

The motivation that stood behind this study was to locate ethical mechanisms that could be useful for societies and cultures that are more collectivistic in their nature and stress the importance of collective action rather than individual self-realization; and also to find ways to assist groups and individuals who strive passionately to achieve what they view as just and moral political aims. The insights and ethical mechanisms Buber and Camus developed may help to guide ideological movements towards a constructive rather than destructive path, if they would only be willing to listen.
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