

**THE**

Martin Buber — Carl Rogers

**D I A L O G U E**

**A NEW TRANSCRIPT WITH COMMENTARY**

**ROB ANDERSON AND KENNETH N. CISSNA**

The  
Martin Buber–Carl Rogers  
Dialogue

*A New Transcript with Commentary*

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and  
Kenneth N. Cissna

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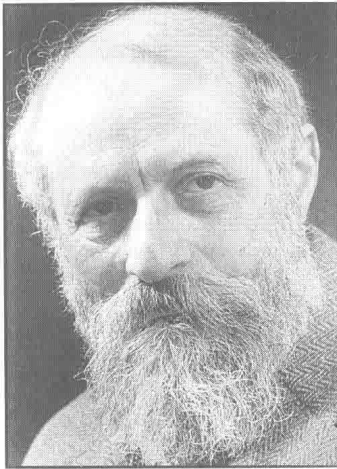
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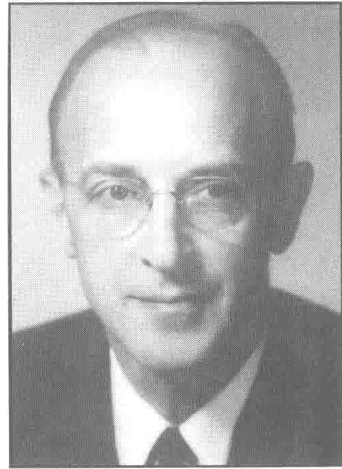
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Dialogue



*Martin Buber*



*Carl Rogers*

SUNY Series in Speech Communication  
Edited by Dudley D. Cahn, Jr.

*To Dona and Susan,  
our favorite partners in dialogue*

## Preface

Recently, one of us presented a brief informal talk about contemporary research into dialogue in the human sciences. In a small audience of teachers and students, two colleagues reacted in especially intriguing ways. Both are intelligent, friendly, humane, and highly committed to enhancing human interaction. One came from a background in literary criticism, the other from quantitative social science. Citing different reasons, each expressed a similar strong skepticism: Dialogue, although a worthy goal, is impossible given the nature of human cultural experience and today's complex media environment.

Such skepticism (and, beyond it, a more disturbing creeping social cynicism) is common, yet by itself skepticism will not demonstrate that studying dialogue is impractical. It only reminds researchers that they should assume the responsibility to study dialogue and its potential in the most realistic, the most concrete, and the most pragmatic ways possible. Such fields as cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, communication, and psychology are increasingly interested in pluralistic dialogue, and philosophers, of course, have continued to explore its essence. What would be most helpful now, however, are studies of how the philosophical and the practical aspects of dialogic interaction can be blended.

In this monograph, we argue that one especially realistic approach to dialogue is to focus on an actual historical meeting at the intellectual junction of the *philosophical* and the *practical*. Accordingly, for several years we have placed a single communication event at the symbolic center of our dialogue project: The 1957 meeting of philosopher Martin Buber and psychologist Carl Rogers at a University of Michigan conference celebrating Buber's thought. This hour and a half conversation, conducted on stage and taped, brought face-to-face Martin Buber, to one biographer "the most radical religious thinker of his age" and "the most

influential religious thinker of the twentieth century" (Streiker, 1969, p. 12) with Carl Rogers, to his biographer the "most influential psychotherapist" and "one of the most influential psychologists" in American history (Kirschenbaum, 1995, p. 98). While Buber emphasized an eloquent delineation of human dialogue, Rogers—from his experience with thousands of clients—had charted some of its praxis. Therefore, the Buber-Rogers dialogue, because it explicitly focused on the nature of dialogue, formed perhaps our richest available touchstone text for examining the philosophical in light of the practical, and the practical dimensions of dialogue in their conceptual context.

Unfortunately, we have discovered that all available published transcripts of this touchstone text are flawed and inaccurate, in hundreds of ways, large and small. After locating a reliable copy of the audiotape made that evening, we set out to clarify the historical record. This brief book, therefore, corrects the earlier errors by presenting a new transcript, discusses the significance of the transcriptional errors and corrections, and examines the implications of the Buber-Rogers interchange for understanding dialogic thought more generally. We want to note that no transcript of this encounter, including ours, could ever be unimprovable. Although our transcript is *much* better than existing transcripts, given the age and ambiguous audibility of the tape it is possible that someone else who listened to the tape could improve on our work. In fact, careful readers of our work may note some minor refinements to our own previously published quotations from the dialogue.

We intend this volume as a disciplined exercise in intellectual history. Buber and Rogers explored crucial topics that we must consider in order to understand the multicultural challenges of a rapidly approaching new century.



# Acknowledgments

We acknowledge, first, those who helped us secure copies of the audiotape of the Buber-Rogers dialogue. The first tape we obtained was provided by John Stewart of the University of Washington, to whom we were referred by Maurice Friedman, the dialogue's moderator, who had sent a copy to Professor Stewart. Most of our work on the dialogue was based on this tape. Later Barbara T. Brodley sent us a copy of the partial tape that is in the possession of the Chicago Counseling and Psychotherapy Center. DeWitt C. Baldwin, Jr., told us about donating his father's copy of the tape to the University of California at Santa Barbara, and David E. Russell, Director of the Oral History Program and Humanistic Psychology Archive at UCSB, kindly provided us with a fine copy of what was the best and most complete tape that we were able to obtain.

Professor Emeritus Maurice Friedman of San Diego State University graciously encouraged us in pursuing this project, even as he disagreed with us about several matters. His is a model of open scholarship we respect enormously. He answered our questions about Buber, Rogers, and the event, and generously allowed us access to relevant letters from the 1950s that he exchanged with Martin Buber. Despite our considerable debt to Professor Friedman, readers should not assume that he either sanctions this particular transcript or agrees with all of our interpretations.

Research grants from the Graduate Schools at our institutions were quite helpful along the way. In addition, several graduate students at Saint Louis University also assisted us in our research; we are grateful to Kevin O'Leary, Thao Dang, Michael Williams, and especially Mary Cox. We have played portions of the tape to several undergraduate and graduate seminars and two colloquia, and we appreciate the responses of those groups.

We also thank Dominik Biemann, Martha Mathis, and the staffs of the Martin Buber Archives at the Jewish National & University Library;

the Michigan Historical Collection at the Bentley Historical Library and the Harlan Hatcher Graduate Library, both of the University of Michigan; the Carl R. Rogers Collection at the Library of Congress; and the Carl Rogers Memorial Library at the Center for Studies of the Person—all of whom helped us obtain documents that have illuminated aspects of the event for us.

Many other people also helped us in this project—by sharing their recollections of the event or of the principals, or by guiding us to other people and resources. In this regard, we thank Judith Buber Agassi, C. Grey Austin, DeWitt C. Baldwin, Jr., Dorothy Becker, Russell J. Becker, Seymour Cain, Charlotte Ellinwood, Richard Farson, Eugene Gendlin, Robert Hauert, Nel Kandel, Howard Kirschenbaum, Robert Lipgar, Betty Lou Mahone, Charles Mahone, William McKeachie, Louis Orlin, Natalie Rogers, John M. Shlien, Len Scott, as well as Tom Greening, who edits the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* and published our first essay on the dialogue. Only after our article was published did we learn that he was present for the dialogue. When we asked him about it, his answer could apply to life itself. He said that he was an overworked graduate student at the time and didn't remember very much (who could?—it was more than 30 years earlier), and he added: "If I had known it was going to be so important, I would have paid more attention."

Cooperation and coauthorship in our ongoing dialogue investigation has been so multileveled and thorough that we no longer try to keep track of who is the "lead" author of each manuscript. Instead, we have adopted the common convention of alternating the order of our names from project to project.

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# Introduction

## *Attending Faithfully to Word, Texture, and Connection*

Let us assume I am discussing a text from our literature. It has been interpreted countless times and in countless ways. I know that no interpretation, including my own, coincides with the original meaning of the text. I know that my interpreting, like everyone else's, is conditioned through my being. But if I attend as faithfully as I can to what it contains of word and texture, of sound and rhythmic structure, of open and hidden connections, my interpretation will not have been made in vain—I find something, I have found something. And if I show what I have found, I guide him who lets himself be guided to the reality of the text. To him whom I teach I make visible the working forces of the text that I have experienced.

—Martin Buber, *Pointing the Way*

Philosopher Maurice Friedman recently wrote: "Now Martin Buber and Carl Rogers are dead, but even after 30 years, the issues raised in their dialogue still seem to me momentous" (1994, p. 47). If the ideas expressed in the dialogue approach this level of importance, and we think they do, then students of dialogue should be confident that the historical record is accurate, and must be assured that commentaries—previous and subsequent—invoke as much relevant context as possible for Buber's and Rogers's remarks. This new annotated transcript corrects many major and minor errors that mar extant transcripts, and elaborates

essential context for understanding this vital conversation in the history of ideas. Previous interpretations and nearly four decades of scholarly quotation have placed virtually complete trust on a transcript of somewhat uncertain origin, which was—to be generous—inexact. In subsequent reprints, many changes to the transcript were justified on criteria of readability; but these, too, take a reader even further from the actual conversation and often alter connotations significantly.

Martin Buber and Carl Rogers met for over an hour of public dialogue on April 18, 1957. Buber, the renowned Jewish philosopher of dialogue, was 79 and on his second trip to the United States. He was invited by Leslie Farber to deliver a series of lectures at the Washington School of Psychiatry, and Rev. DeWitt C. Baldwin, Coordinator of Religious Affairs at the University of Michigan, took the opportunity to invite Buber to his campus for a three-day conference in Buber's honor, the "Mid-West Conference with Dr. Martin Buber" (see "Program," 1957). For Thursday evening, the second day of the conference, Baldwin planned a dialogue between Buber and the American humanistic psychologist and psychotherapist Carl Rogers. Rogers, at 55, was well known among psychologists for his development of a "client-centered" theory of psychotherapy and for his skill as an interviewer and facilitator. They were joined on the stage by Maurice Friedman, then a young professor of philosophy at Sarah Lawrence College, an acknowledged authority on Buber's thought who had devoted several pages of his *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (1955b) to exploring similarities between Buber's philosophy and Rogers's approach to psychotherapy. This evening would be the only meeting between these two seminal thinkers, whose ideas on "the nature of man as revealed in inter-personal relationship"<sup>1</sup> have been compared so often. Surely no one could have predicted the long-term significance of the Buber-Rogers conversation that evening.<sup>2</sup>

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1. "The nature of man as revealed in inter-personal relationship" was the general topic of the dialogue suggested by Rogers and conveyed to Buber by Baldwin (Baldwin, 1957c, 1957d).
  2. Surely Buber did not. He declined to allow his lectures and seminars at the Washington School of Psychiatry, which he gave at the outset of this trip, to be filmed, despite his host having arranged a large grant and secured the services of a well known documentary film-maker, because to do so "slackens the spontaneity" (Buber, 1957a, 1991, p. 605) that he regarded as essential for dialogue, and on arrival in the United States even refused to have these sessions audio-recorded (Friedman, 1983, pp. 210–211; 1991, pp. 361–362).

Interpreters of Buber and Rogers refer often to the dialogue to discuss the thought of one or the other or to distinguish between them (Anderson, 1982; Arnett, 1981, 1982, 1986, 1989; Brace, 1992; Brink, 1987; Burstow, 1987; Friedman, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1992; Kelb, 1991; Peterson, 1976; Rasmussen, 1991; Rendahl, 1975; Roffey, 1980; Schaefer, 1973; Thorne, 1992; Upshaw, 1970; Van Balen, 1990; Van Belle, 1980; Yocum, 1980). In addition, Friedman (1994), Seckinger (1976), Thorne (1992), and Yoshida (1994) have directly analyzed the dialogue itself. All of these discussions appear to presume that Buber and Rogers engaged in a spontaneous and unrehearsed dialogue in which both partners were equally able to articulate their ideas. Returning to the taped dialogue itself, and reconsidering what Buber and Rogers actually said, casts doubt on this presumption in a variety of ways we will explore in our commentary.

Another reflection of the significance of the dialogue is that four somewhat variant transcripts of it have been published in English.<sup>3</sup> Very seldom are intellectual dialogues even transcribed, much less repeatedly reprinted and analyzed in the scholarly literature. Unfortunately, all published transcripts of this event (Buber, 1965b, pp. 166–184; "Dialogue Between," 1960; Friedman, 1964; Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989,

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The organizers of the Buber conference in Michigan, of which the dialogue with Rogers was a part, hoped that they could record the dialogue and had made arrangements with audio-visual services at the university to do so. Although the equipment was in place in advance, they did not know until a few minutes before the dialogue that Buber had agreed to have a recording made.

Grey Austin, then Assistant Coordinator of Religious Affairs at the University of Michigan and the person responsible for arranging many of the details of the conference, reported to us that, during the hour or so when Buber and Rogers met immediately prior to the dialogue, Rogers convinced Buber to allow the taping (Austin, personal communication, January 1, 1996, February 12, 1996). Rogers, he believes, assured Buber that he regularly recorded therapy sessions without any interruption to that sensitive process and that his office had the expertise to transcribe a recording faithfully. Maurice Friedman, who moderated the dialogue, told us that he thought Buber agreed to this taping although refusing at the Washington School of Psychiatry because he had such low expectations for his dialogue with Rogers (Friedman, personal communication, October 22, 1991). This also seems reasonable because Buber believed public dialogue, such as the one with Rogers that involved a large audience, to be impossible, almost a contradiction in terms.

3. In addition, a translation of the transcript from Buber (1965b) has been published in German ("Dialogue zwischen," 1992).

pp. 42–63) have significant and serious errors because all were based on the same typescript made shortly after the dialogue (“Dialogue Between,” nd; “Dialogue Between,” 1957–60). That typescript, originally circulated by Rogers, was flawed, and none of the subsequent published transcripts (nor any of the discussions of the dialogue mentioned above) seem to have relied on a fresh listening to the audiotape itself. This is an issue we consider in more detail later.

This dialogue is also mentioned significantly in biographies of Buber and of Rogers. Maurice Friedman’s definitive three-volume and single-volume biographies of Buber analyze the dialogue at some length (1983, pp. 208, 225–227, 254, 257–258; 1991, pp. 368–370) as do his commentaries on Buber’s thought cited above. Kirschenbaum’s (1979) biography of Rogers, oddly enough, mentions the dialogue only very briefly (p. 393), although in Russell’s oral history interviews with Rogers and in Thorne’s recent book the dialogue is discussed much more prominently (Rogers & Russell, 1991, pp. 201–202; Thorne, 1992, esp. pp. 69–89). Rogers also referred to the dialogue occasionally (1960, p. 96; 1969, p. 349; 1980, p. 9), and even quoted from it in one of his most famous essays (1961, pp. 55, 57). In his interview with Richard Evans (Evans, 1975), Rogers described the dialogue with Buber as “very meaningful to both of us” (p. 111). Although Buber never explicitly wrote about the dialogue, he described it as a “memorable occasion” (Friedman, 1957); and Friedman implies that a section of Buber’s famous “Postscript” to the 1958 edition of *I and Thou* (see pp. 177–179) was at least in part a response to the dialogue with Rogers (Friedman, 1983, pp. 254–255).

The general public was invited to the dialogue, which was held in the most beautiful and prestigious auditorium on the University of Michigan campus, Rackham Auditorium. Although scheduled to last only one hour, it continued for over an hour and a half. Other notables participating in the conference included the economist Kenneth Boulding; Perry LeFevre and Ross Snyder of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago; Bill McKeachie of the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of Michigan; the anthropologist Dorothy Lee; and literary critic R. W. B. Lewis, then of Rutgers (“Attendance” [*sic*], nd; Friedman, 1983, p. 225; 1991, p. 368; “Program,” 1957). The audience for the dialogue also included Judith Buber Agassi, Buber’s granddaughter, herself now a noted sociologist, and Buber’s wife, Paula.

DeWitt Baldwin had corresponded with Buber and Rogers about arrangements and the topic the men would discuss (Baldwin, 1957a, 1957b, 1957c, 1957d). One of Rogers’s suggestions, “the nature of man as revealed in inter-personal relationship” (Baldwin, 1957c, 1957d), was adopted as the general topic for the dialogue. Baldwin also determined

the participants' roles (Friedman, personal communication, December 14, 1991) as described by Friedman in his preliminary remarks that evening—"And the form of this dialogue will be that Dr. Rogers will himself raise questions with Dr. Buber and Dr. Buber will respond, and perhaps with a question, perhaps with a statement" (from our transcript of the dialogue, Turn 2). We have argued elsewhere (Anderson & Cissna, 1991, 1996b; Cissna & Anderson, 1994, 1996) that recognizing the roles assigned to the participants and the presence of two nonparticipating audiences<sup>4</sup> are essential to understanding this encounter.

Eventually, the tape recorder did bring a larger audience to their dialogue. Having facilities for transcribing therapeutic interviews, we suspect that Rogers volunteered to produce a transcript of the dialogue.<sup>5</sup> We do not know who actually did the work or what Rogers's personal role in producing the transcript might have been. He first circulated the transcript, and sent a copy to Buber in January, 1958, as a "token by which to recall our few moments of dialogue" (Rogers, 1958a).<sup>6</sup>

A transcript of the interchange was first published in 1960 in a Japanese psychology journal, *Psychologia* ("Dialogue Between," 1960), and was introduced only by the four sentences that headed the original typescript.<sup>7</sup> While providing no clues to how the manuscript came to be submitted or invited, the editor's note at the beginning of that issue of

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4. The 400 people present that evening were the immediate audience, while the more distant and far larger potential audience was represented by the tape recorder.
  5. Rogers's brief notes on the back of his conference program include "Ask Baldwin re. tape" as well as Buber's address—written in Buber's handwriting ("Tentative Program," 1957). Rogers pioneered recording and transcribing psychotherapy interviews (see 1942b) and published the first complete transcript of a psychotherapy case (see Rogers, 1942a). We should not be surprised, therefore, that Rogers would volunteer in 1957 to produce a transcript of this dialogue.
  6. The original typescript as well as a single mimeographed copy are preserved in the Carl R. Rogers Collection at the Library of Congress. Rogers's use of the word "moments" here, while probably innocent, may have been a pointed reference echoing the interchange within the dialogue about whether therapeutic mutuality is ongoing or a matter of intense moments. We know that Buber received the typescript because Grete Schaefer later indicated that Buber loaned it to her (Schaefer, 1973, p. 480).
  7. "A Mid-West Conference on Martin Buber was organized by the University of Michigan in April, 1957, during Dr. Buber's visit to this country, arranged by the William Alanson White Foundation. The famous philosopher from the University of Jerusalem gave several lectures during the three-day



the journal implied that both Rogers and Buber agreed to its publication.<sup>8</sup> An abbreviated version of the transcript next appeared in Friedman's critical reader, *The Worlds of Existentialism* (1964, pp. 485–497). The most accessible and commonly cited transcript was published the next year as an appendix to Buber's *The Knowledge of Man* (1965b), edited by Friedman. The most recent transcript in English was printed in Kirschenbaum and Henderson's (1989, pp. 41–63) collection of dialogues Rogers held with noted intellectuals.<sup>9</sup> This transcript was reprinted from the *Psychologia* transcript, with minor changes in punctuation and spelling, corrections of a few printing errors, and the omission of one word. Recently, a translation of the transcript from *The Knowledge of Man* appeared in German ("Dialog zwischen," 1992). All of these transcripts are based on the original typescript circulated by Rogers, and none show evidence that those reprinting the transcripts systematically listened to the audiotape to compare it with what they printed.

In all likelihood, the initial transcribing was done by a secretary working for Rogers.<sup>10</sup> We know that Rogers listened carefully to the tape and made six pages of extensive notes (Rogers, nd-b). We do not know whether he personally compared the completed transcript with the tape. Only Friedman (see Buber, 1965b, p. 166) acknowledged editing the transcript, although he later referred to what he produced as a "verbatim"

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conference, using papers he had delivered in Washington as the William Alanson White Memorial lectures.

"Another feature of the program at Ann Arbor was a dialogue on April 18, between Dr. Buber and Dr. Carl Rogers, Professor of Psychology and Executive Secretary of the Counseling Center, University of Chicago. This dialogue was recorded, and because of numerous requests, a transcription of it is presented here" ("Dialogue Between," nd, p. 1; "Dialogue Between," 1957–60, p. 1; "Dialogue Between," 1960, p. 208).

8. "It is a great pleasure for us and would be so for our readers as well that we can publish a dialogue between Prof. Martin Buber and Prof. Carl Rogers in this issue *by their favor*" (Sato, 1960; emphasis added).
9. Following Buber (in 1957), Rogers later held public dialogues with B. F. Skinner (in 1962), Paul Tillich (in 1965), Michael Polanyi (in 1966), and Gregory Bateson (in 1975).
10. Several sources, including a long-time secretary of Rogers from the early 1950s (personal communication, Mrs. Dorothy Becker, October 18, 1995), affirm that it was Rogers's practice to employ secretaries to transcribe tapes of therapy sessions. As secretaries were experienced at the task of transcribing, it is very likely that one or more secretarial employees transcribed the tape of the dialogue.