

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF BUBER'S COSMIC VISION OF DIALOGICAL LIFE¹

MICHAL BIZOŇ

Abstract: This paper provides an analysis of Martin Buber's not very well-known essay "Distance and Relation", which is his most relevant contribution to philosophical anthropology. In the essay, which was published almost thirty years after the publication of his most famous book, *I and Thou*, Buber elaborated on the anthropological foundations of his cosmic vision of dialogical life. The central question is "How is man possible?" Buber's answer is very important to the further development of his principle of dialogue in psychology (primarily his notion of confirmation) and philosophy of art, but it is not quite clear how compatible it is with some of his earlier theses from *I and Thou*. In particular, the relation between "distance" and the I-It relation is unclear. There are two seemingly contradictory statements: "In the beginning is the relation" and "The primal distance is a presupposition of the relation". The aim of this paper is to examine these anthropological foundations and to elucidate this apparent contradiction.

Keywords: philosophical anthropology; dialogical philosophy; Martin Buber; psychotherapy; distance; relation; confirmation.

Introduction

In 1923 Martin Buber published his most famous book, *I and Thou*, in which he presented his cosmic vision of the dialogical life of man. I call his vision a cosmic one because he discussed the possibility of entering into an I-Thou relationship not only with human persons and God but also with non-human entities such as natural ones or different forms of the spirit.² In fact, the cosmic dimension of his philosophy is best expressed in his "Postscript" (1957) to the second edition of *I and Thou* (1958), where he says that the area of the I-Thou relationship "reaches from stones to the stars" (Buber, 1970a, p. 173).³ This founding work of

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² I examine in detail the possibility of the dialogical relationship in these areas with regard to the problem of mutuality in my latest book (Bizoň, 2017).

³ Zlatica Plašienková and I referred to this vision as cosmic in our book, *The Anthropology of Normativity in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's and Martin Buber's Thought* (Plašienková & Bizoň, 2016, p. 147). For a focus on Teilhard's cosmic vision of man, see Plašienková and Kulisz, 2004. In quoting

the nascent philosophy of dialogue inevitably contains a number of important insights and knowledge about man—the philosophizing in it had to be essentially anthropological (Buber, 1967, p. 693)—but what are the anthropological foundations of such a vision? Specifically, this is a question of “How is man possible?” and “What is a presupposition of the duality of man’s relation with the world (I-Thou, I-It)?” (Buber, 1967, p. 694). In the atmosphere of an emerging modern philosophical anthropology, Buber was aware of these questions and therefore planned to elaborate on them. This was also necessary to further developing his principle of dialogue, for example, in the field of psychology and the philosophy of art. This is why there was a clear shift in Buber’s philosophy to philosophical anthropology from 1938 (Schaefer, 1973, p. 411). Almost thirty years after the publication of *I and Thou*, he succeeded in elaborating on the anthropological foundations of his philosophy in a short essay entitled “Distance and Relation (Urdistanz und Beziehung)” (1950) (cf. Buber, 1970a, p. 171). Undoubtedly, this was his most important theoretical treatise from the period after the Second World War. This is also reflected in the “more technical” language in which it is written, which differs from his earlier writings such as *I and Thou, Dialogue* (1932), and *The Question to the Single One* (1936). In the foreword to the first edition (1951), he states that this was the first part of his still uncompleted anthropological work (Buber, 1951, p. 7). The prelude to this never-completed project⁴ was his book *What is Man?* (1943/1947), which was written as a history of anthropological thought and not as his own philosophical anthropology.⁵ In the above-mentioned foreword, he also writes that the connection between this anthropological work and his writings on dialogical existence should be obvious to the reader (Buber, 1951, p. 7), but it must be said that this is not always the case. In particular, the connection between “distance” and the I-It relation is unclear. The aim of this paper is to therefore examine the anthropological foundations of Buber’s cosmic vision of dialogue life and subsequently to elucidate their connection with some of his earlier theses from *I and Thou*.

The twofold principle of human life

Buber’s overview of the history of anthropological thought in *What is Man?* ends with a chapter that outlines the perspectives of his own thinking about man. Rejecting both

from Buber’s works, I think it better to rely on published translations of his works rather than my own. Therefore, throughout my article, I refer to the English-language editions. Key terms are given in German in parentheses. The German originals of most of his works can be found in the first volume of *Martin Buber Werke* (Buber, 1962).

⁴ The first volume of his collected works, *Werke*, contains a special section on his contributions to philosophical anthropology, which includes the following works from the 1950s: “Man and His Image-Work” (1955), “The Word That Is Spoken” (1960), “What Is Common to All” (1960), “Guilt and Guilt Feelings” (1957) (Buber, 1962, pp. 409–502). Views on whether a collection of these essays can be considered a completed project of his philosophical anthropology vary (cf. Friedman, 1965, p. 7; Schaefer, 1972, p. 123).

⁵ *What is Man?* is the English title of his book *The Problem of Man* (1943), which was originally published in Hebrew as the book form of his inaugural course of lectures as a professor of social philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1938). The German translation was published in 1947 in Switzerland under the title *Das Problem des Menschen*. In 1948 it appeared as his first book in post-war Germany (Schaefer, 1972, p. 125).

individualistic and collectivistic anthropology, this “prospect”, as he named the last chapter, claims that “the fundamental fact of human existence is man with man” (Buber, 2004b, p. 240) and that the original category of human reality is the ontic sphere “between” man and man (Buber, 2004b, p. 241; cf. Schaefer, 1973, p. 437). In his essay “Distance and Relation”, he follows on from this conclusion and asks about the principle of human life. In seeking the answer to this fundamental question, Buber proceeds in a way that is typical of the philosophical anthropology of his time. He compares the reality of human beings with that of other known beings, namely animals.⁶ Since man is a part of nature, and simultaneously an aberration of it, the specific examination of man does not take place within nature but rather starts from it. The aim of his anthropology is not to find those characteristics that distinguish man from other living beings but rather to examine “the grounds of those characteristics as a whole” that constitute a special way and category of being (Buber, 1965a, pp. 59–60). Man does not differ from other living beings in the way they differ from each other. Buber is not primarily interested in individual human characteristics in themselves. Instead, he seeks out what makes them possible and what constitutes them. In this way, Buber came to the insight that the principle of human life is twofold and is based on two movements. He calls the first of these two movements “the primal setting at a distance” (*Urdistanzierung*) and the second of them “entering into a relation” (*In-Beziehung-Treten*) (Buber, 1965a, p. 60).

The element of “distance” is common to the various anthropologies of Buber’s time; of course, philosophers used it differently and came to their own conclusions. Examples are Scheler’s spirit and Plessner’s eccentric positionality. Buber obtained his concept of “primal distance” by comparing the animal and human images of the world. The comparison is based on knowledge of modern biology, especially Uexküll’s (1864–1944) theory of *Umwelt*.⁷ The doctrine of *Umwelt* was very popular among philosophers at that time and influenced the anthropologies of the above-mentioned Max Scheler (1874–1928) and Helmut Plessner (1892–1985) as well as Arnold Gehlen (1904–1976) and Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945).⁸ *Umwelt* refers to the species-specific and individual-specific world of a certain living organism. Animals relate to their surroundings through various functional circles, among which the most important are the circles of physical medium, food, enemies, and sex (Uexküll, 1982, p. 33). An animal is concerned only with what is useful and necessary for it. It focuses only on those elements that satisfy its life needs in order to construct the circle of its existence from them. This world is only a certain section of the environment (*Umgebung*) (Uexküll, 1957, p. 13) that surrounds the animal, but it is the only world (*Umwelt*) (Uexküll, 1957, p. 153). In Buber’s view, it is questionable whether world is the right term here and whether *Umwelt* can justifiably be regarded as a kind of world and not just as a kind of realm (*Bereich*). According to Buber, the “world” can only be a world that essentially extends beyond the

⁶ Although this type of investigation is no longer dominant, it is still alive. See, for example, Harari’s bestseller *Homo Deus*, and especially its first part: *Homo Sapiens Conquers the World* (Harari, 2017). Today the basic anthropological question of “Who is man?” (we still have no answer to that) is replaced by the question of “What will man be?” or its stronger variant “Will man still be man?”

⁷ For a contemporary view of the concept of *Umwelt* in the work of Jacob von Uexküll, and elsewhere, see Kliková & Kleisner (Eds.), 2006.

⁸ On this, see Brentari, 2015.

realm of the observer, who is “in” the world, which is independent as such. Even a “world of the senses” is not only what is perceived but also what can be perceived (Buber, 1965a, p. 60). An animal’s “image of the world” is nothing more than the dynamic of the presences bound up with its functions of life (Buber, 1965a, p. 61). Unlike for man, no world exists for animals that exists for itself. Contrary to Uexküll, Buber claims that man has a world (*Welt*) and not just an environment (*Umwelt*). An animal is so bound up with its *Umwelt* that it lives “with his environment (*Umwelt*) as with his organs” (Buytendijk cited by Buber, 1965c, p. 158). It is not able to perceive and know anything more and anything other than the things which relates to its own needs (Buber, 1965c, p. 158). The meeting of an animal with nature produces a mass of useable sense data that constitutes its realm of life (Buber, 1965a, p. 61). Man replaces the animal’s “image of the world”—this unsteady conglomeration—with a unity which he can imagine or think of as existing for itself (Buber, 1965a, p. 61). A man goes beyond what is immediately given to him, he “flies beyond the horizon and the familiar stars” and grasps a totality (Buber, 1965a, p. 61). From the meeting of man with nature something new and enduring comes into being, something that transcends his realm (Buber, 1965, p. 61). Through being of man, “what is” (*das Seiende*) becomes detached from him and is recognized for itself, whereby it makes the world’s existence possible (Buber, 1965a, p. 61). The world exists only where there is man. Based on this biological distinction between the *Umwelt* and the world (Rotenstreich, 2010, p. 37; 1967, pp. 110–111), Buber postulates the first movement constituting human life. As an independent counterpart, the world can exist for man on the condition that there is a distance between him and the world that guarantees its independence.⁹ The existence of the first movement does not mean that the I of man will “establish” the world (Buber, 1965a, 63) “Distance” is not a “reflective attitude”, as Rotenstreich understood it, because the world does not exist through reflections but rather through human beings (Buber, 1967, pp. 694–695). This is the primal attitude of man. Buber defines this in more detail as a manner of perception that distinguishes men from animals (Buber, 1967, p. 695). The first essential difference between men and animals that constitutes the principle of human life concerns the way in which the environment perceived. While animals perceive it, so to speak, as a part of their own corporeality, men perceive it as independent of them, as at a distance from them.

To clarify the second movement, we can begin by pointing out that one can turn to the withdrawn structure of being (*Seiende*) that is the world and enter into a relationship with it (Buber, 1965a, p. 62). Since an animal is unable to distance itself from its surroundings, it cannot “know the state of relation because one cannot stand in relation to something that is not perceived as contrasted and existing for itself” (Buber, 1965a, p. 62). Buber characterizes the act of entering into a relationship with the world as a synthesizing apperception (*synthetische Anschauung*), which means the apperception of a being as a whole and as a unity (Buber, 1965a, p. 62). The concept of wholeness and unity is originally identical with the concept of the world to which man is turned (Buber, 1965a, p. 63). The world as a genuine wholeness and unity is not given to man only by “distance”—it offers him the world only as an object—but it is necessary for man to enter with his whole being into a

⁹ It should be noted that the concept of “primal distance” cannot be identified with the concept of the sphere “between” as Emmanuel Lévinas (1906–1995) attempted (Buber, 1970b, p. 27).

relationship with it (Buber, 1965, p. 63). The second essential difference between men and animals is the possibility and ability of man to enter into a relationship with the world.

Although it is obvious that the two movements are very closely linked, a further examination of their relationship is necessary. First, it must be said that the first movement is the presupposition of the second. This results from the fact that “one can enter into relation only with a being which has been set at a distance” (Buber, 1965a, p. 60). In other words, one can enter into a relationship only with this being, which has become an independent opposite. Nevertheless, there is no relation of causality between these two movements. The categories “distance” and “relationship” are implicit to each other, which means that “the process of distancing implies as its complementary the process of entering into a relationship” (Wheelwright, 1967, p. 84). While the second movement, as we have seen, is not possible without the first, the first is possible without the second. This is down to the transition from the first to the second being not inevitable but possible; the first movement only allows room for the existence of the second. While a relationship necessarily implies a “distance” as its presupposition, “distance” only implies the possibility of a relationship. The nature of the first movement is universal, and therefore it is inherent to each person as a person; however, the nature of the second is personal. The personal dimension of human life is constituted through the “relation” and not through “distance”. The first movement yields the answer to the question: “How is man possible?” The second answers the question: “How is human life realized?” The movement of distance provides the human situation, and the movement of the relationship provides man’s becoming in that situation (Buber, 1965a, p. 64). The difference between the first and second movement as well as the twofold principle of human life and the distinction between man and animals can be better explained by the example of man’s relationship to things and to other people.

Considering the relationship to things, Buber recognizes that animals also use things and even use them in the exact sense of this word (*verwenden*). “They turn (*wenden*) something, on which they happen, round and round until they reach the possibility of using it for the attainment of a definite purpose, whether preconceived or arising at the moment” (Buber, 1965a, pp. 64–65). However, they cannot put the thing aside so it can later be used in the same way. They do not consider things as tools except at the moment of use. No things persist in an animal’s consciousness as merely tools, as things that have such and such a faculty or function. For instance, while monkeys make use of a stone to crack nuts, the stone does not become a hammer for them. These things are at hand every time the occasion arises, but they do not have their own place in the world (Buber, 1965a, p. 65). By contrast, a man gives distance to things and makes them durable bearers of function: tools with their own functions that are repeatedly at man’s disposal in this function. For man, things have an independent existence. Man is not satisfied with merely using and possessing things; he “has a great desire to enter into personal relation with things and to imprint on them his relation to them” (Buber, 1965a, p. 66). This great desire can be illustrated by a young man from a tribe scratching a curved line on his axe with the aid of a sharp stone (Buber, 1965a, pp. 65–66). The young man’s act is usually explained either as a form of magic that gives the tool more power or as playing with the possibility of the empty space on the axe handle (Buber, 1965a, p. 66). Buber rejects both interpretations because neither the first nor the second, nor the two together (as they are mutually exclusive), can sufficiently explain the fact

the act was carried out without a model and that its purpose is not purely technical (Buber, 1965a, p. 66). The curved line becomes a picture that gradually becomes independent and ceases to be an accessory to the tool; it gets its own independent structure (Buber, 1965a, p. 66). This form indicated by ornamentation is then realized in the autonomous sphere “as the sediment of man’s relation to things” (Buber, 1965a, p. 66). Here man’s relationship to things is manifested in art. “Art is neither the impression of natural objectivity nor the expression of spiritual subjectivity, but it is the work and witness of the relation between the *substantia humana* and the *substantia rerum*, it is the realm of ‘the between’ which has become a form” (Buber, 1965a, p. 66; cf. Buber, 1965c, p. 165). The fact of art can only be understood based on man’s essential relationship to things, only from it and only in connection with it (Buber, 2004a, p. 210). Every essential relationship to things reaches completion in art (Buber, 2004a, p. 213). “All art is from its origin essentially of the nature of dialogue,” wrote Buber in his essay “Dialogue” (1932) (Buber, 2004b, p. 30).

The role of confirmation in Buber’s anthropology

Regarding the sphere of relationships to other people, Buber introduces some important concepts from his anthropology, such as confirmation (*Bestätigung*), acceptance (*Akzeptation*), “making present” (*Vergegenwärtigung*), and “imagining the real” (*Realphantasie*). Unlike the animal kingdom, where the division of labour works without granting a function in the sense of an individual award, people in society confirm each other in their qualities and capacities. How is it possible that man, who is “so badly equipped ‘by nature’”, achieved lordship over the earth (Buber, 1965a, p. 67)? Man faces nature and its forces in two ways: through the use of tools and weapons and by forming associations, which rest on mutual individual completion, and the recognition of function (Buber, 1965a, p. 67). The mutual confirmation of human beings in their uniqueness distinguishes man from other living beings. Man is the sole living creature in whom the category of possibility is embodied—he is not fully determined and fixed in his being—and therefore needs confirmation (Buber, 1953, p. 136). A man needs to be confirmed in his being: not in a general being—to be a human being—but in his unique being as in his being-this-man (Buber, 1953, p. 136). By contrast, an animal is fixed in its being, and all possible modifications of its being are preordained, as in the case of a caterpillar’s metamorphosis into a butterfly. It is beyond question that the animal is and can only be what it is and therefore does not need confirmation (Buber, 1965a, p. 71; 1953, pp. 135–136). Surrounded by chaos and possibilities, man seeks the confirmation of “Yes”, which, however, can only be received through another person and not through himself (Buber, 1965a, p. 71). The result of this is that on the one hand man is characterized by the desire to be confirmed as what he is and as what he can become, and on the other hand by the innate ability in this way to confirm other people (Buber, 1965a, p. 68). A presupposition for both characteristics is the first movement of “distance”, which guarantees that another person is perceived as an independent counterpart. The confirmation itself then represents the realization of the second movement of the “relation”.

The concept of confirmation plays a key role in Buber’s dialogical philosophy and has important applications, for example, in education, family life, and psychotherapy (Friedman,

1965, p. 29). What is confirmation? That concept must first be distinguished from the concept of acceptance. Every essential relationship with the other begins with acceptance. One accepts the other as he is *here and now* in the moment of the encounter (of course, *here and now* also forms what already was); he accepts him in his actuality. The confirmation concerns the whole man in his present actuality as well as in the possibilities of what he can become. The confirmation also concerns the as-yet-unrealized possibilities of the other. Thus, it supposes the acceptance of the whole potentiality of the other. The act of accepting the other in his actuality does not imply confirmation of him in that actuality. A man can accept another in his actuality, but he does not have to confirm him in it even though he can. While acceptance turns to the present and past of the other, confirmation also looks to his future. To confirm someone in his unique being means making a decisive differentiation in his potentiality with respect to this possibility, to which he has been created *to become*. Man confirms the being of the other, first in himself and then in the other. The distinction between acceptance and confirmation can be illustrated by the example of education. An educator who comes into contact with a “problem child” cannot be content with accepting the child as he is (even though it is the first thing he has to do) if he does not want to completely give up on his task of educating him. This would *de facto* mean confirming him in his actual state of being a “problem child”. Accepting and confirming of the other is not identical with the approval that would approve of all his thinking or acting. Man confirms the actual being of his partner only to the extent that he can (cf. Buber, 1965b, pp. 79, 85). If one of the partners in the dialogue holds some positions that are incompatible with my own belief, then I cannot confirm him in them. My partner affects me in his position; I accept him, but I do not confirm him in it. Unlike acceptance, confirmation is limited in scope, but because it is confirmation of what a man is to become, it is realized despite these limitations.¹⁰ The intention of affecting my partner, however, does not mean making an effort to change him in the sense of injecting my own “rightness” into him (as in propaganda). Rather, it is to allow that which is recognized as right and true in man to germinate and grow in him through my influence in the form suited to individuation (as it is in education) (cf. Buber, 1965a, p. 69; 1965b, pp. 82–85).

Every “man wishes to be confirmed in his being by man, and wishes to have a presence in the being of the other” (Buber, 1965a, p. 71). What does it mean to have a presence in the being of the other? A presupposition for confirmation is the act of “making present” or “imagining the real”. In this act, one imagines “what another man is at this very moment wishing, feeling, perceiving, thinking, and not as a detached content but in his very reality, that is, as a living process in this man” (Buber, 1965a, p. 70). Man becomes himself (*Selbst*) in the act of making present; or more precisely expressed, he becomes himself with the other. The act of making present is ontologically complete only when man knows that he is made present by the other in the uniqueness of his being and when this knowledge

¹⁰ The significance of Buber’s anthropology for psychology and psychotherapy, especially his distinction between acceptance and confirmation, is evidenced also by the fact that Rogers adopted the concept of confirmation in one of his most important writings, *On Becoming a Person* (1961) (cf. Rogers, 1961, pp. 55–56). On the influence of Buber’s philosophy on psychotherapy, see Abramovitch (2015).

induces the process of his inmost self-becoming at the same time. The innermost growth or development of the uniqueness of one's own being does not take place in the relation of man to himself but in the relationship between him and the other that is characterized by the mutuality of the making present, acceptance, and confirmation (Buber, 1965a, p. 71). The goal of the relationship is not self-realization; it is only a by-product (Friedman, 1965, p. 21). The knowledge that a man is made present in his own self by the other, and that he is accepted and confirmed by him in his uniqueness, leads to his true self-acceptance and self-confirmation.

Relation between *I and Thou* and *distance and relation*

These newly elaborated anthropological foundations of how Buber's cosmic vision of dialogical life complements and clarifies the basic elaboration in *I and Thou* will now be examined in more detail. The addition of new elements sometimes involves correcting old ones, and some clarifications obscure rather than clarify what they wanted to illuminate. What is the situation in this case?

When looking at the two writings, the question arises of what the connection is between "distance" and "relationship" and the basic words of I-Thou and I-It. The connection between "entering into a relation" and the basic word I-Thou is obvious. The first means entering into the I-Thou relationship. The "relation" from the essay "Distance and Relation" can be fully identified with the I-Thou relationship from *I and Thou*.¹¹ The connection between "primal distance" and the I-It relation is not so obvious. This ambiguity is related to the assertion at the beginning of paragraph 23 in the first part of *I and Thou*. Here Buber formulates one of the fundamental theses of his philosophy: "In the beginning is the relation" (Buber, 1970a, p. 69). He "proves" its validity on two levels in the following paragraphs (§§ 23–27): in the history of the human race (§§ 23–25) and in the history of the human individual (§§ 26–27). On both levels, he shows that the relationship is antecedent "towards emancipation, delimitation, and separation" (Šajda, 2013, p. 65) using several examples. The existence of an emancipated and separated I does not occur until the hypostatizing of the acting Thou and the acting I (Buber, 1970a, p. 73). As the acting Thou becomes the carrier of action, the acting I becomes the carrier of perception (Buber, 1970a, p. 74). The basic word I-Thou precedes the I, and the basic word I-It follows after the emergence of the I and the It (1970a, pp. 73–74). It seems that these passages from *I and Thou*, which report the primacy of the relationship and how the I gradually emancipates itself (Šajda, 2013, p. 66), contradict the later claim that "distance" is a presupposition for a "relation".¹²

¹¹ In addition to the evident coincidence of meaning, there is also a terminological coincidence, since here Buber uses the German word *Beziehung*, which is reserved in *I and Thou* for the I-Thou relationship.

¹² Rotenstreich formulates this objection in a similar fashion: "The later stage of Buber's thought, expressed in his idea of distance and relation, leaves us with some doubt whether relationship within the human sphere is as primary as it was described in his earlier and more well-known work" (Rotenstreich, 2010, p. 35; 1967, p. 109).

Such a reading may be based on the mistaken identification of two different concepts of “primal distance” and the basic word I-It. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the second movement of the “relation” is identical to the basic word I-Thou, and therefore by analogy it should be true of the first movement of “distance” that it is identical with the word I-It.

What follows is an attempt to prove that such an identification of conceptual pairs cannot automatically be applied by analogy to the couple of “distance” and the I-It relation. Both concern a separation of man from his counterpart, but in a different way. The very term “primal distance” indicates to us that it is “more primal” and therefore a different form of separation than the one implied in the basic word I-It. “Primal distance” is inherent to every man as a man; it is a particular state that establishes the human situation and as such is pre-personal. However, the relations of I-Thou and I-It express the personal existence of man (Friedman, 1965, p. 22). Both are acts of the human being, whether done by the whole being (I-Thou) or not (I-It). This means that the “primal distance” is not an ontological presupposition only for the relationship of I-Thou but also for the relationship of I-It (Buber, 1967, p. 694). “Distance” makes room for entering into a relationship, but when the establishment of the I-Thou relation fails, the distance becomes solidified and thickened (Buber Agassi, 2008, p. 262), thereby presenting an obstacle to the essential relationship. This failure to enter into the essential relationship—this persistence in distance—and not the distance itself corresponds to the I-It relation (Friedman, 1965, p. 22). Finally, if the assertion “at the beginning is a relation” is to be true, it must assume the existence of some form of distance between the two partners in the relationship, because the existence of an essential relationship is possible only where there is duality and a real ontic difference between man and his partner. Buber also follows this strict logic in describing the emancipation of the human I and the emergence of the realm of It from the realm of Thou in *I and Thou*. In the original relational event an I is implicitly included without man being aware of it yet (Buber, 1970a, p. 73). Man, who before recognized himself as an I, utters the basic word I-Thou quite naturally. Since the following two sections (§ 24) are crucial to the current problem, a large portion is quoted below:

In the natural fact, on the other hand, that will give way to the basic word I-It and I-related experience, the I is not yet included. This fact is the discreteness of the human body as the carrier of its sensations, from its environment (*Umwelt*). In this particularity the body learns to know and discriminate itself, but this discrimination remains on the plane where things are next to each other, and therefore it cannot assume the character of implicit I-likeness. But once the I of the relation has emerged and has become existent in its detachment, it somehow etherializes and functionalizes itself and enters into the natural fact of the discreteness of the body from its environment, awakening I-likeness in it. Only now can the conscious I-act, the first form of the basic word I-It, of experience by an I, come into being. The I that has emerged proclaims itself as the carrier of sensations and the environment as their object. (Buber, 1970a, p. 74)

This passage bears witness to the additional elaboration of the anthropological foundations really being based on his most important philosophical book. “The natural fact of the discreteness of the human body as the carrier of its sensations, from its environment” is a precise definition of what Buber later calls “primal distance”. “The natural fact” refers

to the fact that it is a specific biological givenness of man, which allows him to perceive his environment as something independent of him; therefore, when the “natural fact” is identified with “primal distance”, there are the two confused concepts of “primal distance” and the basic word I-It in this passage, which enables readers to precisely determine the relation between them. From the above, it is clear that these are two different concepts, since the “natural fact of separation of the body from the environment” precedes the basic word I-It. Thus, the existence of the “primal distance” between man and his counterpart does not presuppose the emancipated I; on the contrary, it allows it. One realizes that his body is separated from his environment as a bearer of perception, but he is not yet aware of his awareness—his I. While the basic word I-Thou precedes an I, the basic word I-It only follows after the appearance of I and It. The “primal distance” is the basis for man to have the conception of an independent world on the one hand and any conception of himself on the other. Consequently, the process of distancing is *a priori* in the Kantian sense (Wheelwright, 1967, p. 84). “Distance” provides the separation and independence of man and his counterpart, but man is not yet aware of himself as a subject of experiencing and using, and his counterpart is not an object of experiencing and using, as is the case with the I-It relation.

In the concept of “primal distance”, that is the ontological presupposition of all human relationships to all existing beings, Buber recognized the anthropological foundation of his cosmic vision of dialogical life. In *I and Thou*, he emphasizes the innate desire of man to realize the I-Thou relationship; later in “Distance and Relation” he emphasizes the innate desire of man to be confirmed in his being by another person and to have a presence in his being. Both desires are perfectly fulfilled in the mutual relationship of two people. At the moments of these encounters “the spiritual substance of the person matures” (Buber, 1970a, p. 113).

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Department of Ethics and Civic Education
 Faculty of Education
 Comenius University in Bratislava
 Moskovská 3
 811 08 Bratislava
 Slovak Republic
 Email: bizon@uniba.sk