Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas

I. Critiques of the Self

A. Western philosophy and science start with or assume

the Cartesian ego as the fundamental reality -- ontology

B. Several philosophers in the western tradition have

been critical of this Cartesian-Lockean-Kantian tradition

C. Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology"

Martin Buber, I and Thou

Immanuel Levinas, Infinity and Totality

D. There starting point is that the concept of an isolated I,

a subjectivity that stands over and against a world of

objects that are only externally related is wrong

E. Ethically this creates a hopeless situation, nothing can

really be justified by "principle," "calculation", or "analogy

that can be grounded

F. Ontology for all three, the fundamental reality, the

ultimate reality, is "being in the world" or as Heidegger points

out "being with others", "being with the world"

G. Martin Buber, a Jewish thinker, Hasidism, existentialism,

Kierkegaard ( all related to Kierkegaard), Taoism

H. Buber's ontology twofold I-Thou and I-It, I is different in each relationship

I. I of I it relationship is I of experience, manipulation, the

other as object, relationship as means to end

J. I of I thou relationship is I of openness, response to the

other, it is a personal relationship, of address and response

pure relation, can't bring it forth, like grace

K. Like the covenant, based on agreement and trust

L. The other asks a question which demands a response,

openness, recirpocity, mutuality

M. Response is risk, no guarantes, no laws to make it right,

"life on the narrow ridge" -- like Kierkegaard

N. in I and Thou Buber talks about the possibility of an

I thou relationship with nature, with a tree, with an animal

O. alienated man asks this question because indiginous people

already live in relation to their environment, and others, uses

language as an example

P. Yes, can you say thou to a tree, a mountain, an ecosystem

Q. It is reciprocal, can the tree say something to you, can it

ask you a question, make a demand upon you, for Buber,

the I Thou relationship can move beyond the threshold of

speech

R. Morality is response, not calculated, not principle, but response, the world as revelation and question, hallowing

the everyday, making the world a holy place, a place of

justice

S. Not a question of "What you should do?" not a third person

question, you're in the world as first person in relation

T. Between person and person, person and world

II. Levinas

A. Levinas says that when god asked Cain, Where is

your brother?

B. Levinas says that the I other relationship is the primary

ontological category, before all else one is in the world

in relation to the other

C. and that relationship is an ethical one, the other demands

of the I an ethical response, thou shalt not kill