



## EDUCATION AND TRAINING BETWEEN ETHICS AND THE MARKET – NOTES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

### A FORMAÇÃO E A EDUCAÇÃO ENTRE A ÉTICA E O MERCADO – APONTAMENTOS E CONTRIBUIÇÕES

### LA FORMACIÓN Y LA EDUCACIÓN ENTRE LA ÉTICA Y EL MERCADO – APUNTES Y CONTRIBUCIONES



<https://doi.org/10.56238/edimpacto2025.074-002>

Geraldo de Souza Ferreira<sup>1</sup>

#### ABSTRACT

This work explores concepts found in Martin Buber's writings to support a reflection on education committed to the concrete lives of individuals. Buber emphasizes that thought must be anchored in vital reality and lived experience, linking life, knowledge, and responsibility, and must be oriented toward action. This approach is crucial to prevent thought from becoming alienated from its surrounding context. The core of his work rests on the distinction between the I–Thou mode (in which the Other is presence and revelation) and the I–It mode (in which the Other is objectified and instrumentalized). The formation of the person is tied to encounter—when placed in concrete conditions of dialogue, we learn to respond. Education, as an essential domain of dialogue, must preserve freedom and mutual trust, seek coherence between thought and action, and oppose the mercantile and fragmented logic of contemporary education, which tends to highlight the individual to the detriment of the person.

**Keywords:** Person Formation. Responsibility. Education. Instrumentalization.

#### RESUMO

Este trabalho explora conceitos presentes na obra de Martin Buber para fundamentar uma reflexão sobre uma educação compromissada com a vida concreta das pessoas. Buber enfatiza que o pensamento deve se ancorar na realidade vital e na vivência concreta, associando vida, conhecimento e responsabilidade, e deve ser orientado para a ação. Essa abordagem é crucial para evitar que o pensamento seja alienado do que o circunda. O cerne de seu trabalho repousa na distinção entre o modo Eu-Tu (onde o Outro é presença e revelação) e o modo Eu-Isso (onde o Outro é objetificado e instrumentalizado). A formação da pessoa se associa ao encontro, quando em condições concretas de diálogo, aprendemos a responder. A educação, sendo um domínio essencial do diálogo, deve preservar liberdade e confiança mútua, buscar a coerência entre pensar e agir e opor-se à lógica mercantil e segmentada da educação contemporânea, que tende a ressaltar o indivíduo em detrimento da pessoa.

**Palavras-chave:** Diálogo. Formação. Responsabilidade. Instrumentalização.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. in Production Engineering. Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFRJ). E-mail [geraldoferreira@id.uff.br](mailto:geraldoferreira@id.uff.br)  
Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0064-5197> Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/7737006660315245>



## RESUMEN

Este trabajo explora conceptos presentes en la obra de Martin Buber para fundamentar una reflexión sobre una educación comprometida con la vida concreta de las personas. Buber enfatiza que el pensamiento debe anclarse en la realidad vital y en la experiencia concreta, vinculando vida, conocimiento y responsabilidad, y debe orientarse hacia la acción. Este enfoque es fundamental para evitar que el pensamiento se aleje o se vuelva ajeno a su entorno. El núcleo de su obra reside en la distinción entre el modo Yo-Tú (donde el Otro es presencia y revelación) y el modo Yo-Ello (donde el Otro es objetivado e instrumentalizado). La formación de la persona se asocia al encuentro, cuando, en condiciones concretas de diálogo, aprendemos a responder. La educación, siendo un ámbito esencial del diálogo, debe preservar la libertad y la confianza mutua, buscar la coherencia entre el pensar y el actuar, y oponerse a la lógica mercantil y fragmentada de la educación contemporánea, que tiende a resaltar al individuo en detrimento de la persona.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This work is dedicated to exploring the relevance of the dialogical principle, present in the work of Martin Buber, to contribute to the foundation of an education committed to people's concrete lives.

Buber argues that thought should be anchored in concrete experience and oriented towards action, articulating life, knowledge and responsibility. This focus on concreteness reflects the legacy of Buber, who in his masterpiece *I and You* (1921), pointed out the importance of the dialogical principle for modern thought.

The formation of the person and the educational process take place in the present moment, in the confrontation with otherness. Authentic dialogue does not reside in the individual participants, but in the "between" of the two, where freedom and reciprocity are manifested.

From this relational basis, the text addresses the conditions for the intertwining between responsibility and education, built from the concrete situation of life. Education, referenced in Buber's teachings, must preserve freedom and mutual trust, seeking to enhance conditions for the rooting of an independent and autonomous thought in reality, offering crucial guidelines against the mercantile and segmented logic of contemporary education

## 2 AN ATYPICAL WAY OF THINKING: THE BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT AND DIALOGUE

### 2.1 THE BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT: LIFE, THOUGHT, ACTION

In his contribution to the approach to human formation and education, Martin Buber left as a legacy the foundations of the dialogical principle, which are rooted in his life history.

Born in Vienna (1878), with a doctorate in philosophy, in Berlin (1904), Buber taught in Frankfurt until 1933, but, expelled by Nazism, emigrated to Palestine in 1938 and was a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He died in 1965, at the age of 87 (Bartholo, 2001, p.62).

Buber considered himself an atypical man, he rejected typologies of being a specific thinker, mystic, politician, philosopher of language, religion or education. He admitted that reason should not claim to be sufficient in itself, because, for him, a paradox of human existence is that the ability to understand the world is only the threshold of incomprehensibility (Bartholo, 2001, p.69).

For Buber, intuitions often go beyond the human capacity to express thoughts in concepts. And in these cases, communicability needs to be based on examples from personal life (Buber, 1982, p.37).



Buber assumed as his mission to open the eyes of the interlocutors to the vital reality of their existences, to the life lived in the concreteness of situations, not to the life thought from preconceived mental schemes. He claimed to have only a conversation and had no doctrine. He emphasized that he only took those who heard him by the hand, took him to a window and, opening it, pointed to something in reality that had not been seen, or that had been seen very little (Bartholo, 2001, p.13).

Buber's work invites us to *have a conversation*. And this implies an attitude based on the primacy of listening. Listening to what the other has to say to us is the condition of possibility of all authentic dialogue. For Buber, the *dialogical principle* is the human possibility of access to Being. For him, the human being is an entity open to relational possibilities, whose freedom is enhanced by being rooted in the concreteness of his life situation. And to take root in life is to allow oneself to be confronted by the mystery of presence, and to seek to respond to it.

## 2.2 INTELLECTUAL BONDS AND THE DIALOGICAL PRINCIPLE

Buber's work is influenced by his readings and the events that occur in his life. He points out that the remarkable encounters in his life were Franz Rosenzweig and Gustav Landauer, with whom he maintained a close friendship. From Landauer, Buber receives contributions to his conception and study of communities. He also decisively influences him in terms of political activism and commitment to social struggles.

The work of Franz Rosenzweig, especially *The Star of Redemption*, exerts a decisive influence on Buber's intellectual path, in particular the disbelief in the Hegelian idea of an infinite progress being realized in history. In line with Rosenzweig and in opposition to all historical determinism, he reaffirms the Jewish conception that each mortal instant is a possible opening for the reception of the Eternal (or *the door through which the Messiah can enter*) (Bartholo, 2001, p.59).

Other important formative influences were his masters at the university, W. Dilthey and G. Simmel, and, in particular, the works of Kant, *Prolegomena to the All Metaphysics of the Future* and Nietzsche's, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It also receives influences from Feurbach and Kierkegaard.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Buber dedicated himself to the interpretation of Hasidic mysticism. For him, what was relevant in his study of Hasidism was not the objectivity of a historian scientist, guided by the rigorous causality of logic and erudition, but rather the fusion of justice and love, as the soul of true knowledge" (Bartholo, 2001, p.16).



Buber did not consider himself a mystic, because he could not affiliate himself with a mystical doctrine in which union with God would be the result of the "annihilation" of the Self (Bergman, 1991, p.297). He emphasizes feeling unable to deny the value and necessity of critical reason in the human effort to understand reality. Nor did he admit the asceticism proposed by mystical currents in the sense of operating a *disembodiment of the senses*, which represented a true *denial of the world* as a condition of possibility for the mystical union of the human with God (Buber, 1982, p.83).

Buber saw reality in a divided way; one part the ordinary reality, the common denominator that can be ordered and compared, the other, a greater reality is another. For him, giving the personal world this effective reality requires that the present world can only be "known by the response given to things by the spirit-sense of the man who loves" (Buber, 1991, p.28).

This perspective is developed in Buber's masterpiece *I and Thou (Ich und Du)*, a masterpiece released in 1921, in which he makes explicit the recognition of the primacy of vulnerability to otherness as the "primordial chance of Being".

Buber emphasizes in *I and You* that the other as You is presence, is revelation. I only know from him what he reveals to me. The other, as That, is part of the reality in which it is a thing, of which I have an objective, orderable knowledge. *Eu e Tu* marks the rediscovery of the dialogical principle, an event that marks a Copernican revolution for modern thought, and "which may lead to a second resumption of thought in contemporary European philosophy" (Buber, 1985, p.58).

For Emmanuel Lévinas, it is thanks to this perspective raised by a current of ideas that manifests itself independently in Martin Buber's *I and You* and in Gabriel Marcel's *Journal Métaphysique*, that an invaluable contribution comes to the creation of a new situation, where "the relationship with the Other, with the You, as irreducible to objective knowledge loses its unusual character" (Levinas, 1988, p.55).

Marcel, like Buber, considered that the goal of thinking should not be the formulation of a system, but personal reflection on the concrete human situation. Its privileged emphasis on being and not on knowing places it in contrast with contemporary scientism. For him, thought should have as its primary reference the existence and the human person, and not any abstraction.

Marcel saw that the technological mentality, in which man considered himself the sole creator of meaning, would lead him to see the world as raw material for the satisfaction of his desires. For him, abstraction and possession were seen by him as the roots of social problems. By abstraction, man forgets the concreteness of experience, abandoning those



aspects of it that cannot be easily framed into categories. Through possession, he enhances his power to retain, preserve, protect and dispose of objects (Marcel, 1951).

Marcel's discovery of the reality of Tu occurs almost at the same time as Buber; a coincidence that he considered a spiritual convergence (Marcel, 1991, p.41). In 1919, Marcel wrote that it was necessary to react against the classical idea of the eminent value of autarkia, of self-sufficiency in oneself. For him, the perfect is not that which is sufficient for itself, because this perfection is that of a system, not that of a being. "What counts is the spiritual commerce between beings and here it is not a matter of respect, but of love" (Lévinas, 1997, p.96). For beings, reciprocity, an awakening, are conditions that make the relationship that binds a being to what he needs present a spiritual value. Marcel's writings help to better understand the meaning of alienation and the lack of richness that characterize the human experience in the scientific age (Marcel, 1955).

### 2.3 THOUGHT AS A SUPPORT FOR ACTION

Thus, Buber exposes that being is not self-consciousness, but relation to the other. The human being is the entity capable of a personal relationship with otherness, it is the being-in-relation (Bartholo, 2001, p.77).

It is an awakening of me by someone else that manifests itself as a responsibility attributed to me with no possibility of escape and without indifference. This is the foundation for an ethics of the interhuman. This rationality shifts its center of reference from autonomy to heteronomy, in the sense that "consciousness, subjectivity, no longer has the first place in its relation to the other" (Lévinas, 1997, p.52).

To develop the book *Me and You*, Buber did not base himself on abstract principles and concepts, but on the concrete experience of his life. According to him, the book is the codification in objective form, for the world of It, of I-Thou events that occurred in his life (Bartholo, 2001, p.13).

Back in 1933, in dark times for the Jewish community, Martin Buber taught that the human condition is a becoming, a striving to become what we are, because "if we are sure of what is ours, no one can expropriate us", remaining faithful to one's vocation, united to one's origin and objective, we preserve rights and freedom of the soul and no one can uproot us. No power in the world can impose servitude on those who have gained true service, true freedom of the soul" (Bartholo, 2001, p.62).

The constitutive principle of thought must be the orientation to action. Thought must serve the understanding of concrete experience and its subsequent signifying transformation.





For Buber, man has the potential capacity to develop in himself conditions of full existence. And when, from the relationship between two or more people, the union is guided by the sign of help, the aspiration for fulfillment through mutual education arises in companionship (Buber, 1987, p.48). And education is one of the themes to which Buber devotes attention in his work, considering it to be the domain of the dialogical principle. As a possibility for learning, pedagogical practice must preserve conditions for the occurrence of freedom and mutual trust.

Buber contrasts education and propaganda, as spaces of freedom and indoctrination. In education, the authentic pedagogical relationship is a space of discovery and surprise, where every moment requires for the formation of the person the mutual responsibility of the master and the apprentice. Propaganda is imposition (Buber, 1982, p.149).

Genuine education is, in Buber's conception, an education for life, which enhances conditions for the establishment of the reality of an ethical community (Buber, 1975, p.116). This education requires the I-Thou relational mode between teacher and student, and of the students among themselves. Such a requirement implies that the highest form of education is the one that provides "existential unity" (Simon, 1991, p.544), coherence between thinking and acting.

### 3 PERSON, DIALOGUE, RESPONSIBILITY

#### 3.1 THE DIALOGICAL ATTITUDE AND THE FORMATION OF THE PERSON

In Buber's perspective, the formation of the person occurs in the present moment, in the face-to-face confrontation with the revelation of the authentic and irreducible other. It is through encounters with the immeasurable reality of being and becoming that "the world generates the person in the individual" (Buber, 1975, p.89), teaching him to say You. The connection of this formation to the world is the possibility of encounter, through which the Self remains capable of maintaining the effectiveness of its action (Buber, 1979, p.36); preventing the growth of the world of things, which would sweep him away like an appendage.

Buber affirms the primacy of dialogue in the process of formation and education of the person, but says that we should not conclude that the I-It relational mode is inferior or negative. This mode supports the acquisition of scientific and technological activities; it is negative for man to allow himself to be absorbed and impregnated by the purposes of this attitude, subjugating his life to values oriented towards the instrumentalization of the world of things.

Each present moment is unique, therefore, the encounters are not interrelated events and are not ordered forming a world, but show the order of the world to man. In the encounter,



when the man is in presence, there is a limit, an "interval" between him and the other (Buber, 1985, p.149).

This interval is the place and real support of inter-human occurrences, such as: an authentic conversation, marked by spontaneity; a true lesson, the result of which is not known in advance by the teacher or by the students; and a true, non-formal embrace. These are cases for which the essence of the interaction does not occur in a neutral world that encompasses the participants, nor in any of them. But rather in the "between" the two, a dimension that only the two participating partners have access to (Buber, 1985, p.147).

The "in-between" is the interval where authentic interaction and the reciprocity of the gift of human freedom are manifested. The "in-between" is the interpersonal, a horizon of reference from which presences are revealed to the Self. The interpersonal is the support of alterity for the person, and extends beyond the sphere of the interhuman, dialoguing with the sphere of nature and life with other men (Buber, 1979, p.118).

According to Gabriel Marcel, with the term "between", Buber means that, in the presence between human beings, a creative *milieu* is formed from which the condition of possibility of renewal of the human being as a human being is provided (Marcel, 1991, p.45).

In fact, Buber says that in every encounter, the man receives something new, because he leaves the same different from how he entered. In the encounter, man receives the strength of the concreteness of the presence of the Thou that is destined for him by the world (Buber, 1979, p.127. This force is beyond any spatial-temporal aspect of existence, it is something that he does not know and does not control, but "happens" to him, adding to him and constituting him in his essence, forming him as a person. "The truth is that we have received something that we did not possess before and we have received it in such a way that we know that it has been given to us." This something promotes our attachment to life, making it heavy with meaning (Buber, 1979, p.126).

To live is to be open to dialogue. The limits of possibility of human dialogicity, in which the reception of the person – of the Other – takes place, do not depend either on an attitude of observation, which captures traces of the real through concentration, or on an attitude of contemplation, which awaits the presentation of the real.

In contrast to these positions, Buber states that the limits to the condition of dialogue are the limits of the acquisition of intimate knowledge. The attitude of becoming aware of oneself is a form of perception in which there is and demands reciprocity of inner action, because in the encounter there is "a word that demands a response" (Buber, 1982, p.43).

The reception of the presence is a free decision of the Self to enter into a relationship, to respond to and welcome the authentic destiny that comes to meet it, as a word that is





addressed to it (Buber, 1982, p.46). For this attitude, dialogical action is required, which presupposes the basic movement of "turning-to-the-other", as opposed to "folding-in-oneself".

"Turning to the other" is a simple attitude in which man meets his fellow man in the "absence of reservations", but which has been despised and forgotten in the conditions of contemporary life (Buber, 1987, p.94), because man, through his habits, builds a protection – a shield – that leaves him sterilized in the face of the instants that incite him to receptivity. Only the "turning-to-the-other" allows the transformation of communication, which is a constituent of all human dialogue, into communion, the embodiment of the dialogical word (Buber, 1982, p.37).

Buber uses an example from his personal life to explain the state of "absence of reservations" and the embodiment of the word dialogic. He says that, when he was younger, a young man sought him out, when he was at a time under the influence of the phenomenon of "religion". He attended to the young man, but did not guess the essence of the "questions he did not ask". Later, I learned that he was no longer alive. He understood that the young man had been led to him by fate, desperate and in search of a presence that would say that "meaning still exists" (Buber, 1982, p.47).

After that, Buber renounced the "religious sphere" as an isolated phenomenon. He understood that in authentic dialogue each of the participants must be in an "absence of reservations", whole in the relationship, with the intention of establishing a living reciprocity. He began to consider that presence only exists when we assume the fullness of existence, of the responsibility committed to communion and the embodiment of the dialogical word.

### 3.2 THE INTERTWINING BETWEEN RESPONSE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Authentic dialogue differs from technical dialogue that has as its motive an objective understanding; and the monologue disguised as dialogue that brings men together, but each one talks to himself, and believes he has escaped the torment of relying only on his own resources.

The place of authentic dialogue is the dialogical life, marked by the dialogical existence where the reciprocity of a true response resides. In monological life, man is not capable of becoming effective and actualizing the society where his destiny makes him move, because the one who lives it does not venture to grope outside its contours (Buber, 1982, p.55).

Our response to what is presented to us in dialogical life is spoken in the words of action and omission. Each moment lived demands its response. What we say/respond to is our penetration into the interior of the situation that has presented itself to us. We have never



mastered this situation of which we have become intimately aware, but we have succeeded in incorporating it into the substance of lived life.

Thus, the life we live is different from a sum of moments, we respond to the moment, but we take responsibility for it. A concrete reality of the world, created again, has been placed in our arms, we are responsible for it. Small everyday acts (the gaze of an animal, the touch of a child) summon our responsible response.

Buber thus arrives at a living intertwining between response and responsibility. He states that an unaccountable responsibility is a metaphor for morality, because responsibility only exists when there is an instance before which someone is responsible. Real responsibility is dialogical and does not need to name the sender of the word to which one responds.

Buber points out that, in order to be able to leave ourselves towards the other, we need to start from our own interior. The dialogue between mere individuals is only an outline; only between people is it realized. A man is essentially transformed from an individual into a person through the austere and tender experiences of dialogue, which teach him the unlimited content of the limit (Buber, 1982, p.56).

It is crucial to emphasize that the conception of the human being that emphasizes the individual to the detriment of the person enhances the conditions for human education to be treated by market and regulation mechanisms. The individual, focused on self-sufficiency and instrumentalization (typical of the I-It mode), represents the mentality that Buber and Marcel criticize, in which abstraction and possession are the roots of social problems. Only the transformation of the individual into a person, brought about by the experiences of dialogue and 'turning-to-the-other', allows the overcoming of the mercantile logic, establishing dialogical responsibility, which is genuine and linked to the concrete situation.

In this perspective, the person is formed by responsibility. But not by an abstract responsibility of specialized ethics, of the field of norms, of the rationalization of the I-It. In this field, responsibility is not moral because it is tentatively exhausted in a list of obligations and rights granted. Genuine responsibility is linked to the concrete situation in which man finds himself, and is due to each person. "Each concrete hour, with its content of the world and of destiny, is a language for the attention aroused." The attentive man firmly faces the acts of each present moment of creation. "There is only genuine responsibility when there is a true response" to the event of the person's daily life (Buber, 1982, p.46).

The person's attitude of responding cannot be demanded. The person is free to "turn-to-the-other" and attend to the vocation that calls him. Thus, "responding is not a duty, but it is a power." A human power that no one can impose on anyone, because no one can impose



a dialogue on anyone. Dialogue is not a privilege of intellectual activity, it concerns the trivial, irreplaceable man. Therefore, there are no gifted and non-gifted for him. There are those who give themselves and those who do not. To the one who will give himself tomorrow, this power is not noticed. Not even he knows that he has it inside him. "If you find it, you will be surprised" (Buber, 1982, p.71).

Responsibility presupposes someone who addresses me and to whom I must give an account of something that has been entrusted to me and to whose protection I am entrusted. That someone addresses me within the framework of his trust and I respond in my loyalty or refuse to respond in my disloyalty, or being in disloyalty, I forcibly free myself by the loyalty of the response.

The reality of responsibility implies giving an account of what has been entrusted to us before the one who has entrusted it to us. In a situation of not responding, the reciprocity of life ceases, and whoever ceases to give the answer, ceases to hear the word" (Buber, 1982, p.85).

In alignment with Buber, Lévinas emphasizes that responsibility for the Other does not expect reciprocity. Reciprocity is his business... The "I always have one more responsibility than all the others" and a proposal for education committed to concrete life must be guided by these considerations (Levinas, 1985, p.98-99).

#### 4 AN EDUCATION COMMITTED TO CONCRETE LIFE

Martim Buber, in his contribution to the approach to human formation, considered education as one of the essential domains of dialogue. The dialogical principle, as established by Buber, offers a relevant conceptual framework for the defense of an education committed to people and to concrete social reality.

From the author's writings on dialogue, and his understanding of responsibility and formation of the person, we can list some principles for education:

1. Education must be anchored in concrete life; for thought cannot be alienated from what surrounds it.
2. Coherence between thinking and acting.
3. Action-oriented thinking, serving the understanding of experience and its meaningful transformation.
4. Educational practice must act as a means of preserving conditions for the occurrence of freedom and mutual trust.
5. Authentic education is a space of discovery and surprise, opposing propaganda and imposition.



6. The I-Thou relational mode should be prioritized in education, preventing life from being subjugated to the world of things (I-It).
7. Formation takes place in the inter-human, where human freedom is manifested and the reciprocity of self-giving takes place.
8. One must seek the attitude of "turning-to-the-other", in order to transform communication into communion, in a state of "absence of reservations".
9. Genuine response is a human power that must be honed in education.
10. The goal of education is the establishment of an ethical community, where dialogue reigns and people are bound together by mutual and genuine bonds.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Following in Buber's footsteps, trust, and the freedom for responsibility go together in the relationship. The conditions of learning must allow for an authentic education that constitutes a space for discovery. In it, the pedagogical relationship binds, for the formation of the person, the mutual responsibility of the master and the apprentice. The highest form of education is, therefore, the one that provides coherence between thinking and acting.

Buber also points out that the establishment of genuine education for life requires the I-Thou relational mode between teacher and learner, and of the learners among themselves.

The constitutive principle of thought, in this context, must be the orientation to action. Thought should serve, primarily, the understanding of concrete experience and its subsequent significant transformation.

Buber's teachings bring us a contribution to the search for an education in opposition to many paths of contemporary education, resulting from precepts associated with the mercantile logic, as a mediating agency of the relations between the human being.

The teachings and principles arising from his writings are guidelines that contribute to overcoming the limitations of an education that is based on a conception of the human being, which emphasizes the individual to the detriment of the person, and whose prevalence provides conditions for the regulation and treatment of human formation based on market mechanisms.

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