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A Philosophy of Dialogue as an Anthropology. In the Circle of Buber's Ideas

Anthropological thought reached the depths of its experience in those epochs in the history of the spirit, in which man had the feeling of a mild, unavoidable loneliness, and its fruits were given to those who were most lonely.*

Philosophical cognition of man is by its very nature a reflection on oneself [...].**

Here the genuine third alternative is indicated, the knowledge of which will help to bring about the genuine person again and to establish genuine community.***

Buber's Anthropology as "Theoanthropocosmology"

The methodological status of the philosophy of dialogue, in spite of numerous studies devoted to it, or perhaps precisely because of their number, remains, it seems, still unexplained or, to express it better, elusive of rigid classifications. Leaving aside the unfortunate name itself

* Martin Buber, *Problem człowieka*, transl. Jan Doktor (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993), 11.

** Ibidem, 9.

*** Ibidem, 93.

(or more specifically its second segment), which is pointed out for instance by Witold P. Glinkowski,¹ describing this discourse as a philosophy obliges both itself and its researchers to seek an answer to the essential question of what kind of philosophy it is. Owing to its programmatic, anti-systemic, and anti-academical nature, it is not subject to easy or unequivocal classification. In fact, its creators, Martin Buber,² and Franz Rosenzweig,³ consciously and intentionally avoided calling their work philosophical,⁴ preferring instead to use the label of “new thought” or “new metaphysics”. This matter will presumably require further elaboration later in this paper.

Leaving aside the discussion of the legitimacy of qualifying this discourse as a philosophy – which in itself remains as much an ambiguous as it is essentially an undeveloped issue – we should distinguish three layers that constitute it, complementary to each other, the first of which seems primary in relation to the others. These are respectively: the anthropological layer, the cosmological layer, and the theological, otherwise known as metaphysical, layer. The primacy of the former does not mean either its superiority to the latter, nor their subjection to it. They all constitute a dense *compositum*, determining the shape and character of this philosophy. The distinguished position of the anthropological layer bears a special significance in relation to what Martin Buber calls the “problem of man”.⁵ The other layers are concentric to it, being, in fact, its necessary and significant supplementation, extension, and clarification. This, however, does not mean falling into the notorious anthropocentrism, but – as is the case with Nikolai Berdyaev’s philosophy, which I consider to be one of the second generation representatives of European dialogue – taking predetermined anthropological positions. Man is not the centre here, nor is he absolutized, or at the top of the hierarchy of beings or values, but he is each time a point of reference and anchorage around which he organizes himself and onto which the dialogical thought is constantly oriented.

However, this is not – as one might easily think – pure anthropology alone, from which, one after another, ethics and theology emerge. One might say that it is more likely to be a kind of anthropocosmology and

¹ Witold P. Glinkowski, *Imię filozofii. Przyczynek do filozofii dialogu* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2005), 10, footnote 5.

² Martin Buber, *Problem człowieka*, transl. Jan Doktor (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993), 87; Jan Doktor, “Wprowadzenie”, in: Martin Buber, *Problem człowieka*, transl. Jan Doktor (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993), XI.

³ Franz Rosenzweig, “Nowe myślenie – kilka uwag *ex post* do *Gwiazdy Zbawienia*”, in: idem, *Gwiazda Zbawienia*, transl. Tadeusz Gadacz (Kraków: Znak, 1998), 659–689.

⁴ Doktor, “Wprowadzenie”, XIII.

⁵ Buber, *Problem człowieka*.

anthropotheology (which, however, has two inseparable dimensions: as the theology of man and as the anthropology of God), or more precisely, "the theoanthropocosmology". An interesting example of such an approach to the problem of man is the philosophy of dialogue developed by Martin Buber. I would like to take a closer look at its assumptions, conceptual constructions, and conclusions, aware of the difficulties and complexity, as well as the inexhaustibility of the research task that I undertake.

Criteria, Formulas and Types of Anthropological Discourse

Witold P. Glinkowski's erudite monograph on Buber's philosophical anthropology has recently been published in Poland, systematizing – as its subtitle indicates – *Dialogics of Martin Buber as the basis of philosophical anthropology*.⁶ I do not intend to refer to the content of this book in this paper. Those who wish to read it can do so on their own, without anyone's presuppositions. I refer to it primarily because the results of its author's findings positively verify the thesis that the philosophy of dialogue in general, and Buber's dialogics in particular, as one of its most significant examples, can and should be treated as philosophical anthropology *sui generis*. This is because it is generally approached as a philosophy of religion, which is only a philosophy by name, and which – as it is believed – lacks the systematics combined with discourse, so typical of philosophical thinking.

The basic research problem that Glinkowski poses in his book is to consider "the possibility of posing a philosophical question about man in the perspective of the philosophy of dialogue in the shape that Martin Buber gave it",⁷ and the primary goal of the work of the researcher from Łódź is to "analyze the dialogical thought of Martin Buber (1878–1965) as an anthropological-philosophical reflection".⁸

The recognition of the philosophy of dialogue, and within it Buber's dialogics as a philosophical anthropology that ultimately is in their favour, may raise a number of more or less justified doubts or even objections. However, many important arguments can be put forward to defend this perspective. First of all, one comes to the fore that calls into question the methodological self-consciousness and the domain

⁶ Witold P. Glinkowski, *Człowiek – istota spoza kultury. Dialogika Martina Bubera jako podstawa antropologii filozoficznej* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2011).

⁷ Idem, *Człowiek – istota spoza kultury*, 5.

⁸ Ibidem, 7.

specificity of philosophical anthropology as such.⁹ From this point of view, it appears to be still *in statu nascendi*, and therefore never fully defined,¹⁰ and thus also heterogeneous. This diversity within the continuum of the anthropological field translates into the polarization of the spectrum of possible conceptualisations. For this reason, even in the absence of more important premises, the philosophy of dialogue allows itself, without any obstacles, to be classified as a philosophical anthropology.

Secondly, while remaining at an equally general level of analysis, dialogue can be tested in terms of – so to speak – the degree to which it is anthropologically anthropological through the use of a simple terminological criterion, namely, whether, and how often and in what capacity the term ‘anthropology’ is used. In the case that interests us, as Glinkowski demonstrates, and which is easy to verify, “The terms ‘anthropology’ or ‘philosophical anthropology’ often appear in Buber’s texts”.¹¹ In this sense, Buber’s dialogics, while satisfying the terminological criterion, may at least nominally be considered as anthropology. However, it should be noted – as Glinkowski consciously points out – that Buber’s use of the term “anthropology” does not at all testify to

his reference to this philosophical paradigm where the “problem of man” has been taken up by contemporary philosophers who aim to make it the axis of their – not identically understood and practiced – philosophical anthropology. Buber uses the terms “anthropology” or “philosophical anthropology” in a rather arbitrary manner.¹²

⁹ Suffice it to mention the attention that Martin Heidegger gave in his considerations dedicated to the “idea of philosophical anthropology”, stating that a critical reflection on this idea “not only reveals its indefiniteness and internal limitation, but also highlights, above all, the lack of both the basis and the framework for the fundamental question about the essence of this idea”. See Martin Heidegger, *Kant a problem metafizyki*, transl. Bogdan Baran (Warszawa: PWN, 1989), 237, § 37.

¹⁰ Such indefiniteness not only of the discipline, but of the idea of philosophical anthropology in general, seems to be at the forefront of Heidegger’s critique of philosophical anthropology. This is evidenced by a number of his statements, the most characteristic of which are: “However, it is precisely from these various possibilities of distinguishing the philosophical character of anthropology that the indefiniteness of this idea results. Indefiniteness increases if we focus our attention on the diversity of empirical-anthropological [conditions] of cognition, which at least at the starting point are at the basis of any philosophical anthropology. [...] The idea of philosophical anthropology is not only insufficiently defined; its function in philosophy as a whole is also unclear and unresolved. [...] The definition of this idea ultimately boils down to the assumption that anthropology is a kind of reservoir of the main philosophical problems – a definition whose superficiality and dubious philosophical character is striking”. See Heidegger, *Kant a problem metafizyki*, 236, § 37.

¹¹ Glinkowski, *Człowiek – istota spoza kultury*, 8.

¹² *Ibidem*.

Accordingly, Glinkowski introduces a useful distinction between an explicit and an implicit formula of anthropology, without hesitation referring the latter to Buber's position. The explicit definition of anthropology, as the term itself suggests, means an openly declared aspiration "to engage in a discourse with systematized philosophical projects of twentieth-century philosophical anthropologists". In turn, the implicit definition of anthropology reduces it from the level of formal declarations of affiliation to the level of intentions carrying – as Glinkowski says – "anthropological assumptions".¹³

Whether the philosophy of dialogue, and with it Buber's dialogic, can rightly be considered philosophical anthropology may also be determined by the implementation of two criteria: formal and substantive. The application of a formal criterion makes it possible to determine the objective affiliation of a given concept or theory to a particular field. In the case of philosophy of dialogue, including Buber's dialogics, one finds significant difficulty in unambiguously classifying it as an anthropology, and this is owing to two reasons. Firstly, because in the textbook approach to philosophical anthropology there is generally nothing as a separate figure that would resemble dialogical anthropology (founded on the philosophy of dialogue);¹⁴ secondly, because the philosophy of di-

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Ireneusz Bittner, in a widely read and erudite textbook on philosophical anthropology, which has already been published in three editions, the most recent in 2000, presents a panoramic "outline of history and an overview of positions" – as the subtitle of this textbook says – formally classified as philosophical anthropology, despite the vastness of the outlined perspective. Bittner does not include among "contemporary orientations and directions of the philosophy of man" – to which the extensive second part of the book is devoted in its entirety, except for Tischner – who is classified as a representative of phenomenological anthropology – does not account for what could be called dialogical anthropology. See Ireneusz Bittner, *Filozofia człowieka. Zarys dziejów i przegląd stanowisk* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2000). This is not the place to query all the monographs and anthologies that present the achievements of philosophical anthropology in terms of their scope and the degree of their inclusion of the dialogical current. It is enough to mention that in some of the works it is completely neglected, in others it is only signalled – and usually indirectly, by means of identification either with phenomenology (see Stanisław Kowalczyk, *Zarys filozofii człowieka* (Sandomierz: Wydawnictwo Diecezjalne, 2002), 36), or with personalism (rarely defined – as, for example, Janusz Tarnowski (see Janusz Tarnowski, "Problem komunikacji interpersonalnej w katechezie dorosłych", *Śląskie Studia Historyczno-Teologiczne* 13 (1980): 47) – with dialogical personalism, as the main representative of which he considers Martin Buber (ibidem) – see also Carlos Valverde, *Antropologia filozoficzna*, transl. Grzegorz Ostrowski (Poznań: Palotinum, 1998), 95; and only in a few of the cases discussed explicitly as such. As an example, let us indicate: Joseph Möller, *Człowiek w świecie. Zarys antropologii filozoficznej*, transl. Michał Kaczmarkowski (Paris: Éditions du Dialogue, 1969), chapter 3: "Egzystencja osobowo-dialogowa", in particular 73–76; Marek Jedraszewski, *Antropologia*

alogue as such, including Buber's dialogics, does not aspire to operate under the name of anthropology. What is more, even the opposite happens – it is avoided in the philosophy of dialogue – in fact programmatically – to decree any formal affiliation, treated in it as essentially fatal to philosophy, as it limits and flattens its field of vision. Thus, it seems quite right that the philosophy of man is distinguished from philosophical anthropology. When the former is interested in the whole of man, the latter concentrates on a particular aspect of what is human, on a defined – speaking in the language of Gernot Böhme – *anthropologicum*¹⁵ – a characteristic human attribute of man, determining his essence.

Nevertheless, I am ready to defend the thesis that if in the case of the philosophy of dialogue, taken as a whole (this whole being extremely diverse – which is worth emphasizing in this instance, and which is not without effect on the possible ways of understanding it), the formal criterion which allows us to judge its affiliation to philosophical anthropology does not exist, then in the case of Buber's dialogics it does occur at least partially and on the basis of a legitimate, far-reaching presumption. I derive it on the basis of and in connection with Buber's book, entitled *The Problem of Man*.¹⁶ Its very construction and the accompanying idea, quite clearly articulated by the author, and the highly tendentious title, are enough to declare that we are dealing with a philosopher who consciously and consistently aspires to the name of an anthropologist on the ground of philosophy. But not only that. In order not to become entangled in purely formal categorisations, let us note something that cannot be overlooked in our analyses. Let us consider why Buber in general, and more broadly the philosophy of dialogue, aspire not so much to the name, but to becoming, being reborn, being anthropology.

The answer is reliably provided by the author of *The Problem of Man* himself. He invokes Kant's authority and his famous questions, culminating in the question "What is man?", which he assigned to a "discipline

filozoficzna. Prolegomena i wybór tekstów (Poznań: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 1991), chapter 4, pt 8: 130–139; Roman Darowski, *Filozofia człowieka: zarys problematyki. Antologia tekstów*, edition 4, modified and complemented (Kraków: Akademia Ignatianum – Wydawnictwo WAM, 2015), part 2, chapter 13: "Człowiek istotą dialogiczną", 134–137; Witold Glinkowski, *Człowiek. Filozoficzne wyzwanie* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2018); Jan Galarowicz, *Antropodramatyka. Giganci filozofii człowieka* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Petrus, 2020). For the sake of order, I will add that the terms "philosophical anthropology" and "philosophy of man" are used interchangeably, knowing the nuances that can be raised in connection with them. See Darowski, *Filozofia człowieka: zarys problematyki*, 22–24.

¹⁵ Gernot Böhme, *Antropologia filozoficzna. Ujęcie pragmatyczne* (Wykłady z Darmstadt), transl. Piotr Domański (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, 1998), 246.

¹⁶ Buber, *Problem człowieka*.

called anthropology",¹⁷ Buber formulates the unambiguous conclusion that "since the fundamental issues of human philosophy are at stake" – this anthropology "can only be understood as a philosophical anthropology". And it – the author of *I and Thou* concludes – would be the fundamental philosophical science".¹⁸ My conjectures in this respect – as I permitted myself to define their status – are positively verified by the author of one of the most recent monographs on Buber, Elżbieta Stawnicka-Zwiahel.¹⁹ According to her, "Martin Buber conceded that Immanuel Kant was absolutely right to recognize philosophical anthropology as a fundamental philosophical science. He was surprised that Kant's philosophy had failed to meet the goals he had set for it".²⁰ Buber expresses it in words: "It looks as if Kant is hesitating to pose questions in a truly philosophical fashion, which he himself considered to be fundamental".²¹ It seems, therefore, that Buber not only refers to Kant's judgments, making himself their intellectual heir, but also clearly identifies with them, and, by acknowledging their inadequacy and unreadiness, proposes their authorial and creative modification – one that will allow philosophical anthropology as a fundamental philosophical science to resonate with all its might.

The Dialogical Turn in Philosophical Anthropology

For this to happen, a new Copernican revolution is needed in philosophy, comparable to Kant's, yet completely different; a revolution that, because of the privileged position of philosophical anthropology that has just been established, must and will suffice to occur on and through it. For this reason, this revolution can be described after Stawnicka-Zwiahel as a "dialogical turn".²² It bears the resemblance of Kuhn's paradigmatic shift. Thus, it is not limited to mimetic references and the continuation of the previous achievements of philosophical anthropology. It is also not limited to the criticism of what has been found in anthropology. Neither does it consist in questioning, in whole or in part, what anthropology has achieved with such difficulty over the centuries, and what becomes a point of attachment for any new anthropology. Questioning these achievements would be nothing more than cutting off the branch

¹⁷ Ibidem, 4.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Elżbieta Stawnicka-Zwiahel, *Stworzeni do relacji. Dialogiczne inspiracje Martina Bubera* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2014).

²⁰ Ibidem, 95.

²¹ Buber, *Problem człowieka*, 5.

²² Stawnicka-Zwiahel, *Stworzeni do relacji*, 97.

you are sitting on yourself. Aware of the limitations and inefficiencies of the dominant philosophical paradigm in anthropology, which because of its characteristics can be described as monologic, Buber appears with a project of anthropology based on a dialogical principle – a principle, let us add, whose origin and nature cannot be derived from even the most advanced and complicated scientific observation – radically exceeding – and not merely changing this paradigm. By its very nature, the dialogical principle remains invariably trans-border and multidimensional, combining moments that are completely irreconcilable with each other, while maintaining the inequalities and differences existing between them.

Thus, the author of *Tales of the Hasidim*²³ does not so much add his own contribution to the impressive structure of philosophical anthropology, nor does he revolutionise this anthropology according to his own idea; neither does he open up a new stage of its development – although probably all this takes place in the right proportions – but he rather reconstructs anthropology, giving it a new beginning and setting a direction. Hence, one can say that the philosophy of dialogue, with Buber's in the forefront, is an anthropology based on its own foundations and functioning on its own terms, and at the same time not leading to any known *ordo antropologicum*. Dialogical anthropology is, as it follows, governed by its own laws, but with such restraint that *mutatis mutandis* it does not lose its connection with pre- or non-dialogical anthropology, although it by necessity pushes it back into the past.

Anthropodialogics, i.e. the Unity of Anthropology with Dialogics

In view of the founding role for anthropology and in all respects the primary role of dialogue, I propose to call it “anthropodialogics”, adding the significant word “dialogue” to the word “anthropology”. As a result, we are able to concretize and express the sense of anthropology, embraced in the dialogical context. The term “anthropodialogics” suggests, above all, the inseparability – a source one – of both perspectives, i.e. the anthropological perspective and the dialogical perspective. Dialogics does not function here as an *instrumentarium* of the anthropological domain, but is its *modus operandi*. In other words, there is no anthropology without or beyond dialogics, just as there is no dialogics without or

²³ Martin Buber, *Opowieści chasydów*, transl. Paweł Hertz (Poznań: W drodze, 1986).

beyond anthropology. These are areas so convergent that it will not be an exaggeration to say that they are indeed identical.

For this reason, I dare to slightly disagree with the *dictum* of its translator into Polish, Jan Doktor, in the *Introduction* to the *Problem of Man*, according to which Buber's dialogics would be limited only to attempts at "its application in anthropology, psychology, sociology, and pedagogy".²⁴ I am afraid that that Buber's model of dialogics, similarly to others, strongly resists or almost prohibits such applications. If they do occur, however, they generally contribute to the caricaturization of the thought applied in this manner. This can best be seen in the example of Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of dialogue, much more popular than Buber's dialogics, which, usually in spite of its very nature – not sparing its deformations or distortions – is sometimes applied with delight and thoughtless automatism in completely unexpected places and moments, albeit in the way referred to in relation to Buber's dialogics by Doktor.

Anthropology without a Happy Ending

I also disagree with the latter on the issue that, in *The Problem of Man*, Buber seeks only to "critically reflect from a dialogical point of view on the [anthropological – added by P.D.] concepts presented so far, but [...] he does not attempt to create a positive alternative for them on the basis of his dialogics", but "is satisfied with the finding of the inadequacy of the concepts based on the monological principle".²⁵ It seems to me that this observation is based on some misunderstandings. Although it is correct to say that the pre-Buber anthropological concepts in the dialogics of the Austrian philosopher are subject to far-reaching criticism, the comment is not very accurate, that he does not try to create a positive alternative for them being satisfied merely with the claim of the "inadequacy of concepts based on the monological principle". While all these comments are in their own way justified, they do seem to err with a simplistic approach. In my opinion, Buber was at the time working on creating a dialogical alternative to monological anthropologies, or more precisely – he was not so much looking for an alternative for them as replacing them with an independent and henceforth non-alternative dialogical perspective, for which he reserved a special term, highlighting its unique character, namely "the genuine Third".²⁶ To say in this context that he therefore only satisfies himself in his dialogics by stating "the

²⁴ Doktor, "Wprowadzenie", VII.

²⁵ Ibidem, XIV.

²⁶ Buber, *Problem człowieka*, 90–93.

insufficiency of concepts based on the monological principle" – in all the rightness of this statement, one that no sensible person would question, condemns it to a life of half-truth seeking its completion. And even more so – to avoid giving Buber the face of a philosophical megalomaniac or, God forbid, of an ignoramus – let us add outright that he himself is not entirely convinced that the philosophy of dialogue – which at the same time means that this applies *eo ipso* to every conceivable philosophical concept – gives a final, certain and unquestionable answer to the basic question of anthropology, formulated by Kant: "What is man?". This is indicated by at least two important moments that we encounter on the pages of *The Problem of Man*.

The first of these occurs at the very beginning of this dissertation and, strikingly enough, it is with it that Buber's course towards his own proposal of anthropodialogics begins. It is connected with a reminder of the extremely important and weighty remark made by Rabbi Symcha Bunam of Przysucha, "one of the last great teachers of Hasidism"²⁷ – as attested by Buber himself – who "once told his students: 'I wanted to write a book, it was supposed to be called Adam, and to capture the whole man. However, on reflection, I gave up on that intention'"²⁸. "These simple words of a true wise man", explains Buber, "express [...] the whole history of human reflection over man"²⁹.

And the second moment, which proves that Buber had an initial, admittedly not yet fully crystallised, but already visible awareness of the limitations not only of monological anthropology, but also of dialogical anthropology, occurs – which is just as remarkable as in the first case – at the end of *The Problem of Man*, in a way binding together not only the dissertation itself, but also the project of anthropology formulated in it. Buber writes there: "When asked by Kant, 'what a man is', whose history and influence I discussed in the first part of this work, one cannot find an answer [...] when considering a person as such [...]"³⁰. And here comes the barely noticeable, since it is put in parentheses, but an extremely important mention: "(if it [the answer – added by P.D.] can be found at all)"³¹. This means that in this fundamental philosophical anthropology, the philosophy of dialogue may ultimately also fail, which would unfortunately indicate – despite the hopes involved – that the concepts based on the dialogical principle are also insufficient.

It is worth asking why this happens; for what reason philosophical anthropology of any provenance and orientation must eventually

²⁷ Ibidem, 3.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Ibidem, 87.

³¹ Ibidem.

capitulate, not so much because of its own ineptitude, resulting from its inherent, not always realized deficiencies, but rather because of the cardinal impossibility of its finding an answer to the question about man. It is possible that man will forever remain a question to himself without a proper answer, proving with every subsequent attempt to formulate it that it is an unsolvable and yet, or precisely because of this, tenacious and eternally tormenting puzzle. Not for nothing, another outstanding representative of twentieth-century philosophy of dialogue, Abraham Joshua Heschel – who knew *de facto*, and collaborated with, Martin Buber, and was appointed by him in 1937 as his successor “at the Jüdische Lehrhaus in Frankfurt, founded by Franz Rosenzweig”³² – expresses a somewhat surprising view that nowadays we are, oddly, seeking “evidence for the existence of man”.³³ It is difficult to get a more meaningful and equally harsh review of the philosophical achievements of anthropology.

Homo Absconditus

The reasons for this state of affairs, and this is from within the anthropological-philosophical discourse, are revealed by Helmuth Plessner, stating that, in fact, none of the anthropological orientations in philosophy can provide a satisfactory answer to Kant's question. Therefore, they are all trapped in simplifications, approximations, and one-sidedness that seem so transparent to their representatives that they do not even notice them, and if so, it is in the concepts of their adversaries. To avoid this, it is necessary to adopt a trivial axiom at the starting point of every anthropology, which in countless ways verifies the history of this discipline, carefully scrutinized by Buber in *The Problem of Man*. He comes to the conclusion that “Man knows the limits of his openness and therefore knows that he is unfathomable”.³⁴ “As a being shoved into the world, man is hidden from himself – *homo absconditus*”.³⁵ According to Plessner, it makes sense to speak of his nature only in terms of hybridity.³⁶ There-

³² Stanisław Krajewski, “Abraham Joshua Heschel o naszym człowieczeństwie”, in: Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Kim jest człowiek?*, transl. Katarzyna Wojtkowska (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2014), 12.

³³ *Ibidem*, 7.

³⁴ Helmuth Plessner, “Homo absconditus”, transl. Zdzisław Krasnodębski, in: Helmuth Plessner, *Pytanie o conditio humana. Wybór pism*, introduction, selected and edited by Zdzisław Krasnodębski, transl. Małgorzata Łukasiewicz, Zdzisław Krasnodębski, Andrzej Żaluska (Warszawa: PIW, 1988a), 111.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 120.

³⁶ Helmuth Plessner, “Pytanie o conditio humana”, transl. Małgorzata Łukasiewicz, in: Helmuth Plessner, *Pytanie o conditio humana. Wybór pism*, introduction,

fore, he himself presents him as a “hybrid creature between an angel and an animal”,³⁷ for the description of which the most useful and the most appropriate seems to be this enigmatic “between”. Mainly for this reason, Buber, a former Neo-Kantian, claims rather provocatively that man is an unfathomable creature, because he is *homo absconditus* – remaining eternally hidden both “from himself” and “from his fellow human beings”.³⁸

He can never fully recognize himself in his actions – only his shadow, which he casts before and behind him, a trace, a reference to himself.³⁹ [...] This concept, originally defining the unfathomable essence of God, expresses the nature of man. It can only be understood as a way of life that is limited and made possible by its biological basis, which makes it impossible to define man more precisely.⁴⁰

Plessner’s account of the intrinsic nature of philosophical anthropology in any shape and purpose finds an intriguing parallel in the way Buber refers to anthropology, taking into account the differences between the two perspectives. Glinkowski, in his reading of Buber’s anthropology, which is very much in line with the optics adopted by Plessner, states the following:

Or perhaps Buber, when posing the “question about man”, does not expect it to be possible to answer it fully positively, that is, to present a full, adequate, theoretically, and substantially established philosophical anthropology. But then the answer would enclose itself in a “negative” proposal, one would like to say apophatic – to signal a formal similarity to apophatic theology. I will aim – concludes Glinkowski – to demonstrate the validity of the last segment of the alternative outlined above.⁴¹

The reasons for this insufficiency and, in fact, the provisional nature of anthropology seem to be best explained by the expression used in the title of Buber’s anthropological dissertation. The matter is probably all about the “problem of man”. The unparalleled and extremely helpful exegesis of what it exactly means to use in this phrase the non-accidental

selected and edited by Zdzisław Krasnodębski, transl. Małgorzata Łukasiewicz, Zdzisław Krasnodębski, Andrzej Załuska (Warszawa: PIW, 1988c), 77.

³⁷ Helmuth Plessner, “O tym, co ludzkie i nieludzkie”, transl. Andrzej Załuska, in: Helmuth Plessner, *Pytanie o conditio humana. Wybór pism*, introduction, selected and edited by Zdzisław Krasnodębski, transl. Małgorzata Łukasiewicz, Zdzisław Krasnodębski, Andrzej Załuska (Warszawa: PIW, 1988b), 256.

³⁸ Plessner, “Homo absconditus”, 114.

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, 120.

⁴¹ Glinkowski, *Człowiek – istota spoza kultury*, 10.

term “problem” is presented in Heschel’s own anthropological dissertation. First of all, he recommends that a distinction be made between the basic *modi* whereby thinking about a person can be realised. And these are respectively: a question and a problem. After all, it is possible both to inquire about a man and to problematise him. For Heschel, there is no doubt that true anthropology begins not with the question about man – hence the failure of predialogical anthropologies – but with posing a problem of man. Even the most complete, indisputable and satisfactory answer to the question of what man is, according to Heschel, does not translate into a solution to the problem that anthropology actually faces. There are many differences between querying and problematizing, and they all have an impact on the concreteness of anthropology.

Asking questions, says Heschel, engages the intellect; facing a problem engages the person as a whole. A question stems from a thirst for knowledge; a problem reflects a state of confusion or even distress. A question demands an answer, a problem demands a solution [...].

No real problem is born of pure inquisitiveness. A problem is the result of the situation. It appears at times when we are in trouble, at times of intellectual perplexity, in the experience of tension, conflict, contradiction.⁴² [...] One should not put a sign of equality between the verbalized question and the problem we are faced with.⁴³ [...] We deal with the problem of man because he is an entity tormented by contradictions and dilemmas [...]. [...] Man [...] is clearly a problem in himself and in all circumstances. Being human is a problem [...].⁴⁴

Meeting (in the Place) of Solitude

The fundamental problem of man and the source of all human problems, according to Buber, turns out to be solitude. The solution to it – if it is possible to find one at all (speaking with caution typical of Buber) – should therefore be sought in an always concretized and, most importantly, “live”⁴⁵ “dialogical bond”,⁴⁶ evolving and articulating itself in a non-discursive (sphere) “Between”⁴⁷ I and Thou. It does not only mean, and by no means reduces itself to simply being together, sharing the same space and the same time with one another, sharing the same or similar views, interests and passions, coping together with suffocating

⁴² Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Kim jest człowiek?*, transl. Katarzyna Wojtkowska (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2014), 22.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 23.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 24.

⁴⁵ Buber, *Problem człowieka*, 93.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 92.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 91–92.

problems, tasks and responsibilities. Nor will emergence from loneliness be guaranteed by social escapades, or settling for cheap sentimentalism and (spontaneous or occasional) bursts in the pursuit of community. In order to overcome the imperialism of loneliness and at the same time to deal with the fundamental problem of (for) man it is necessary to have a bond that “does not yield to psychological notions”,⁴⁸ and thus does not boil down to “emotional motives”.⁴⁹ As Buber says, “this is something ontic”.⁵⁰ “[...] the dialogical situation is [therefore – added by P.D.] sufficiently tangible only ontically. But it is graspable not from the side of the ontics of personal existence, nor from the side of two personal existences, but only from the side of what happens between them as transcendent towards them”.⁵¹

If, therefore, solitude is truly the fundamental problem of man, with which he tries to deal by various methods and means – if it is to be dealt with effectively – the answer cannot be anthropology, which is not able even to diagnose it properly, since, being contaminated with it itself, it is entangled in it, defending its position and contributing to the consolidation of its hegemony. All hope for a way out of this oppression must be placed in the hands of dialogically-sensitive anthropology, because only such anthropology is capable of dealing with solitude. As Buber says, loneliness is only overcome “in the unconditional and transient encounter [...] of one man with another man living beside him”.⁵²

As a result, the author of *I and Thou* reaches a conclusion, which becomes a programme of anthropology growing in its subsoil: “We will come closer to the answer to the question ‘what man is’ [come close but not find out for sure – added by P.D.] if we learn to understand him as a being in whose dialogics, in the mutually present existence of two persons, the encounter of one with the other is realized and learned”.⁵³

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⁴⁸ Ibidem, 92.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² Ibidem, 89.

⁵³ Ibidem, 93.

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Summary

A Philosophy of Dialogue as an Anthropology. In the Circle of Buber's Ideas

Dialogical thinking is a compositum of three stratum: anthropological, ethical, and theological (otherwise known as metaphysical). The distinguished meaning of the former is associated with the primacy of what Martin Buber calls "the problem of man". It also encompasses moral and metaphysical issues. A human, however, is not absolutized here, but is the starting point and destination of the dialogue thought. It appears therefore it cannot be considered a pure (or typical) anthropology. It is rather a kind of anthropoethics and anthropotheology (theology of man and anthropology of God). An interesting example of such an approach is Buberian dialogue. In this article I argue for the possibility of interpreting it as an anthropology.

Keywords: Philosophy of dialogue, Martin Buber, philosophical anthropology, ethics, metaphysics, human, God, dialogue