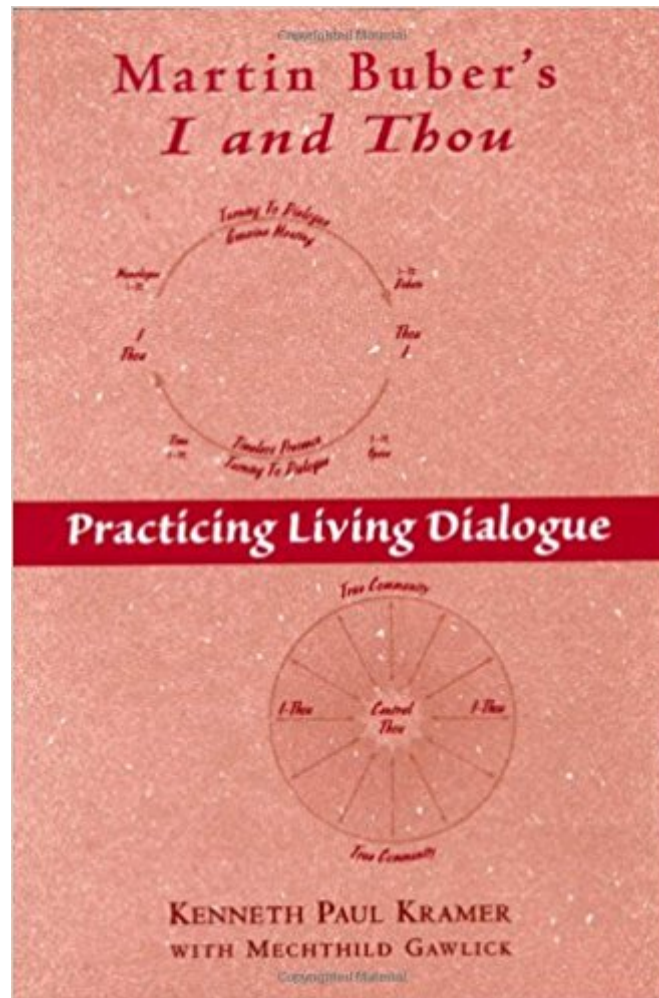


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Martin Buber's I And Thou: Practicing Living Dialogue



Synopsis

Martin Buber's classic philosophy of dialogue, *I and Thou*, is at the core of Kenneth Paul Kramer's scholarly and impressive *Living Dialogue: Practicing Buber's I and Thou*. In three main parts, paralleling the three of *I and Thou*, and focusing upon Buber's key concepts --"nature," "spirit becoming forms," "true community," the "real I," the "eternal Thou," "turning,"--and the two fundamental dialogues--the "I-Thou" and the "I-It"--the book clarifies, puts into practice and vigorously affirms the moral validity of Buber's philosophy, with its extension to love, marriage, the family, the community, and God, in the conviction that "genuine dialogue" will effect better relations with one another, the world and God. Well-researched, and replete with a glossary of Buberian terms, practice exercises for true dialoguing, and discussion questions, *Living Dialogue* emerges as an invaluable guide to *I and Thou*. Highlights:
• a lens through which to see and understand the philosopher and his work anew
• a must-read for undergraduates, as well as relationship counselors, therapists, and general readers, who will benefit from the work's clarity and ease of expression
• includes a foreword by Maurice Friedman

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Customer Reviews

I recommend this book for either classroom or study groups. --Monastic Interreligious Dialogue

Kenneth Paul Kramer, who holds a Ph.D. in religion and culture from Temple University, is on the faculty of San Jose State University, San Jose, CA. His previous titles for Paulist Press include

Death Dreams: Unveiling Mysteries of the Unconscious Mind, The Sacred Art of Dying, and World Scriptures: An Introduction to Comparative Religions.

Most of us probably would welcome a trustworthy guide to Martin Buber's masterpiece of philosophy and theology, the "I and Thou." We might hope for a guide that--shines the light on the most central themes, bringing together the best translations of these themes--enriches the "I and Thou" by connecting this book to others Buber wrote, both earlier and later--connects the thoughts in 'I and Thou' to the context of Buber's life and what else was happening that touched his philosophy and theology--uses contemporary approaches to teaching and learning such as appropriate new diagrams and reflective questions to check our understanding--emphasizes application of Buber's ideas to our daily lives & practice--presents ideas vividly, holds our interest, rich in anecdote and stories. That's quite an order. In the fine book, "Martin Buber's 'I and Thou': Practicing Living Dialog," author Kenneth Kramer with Mechthild Gawlick delivers all of this and more. After almost 80 years, much of Buber's thought seems as relevant as tomorrow. For example, consider two central concepts---authentic communication and relationships. How often do we hear discussions of what these are and how to achieve them! Buber regards authentic communication as dialog, a totally engaged dialog in which one listens to the said and the unsaid, stays wholly in the present. In so doing, the authentic dialog creates a new energy. Not "I" talking with "You" but the resultant combined form, the "I-Thou." Buber presents three such combined forms: the "I-It," the "I-Thou", and the great dialog of the "I -Eternal Thou." With the "I-It" we may negotiate everyday life, sometimes hurtfully, even dangerously treating the Other as an object. The "I-Thou" is respectful, honest, engaged, created not once & forever, but with each opportunity. The dialog between the "I-Eternal Thou" is not, for Buber, aligned with any specific theology but draws on his own Hassidic background, on Christianity and on the great spiritual thought of the middle and far east. This all too-brief example may illustrate why a trustworthy guide beyond the translation itself of Buber's original "I and Thou" is so valuable. Buber's thought is at once elegantly simple and enormously complex. Kramer and Gawlick offer three extended sections, encompassing seven chapters, as well as Buber's own "Postscript" and a useful reference section. Each chapter uses the format of 1: Buber's principal address spoken through side-by-side translations,; 2: interpretative comments, 3: illustrative anecdotes from Buber's autobiography, and 4; practice oriented discussion questions. (The side-by-side translations come from two leading but different approaches, one more poetic and classic, the other in contemporary, plainer speaking.) This fine book is an excellent guide, reflecting Kramer's deep scholarship of Martin Buber and his times and Kramer's own understanding of ours.

Mr Kramer's book is certainly a worthwhile read. However, I did not engage in any of the practices. (In I-Thou) Life needs no help from you to do what it does. (In I-It) The belief that it's you that's doing what is already happening, is what prevents you from seeing "I-Thou" as Mr Buber did. Mr Buber himself has stated that he has nothing to teach. It is because there is nothing to learn. You either see it or you don't - "seeing" is timeless - intuitive. With all due respect to Mr Kramer, I do not regard Mr Buber's book "I and Thou," as philosophy. There is nothing philosophical about it. To see it in a philosophical context makes it "your" philosophy, not Mr Buber's. "I and Thou" is an account of Mr Buber's direct "living experience" of a "life in dialogue." While at times he may have described himself as a philosopher, I think he would agree, "I and Thou" is beyond debate. Sadly, in society today, there is very little evidence to indicate that we understand what Mr Buber is really pointing to, otherwise the world would not be in the sorry state that it is. So, if you decide to read Mr Kramer's book, I sincerely hope that while reading it, you will "see" as Mr Buber did.

I had heard of Martin Buber and seen isolated quotes for many years but never thought I would get much out of his work, fearing it to be heavy and difficult to understand. Kenneth Kramer has done a masterful job of making Martin Buber's I and Thou come alive for me. I was so excited by I and Thou or I and You versus I and It - that I prepared a presentation to our church Care group shortly after reading. As an engineer by training I fully understood his I and It characterization because that was how I related to people in my early life. Now, having experienced the deep joy of relating as I and You or I and Thou, if you will, I believe I and You is the ultimate way to relate to people. I highly recommend this book and urge folks to try Buber's suggestions as interpreted by Kramer. I believe this is a hidden gem.

I really liked how Kramer uses the parallel English translations to unpack the meaning of Buber's profound theological insights. He does this better than most commentators on the Bible. It is enjoyable to read the personal stories of Buber's life and how they relate to the themes in 'I and Thou'. Kramer makes Buber come alive in a way that did not happen to me when reading Buber in seminary. So, I am very glad to have come across Kramer's book. Kramer explains how the dialogical movement evolved as well. There is still a feeling of "outdatedness" to Buber's I/Thou, with its anthropocentric view and emphasis on language which deconstructionists have shown to be relative to culture and worldview. Yet the recognition of a change in consciousness when we switch from I-Thou to I-it remains as one of the most significant observations of any theologian of modern

time.Kramer's book sparked a good discussion among my peers, including a Jewish rabbi and a Protestant minister who claims Buber's book as his "second Bible".I highly recommend this book for anyone wanting to get a better grasp on Buber and his theology.

Absolutely superb. Buber never fails to inspire. This book explains how we can apply Buber's vision to our own lives.

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