

Martin Buber and the Life of Dialogue



INSTRUCTOR:
Benjamin Sax, Ph.D.,
ICJS Jewish Scholar

Register Today!
www.icjs.org/buber

ICJS
COURSE

FEB 28-APR 4, 2022
MONDAYS
7:00-9:00 PM EST
VIA ZOOM

MAR 1-APR 5, 2022
TUESDAYS
10:00 AM-NOON
@ ICJS LIBRARY

Today's Agenda

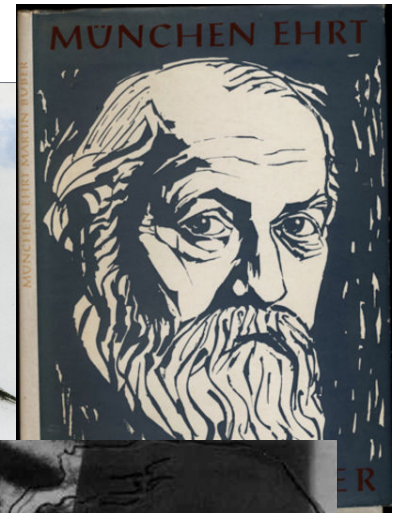
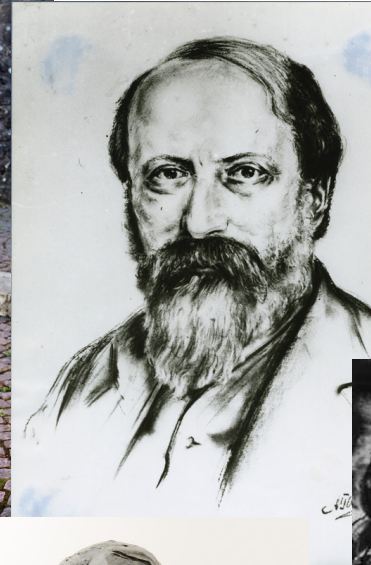


@ICJSbaltimore

10:00 a.m.	Welcome
10:05 q.m.	Class Agenda
10:10 a.m.	Why Buber, Why Now?
10:15 a.m.	Overview of the Course
10:25 a.m.	Breakout Room Discussion #1
10:45 a.m.	Plenary
10:50 a.m.	Buber: A Very Brief Biography
11:20 a.m.	Breakout Room Discussion #2
11:40 a.m.	Plenary
11:45 a.m.	I-It/I-Thou: A First Look
11:50 a.m.	Parting Thoughts
12:00 p.m.	Adjourn



Why Buber, Why Now?



Key Questions



- (1) How does Buber's view of dialogue help or hinder interreligious dialogue today?
- (2) How much of our experience of religion is truly ours and how much of it belongs to the power of history and culture?
- (3) Does our society (the combination of culture, economics, and politics) provide us with the best conditions for dialogue and for religious and/or interreligious experience?
- (4) For Buber, we hold on to our religious views as a way of protecting ourselves, yet in doing so we prevent ourselves from entering into "authentic" experiences with others. How can interreligious dialogue be a space for entering non-contrived "authentic" experiences?

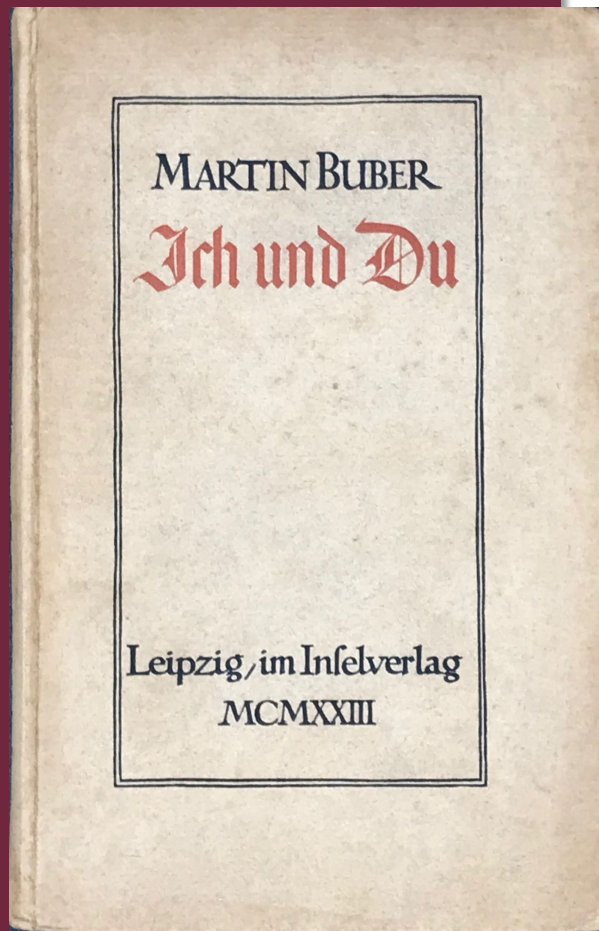
Take-Aways for the Course



**Saints Peter and Paul by Daniele
Crespi (1598-1630)

- (1) To know that dialogue is not a universally accepted or understood term.
- (2) For Buber, dialogue is not merely a conversation, nor is it the sharing of different perspectives, or even a negotiation: It is a transformative, and possibly even transcendent experience.
- (3) Our orientation to dialogue requires an openness to uncertainty.
- (4) That Buber can still teach us how we can be religious and political while also being vulnerable and full of doubts.

Aspirations



- (1) To unpack a different dimension of the I-It and I-thou relation in each class.
- (2) To read *I and Thou* in the fourth class. The first three classes will prepare you for this text. (It is a notoriously difficult little book to read).
- (3) To walk away with a sense of the complicated, yet urgent need for interreligious dialogue and encounters.
- (4) To have a deeper appreciation of the adjectives we use in day-to-day language. What makes an idea Jewish? Christian? Muslim? Hindu? Not-religious? Are these adjectives important?
- (5) To gain confidence to pursue study of Buber on your own.



Class Structure



MARTIN BUBER - watercolor
portrait painting by Fabrizio
Cassetta, 2013.

- (1) The first part of each class will be devoted to a few moments in Buber's life and some historical background. Our breakout room conversations will be oriented toward engaging Buber's experiences.
- (2) The second part of each class will be devoted to a theme or idea in Buber's thought. Our breakout room conversations will be concentrated on reading/interpreting one of Buber's texts.
- (3) The third part of each class will be a plenary. We will address the class's themes in our contemporary context.
- (4) Each part of each class will address aspects of Buber's view of dialogue and the I-It/I-Thou relation.



Course Schedule



"Circles in a Circle," by Wassily Kandinsky,
1923.

- Class 1:** Intro to Buber and Dialogue
- Class 2:** Hasidism, Mysticism, and God
- Class 3:** Revelation and Law: Martin Buber's Relationship with Franz Rosenzweig
- Class 4:** *I and Thou*
- Class 5:** Buber's Theo-Politics: Mahatma Gandhi and the Israel/Palestine Question
- Class 6:** Biblical Humanism and the Dialogical Community



From: "Dialogue" (1932)

"Above and below are bound to one another.

The word of he who wishes to speak with people without speaking with God is not fulfilled;

but the word of he who wishes to speak with God without speaking with people goes astray.

There is a tale that a man inspired by God once went out from the creaturely realms into the vast waste.

There he wandered until he came to the gates of mystery.

He knocked.

From within came the cry, 'What do you want here?'

He said,

'I have proclaimed your praise in the ears of mortals, but they were deaf to me. So I come to you that you yourself may hear me and reply.'

'Turn back,' came the cry from within.

'Here is no ear for you. I have sunk my hearing in the deafness of mortals.'

True address from God directs the person into the place of lived speech, where the voices of the creatures grope past one another and, in their very missing of one another, succeed in reaching the eternal partner."

Breakout Room #1



Paul Klee, Black Columns in a
Landscape, 1919

Let's look at one of the course's key questions:

*In your opinion, does genuine dialogue require a transformational experience?

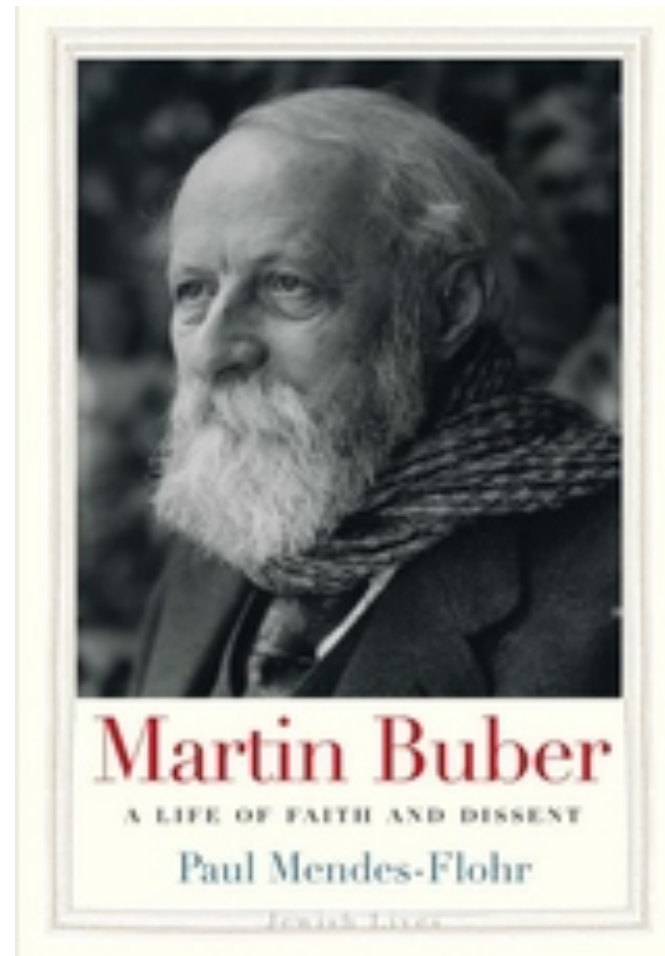
*Must you change—that is, rethink your religious point of view— for dialogue to be effective and meaningful?



Biography



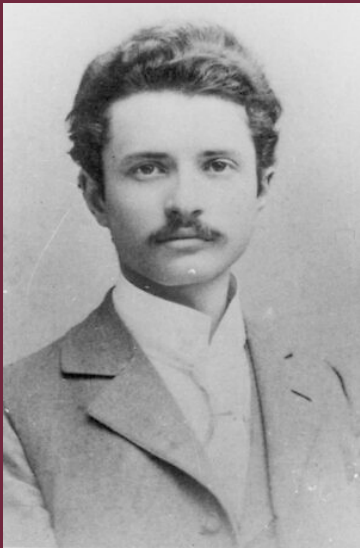
Paul Mendes-Flohr



Buber's Early Life

Born in Vienna on February 8, 1878.

Died in Jerusalem on June 13, 1965



1882 Moved in with his grandparents

1888 Started attending the Franz Joseph Gymnasium

1892 Decided the Polish need to read Nietzsche

1898 Joined the Zionist Movement

1899 Met Paula Winkler in Zurich



1900-1916



Quelle: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Paula and Martin move to Berlin

1900 Birth of Rafael

1901 Birth of Eva

- Befriend renowned anarchist Gustav Landauer.
- **1901:** Theodor Herzl recruits Buber to be the editor of his journal *Die Welt*.

Buber finishes his dissertation.

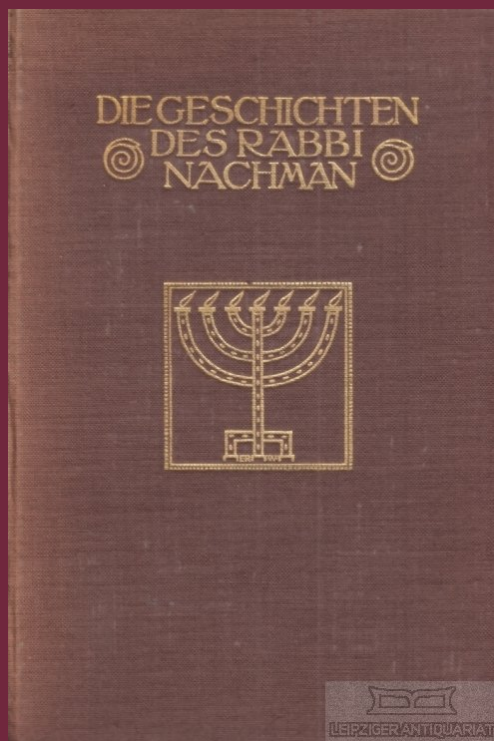
Buber becomes a literary editor for Reutton & Loening.

1909-1919 He gave a number of speeches in Prague for the student Zionist group called Bar Kochba, later published as “Speeches on Judaism”

In **1916**, he found *Der Jude* with Salomon Schocken (edited until 1924; closed in 1928).



1906 -1916



Several Important Publications:

1906 *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*

1908 *The Legend of the Baal Shem*

1909 *Ecstatic Confessions*

1911 *Chinese Tales*

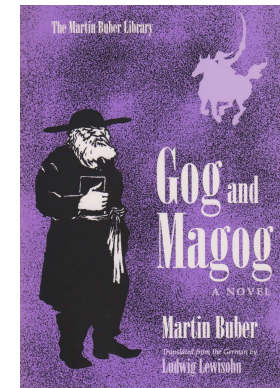
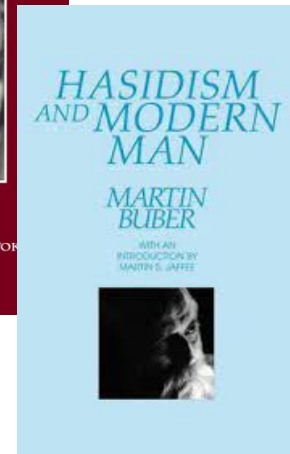
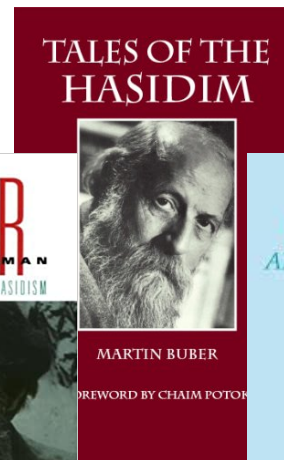
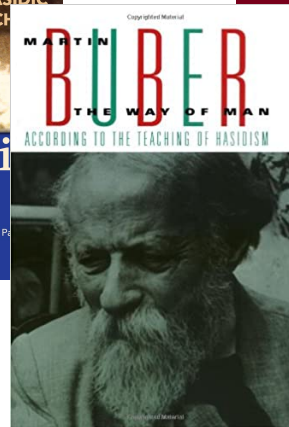
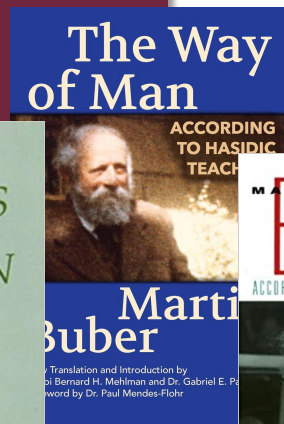
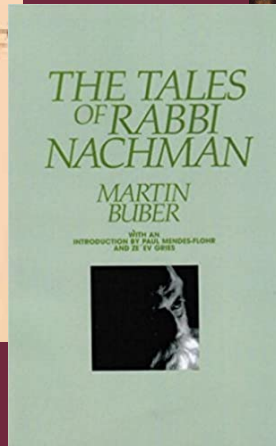
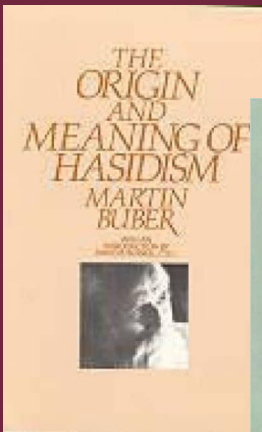
1913 *Daniel*

1916 *On Judaism*



Buber's Work on Hasidism

“Hasidism has exercised a great personal influence on me; much in it has deeply affected my own thinking, and I felt myself called ever again to point to its value for the life of man.” *Responsa*, 88



1916-1938



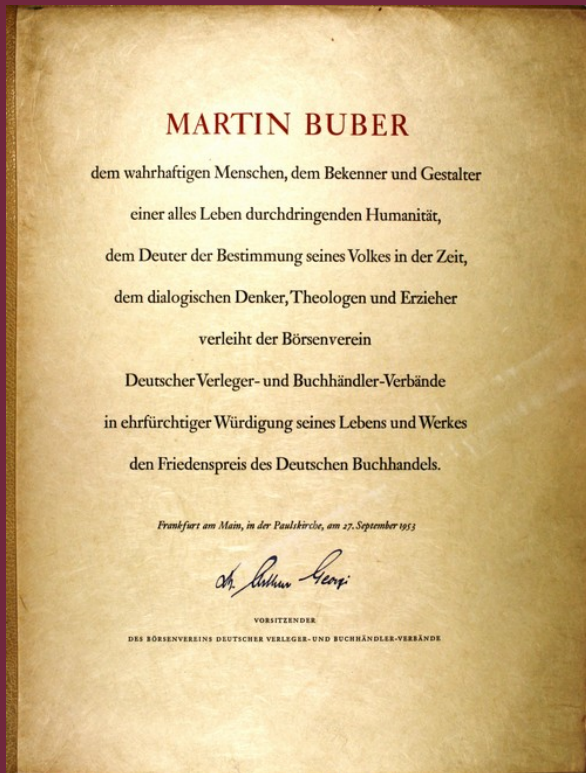
- 1916** Martin and Paula moved to Heppenheim
- 1921** Began a close relationship with Franz Rosenzweig
- 1922** Started teaching at Rosenzweig's *Freies Jüdische Lehrhaus*
- 1923** Completed *I and Thou*; became the first lecturer in "Jewish Religious Philosophy and Ethics" at the University of Frankfurt.
- 1925** Started his famous translation of the Hebrew Bible with Rosenzweig; helps found *Brit Shalom*
- 1926-1930** Edited *Die Kreatur*
- 1930** Became a professor at the University of Frankfurt am Main, but resigned in 1933.
- 1933** Became Head of the *Freies Jüdische Lehrhaus*
- 1938** Left Germany for Jerusalem. Received a professorship at the Hebrew University.

1938-1965



- 1939** Helps form the League for Jewish-Arab Rapprochement and Cooperation.
- 1942** Helps form the political party *Ichud*
- 1947** Publishes *Paths in Utopia*
- 1949** Established the School for the Education of Teachers of the People
- 1951** Becomes Chair of the Department of Sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- 1952** Publishes *Eclipse of God*
- 1954** Finishes the Bible Translation
- 1957** Buber and Heidegger Meet
- 1958** Paula dies
- 1963** Buber's public debate with Gershom Scholem
- 1965** Buber dies with Shai Agnon at his side

Awards



1951 Buber was awarded Goethe Award from the University of Hamburg

1953 Buber was awarded the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade (first Jewish person to win)

1958 Israel Prize in the Humanities

1961 The Bialik Prize in Jewish Thought

1963 Erasmus Prize

****Nominated 10 times for the Nobel Prize in Literature.**

****Nominated 7 times for the Nobel Peace Prize.**



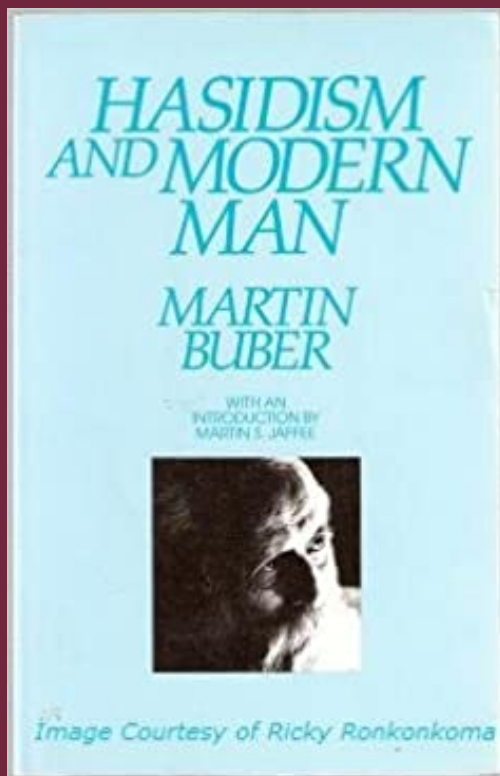
Buber, "Replies to My Critics," in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, ed. Paul A. Schlipp and Maurice Friedman (LaSalle Ill.: Open Court, 1967), 691-695.



"My philosophy serves an experience, a perceived attitude that it has established to make communicable. I was not permitted to reach out beyond my experiences, and I never wished to do so. I witnessed for experience and appealed to experience. The experience for which I witnessed is, naturally, a limited one. But it is not to be understood as a 'subjective one'.... I say to him who listens to me: 'it is your experience'.... I must say it once again: I have no teaching. I only 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."



Breakout Room #2



“Man cannot approach the divine by reaching beyond the human; he can approach [the divine] through becoming human. To become human is what he, this individual man, has been created for. This, so it seems to me, is the essential core of Hasidic life and Hasidic teaching.” (34-35)

Using your own experiences and drawing from your own traditions, please share what you think it means to become fully human.

What do you think Buber means by stating that the divine is *not* beyond the human?

How might dialogue help us answer these questions?

