EDUCATIONAL THEORY

LISTENING AS EMBRACING THE OTHER: MARTIN BUBER'S PHILOSOPHY OF DIALOGUE

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Abstract. In this essay, Mordechai Gordon interprets Martin Buber's ideas on dialogue, presence, and especially his notion of embracing in an attempt to shed some light on Buber's understanding of listening. Gordon argues that in order to understand Buber's conception of listening, one needs to examine this concept in the context of his philosophy of dialogue. More specifically, his contention is that closely examining Buber's notion of *embracing* the other is critical to making sense of his conception of listening. Gordon's analysis suggests that, in Buber's model, listening involves a kind of active attentiveness to another's words or actions, engaging them as though they are directed specifically at us. Gordon's discussion of dialogue and listening also indicates that the relation between speaking and listening is one of reciprocity and mutual dependence and that listening plays an essential role in initiating many dialogues by creating a space in which two people can embrace each other as complete individuals.

For some readers, it might be surprising to discover that almost nothing has been published on Martin Buber and listening. After all, Buber's philosophy of dialogue or dialogical approach advocates a kind of presence to other beings in which one is receptive and open to being influenced by them. Such presence, in my view, implies that one is ready to *really listen* to the other without dominating the conversation or hastily prejudging the other. Yet while Buber did focus on dialogue, presence, and speech in many of his writings, he made only few explicit and very brief references to listening. Of course, Buber's lack of attention to listening is in no way unique. As Joseph Beatty points out, "with few exceptions (Heraclitus and Martin Heidegger), philosophers have virtually ignored listening to focus on speech acts and arguments."[1] Therefore, in this essay, I attempt to interpret Buber's ideas on dialogue, presence, and especially his notion of embracing in order to shed some light on his understanding of listening.

For Buber, to truly listen entails being present to the other, that is, responding to the other as a whole person and creating a space in which the other can speak his or her own words and meaning. When one is open to the other's being, one does not try to speak for the other or to impose one's own language, concepts, and interpretive schemes on the other. From Buber's perspective, genuine listening involves encouraging the other to create his or her own meanings, which may be very different from one's own. According to Buber,

> Genuine conversation, and therefore every actual fulfillment and relation between men, means acceptance of otherness. . . . Everything depends, as far as human life is concerned, on whether each thinks of the other as the one he is, whether each, that is, with all his desire to influence the other, nevertheless unreservedly accepts and confirms him in his being this man and in his being made in this particular way.[2]

1. See Joseph Beatty's fine essay "Good Listening" in *Educational Theory* 49, no. 3 (1999): 282.

2. Martin Buber, *Knowledge of Man: Selected Essays* (New York: Humanity Books, 1998), 59.

For Buber, a real conversation is one that is not preconceived and that develops spontaneously, in which an individual speaks directly to his or her partner and is able to respond to the unpredictable response of the other. What is essential in such dialogue does not take place in each of the participants or in a world that binds them together. Rather, what is essential in this dialogue occurs *between* the two participants in a realm that is shared only by the two participants. In understanding such a dialogue, Buber argued, one must not employ feelings or merely rely on psychological concepts. Neither should one view dialogue as a meeting between two souls, their unconscious thoughts or their bodies. In Buber's view, dialogue can only be grasped as an ontological phenomenon — a meeting of one whole being with another whole being.

In what follows, I first lay out Buber's philosophy of dialogue or dialogical approach while carefully explaining his ontology: the distinction between the I-You and the I-It, his notion of the ''between,'' as well as some of the different types of dialogical relations. I introduce Buber's notion of *embracing* the other as central to understanding his conception of listening. The next part explores the relation between dialogue and listening. My analysis suggests that listening, though all too often ignored or marginalized, needs to be considered an essential component of dialogue just like speaking. In the final part of this essay, I briefly take up the following question: what does Buber's conception of listening suggest about how people can become good listeners?

Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue

Buber was a trailblazer in philosophical anthropology, the science of the human being, in that he discovered a new realm, which until then had been largely ignored by philosophers — the realm of between person and person. He stressed that something essential can happen between two persons that is fundamental to each of the individuals as such and greatly significant for the collective world that binds them. This something, which will be described in detail later in the essay, Buber called dialogue or the I-You relation. Dialogue emerges when one whole person encounters another whole person, an encounter in which each individual gives his or her whole being to the other and does not hold anything back. As Buber eloquently wrote,

> The life of dialogue is no privilege of intellectual activity like dialectic. It does not begin in the upper story of humanity. It begins no higher than where humanity begins. There are no gifted and ungifted here, only those that give themselves and those who withhold themselves.[3]

To introduce Buber's concept of dialogue or the I-You relation, one must also include the I-It relation because these two attitudes, though radically opposed to

3. Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Roger Gregor Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 35. This work will be cited in the text as *BMM* for all subsequent references.

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each other, cannot really be separated as one separates two distinct objects. Indeed, although Buber posed the I-You as fundamentally opposed to the I-It, these two attitudes help to delineate and make sense of each other. By attitudes, he meant not simply psychological outlooks or moods but rather two distinct ontological modes of existence. As Buber explained in *I and Thou*,

> The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold in accordance with the two basic words he can speak. The basic words are not single words but word pairs. One basic word is the word pair I-You. The other basic word is the word pair I-it; but this basic word is not changed when He or She takes the place of It. Thus the I of man is also twofold. For the I of the basic word I-You is different from that in the basic word I-It.[4]

Buber maintained that there is no I as such, but only the I of the basic word I-You and the I of the I-It. In other words, when one addresses another as You, the I of the basic word I-You is included; likewise, when one addresses the other as It, the I of the basic word I-It is included. Buber's distinction between the I-You and the I-It may be too extreme, as when he noted that "the basic word I-You can *only* be spoken with one's whole being. The basic word I-It can *never* be spoken with one's whole being" (*IAT*, 54, emphasis added). Still, his point is to highlight two very different modes of existence — experience and relation. The basic word I-It belongs to the realm of experience, which always has something for its object. To see something, to feel something, to want something, and so forth are all conscious acts directed at an object, an object that can never be grasped in its entirety. That is, when we perceive something, we are always perceiving parts of it or viewing it in parts rather than encountering it in its entirety. In short, Buber believed that the I-It by its very nature can only provide us with partial aspects and incomplete understandings of its objects.

The basic word I-You, on the other hand, belongs to a different realm altogether — the realm of relation or dialogue. This realm is very difficult for us to think about or know because, in Buber's model, there is no object to which one can relate it. By the I-You relation or dialogue Buber did not mean the ordinary conversations that we have with colleagues, friends, or family on a daily basis. For him, the term dialogue is used in a much narrower sense to signify the act of one whole being encountering or confronting another whole being. To relate means to encounter or confront another being, but it is never to experience, which Buber used in *I and Thou* to refer to our practice of disconnecting from and objectifying the world. The word "confront" might sound a bit harsh, but is actually meant to capture a relation in which each person affirms the other's basic difference and still stands firm in his or her own being. Buber's point is that a genuine encounter often involves confronting the other, not in order to impose oneself or to change the other but in order to confirm and accept the other as a partner in dialogue. Confirming the other does not imply approval; it means accepting the other with his or her difference and uniqueness.

4. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 53. This work will be cited in the text as *IAT* for all subsequent references.

> The chief presupposition for the rise of genuine dialogue is that each should regard his partner as the very one he is. I become aware of him, aware that he is different, essentially different from myself, in the definite, unique way which is peculiar to him, and I accept whom I thus see, so that in full earnestness I can direct what I say to him as the person he is.[5]

To experience an object is to set it at a distance, to objectify, and to remove the I (the subject) from it. René Descartes and other Western philosophers detached the individual subject and then attempted to establish the being of an "objective world." The individual subject, the ego, was removed from the world and all other beings and considered as significant in itself. For Buber, any such attempt belongs to the realm of experience, the I-It, because these theories view the beings that are contemplated as objects. He believed that the subject-object dichotomy that is at the basis of many Western philosophies results in a distancing of the individual from the beings that confront him or her. Moreover, our everyday language presupposes the subject-object dichotomy; when we speak, it is *about* something, an object, which is removed from us. We continually analyze objects, that is, divide them into parts, abstract their colors, shapes, and numbers. The problem is that, according to Buber, "those who experience do not participate in the world" (*IAT*, 56). Put differently, those who experience do not grasp the whole being but only parts, qualities, or characteristics of it.

> Unlike the realm of experience, the I-You relation is unmediated: Nothing conceptually intervenes between I and You, no prior knowledge and no imagination; and memory itself is changed as it plunges from particularity to wholeness. No purpose intervenes between I and You, no greed and no anticipation; and longing itself is changed as it plunges from the dream into appearance. Every means is an obstacle. Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur. (*IAT*, 62–63)

For Buber, the term dialogue refers to a unique kind of immediacy and connection of two beings that have no conscious intent of influencing the other. Dialogue means that I communicate with you for no purpose I wish to accomplish, that I expect nothing specific from you, and that my experience of you is not limited by ideas I have formed from our previous encounters. This is why Buber said that "every means is an obstacle," suggesting that when we relate to others as means in the service of our ends rather than as unique individuals, dialogue cannot emerge.

As noted previously, Buber's radical opposition between the I-You and the I-It is a distinction between two very different modes of being, but it can also be viewed as a conflict between two ethical positions. Indeed, Lisbeth Lipari characterizes this conflict as one between "the intersubjective, ethical, dialogical relation of the I-Thou and the instrumental, goal-oriented, monological relation of the I-It."[6] The former is based on attitudes such as care and acceptance of difference while the latter rests on a feeling of superiority and a desire to control the world. Although Buber stressed that both the I-You and the I-It are necessary modes of being, he

5. Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, ed. Maurice Friedman (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965), 78. This work will be cited in the text as *TKM* for all subsequent references.

6. See Lisbeth Lipari, "Listening for the Other: Ethical Implications for the Buber-Levinas Encounter," *Communication Theory* 14, no. 2 (2004): 125.

clearly believed that we exist too little in the former and too much in the latter. For him, human beings fully emerge as persons not as isolated individuals or as part of a collective, but rather in a dialogue or relation with other beings.

What is essential in the I-You relation is not I as an individual or You as an individual, but something that happens *between* You and I in a dimension that is accessible only to us. Love, Buber held, unlike feelings that each person has, is between You and I. He noted in *I and Thou* that "feelings dwell in man, but man dwells in his love" (*IAT*, 66). Unlike feelings such as anger or sadness, which can be localized in an individual, love implies a reciprocal responsibility of one person to another. Regarding this responsibility, Buber wrote that it assumes "one that addresses me primarily, that is, from a realm independent of myself, and to whom I am answerable" (*BMM*, 45). Responsibility, therefore, is not so much a personal trait but presupposes one individual who responds to another as a person.

Still, what does it really mean to say, as Buber did, that love is *between* you and me? And what did he mean by the sphere of "between"? His point is that we must stop localizing the relation between human beings within the individual souls or in some collective group that binds them, and must instead insist that this relation is something that happens literally between persons. In a genuine conversation, a real classroom lesson, or a spontaneous embrace, he wrote, "what is essential does not take place in each of the participants or in a neutral world which includes the two and all other things; but it takes place between them in the most precise sense, as it were in a dimension which is accessible only to them both" (*BMM*, 203–204). This sphere is transient and rather uncommon, yet it is reconstituted over and over when human beings encounter each other. Thus, dialogue occurs, according to Buber, in the intersubjective realm that exists between persons; it cannot be reduced to something that happens within an individual's psyche or the dynamics of a group.

Embracing the Other

Although the ideal I-You relation is characterized by reciprocity and mutuality, as in the case of love between two persons illustrated in the preceding section, Buber believed that not all relations are entirely reciprocal. Some relationships, like the ones between an educator and his or her students or a psychotherapist and his or her patients, by their very nature can never unfold into complete mutuality. Buber insisted that the educator who wants to help students realize their potentials must grasp them as a whole and not merely as a sum of qualities and aspirations. But this can only be achieved if the educator encounters those students in a dialogical relation. In the afterword to *I and Thou*, written in 1957, Buber explained that in order to make his influence meaningful, the educator

> must try to live through the situation in all its aspects not only from his point of view but also from that of his partner. He must practice the kind of realization that I call *embracing*. It is essential that he should awaken the I-You relationship in the pupil, too, who should intend and affirm his educator as this particular person; and yet the educational relationship could not endure if the pupil also practiced the art of *embracing* by living through the shared situation from the educator's point of view. (*IAT*, 178, emphasis added)

Thus, as Buber correctly recognized, there is a certain tension and discord between the educational relation and complete mutuality. Likewise, he claimed that the therapist-patient relation cannot endure a total reciprocity; if the patient attempted to embrace the feelings felt by the therapist, he or she would undermine the therapeutic relationship. Buber used the term ''embrace'' here to refer to the act of identifying with someone else's position and lived situation while simultaneously maintaining a clear sense of oneself. The point that needs to be stressed here is that an I-You relation that is characterized by complete mutuality presupposes that the two partners are relatively equal and have no conscious intent of changing the other. In contrast, Buber argued that ''every I-You relationship in a situation defined by the attempt of one partner to act on the other one so as to accomplish some goal depends on a mutuality that is condemned never to be complete'' (*IAT*, 179).

Earlier, Buber had already raised the notion of embracing in his 1925 address ''Education,'' but there he referred to embracing as *inclusion*, which he distinguished from empathy. Empathy, for Buber, means

> to glide with one's own feeling into the dynamic structure of an object, a pillar or a crystal or the branch of a tree, or even an animal or a man, and as it were to trace it from within, understanding the formation and the motoriality of the object with the perceptions of one's own muscles.[7]

Empathy requires one to completely identify with an object, an animal, or a person in order to get a good glimpse of it from within. In Buber's view, empathy involves the temporary ''suspension'' of one's own concreteness for the sake of understanding the other.

Unlike empathy, inclusion does not involve a suspension of one's own concrete reality in favor of another's. In fact, Buber wrote that inclusion is ''the extension of one's own concreteness, the fulfillment of the actual situation of life, the complete presence of the reality in which one participates'' (*BMM*, 97). Inclusion or embracing, therefore, involves attempting to adopt the other's lived reality without in any way forfeiting one's own. Chris Higgins rightly refers to inclusion as ''experiencing the other side,'' but fails to acknowledge that, for Buber, inclusion also requires us to keep close sight of our own side.[8] In fact, according to Buber, the most important aspect of inclusion or embracing is the fact that one person ''without forfeiting anything of the felt reality of his activity, at the same time lives through the common event from the standpoint of the other'' (*BMM*, 97). Simply put, embracing refers to a common event experienced by two people in which one of them attempts to experience this event from the vantage point of the other while maintaining clear sight of his or her own position. In the next section

7. See Martin Buber, ''Education'' (*BMM*, 97). To me the term ''embracing'' is better than ''inclusion'' not only because the latter is usually associated today with the practice of including students with special needs in regular classrooms, but also because to embrace more accurately captures what Buber is getting at — *to espouse the other's point of view and reality*.

8. See Chris Higgins, ''Teaching and the Dynamics of Recognition,'' in *Philosophy of Education 2002*, ed. Scott Fletcher (Urbana, Illinois: Philosophy of Education Society, 2003), 296–304.

of this essay, I will further develop Buber's notion of embracing and argue that it implies a kind of deep listening and attending.

Dialogue and Listening

While Buber was aware of the tension or conflict between the educational relation and complete mutuality, he never provided us with specific guidelines as to how the educator should address this issue. Yet, this fact does not necessarily point to a weakness in his thinking; rather, it underscores the point that Buber's philosophy of dialogue is a challenge, one that might inspire other theorists to apply its major concepts to the field of education and teaching. Two recent articles — by Henry McHenry and by Andrew Metcalfe and Ann Game — are good examples of insightful essays that explore the significance of Buber's philosophy of dialogue for teaching and learning.[9] Here I would like to extend the efforts of those theorists who have examined the educational implications of Buber's philosophy by analyzing the seldom-discussed relation between dialogue and listening.

Although dialogue is often based on a verbal encounter between two subjects, Buber made it clear that the I-You relation is by no means limited to speech. Indeed, Buber believed that while the I-You relation can arise in three spheres — life with nature, life with spiritual beings, and life with human beings — only dialogue with people can manifest in language and speech. Regarding our interactions with the creatures of nature, he wrote, "the You we say to them sticks to the threshold of language" (*IAT*, 57). Buber went on to explain that even though humans cannot communicate with plants or animals in our own language as we communicate with each other, a relation can still emerge between a person and a tree, a dog, or a cat. Most people have observed how dogs and cats can react to the intonation in their owners' voice. But, more fundamentally, Buber believed that a cat or even a tree will sometimes respond to our presence in its own particular way, and attending to that response is sometimes enough for a relationship to emerge between a person and a natural being.

With respect to our interactions with spiritual beings, Buber thought that there is no You that speaks to us in our own language, yet we still feel addressed. People who pray address God in their everyday It language and describe God as a being who has various characteristics and qualities. At the same time, however, Buber noted that "all names of God remain hallowed — because they have been used not only to speak *of* God but also to speak *to* him" (*IAT*, 123). Hence, prayer can be used not only for praising God but also as a way of addressing and entering into a relation with a spiritual being.

The last and probably most common sphere in which dialogue emerges is the life with human beings. Dialogue between persons, according to Buber, occurs on various levels, including the level of speech as when an I addresses a You using

9. See Henry D. McHenry, Jr., "Education as Encounter: Buber's Pragmatic Ontology," *Educational Theory* 47, no. 3 (1997): 341–357; and Andrew Metcalfe and Ann Game, "Significance and Dialogue in Learning and Teaching," *Educational Theory* 58, no. 3 (2008): 343–356.

language. As speech, dialogue is not so much a word *about* something; dialogue is rather the word that is spoken, that reaches out from one person to another. ''The importance of the spoken word,'' Buber remarked, ''is grounded in the fact that it doesn't want to remain with the speaker. It reaches out toward a hearer, it lays hold of him, it even makes the hearer into a speaker, if perhaps only a soundless one'' (*TKM*, 112). In genuine dialogue the spoken word is not really an object or possession of one speaker or another, but rather exists in that sphere of between person and person mentioned previously. Buber emphasized that the sphere that exists between two persons transcends the individual spheres of each of the speakers and is always more than the sum total of their individual worlds.

Still, Buber made it quite plain that the dialogical relation between persons is by no means limited to speech. In fact, a glance, a look, or a gaze that meets the eyes of another person is sometimes enough for dialogue to emerge. Buber gave an example of two people that are stuck together in a shelter during an air raid and another of two audience members who are listening together to an opera:

> In the deadly crush of an air raid shelter the glances of two strangers suddenly meet for a second in astonishing mutuality; when the All Clear sounds it is forgotten; and yet it did happen, in a realm that existed only for that moment. In the darkened opera-house there can be established between two of the audience, who do not know one another, and who are listening in the same purity and with the same intensity to the music of Mozart, a relation which is scarcely perceptible and yet is one of elemental dialogue, and which has long vanished when the lights blaze up again. (*BMM*, 204)

To be sure, the cases that Buber cited in this passage are fleeting and do not occur very often. Yet many people would probably testify that they have lived through a similar ontological occurrence at least once in their life. What is significant about the two examples cited by Buber is that in each case the dialogical relation took place on the level of looks and gazes through a shared experience rather than on the level of speech. Peter Roberts develops this point further, noting that

> For Buber, dialogical relations are not confined to conversational communication: dialogue can occur without speech and even in the absence of sound and gesture. At its most basic level, dialogue is the experience of, and more particularly the acknowledgement of, an other: a being through which the self is defined.[10]

The fact that dialogue has to do with acknowledging and responding to another implies that we need to explore in more depth what happens when we listen to someone. For how can we acknowledge and respond to someone without first listening to them? In what follows, I explore the following questions: How would Buber define the act of listening? What is the relation between speaking and listening in Buber's model? And, finally, what role does listening play in helping dialogue emerge, according to Buber?

Since Buber only rarely mentioned listening in his various works on dialogue, it is not surprising that he never explicitly said what listening means to him.

10. Peter Roberts, ''Beyond Buber: Dialogue, Education, and Politics,'' *Journal of Educational Thought* 33, no. 2 (1999): 184.

Still, in *Between Man and Man* Buber suggested that the act of listening is being completely attentive to the other's speech:

> It will then be expected of the attentive man that he faces creation as it happens. It happens as speech, and not as speech rushing out over his head but as speech directed precisely at him. And if one were to ask another if he too heard and he said he did, they would have agreed only about an experiencing and not about something experienced. (*BMM*, 16)

In this passage, Buber implied that listening includes two essential conditions. First, listening requires us to be attentive to the other's words as though they are directed specifically at us and not at some general crowd or abstract entity. Second, listening involves a kind of attentiveness that is active, not passive, which is why Buber wrote that the other who also heard is actively ''experiencing'' the speech. For instance, two students in my class who both keenly listened to my message may have heard two very different ideas, yet they were both attentive to my words and meaning and personally influenced by my message. Thus, listening, for Buber, implies that people be actively and deeply engaged; it does not require that all listeners heed the same message.

So what is the relation between speaking and listening in Buber's model? Clearly, Buber spent much more time talking about the former than he did about the latter throughout his various works on dialogue. In fact, speaking is addressed extensively in a number of works (for example, ''The Word That Is Spoken'' in *The Knowledge of Man*, and ''Dialogue'' in *Between Man and Man*). By contrast, listening is rarely mentioned in Buber's various works on dialogue, and it is certainly not addressed in sufficient depth. It remains, therefore, up to the reader of Buber's writings to try to make sense of how he would characterize various issues such as the relation between speaking and listening in dialogue.

Even though Buber gave much more attention to speaking than to listening, I believe that if he had been asked to describe the relation between the two, he would have acknowledged that this relationship needs to be characterized in reciprocal terms. Metcalfe and Game echo this point when they write that ''dialogue is not an excess of giving, or even a sequence of giving and then receiving, but a receiving that gives and a giving that receives. It is the ability to listen that allows teachers to know what is called for at any stage of the class.''[11] In other words, dialogue depends on a mutual interaction of speaking and listening, one in which the sharp distinction between the two becomes blurred. Moreover, Metcalfe and Game point out correctly that genuine listening is what makes an authentic verbal response possible in a dialogical encounter. Listening carefully to a student's question provides teachers the ability to respond to this query as a whole person in a unique way.

In his essay ''The Education of Character,'' Buber gave an example of a student who approaches his teacher with a moral dilemma regarding what to do about a friend who betrayed an important secret that was entrusted to him. Asked to respond to such a dilemma, the teacher ''has to answer, to answer under a

11. Metcalfe and Game, ''Significance and Dialogue in Learning and Teaching,'' 352.

responsibility, to give an answer which will probably lead beyond the alternatives of the question by showing a third possibility which is the right one'' (*BMM*, 107). While Buber did not explicitly mention embracing in this example, it is clear that in order to answer authentically, the teacher has to embrace the student who approached him for advice, that is, the teacher must view the situation from the student's perspective. Clearly, such embracing requires a teacher to listen carefully to the student's dilemma before coming up with a response. Buber's notion of embracing, then, seems to be contingent on a deep listening to the other's point of view and an attentiveness to his or her lived reality.

The preceding example suggests that the relation between speaking and listening in Buber's philosophy of dialogue is one of reciprocity and mutual dependence. In other words, a verbal dialogue cannot emerge unless both speaking and listening take place. In dialogue, just as the speaker depends on the listener to hear one's words and meaning, so does the listener depend on the speaker to initiate the conversation and express something significant to the listener. Once the listener receives the words of the speaker, he or she often responds to these words. In this way, the listener becomes a speaker while the original speaker turns into a listener. This process, in which the speaker and listener interact and exchange roles, can theoretically go on indefinitely, though the kind of dialogue that Buber was talking about tends to be fairly brief. The point that is important to keep in mind in this context is that in a verbal dialogue, speaking and listening are mutually dependent in the sense that one cannot have one without the other.

With respect to the last question regarding the role that listening plays in the emergence of dialogue, Buber argued correctly that in many conversations the participants do not really listen to each other but rather talk past one another. As Buber noted in *The Knowledge of Man*,

> By far the greater part of what is called conversation among men would be more properly and precisely described as speechifying. In general, people do not really speak to one another, but each, although turned to the other, really speaks to a fictitious court of appeal where life consists of nothing but listening to him. (*TKM*, 78–79)

The kind of listening that Buber was referring to in this passage is passive and superficial, as opposed to the active, deep listening that might help dialogue to emerge. It follows that genuine listening in the sense of actively attending to and embracing the other is a necessary condition for the emergence of dialogue in Buber's model.

Hence when two people engaged in a conversation fail to truly listen to each other, the possibility for the existence of dialogue is greatly compromised. Buber described a rather familiar situation whereby two of his friends got into an argument in which each tried to score points over the other and — one of them eventually triumphed, but the dialogue was destroyed (*TKM*, 88). Of course, Buber was not always able to live up to his own ideals of dialogue. Lipari characterizes the miscommunication between Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas as a failure to listen to the other's alterity. For Lipari, ''listening to the alterity of the other involves giving the other meaning-making rights by renouncing one's own

inclinations to control and master.''[12] In other words, genuine listening requires one to create a space in which the other's unique voice can resonate. In the case of the dialogue between Buber and Levinas, Lipari thinks that both scholars tried to place the other in conformity with their own categories rather than allowing the other to speak for himself.

Listening, then, plays a vital role in initiating many dialogues by opening up a space in which the two partners can relate to each other as whole individuals. In education, genuine listening requires teachers to remain open to being surprised by their students' responses and to attend to what the students are actually saying rather than their preconceived notions of what the students will say. Inspired by Buber's philosophy of dialogue, Vincent Adkins captures this point well:

> In the I-Thou relationship, the teacher is genuinely living in the present because he or she is prepared for any and every response of the student, the expected as well as the unexpected. Hence, the teacher is genuinely listening. Rather than hearing what is determined by the teacher's past knowledge of the student, or according to the teacher's own theories, the teacher is hearing what the student is saying, aware that the student is saying something that is new. The teacher does not know ahead of time what the student will say nor does the teacher filter what the student says according to the teacher's own prejudgments.[13]

Buber's concept of dialogue implies that people who are engaged in a conversation listen in such a way that they hear what the other person is actually saying and that they leave themselves open to being influenced by the other's words. Genuine listening requires that we pay close attention to the other's words and meaning rather than, as so often happens, thinking about and planning our own response while the other is still speaking. Moreover, I would argue that for Buber, genuine listening does not only imply attending to others' words, but also to what their faces and body language are conveying. Since Buber insisted that dialogue can sometimes manifest on the nonverbal level, he would certainly support the claim that when we listen, we need to attend to much more than merely what someone is saying. His notions of presence and embracing challenge us to respond to another's communication (which may be simply a glance, a look of sadness, or a gesture) in a unique way with all of our being.

Conclusions and Implications

In this essay I have argued that in order to understand Martin Buber's conception of listening, one needs to examine this concept in the context of his philosophy of dialogue. More specifically, my contention is that closely examining Buber's notion of embracing the other is critical to making sense of his conception of listening. My analysis suggests that, in Buber's model, listening involves a kind of active attentiveness to another's words or actions, engaging them as though they are directed specifically at us. The discussion of dialogue and listening presented here also indicates that the relation between speaking and listening is one of

12. Lipari, ''Listening for the Other,'' 138.

13. Vincent K. Adkins, ''Buber and the Dialectic of Teaching,'' *Journal of Educational Thought* 33, no. 2 (1999): 179.

reciprocity and mutual dependence and that listening plays an essential role in initiating many dialogues by creating a space in which two people can embrace each other as complete individuals.

The conception of listening as embracing the other presented in this essay suggests that, for Buber, listening is much more about *being present* to the other than about displaying some proficiency or following a set of techniques. According to this view, deep listening, in Buber's account, is not really a skill that can be displayed or modeled but rather a mode of existence toward others. Leonard Waks refers to this kind of deep listening as *apophatic* and insists that "it is something that happens, not something willed or done."[14] Waks goes on to explain that learning to listen apophatically to others does not result from any deliberate techniques or efforts, but happens in its own time, when the listener is psychologically ready. If one accepts this argument, which associates good listening with being rather than doing, it would seem to follow that listening, since it is not a knowledge or skill, could neither be taught nor learned. And if good listening cannot be taught or learned, we are left with this question: How can people become good listeners?

To be sure, one cannot learn how to be a good listener by merely reading about it or by observing someone give a detailed account of listening. Neither is practicing listening to others speak without interrupting them sufficient to achieve this goal. Yet, it seems to me that it is possible for students to be *inspired* to follow the example of a teacher who is really present in the classroom and embraces his or her students in Buber's sense of the term. Parker Palmer's discussion of mentors who have inspired us in his well-known book, *The Courage to Teach*, appears to support this point. Palmer writes that

> the power of our mentors is not necessarily in the models of good teaching they gave us, models that may turn out to have little to do with who we are as teachers. Their power is in their capacity to awaken a truth within us, a truth we can reclaim years later by recalling their impact on our lives.[15]

In this passage, Palmer (who was certainly influenced by Buber[16]) suggests that great teachers have a power to evoke in their students an inner truth about their own identities, a truth that has little to do with technique or skill. In fact, Palmer emphasizes throughout his book that being in touch with one's inner truth (identity) is much more important to good teaching than perfecting a particular technique. The point that is relevant to our discussion of listening is that teachers who are really present in their interactions with students and who embrace their students can inspire them to listen carefully to what makes them unique as individuals. In this case, the students would be learning to listen better

14. Leonard J. Waks, "Two Types of Interpersonal Listening," in Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon and Leonard Waks, eds., "Listening: Challenges for Teachers," special issue of *Teachers College Record* 112, no. 11 (2010): 2743–2762; http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentId=15790.

15. Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscapes of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 21.

16. See Ibid., 16.

not by internalizing the teacher's messages or by following a certain technique that the teacher is using. They would be learning to listen by being aroused by the teacher to attend more closely to their own desires and passions as well as their dislikes and challenges. In short, by attending carefully to what makes us unique individuals, we can also learn to listen better to others.

My contention is, therefore, that while listening for Buber is more about being present to the other than about displaying a skill or technique, it *is* possible to be moved by someone to become a better listener. Of course, there is no guarantee that a teacher who practices good listening will inspire his or her students to become good listeners. My point is simply that there is a sense of learning and being educated that involves being inspired by others to transform oneself for the better. For instance, moral virtues, unlike topics such as math and languages (which can be taught through disseminating information), can best be learned when teachers set a good example for students to follow and interact morally with them. And good listening is one of those virtues that perhaps can only be ''learned'' when one is aroused to pay closer attention to oneself, to others, and to one's relation to the world.