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The 'Walls of Distrust' within the 'Age of Mistrust'

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I » The ‘Walls of Distrust’ within the ‘Age of Mistrust’

The encounter of Dag Hammarskjöld and Martin Buber, phase I (1958–59)

When the great Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (1878–1965) spoke about his encounter with the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld (1905–1961), in a speech for the Swedish Radio in 1962, entitled ‘Memories of Hammarskjöld’ (Buber 1962a: 57–59), he not only talked about their common understanding of the Cold War and the current incapacity of states’ representatives to take part in true dialogue, but went on rather mysteriously:

But I sensed, looking at and listening to him, something else that I could not explain to myself, something fateful that in some way was connected with his function in this world-hour (Buber 1962a: 58).

Buber continued with his account of their relationship instead of exploring in more depth what he meant by ‘something fateful’. Did he think that because of Hammarskjöld’s function his good intentions were doomed to failure? Or did he even mean that he sensed Hammarskjöld’s impending death? As for Hammarskjöld, was this sense of destiny, this inescapable duty concerning his office at this ‘world-hour’, something he started to regret during his encounter with Buber? Did he already feel that he might not survive this critical moment in the Cold

War? Did he have an unconscious hunch that his final project, resulting from his relationship with Buber – namely, translating Buber’s major work on dialogue, *I and Thou* – would not be accomplished, and that his desire for a wide-ranging, long-term and intensified contact with Buber, whom he admired, would be unfulfilled? In his letter of 26 August 1961 to Buber, Hammarskjöld was boldly outspoken about the kind of relationship he was hoping for:

If this all works out, may I tell you how much it would mean to me also by providing me with a justification for a broadened and intensified contact with you personally.¹

It is surprising to see so much wishful thinking on the part of the usually realistic Hammarskjöld, who knew when he wrote this that Buber was already 83 years old.

1 Kungliga Biblioteket Stockholm, Dag Hammarskjöld Samling (hereafter KBS DHS), Dag Hammarskjöld, Letter to Martin Buber, 26 August 1961. Some but not all of the letters that Dag Hammarskjöld and Martin Buber exchanged are published in Nahum N. Glatzer and Paul Mendes-Flohr (eds) (1991), *The letters of Martin Buber*, New York: Schocken Books, which is an abridged version of Martin Buber *Briefwechsel aus sieben Jahrzehnten* (1972/73/75), edited by Grete Schaefer, 3 vols, Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider.

The itinerary of the encounter and the letter exchange between Dag Hammarskjöld and Martin Buber has been well documented in German and English by several authors. They all agree that no direct influence of Buber's philosophy was discernable in Hammarskjöld's writings before Hammarskjöld contacted Buber for the first time in April 1958.² One of Hammarskjöld's biographers, Henry van Dusen, points out that the Secretary-General had even visited Jerusalem three times before (April-May 1956; May 1957; December 1957) without contacting Buber or showing any intention of visiting his house (van Dusen 1967: 215). Van Dusen even invited Buber's English translator and main biographer, Maurice Friedman, to examine carefully Hammarskjöld's posthumously published memoirs, *Markings* (1965), to prove that there was no evidence of influence by Buber in these. After reading them, Friedman made some remarks on similarities, for example that for both of them 'to live meaningfully meant to live in response to the demand of the situation'; that both showed respect for the word and would not allow it to be misused, as this would show contempt for man; furthermore, that their approach to conflict with another person included both

an objective detachment as well as a capacity 'to experience his difficulties subjectively'; finally, that both 'knew a realistic and active mysticism which does not turn away from the world' (Friedman 1988: 311). Nonetheless, Friedman confirmed van Dusen's judgement when it came to exploring the fundamental differences between them:

There are, however, *differences* between *Markings* and Buber's thought, one of which is that while Buber was also decisively influenced by Meister Eckhart, Hammarskjöld seemed to remain Kierkegaardian precisely in the way that Buber did not, i.e., focusing on the I-Thou relationship with God somewhat at the expense of that with man. There was, indeed, a Kierkegaardian quality of loneliness and isolation about Hammarskjöld even in the midst of his intense activity, which Buber did not share. Hammarskjöld, too, was concerned about the tension between 'being' and 'seeming', but he saw no resolution of this tension in authentic interhuman contact as Buber did. What is more, in Hammarskjöld's concern for God and others there was a note of denial of the self that was very foreign to Buber (Friedman 1988: 312).

It is striking that in both phases of their relationship, it was Hammarskjöld who initiated the contact by writing to Buber. It was Hammarskjöld who read and interpreted Buber, not the other way round. Essentially, Hammarskjöld felt the urge for contact with Buber after reading English translations of his essays, so already in his first letter of 16 April 1958, only five days after his re-election for a second term as Secretary-General of the United Nations, he wrote:

2 See most notably: in German, Fröhlich (2002: 192-211), and occasional discussions on Buber's influence elsewhere in this book), Fröhlich (2005: 97-114), Friedman (1999: 489-501); and in English, Friedman (1983: 303-331), van Dusen (1967: 215-219), Hodes (1972: 153-171). Manuel Fröhlich explains that there were 'parallel ways' in the sense that Hammarskjöld's 'quiet diplomacy', established during his negotiations in China in 1955, were an implementation of central elements of Buber's philosophy of dialogue without his knowing it – a thesis which will be discussed in the section on the second phase of their encounter (Fröhlich 2002: 253-283; Fröhlich 2005: 108-111).

My reason for sending you these lines is that I just read the newly published American edition of your collection of essays, 'Pointing the way'. I wish to tell you how strongly I have responded to what you write about our age of distrust and to the background of your observations which I find in your general philosophy of unity created 'out of the manifold'. Certainly, for me, this is a case of 'parallel ways'.³

He finished the letter by expressing the wish to visit Buber when he – Hammar skjöld – was next in Jerusalem. But only two days later, Hammar skjöld wrote again, having learned that Buber was currently in the United States:

Today I see from the papers that you are at Princeton for guest lectures. Please may I most warmly invite you to visit us at the United Nations if and when it might suit you. I would be happy and proud, indeed, to receive you here.⁴

He even gave the telephone number of his office. This fact and the devoted tone of his letter show Hammar skjöld's eagerness to meet Buber. He enclosed a copy of his first letter, sent to Buber in Jerusalem.

Buber's speech at the Community Church and the first encounter with Hammar skjöld in New York, 1 May 1958

Buber himself was on his third trip to the United States, which lasted from March to early June 1958. He and his wife Paula (*née* Paula Winkler) had been given a house for the duration of their stay in Princeton, New Jersey. Both were elderly: Buber had just celebrated his 80th birthday, and Paula was to die on their way back to Israel, in Venice. During his sojourn in the United States, Buber was holding informal conversations with chosen students of Professor Friedman at Princeton, but more important concerning his predisposition towards meeting Hammar skjöld was a speech he was about to give in New York 'at the end of April' (Buber 1958: 364) on Zionism and the Israeli-Arab question. The speech was to be given to the American Friends of Ichud ('Association' or 'Union') – a group formed by Buber and his friends in Palestine, in 1942) – who were having a big meeting to celebrate Buber's birthday as well as commemorating the 10th anniversary of the death of Judah Magnes, the former president of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and a close friend of Buber's in the Ichud and the League for Jewish-Arab Rapprochement and Co-operation in Israel. This celebration was to take place at the Community Church in New York, attended by several thousand people (Friedman 1988: 236). A quarrel took place between Isidor Hoffman (the Jewish chaplain at Columbia and a leading American pacifist), Erich Fromm (who was anti-Zionist) and Friedman (then chairman of the US Ichud) as to whether Buber should speak as the last and main orator. The conflicts in

3 KBS DHS, Dag Hammar skjöld, Letter to Martin Buber, 16 April 1958.

4 KBS DHS, Dag Hammar skjöld, Letter to Martin Buber, 18 April 1958.

the aftermath of the celebration led to Friedman's resignation as chairman and to the splitting of the Zionist Ichud mother group in Israel from her more and more anti-Zionist daughter group in the US (Friedman 1988: 446). Friedman recounts that Buber's speech

...lasted for almost an hour and was an ambitious attempt to present an overview of the whole Zionist movement with the split between those who wanted to achieve Zion by diplomatic means and those like Buber and his friends, who believed in organic colonization and in Jewish-Arab good-neighbourliness and cooperation (Friedman 1988: 236-37).

Such had been the antagonism between Theodor Herzl and Martin Buber long ago at the very beginning of the Zionist movement. In this highly sensitive celebration speech, still unpublished as far as I know, Buber stated explicitly, according to his own notes for the speech:

In the days of Hitler the majority of the Jewish people saw that millions of Jews have been killed with impunity, and a certain part [of the Jewish people] made their own doctrine that history does not go the way of the spirit but the way of power.⁵

This passage provoked severe criticism by the Jewish press in the US and in Israel. In the months that followed, Buber repeatedly regretted having said that Hitler had killed 'with impunity', for Hitler had lost the war as well as his life and that was his punishment. But he remained decidedly

insistent about the essence of what he had said. In a 'rectifying communication' to the editor of *Ha-aretz*⁶, one of the few Israeli newspapers that didn't criticise him for his speech, he confirmed:

I must add now that the part of the Jewish people did not change this opinion even after Hitler's defeat. I oppose now as I opposed then, with all my force, those who believe in the doctrine of 'Not by the spirit, but by power' and act upon it.⁷

In response to this controversy, Buber felt obliged to write an article for the American Jewish press with the intention of further explaining his views. This was published in *Congress Weekly* and later included in the paperback edition of Buber's book *Israel and the World* (Friedman 1988: 237). Here, Buber still maintained:

Within a part of the Jewish people, gruesomely affected by the victory of the sub-human over the human, the false doctrine lasted, even as the sub-human had been toppled... It has been by the spirit that this people survived through all times, unbowed, challenging unfortunate destiny. With the methods of the spirit alone, the Zionist movement took her position in Palestine and has already achieved the first legal titles. Only by strictly following the guidance of the spirit could it hope to create something greater than merely one more state amongst the states of the world...

5 Martin Buber, quoted by Friedman (1983: 237).

6 *Ha-aretz*: Israel's oldest daily newspaper, founded in 1918, today published in Hebrew and English. The English edition is sold together with the *International Herald Tribune*, affiliated to the *New York Times*, and appears as a weekly.

7 Martin Buber, quoted by Friedman (1983: 237).

We only recognised how deeply the evil had already penetrated into a part of the people, when this fact could no longer be overlooked. Meanwhile, in opposition to the proposals [of Buber and the Ichud] for a bi-national state or a Jewish part within a federation of the Middle East, the unfortunate partition of Palestine has been carried out, the abyss between the two peoples has been torn wide open, battle has raged... But one day it happened that, contravening all orderly conduct of war, a gang of armed Jews attacked an Arab village and annihilated it...⁸ Here it was a matter of our own, of my own crime, an assault of the Jew on the spirit. Even today, I cannot think of it without feeling guilty. Our fighting belief in the spirit has been too weak to prevent the outbreak and expansion of the demonic false doctrine.⁹

Thus Buber's political confession, reflecting his mental disposition in the aftermath of his speech, just before travelling from Princeton to New York to meet Hammarskjöld. Buber proposed the meeting with Hammarskjöld in his letter of 22 April 1958:

I want to thank you for your two letters. What you tell me in your letter to Jerusalem is very important for me. I think to go to New York April 29 for 3 days. Would it suit you if I come to see you May 1 in the afternoon? (on April 30 I have no leisure at all).¹⁰

From the dates given by Buber, it is clear – although neither Friedman nor Buber himself gives a precise date for the speech at the Community Church (Friedman [1988: 236] talks of 'spring' 1958 and Buber [1958: 364] of the end of April) – that Buber delivered the speech on 30 April, the day when he had 'no leisure at all'. Thus, Buber met with Hammarskjöld, who was essentially a diplomat, involved in power politics in the context of the Cold War at the same time that Buber was reflecting on his own experiences of nearly 50 years of involvement with the Zionist movement, and was publicly denouncing 'diplomatic means' (Friedman 1988: 237) as strongly as he had done many years before in his very early quarrel with the purely diplomatic approach of Theodor Herzl (Friedman 1982: 53–73). And yet, Buber showed no resentment about entering one of the towers of worldwide power politics and diplomacy to meet Hammarskjöld, even saying that the latter's impression when reading *Pointing the Way* had been 'very important' to him.

8 Buber is referring here to the incident on 9 April 1948 at Deir Yasin, an Arab village which was attacked by unified troops of Irgun ('National Military Organisation in the Land of Israel' and the Stern-Gang/LEHY ('Fighters for the Freedom of Israel'). During this attack 254 Arab inhabitants – men, women and children – were reportedly killed (Buber 1958: 368–369). From 1931 to 1948 Irgun operated as an armed group of revisionist Zionists under Jabotinsky, and after 1948 it was slowly integrated into the Israeli Defence Forces. The Stern-Gang/LEHY was an underground armed group opposed to the British Mandate of Palestine, which carried out political assassinations of the British authorities and Palestinian Arabs and killed UN mediator Folke Bernadotte in September 1948; it was then banned by the new Israeli government under a new anti-terrorist law, but LEHY activists benefited already on 14 February 1949 from a general amnesty granted by Israel.

9 Buber (1958: 367–368), translated from the German by Lou Marin as no English edition of 'Israel and the Command of the Spirit' was available to the author. The only English version is in the 1963 revised paperback edition of the original text by Buber (1948, hardcover), *Israel and the World. Essays in a Time of Crisis*, New York: Schocken Books.

10 KBS DHS, Martin Buber, Letter to Dag Hammarskjöld, 22 April 1958.

Before their meeting in Hammarskjöld's office at the UN building, which lasted about two hours, Hammarskjöld gave instructions that they should not be interrupted under any circumstances (van Dusen 1967: 216). Buber speaks about this first meeting in his memorial address:

When we then met in the house of the organization so remarkably named the United Nations, it proved to be the case that both of us were indeed concerned about the same thing: he who stood in the most exposed position of international responsibility, I who stand in the loneliness of a spiritual tower, which is in reality a watchtower from which all the distances and depths of the planetary crisis can be descried... We were both pained in the same way by the pseudo-speaking of representatives of states and groups of states who, permeated by a fundamental reciprocal mistrust, talked past one another out the windows. We both hoped, we both believed that still in sufficient time before the catastrophe, faithful representatives of the people, faithful to their mission, would enter into a genuine dialogue, a dialogue dealing with one another out of which would emerge in all clarity the fact that the common interests of the peoples were stronger still than those which kept them in opposition to one another (Buber 1962a: 57–58).

During their meeting Hammarskjöld also mentioned that he would like to quote Buber's remarks on the need to combat the prevailing mistrust. Hammarskjöld was already preparing for an address he was due to give in June 1958 at Cambridge University (Hodes 1972: 160). Furthermore, Hammarskjöld suggested

for the first time the possibility of translating 'Hope for this Hour' into Swedish, together with two or three other essays in *Pointing the Way* (Hodes 1972: 162).

Before examining that in more detail, we need to draw attention here to the fact that when Buber addressed himself publicly in terms of criticism he used the term 'representatives of states and groups of states', whereas when he spoke positively of his hopes and perspectives for the future he always used the expression 'representatives of the people'. These are not necessarily the same, and hint at a symptomatic difference in Buber's outlook, also hinting at the different spheres of his experience within the Zionist movement. Whereas, Hammarskjöld, for his part, was entirely concerned with the power politics of states' representatives.

Hammarskjöld: Respect for the word

It is not that Hammarskjöld was unaware that there were other domains where the capacity for true dialogue needed to be restored. This awareness is evident in his letter to the poet and translator Erik Lindegren with whom he was working at the time on a translation of the poet Saint-John Perse:

I saw the other day old Martin Buber – he really is a great man – who said that he felt that we had come to a stage where the individual life had been completely gobbled up by political life and that political life now represents a world without any exit and without any entry. He talked about our de-humanised existence where language has ceased to have its normal function of communication in order to establish a living contact between human

beings. I think he is basically right, and I think that is one reason why the poets should add a new dimension to their task as guardians of straight human communication where the respect for the word is still maintained.¹¹

Apparently, for Hammarskjöld this was a justification for his evaluation work on literature within the Swedish Academy as well as his translation work, which would soon turn to an interest in translating Buber into Swedish. One of Hammarskjöld's biographers, Manuel Fröhlich (2005: 101), points here to a phrase Hammarskjöld wrote in his diary (later published as *Markings*) on 1 August 1955:

Respect for the word is the first commandment in the discipline by which a man can be educated to maturity – intellectual, emotional and moral... To misuse the word is to show contempt for man (Hammarskjöld 1964: 101).

But Fröhlich (2005: 105–06) also highlights the fact that Hammarskjöld wanted to re-establish respect for the word first and foremost in his very own domain, international diplomacy. Another biographer, Emery Kelen, testifies— without giving a precise date – that at a press conference Hammarskjöld was defending his 'quiet diplomacy' with explicit reference to two philosophers of dialogue:

I do believe, to use what has become a famous term, thanks to Camus and Buber and others – I do believe that development in human terms of what they call dialogue is badly needed (Kelen 1966: 132).

For the moment, we can overlook the fact that Camus, too, did not write for the realm of diplomacy but for society, and that he was known as a philosopher of revolt as well as dialogue.

The corollary of absence of word and trust is fear and mistrust. In fact, when Hammarskjöld was seeking to make contact with Buber, the Cold War was in full swing, and more often than ever the Security Council was blocked because of vetoes by one or more of its members. Each conflict ran the risk of quickly accelerating into an imminent threat of nuclear war between the superpowers. In April 1958, at the time of the first encounter between Hammarskjöld and Buber, the Security Council quarrelled about a charge by the Soviet Union that the United States were overflying the Arctic region without their permission. As a reaction, the US proposed a monitored inspection zone, the proposal rejected in turn by the Soviet Union. Unusually, Hammarskjöld spoke out in this Security Council debate, implicitly referring to Buber's critique of the current crisis by stating that the basic reason

is the crisis of trust from which all mankind is suffering at the present juncture and which is reflected in an unwillingness to take any moves in a positive direction at their face value and a tendency to hold back a positive response because of a fear of being misled (Hammarskjöld 1958: 71a).

Hammarskjöld also spoke of the relation between governments and individual citizens in this statement, but in a fundamentally different way from Buber:

11 Martin Buber, Letter to Erik Lindegren, 3 May 1958, quoted by Fröhlich (2002: 202 and 2005: 101).

Each government is in close contact with the opinion of the man in the street in its own country. For that reason, I am sure that all governments are in a position to confirm my statement that the peoples are eagerly and anxiously expecting leadership bringing them out of the present nightmare. The government taking a fruitful initiative will be hailed as a benefactor by the peoples (Hammar-skjöld 1958a: 71).

This is an entirely different view from Buber's, the latter regarding 'the man in the street' as an atomised individual totally oriented to, and obeying, the large collective such as the nation or the state (via media propaganda), not acting as a conscious participant in a small community and hence as a true and independent personality in opposition to and demanding something from his or her government.

Hammar-skjöld in Cambridge: 'The Walls of Distrust', 5 June 1958

The award of an honorary doctorate for Hammar-skjöld at Cambridge University was approaching, and Hammar-skjöld gave a major address there entitled 'The Walls of Distrust' (Hammar-skjöld 1958b: 90–95) on 5 June 1958. In this he quoted explicitly and at length from Buber's speech 'Hope for this Hour' (Buber 1952: 220–229), as he had already told Buber was his intention when they met:

In an address in Carnegie Hall in New York, in 1952, Martin Buber had the following to say: 'There have always been countless situations in which a man believes his life-interest demands that he suspect the other of making it his object

to appear otherwise than he is... In our time something basically different has been added... One no longer merely fears that the other will voluntarily dissemble, but one takes it for granted that he cannot do otherwise... The other communicates to me the perspective that he has acquired on a certain subject, but I do not really take cognizance of his communication as knowledge. I do not take it seriously as a contribution to the information about this subject, but rather I listen for what drives the other to say what he says, for an unconscious motive... Since it is the idea of the other, it is for me an 'ideology'. My main task in my intercourse with my fellow-man becomes more and more... to see through and unmask him... With this changed basic attitude... the mistrust between man and man has become existential. This is so indeed in a double sense: It is first of all, no longer the uprightness, the honesty of the other which is in question, but the inner integrity of his existence itself... Nietzsche knew what he was doing when he praised the 'art of mistrust', and yet he did not know. For this game naturally only becomes complete as it becomes reciprocal... Hence one may foresee in the future a degree of reciprocity in existential mistrust where speech will turn into dumbness and sense into madness...' Martin Buber has found expressions which it would be in vain for me to try to improve.¹²

So Hammar-skjöld, as Fröhlich (2005: 104) put it, made politics with Buber 'in the best sense of the word'. Hammar-skjöld's political application of Buber's thinking, as he inter-

¹² Martin Buber (1952), quoted by Hammar-skjöld (1958b: 93).

preted it, was immediate, concerning his efforts to overcome the cleavage between East and West at the level of United Nations power politics. But wasn't that too quick? Did Hammar skjöld in his hasty interpretation of Buber really grasp his thinking in depth, and in all its aspects – to begin with, his analysis of crisis and his proposed solution?

Buber's 'Hope for this Hour'

As surprising as it is to see to what length Hammar skjöld quotes Buber's 'Hope for this Hour', it is also important to look at what he didn't quote. Buber started his address by saying that the three principles of the French Revolution – freedom, equality, fraternity – had broken asunder. Fraternity had been deprived of its meaning, the encounter of human beings, so the two remaining watchwords had been turned against each other. Buber said this had become clear to him since World War I, when direct dialogue was becoming ever more difficult and rare. In another address, in 1953, 'Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace', Buber depicted war as the great enemy of dialogue, and opposed war and speech:

War has always had an adversary who hardly ever comes forward as such but does his work in the stillness. This adversary is speech, fulfilled speech, the speech of genuine conversation in which men understand one another and come to a mutual understanding (Buber 1953a: 236).

So far, Hammar skjöld could surely agree. In 'Hope for this Hour', Buber went on to hail philosopher Robert Hutchins for stating that the essence of the Civilization of the Dialogue is communication, mutual respect and

understanding. Then followed the passages on the current age and the art of mistrust which Hammar skjöld quoted. Buber continued by asserting that despite the progressive decline of dialogue and a corresponding, universal growth of mistrust, there was still a basic need for man's existence to be confirmed by the other. As dialogue was blocked this basic need set out on two false ways:

...he seeks to be confirmed either by himself or by a collective to which he belongs. Both undertakings must fail. The self-confirmation of him whom no fellow-man confirms cannot stand. With ever more convulsive exertions, he must endeavour to restore it, and finally he knows himself as inevitably abandoned. Confirmation through the collective, on the other hand, is pure fiction...it cannot recognize anyone in his own being, and therefore independently of his usefulness for the collective (Buber 1952: 225).

In this way Buber criticised the contemporary atomisation of individuals, perceiving it as a corollary of the incapacity of state officials to communicate. Thus governments were *not* in close contact with the man on the street, and the man on the street was *not* able to express his basic needs. Moreover, in his essay 'The Question to the Single One', Buber described the 'man in the crowd' as being 'pushed', and as embodying 'non-truth' and 'un-freedom' (Buber 1936: 64).

Solutions begin, according to Buber, with the drawing of 'demarcation lines'. The opponent is not 100 per cent an ideologue; that is only one part of his wholeness and 'manifoldness' (we might even consider to find here in part of what Hammar skjöld refers to in his first

letter of 16 April 1958 as ‘unity created “out of the manifold”’). The ideological view of the opponent in the age of mistrust is a reduction of his personality. To overcome this reduction is a precondition for real dialogue between the two camps. But now followed the essential for Buber:

They who begin must have overcome in themselves the basic mistrust and be capable of recognizing in their partner in dialogue the reality of his being. It is self-understood that these men will not speak merely in their own names. Behind them will be divined the unorganized mass of those who feel themselves represented through these spokesmen. This is an entirely different kind of representation and representative body from the political (Buber 1952: 227).

Obviously, Buber didn’t expect solutions on the level of power politics and state representatives. And he went on:

These men will not be bound by the aims of the hour, they are gifted with the far-sightedness of those called by the unborn; they will be independent persons with no authority save that of the spirit... (Buber 1952: 227–28).

Buber wasn’t thinking of people like Hammar-skjöld here; in fact, due to the obligations of his function, the latter was entirely concerned with the political principle; in his years as UN Secretary-General Hammar-skjöld succeeded in furnishing the position with considerable ethical authority as well as political power (Fröhlich 2002: 347–351 and 361–372). Now it becomes clear why Buber’s main biographer and friend Maurice Friedman could write (1988: 333):

‘Buber was a social anarchist in the biblical sense.’

Buber concluded his address ‘Hope for this Hour’ with a hint of who these men (and women) are that oppose power politics only with their spirit:

The representatives of whom I speak will each be acquainted with the true needs of his own people, and on these needs will be willing to stake themselves. But they will also turn understandingly to the true needs of other peoples, and will know in both cases how to extract the true needs from the exaggerations. Just for that reason they will unrelentingly distinguish between truth and propaganda within what is called the opposition of interests (Buber 1952: 228).

There is no doubt that Hammar-skjöld fitted into this description and that Buber was never so strict in his rejection of power politics that he was unwilling to embrace such rare men to be found in the political sphere. But it is equally clear that Buber was talking mainly of ‘representatives’ outside the political sphere – ‘independent persons’ capable of listening to their own and other people’s true needs – whom he was looking out for from his fabled ‘watchtower’, from which he observed the ‘planetary crisis’.

Buber’s conception of the ‘Crossfront’

In other texts of *Pointing the way*, Buber was in this sense beginning to talk of a ‘cross-front’ to be forged, for example at the end of ‘The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle’ (1953b):

There is, it seems to me, a front – only seldom perceived by those who compose it – that cuts across all the fronts of the hour, both the external and the internal. There they stand, ranged side by side, the men of real conviction who are found in all groups, all parties, all peoples, yet who know little or nothing of one another from group to group, from party to party, from people to people. As different as the goals are in one place and in another, it is still *one* front, for they are all engaged in the one fight for human truth... Those who stand on the crossfront, those who know nothing of one another, have to do with one another (Buber 1953b: 218–219).

In ‘Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace’ Buber again referred to this concept of a crossfront for a solution, that is the re-structuring of true dialogue:

To the task of initiating this conversation those are inevitably called who carry on today within each people the battle against the anti-human. Those who build the great unknown front across mankind shall make it known by speaking unreservedly with one another, not overlooking what divides them but determined to bear this division in common (Buber 1953a: 238).

Hammar-skjöld was, in Buber’s understanding, part of the crossfront, but the main participants of the crossfront would stay outside the political – independent, free and unbound by the aims of the political sphere. I think that therein lies a certain and very humbly expressed regret concerning Buber’s relationship with Hammar-skjöld. For Buber the political sphere was far too poisoned by

the prevailing atmosphere of distrust, propaganda and non-communication for there to be any realistic hope that it would yield the solution. The best those working in the political sphere could achieve was to prevent the earth from being literally destroyed by nuclear warfare – sadly enough this would really mean something: the precondition of all life and social reconstruction. But in the long run, according to Buber, the toppling of the Cold War system as well as the related thinking and consciousness had to be initiated from elsewhere. I think Buber uttered this regret in his 1962 eulogy broadcast on the Swedish Radio, precisely through the word ‘but’ – the only ‘but’ in the entire eulogy – which I quoted near the beginning of this essay. Buber sensed in Hammar-skjöld ‘something fateful that was connected with his function in this world-hour’. Hammar-skjöld was, as it were, fatefully bound up with the political sphere due to his function.

Hammar-skjöld’s particular interpretation of Buber’s contemporary and political texts was very understandable due to the necessity of immediate application imposed by his function. But Buber’s philosophy meant more than this. Whereas Hammar-skjöld spoke of the ‘Walls of Distrust’, referring explicitly to the Cold War and the ‘Wall/Iron Curtain’ dividing Europe, Buber spoke of an more long-term ‘Age of Mistrust’, which went far beyond the Cold War situation. In order to explore what Buber meant by this it is necessary to discuss the basic stream of his thinking that was related to Zionism and his hope for a re-structuring of the Jewish community through the Kibbutz village communes.

*Buber's 'Paths in Utopia':
Village communities as the basis
of his worldview*

It is very interesting to see which of the books by (and on) Buber were in Hammar-skjöld's private library, as listed by Manuel Fröhlich (2005: 99, note 5). On the list are many of Buber's books on Hasidic literature and tales, as well as *Pointing the Way* and the first biography of Buber by Maurice Friedman – but none of Buber's writings on Zionism, Palestine and the Kibbutz communities. There is no surprise in this, as it is in his writing on the Kibbutz communities that Buber comes nearest to anarchism. Notably, in the most important of these works, *Paths in Utopia* (Buber 1950), he explored the history of practical community experiments from the first utopian attempts of Robert Owen up to the broad Kibbutzim movement in Palestine and Israel. Buber reminded his readers of the tradition of thinkers such as Proudhon, Kropotkin and Gustav Landauer (1870–1919) – the nonviolent anarchist who was murdered in 1919 during the reactionary repression of the Bavarian Republic of Councils and who, together with Franz Rosenzweig, was Buber's closest friend – and placed them in sharp contrast with Hegel, Marx and Lenin. For Buber, this represented the antagonism between a federalist socialism and a centralised state tradition of socialism. It was the contradiction between self-organised collectivisation and community, on the one hand and Soviet forced collectivisation and state nationalisation, on the other; the contradiction between Moscow and Jerusalem, as Buber put it symbolically at the end of his book. In the practical tradition of federalist socialism, based on voluntary efforts, a natural unity of all the different concrete implementations

of group and community life was emerging, whereas in the tradition of centralised socialism there was a prevailing dogmatic uniformity, compulsion, no diversity, no free will to federate 'out of the manifold' – that is, no constant creativity to meet the challenges of daily life.

Buber wrote *Paths in Utopia* in the midst of World War II, from about 1942 to 1945 (he settled in Palestine after persecution in Germany in 1938). One of the last chapters of this book is called 'In the Midst of Crisis'. Here, Buber developed from the core of his thinking – his analysis of the 'Age of Mistrust' – a historical vision of re-structuring society and community. Buber located the outbreak of the crisis as 30 years before – that is, at the beginning of World War I. But for Buber, this crisis was simply the result of man's historical development. Man had piled up more and more technical inventions but the core of *human* development had always been the creation of a social world through mutual aid (as defined by Kropotkin). According to Buber, this human development had fallen far behind technical progress in the historical development of man.

At an early stage, and until the middle ages, this social creativity developed within a social structure of groups, associations and communities, different and diverse as they were. Power centres were to be found at an early historical stage but:

to the political sphere in the stricter sense, the State with its police-system and its bureaucracy, there was always opposed the organic, functionally organized society as such, a great society built up of various societies, the great society in which men lived and worked, competed

with one another and helped one another; and in each of the big and little societies composing it, in each of these communes and communities the individual human being, despite all the difficulties and conflicts, felt himself at home as once in the clan, felt himself approved and affirmed in his functional independence and responsibility (Buber 1950: 131).

Here, the individual learned what responsibility is all about. This decentralised structure, where some states may have been existing on the margins but did not dominate communities, prevailed until about the middle ages, according to Buber. Then came the fundamental change:

‘All this changed more and more as the centralistic political principle subordinated the de-centralistic social principle’ (Buber 1950: 131).

The centralised state weakened the free communities and marginalised them. And the political principle infiltrated into communities, cooperatives and associations, into the consciousness of their members, thus over-politicising society. So society adapted to the state – not the other way round. Individuals and small communities submitted themselves totally to centralised power, in democratic as well as totalitarian ways.

Everywhere the only thing of importance was the minute organization of power, the unquestioning observance of slogans, the saturation of the whole of society with the real or supposed interests of the State (Buber 1950: 132).

Within the modern, centralised world, where the structure of associations and small

communities is weakened or even destroyed, individuals find themselves atomised. They are – Buber quotes Proudhon – but ‘a heap of dust animated from without by a subordinating, centralist idea’ (Buber 1950: 29). Without the former structure of communities and associations, and having nowhere where he/she feels ‘at home’, the individual becomes scared, is full of fear. Out of this fear the individual develops mistrust and hands him/herself over to a large collective, a state or a nation. The individual develops a will to obey unconditionally.

And the most valuable of all goods – the life between man and man – gets lost in the process; the autonomous relationships become meaningless, personal relationships wither; and the very spirit of man hires itself out as a functionary (Buber 1950: 132).

The functionary, the modern bureaucrat as a result of centralised statist society: that was literally the contrary of what Hammar-skjöld originally conceived to be the ethics of a functionary – being answerable not to one party or another, or any particular interest group, but only to the whole of a nation (or the planet). For Buber, by contrast, the emergence of the functionary, the bureaucrat, was the outcome of the false development of man, where the individual had become just ‘a cog in the “collective” machine’ (Buber 1950: 132). Whereas Hammar-skjöld conceived of his ethics as a functionary as ‘strictly un-political’ (Fröhlich 2002: 120) and as a continuation of his family tradition of Swedish officialdom (Fröhlich 2002: 214), the bureaucrat was for Buber the peak and the symbol of the political principle, unable due to his function to act on the basis of personal relations or true ethical judgements,

with the responsibility only for carrying out orders from above without regard for the person concerned (the Weberian ideal type). Of course, this is Buber's general analysis, not his personal judgement of Hammar skjöld. Buber never formulated his theories in an absolute way, in the sense that literally no one could be an exception. He regarded Hammar skjöld as an exception in the sphere of the political principle – but the norm within this sphere was definitely otherwise.

Thus, for Buber, the structured society of the past has been lost because of the dominance of the centralised state principle. This is the crisis, the 'Age of Mistrust'. The first task in re-structuring society should be, according to Buber, defying the sovereignty of the political principle over society. This could be achieved not through political organisation, but only through the strong will of the peoples to administer and develop the planet by working together, not against each other. In this way the question of contemporary socialism was posed for Buber. He rejected collectivisation in the sense of state socialism. He also rejected the principle of being represented, because true community, cooperation and association required active participation on common matters and couldn't survive without that will. A society could only re-structure itself through the organic co-operation of these associations and communities based on active participation. They were the groups 'out of the manifold' working together. By this process, the social structure would regain the power to expand the demarcation line and to push back the political principle. It was not actually a question of the absolute or nothing. The demarcation line had always to be tested and verified anew according to new historical situations – this was, according to Buber, the task for humanity's spiritual

conscience, and maybe also for the occupant of the spiritual 'watchtower' as Buber described himself in his Swedish Radio speech for Hammar skjöld (Buber 1962a: 33). For Buber, community was always an idea, not a fixed principle. It had become, for practical reasons, more a question of survival than of romance or enthusiasm. Buber was certainly thinking here of the early Kibbutzim communities and the hardship their pioneers (Chaluzim) had to endure. Buber longed for a resurrection of village communes (Kvuzas), not those of the past, but contemporary ones with integrated agriculture, handicraft and industry (a concept derived from Kropotkin). There would surely be some sort of representation there, too, but not an abstract representation of amorphous de-structured masses of individual voters. There would be concrete representation based on common production and common experience. For Buber only such a community of communities was a 'Commonwealth'.

This notion of a 'community of communities' – as well as the historical concept of a structured communal society that existed until the middle ages, before the intrusion of the centralised state – derived from Buber's highly influential early friend, the nonviolent anarchist Gustav Landauer (Buber 1950: 46–57; Wolf 1994: 10; Seemann 1997: 74–91; Wolf 1997: 210–226; Wolf 2001: 35–48). In *Pointing the Way* there is one article dealing with this antagonism of centralisation and decentralisation ('Society and the State', Buber 1951: 161–76) and another commemorating the revolutionary and nonviolent legacy of Gustav Landauer ('Recollection of a Death', Buber 1929: 115–20) though not quite dealing with his historical community concept as in *Paths in Utopia*.

*Buber's 'Society and the State':
What is Hammar skjöld's unity
'out of the manifold'?*

It is not quite clear to me whether Hammar skjöld's agreement with Buber's 'general philosophy of unity created "out of the manifold"' derived from a reading of 'Society and the State'. There is no such literal formulation in that particular text. Nonetheless and at first sight, there are paragraphs that support the idea that Hammar skjöld was referring to that essay:

The society of a nation is composed not of individuals but of societies...groups, circles, unions, co-operative bodies, and communities varying very widely in type, form, scope, and dynamics. Society (with a capital S) is not only their collectivity and setting, but also their substance and essence... In so far as the mere proximity of the societies tends to change into union, in so far as all kinds of leagues and alliances develop among them – in the social-federative sphere, that is to say – Society achieves its object (Buber 1951: 173).

Here Buber leaves a task of unification to the State, which could have been regarded by Hammar skjöld as the part he was to occupy within Buber's general philosophy:

Society cannot, however, quell the conflicts between the different groups; it is powerless to unite the divergent and clashing groups; it can develop what they have in common, but cannot force it upon them. The State alone can do that (Buber 1951: 173).

But does that really fit into Hammar skjöld's description of a 'unity "out of the manifold"'? After all, the State steps in here as an outside agency to force a unity out of clashes and conflicts occurring within the manifold. This isn't quite a natural unity 'out of the manifold'. Instead, it was from the viewpoint and for the sake of society that Buber called for a limitation of government power and its reduction to mere 'administration', so that society acquired the space to form a unity of its own, a community of communities. Buber formulated this demand in 'Society and the State' in the following way:

All forms of government have this in common: each possesses more power than is required by the given conditions; in fact, this excess in the capacity for making dispositions is actually what we understand by political power. The measure of this excess...represents the exact difference between Administration and Government. I call it the 'political surplus' (Buber 1951: 174).

That a reading of 'Society and the State' in combination with a knowledge of Buber's emphasis on the Kibbutzim village communes almost certainly led to the anarchist base of Buber's thinking, laid down by Landauer, proves a letter from a young scholar, Hermann Meier-Cronemeyer, writing to Buber on 15 August 1963:

For more than a year I have been writing a dissertation here in Jerusalem on the Kibbutzim, to which I will give the title 'History, Spirit and Shape'¹³. Though I started this work without any preliminary

¹³ Hermann Meier-Cronemeyer (1969), *Kibbuzim. Geschichte, Geist und Gestalt*, Hannover.

assumption – which surely is a disadvantage for a scientific work – I am more and more captured by one question, that is whether the Kibbutzim cannot or at least couldn't be regarded as anarchism taking shape. Only after reading your little script 'Society and the State' was I awakened to the fact that the youth movement not altogether wrongly considered itself to be 'un-political' – an argument in the face of which modern critics, when confronted with it, appear completely helpless, it seems to me. And they have to be helpless, unless the difference between 'social' and 'political', which you emphasise, cannot be seen. Isn't the reduction of the 'political surplus' quintessentially anarchist?¹⁴

Buber answers Meier-Cronemeyer very briefly that the notion of 'anarchism' doesn't suit him, because anarchism

indicates an abolition of the power relation – which is impossible as long as the constitution of the human being is as it is, rather than a respective demarcation and reduction of this relation as far as possible.¹⁵

Compared to *Paths in Utopia*, 'Society and the State' was less radical, and did not deal

with the historical proponents of anarchist federalism and pluralistic socialism to describe crisis and the necessary re-structuring of society. In *Paths in Utopia*, Buber's philosophy of a unity 'out of the manifold' was much more explicitly based on the history of producers' and consumers' co-operatives, community experiments and the Kibbutz movement. There, 'unity' was the federation of the manifold groups, co-operatives and units. And it remained clearly within the responsibility of the federated society to create this unity. Already in his chapter on Proudhon, Buber wrote so beautifully:

...so long as society was richly structured, so long as it was built up of manifold communities and communal units, all strong in vitality, the State was a wall narrowing one's outlook and restricting one's steps, but within this wall a spontaneous communal life could flourish and grow. But to the extent that the structure grew impoverished the wall became a prison (Buber 1950: 27).

And further on, Buber wrote about Proudhon's federalism: 'He refuses to equate a new ordering of society with uniformity; order means, for him, the just ordering of multiformity' (Buber 1950: 36).

Then Buber criticised Lenin's centralism in a similar way:

In the planned, all-embracing State Co-operative [Lenin] sees the fulfilment of the 'dreams' of the old Co-operatives 'begun with Robert Owen'. Here the contradiction between idea and realization reaches its apogee. What those 'Utopians', beginning with Robert Owen,

14 Hermann Meier-Cronemeyer, 'Letter to Martin Buber, 15 August 1963', in Buber (1975: 597); translation by Lou Marin. Unfortunately, neither this letter nor Buber's reply is included in the abridged English edition by Nahum N. Glatzer and Paul Mendes-Flohr (eds) (1991), *The letters of Martin Buber*, New York: Schocken Books.

15 Martin Buber, 'Letter to Hermann Meier-Cronemeyer, 22 September 1963', in Buber (1975: 608); translation by Lou Marin. Finally, in his letter to Meier-Cronemeyer Buber recommends for further reading his article 'The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle' (Buber 1953b: 208–19).

were concerned about in their thoughts and plans for association was the voluntary combination of people into small independent units of communal life and work, and the voluntary combination of those into a community of communities. What Lenin describes as the fulfilment of these thoughts...is an immense, utterly centralized complex of State production-centres and State distribution-centres, a mechanism of bureaucratically run institutes for production and consumption, each locked into the other like cog-wheels (Buber 1950: 123).

Finally, describing the voluntary principle of the Kibbutz village communes, Buber wrote:

...nowhere, as far as I see, in the history of the Socialist movement were men so deeply involved in the process of differentiation and yet so intent on preserving the principle of integration (Buber 1950: 1945).

In fact, this is – more precisely than in ‘Society and the State’ – Buber’s ‘general philosophy of unity created “out of the manifold”’. Lest, Hammar skjöld most likely never read that book, and apparently didn’t give ‘Society and the State’ too much attention when he read *Pointing the Way*. After all, I suppose Hammar skjöld was thinking – when formulating this phrase ‘unity created “out of the manifold”’ to Buber in his first letter – more of Buber’s crossfront at the end of ‘The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle’, where there are formulations such as: ‘As different as the goals are in one place and in another, it is still *one* front...’¹⁶. And there

is the explicit word ‘manifold’ – ‘We wish to perceive his manifoldness and his wholeness, his proper character...’¹⁷ – but this relates to an individual personality. Besides, the reference to ‘Hope for this Hour’ also fits better with Hammar skjöld’s assumption that he and Buber are thinking in ‘parallel ways’. For him, what he read of Buber and the way in which he used him politically was very closely related to the idea of the political sphere trying to break through the ‘Walls of Distrust’ in the political communication of power politics. Practically, that meant at the same time widening the manoeuvrability of the United Nations and the leadership powers of the Secretary-General – which was quite different from the demand for merely administrative function as described by Buber in ‘Society and the State’. Buber, on the contrary, never thought that a real way out of the crisis, a re-structuring of true community and society, could come from the sphere of the political principle – hence his demand for a demarcation line with the political sphere to be pushed back as far as possible.

The Jerusalem encounters 1958/59: Buber’s ‘The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle’

Although Hammar skjöld and Buber were occupied with different spheres from which rescue in the ‘Age of Mistrust’ might be generated, they both considered themselves part of the ‘crossfront’, to use Buber’s term, so their encounter continued. On two occasions when Hammar skjöld visited Jerusalem they met at Buber’s house in the suburb of

¹⁶ See the quotation above (p.19) in this text; Buber (1953b: 218).

¹⁷ See Buber (1953b: 227).

Talbiyeh: in September 1958 (early in the month, as Hammarskjöld returned to New York on 13 September) and in January 1959 (again early on, as Hammarskjöld returned to New York on 9 January) (Hodes 1972: 160). There were two press conferences in New York, after Hammarskjöld's second Jerusalem visit, in which he referred to their meetings. At the press conference on 16 January 1959 Hammarskjöld stated that meeting Buber had been

one out-of-way tourism with a strong personal accent. I had the pleasure of paying a personal call on Professor Martin Buber for whom I have a sincere admiration (Cordier/Foote 1974: 322).

An interesting point emerges from the follow-up press conference on 5 February, when a journalist, Mrs Kay Rainey Gray from the *Greenwich Times* asked Hammarskjöld to say more about the content of these meetings:

After [the second Jerusalem visit], Professor Buber was quoted by the press as saying that your conversation concerned the relationship between philosophy and politics from Plato down to our days, in particular, discussion of his essay, 'The Meaning and Validity of the Political Principle' [correct title: 'The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle'; L. M.] (Cordier/Foote 1974: 325).

Hammarskjöld, in his reply, first rectified a misunderstanding on Mrs Gray's part that he supposedly intended to translate the whole of the essay collection, *Pointing the Way*, into Swedish, saying that he would never have time for that, but then confirming his wish

to translate 'some three or four essays', notably in the final part of the book¹⁸. Already summarising his impressions after both meetings in Jerusalem, Hammarskjöld also went on more generally:

On very many points I see eye to eye with him; on other points, naturally there must be nuances. But as to the basic reaction, I think that he has made a major contribution and I would like to make that more broadly known.¹⁹

Thus, they had not been in complete agreement. Unfortunately, Hammarskjöld gave no hint as to where the differences and the 'nuances' lay, for example, when they discussed 'The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle'. This article closes, as we have shown above, with an outline of Buber's concept of a crossfront, and as we suppose that Hammarskjöld could agree on that, we should mention that the first part of this essay does not deal with 'philosophy and politics from Plato down to our days'. Plato isn't even mentioned in this text. Moreover, in the first part Buber discusses Jesus and his statement about giving unto Caesar what is due to Caesar, to God what is due to God; of course, the aim in discussing this edict of Jesus is to draw a demarcation line with the sphere of the political principle. Plato, on the other hand, is discussed at length by Buber, at the beginning of 'Society and State', in a very negative way as an early historical example of someone who confuses the social with the political sphere.

¹⁸ Hammarskjöld, quoted by Cordier/Foote (1974: 325).

¹⁹ Hammarskjöld, quoted by Cordier/Foote (1974: 326).

*Buber's 'Plato and Isaiah':
The power-entangled intellectual
versus the powerless prophet*

There is one further reference that is connected with the second meeting in Jerusalem in January 1959. This was their last personal encounter, but also the most intimate, when Hammarskjöld stayed on to dinner and spent the whole evening at the house of the Buber family. Aubrey Hodes came to know Buber in 1953 as a member of a Kibbutz in the hills of Nazareth and became a regular friend and visitor. He wrote about this second Jerusalem meeting in January 1959:

Buber sometimes spoke with me about this evening – the last time he saw Hammarskjöld. And he has written that ‘in the centre of our conversation stood the problem that has ever laid claim to me in the course of my life: the failure of the spiritual man in his historical undertakings’ (Hodes 1974: 160).

That was the Plato topic. We can deduce from this that they spoke more about the general ‘Age of Mistrust’ than about the short-sighted, but contemporary Cold War ‘Wall of Distrust’ – more about the depth of the crisis and its solution than about short-term politics. Buber apparently defined the subject. Concerning Plato, Buber was not referring to the beginning of ‘Society and State’, but most likely to another essay, according to Hodes:

[Buber] illustrated this failure [of spiritual man in his historical undertakings] by Plato’s abortive attempt to establish his just state in Sicily, which broke down when his friend and disciple, Prince Dion,

was assassinated. This was a theme which always fascinated Buber. He returned to it again and again in conversation, and wrote about it in his essay ‘Plato and Isaiah’, which formed part of the inaugural lecture he delivered at the Hebrew University in 1938 (Hodes 1974: 160).

Buber’s lecture ‘Plato and Isaiah’ opposes two thinkers about the spirit and their relation to the political principle. The first part deals with Plato’s three visits to Sicily where he wanted to establish his spiritually enlightened just state. He was confronted with Dionysios II, a tyrant he became acquainted with. But Plato’s view was that government rule was in crisis and decay, so he wanted to convince the tyrant to govern in a new, spiritual, intellectual way to bring about a just state. Plato had a friend in Sicily, Dion, a prince who had become a Platonic philosopher himself and wanted to help him convince the tyrant. On his third and last visit to Sicily, Plato was disappointed by the tyrant’s inability to understand the intellectual truth Plato was convinced he himself possessed. After Plato’s return to Athens in 360 B.C., his friend Dion toppled the tyrant in order to establish the just state by himself. Soon Dion was accused of creating a new tyranny and was murdered in 354 B.C. In a letter to Sicily, Plato defended his friend Dion and his power politics.²⁰ In his text on the subject, Buber presupposed the historical story and was very critical of Plato, regarding his efforts as a failure. Buber quoted Kant in his critic of Plato:

[Kant] wrote: ‘Because the wielding of power inevitably destroys the free judge-

²⁰ For an extended historical discussion see for example: Michael Erler (2007), *Platon*, Schwabe Verlag: Basel.

ment of reason, it is not to be expected that kings should philosophize or philosophers be kings, nor even to be desired' (Buber 1938a: 104).

To Plato's approach to power, Buber opposed an alternative approach, the biblical one of the prophet Isaiah. With this opposition, Buber insisted on his judgment that philosophers and intellectuals such as Plato were not the owners of an everlasting truth – while saying that according to the Jewish prophets the spirit (philosophical truth) derived from God, not from any human being. Buber concluded:

Isaiah does not believe that spiritual man has the vocation to power. He knows himself to be a man of spirit and without power. Being a prophet means being powerless, and powerless confronting the powerful and reminding them of their responsibility... To stand powerless before the power he calls to account is part of the prophet's destiny. He himself is not out for power, and the special sociological significance of his office is based on that very fact (Buber 1938a: 108).

Buber, the religious socialist, spoke with the prophet of an 'invisible sovereignty' to which Isaiah felt responsible, the 'sovereignty of God':

But he knew nothing and said nothing of the inner structure of that dominion. He had no idea; he had only a message. He had no institution to establish; he had only to proclaim. His proclamation was in the nature of criticism and demands... But this sovereignty of God which he pro-

pounded is the opposite of the sovereignty of priests... That is why his criticism and demands are directed toward society, toward the life men live together... So, the criticism and demands are directed toward every individual on whom other individuals depend, everyone who has a hand in shaping the destinies of others, and that means they are directed toward everyone of us. When Isaiah speaks of justice, he is not thinking of institutions but of you and me, because without you and me, the most glorious institution becomes a lie... When the mountain of the Lord's house is 'established' on the reality of true community life, then, and only then, the nations will 'flow' toward it (Isa. 2:2), there to learn peace in place of war (Buber 1938a: 109–111).

Here we have already all the ingredients of the forthcoming, Landauer-inspired *Paths in Utopia* that Buber was still to write. If Buber was talking about his favourite subject in his conversation with Hammarskjöld in January 1959 in a similar perspective like he has written it down in 1938, then there was no or very little room for Hammarskjöld's functioning in the world of power politics as Secretary-General of the United Nations. When Buber spoke of renewal or re-structuring he always meant it to start from the bottom of society and face-to-face-relationships between ordinary citizens. Encounter, conversation, dialogue and unity 'out of the manifold' had to be realised through individuals turning to each other rather than standing in awe of the glorious institutions that should decide for them.

Hammar skjöld wanted, nevertheless, to try to renew and restructure the political sphere via the United Nations. In his function he had no choice to this effort. But he had no real understanding of the differences between the spheres and dimensions of politics and society. Engaging in dialogue in society or a community was not the same as doing so in an institution dealing with the interests of superpowers. I think this was what Buber meant when, in his commemorative address in 1962 for the Swedish Radio, 'Memories of Hammar skjöld', he spoke about sensing something 'fateful that in some way was connected with his function in this world-hour' (Buber 1962a: 58). I guess, that here we have a glimpse into the natural 'nuances on other points' that Hammar skjöld referred to at the press conference in New York after the Jerusalem meetings.

That notwithstanding, Buber had a deep sympathy with Hammar skjöld's efforts to tame the superpowers, notably in a time of crisis and danger when the planet was on the brink of nuclear warfare, for Buber knew that his re-structuring of society from below would take time and could suffer setbacks (as could be shown, for example, today in the case of the finally diagnosable failure of the Kibbutzim movement). He felt sympathy for Hammar skjöld as a man of action in the sphere of politics who 'suffered the inner torments of an ethical mystic who had to grapple with always complex and often sordid political problems' (Hodes 1972: 161) and who was, Buber thought, doomed to failure in the end because his mission was impossible.

Dag Hammar skjöld and Martin Buber on the Arab-Israeli conflict

Attitudes to David Ben-Gurion

Aubrey Hodes in addition proposed a more psychological interpretation of that sympathy, deriving from Buber's constant disappointment concerning his relations with, and the politics of, the Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion (1948–53 and again 1955–1963):

I gained the impression that [Buber's] relationship with Hammar skjöld gave him that contact with an active man of State which he had despaired of having with Ben-Gurion (Hodes 1972: 161).

As a matter of fact, according to Hodes, during the two Jerusalem meetings

the conversation touched briefly on Israeli–Arab relations, and more specifically on the problem of the Arab refugees, on which Hammar skjöld was concentrating at the time... On 15 June 1959 Hammar skjöld submitted to the U.N. General Assembly a comprehensive report on the Palestinian refugee problem²¹. This incorporated some of the ideas he had discussed briefly with Buber during their talks in Jerusalem (Hodes 1972: 161–162).

This hints at a mutual influence between Hammar skjöld and Buber on that problem. In fact, there is much more to say on Buber and Hammar skjöld concerning the

²¹ Dag Hammar skjöld, 'Proposals Submitted to the General Assembly for the Continuation of United Nations Assistance to the Palestine Refugees, New York June 15, 1959', in Cordier/Foote (1974: 414–436).

Israeli-Arab question. Manuel Fröhlich quotes a letter Hammarskjöld wrote on 29 April 1958, only two days before their first meeting at the UN building in New York, to his friend and international civil servant of the UN, George Ivan Smith:

I am happy that Buber struck a chord in your U.N. soul as it did in mine. What a truly remarkable fellow and what an influence he might have on his own people if they really listened... If we could make him understand our philosophy on Israel it might be of value beyond the human and personal sphere.²²

Apparently, we have to consider here the interesting fact that up to their first meeting in May 1958 Buber did not understand the reasons that the United Nations uniquely blamed Israel for the Suez crisis. According to Buber, there had likewise been a blockade by Egypt of Israeli shipping in the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aqaba. Buber, for his part, had already publicly expressed opposition to Israel's military invasion of the Sinai, which Ben-Gurion had commanded in the autumn of 1956. Notably, Buber had protested in the name of Ichud in an open letter to Ben-Gurion against the army's massacre of the people of Kafr Kassem on 29 November 1956, where

workers and female workers who came on trucks home to their village [where a curfew was imposed] were torn off the trucks, put up on the roadside and shot by machine guns. It has been reported of a large number of murdered (Buber 1956a: 350).

In fact, 43 inhabitants of the village were killed, men, women and children alike. As a result of the protest by Ichud, eight soldiers who participated were sentenced to between seven and 14 years' imprisonment, but were released in 1959 following an amnesty (Buber 1956a: 351). Buber also held Ben-Gurion responsible for the disastrous consequences of the Suez war, for Israel: the reversal of the position of the United States versus Israel resulting from the Sinai war effort, and furthermore, that the Soviet Union had been brought by this into closest proximity through their military support for Nasser (Friedman 1988: 338). Maurice Friedman describes Buber's position at the time:

When I wrote Buber about the Sinai invasion, he responded, in December 1956, 'Of course, the situation is particularly heavy for me who cannot settle it in my mind by "opposing" principles to it. By the way, I had sharply opposed in Ichud (i.e. Ichud; L.M.) a more radical resolution thanking the U.N., an institution in which I cannot put any trust.' The U.N. had issued a resolution condemning Israel, and Buber could not go along with that any more than with Ben-Gurion's action (Friedman 1988: 338).

22 Dag Hammarskjöld, Letter to George Ivan Smith, 29 April 1958, quoted by Fröhlich (2008: 16). A comprehensive and comparative study of Hammarskjöld's and Buber's agreements and differences in relation to their overall perception of the Israel-Palestine problem would be very interesting, but by far exceeds the frame of this essay and must be left to further exploration.

The most furious clash between Buber and Ben-Gurion occurred at the Jerusalem Ideological Conference in August 1957, when Buber responded to a speech by Ben-Gurion. Buber's response, 'Israel's Mission and Zion'²³, is quoted by Friedman (1983: 341):

Behind everything that Ben Gurion has said...there lies, it seems to me, the will to make the political factor supreme... This 'politicization' of life here strikes at the very spirit itself. The spirit with all its thoughts and visions descends and becomes a function of politics.

Buber compared Ben-Gurion with some of the kings of biblical Israel (King Ahab, for example) who 'employed false prophets', and he refuted Ben-Gurion's claim that the Messianic idea was still alive within his politics:

In how many hearts of this generation in our country does the Messianic idea live in a form other than the narrow nationalistic form which is restricted to the In-gathering of the Exiles? A Messianic idea without the yearning for the redemption of mankind and without the desire to take part in its realization, is no longer identical with the Messianic visions of the prophets of Israel...²⁴

Did Hammarskjöld really tell Buber during their meetings that he had had – after some initial suspicions – an excellent and friendly

relationship with David Ben-Gurion? In her memoirs, Golda Meir, who wrote that Hammarskjöld often talked with Ben-Gurion on 'Buddhism and other philosophical topics', even asserted that Hammarskjöld held 'Ben-Gurion for an angel'.²⁵ In a letter to Ben-Gurion of 4 September 1956, Hammarskjöld openly admitted that through their correspondence and their philosophical discussions he gave more attention to the Israeli side of the conflict, and he asked himself how long and to what extent he could still justify this (Fröhlich 2002: 369). Hammarskjöld and Ben-Gurion even still exchanged friendly notes at the end of September 1956 on their private understanding and philosophical talks, when Ben-Gurion had already drawn up plans for Israel's military invasion of the Sinai, which led to the Suez crisis (Urquhart 1984: 157–158).

The problem of the Palestinian refugees

Nevertheless, Hammarskjöld's strategy on 20 April 1958 – if there was one – to make Buber 'understand our philosophy' had seemingly, at least in part, paid off:

In his report to the General Assembly of the United Nations, 'Proposals Submitted to the General Assembly for the Continuation of United Nations Assistance to the Palestine Refugees, New York June 15, 1959' (Hammarskjöld 1958c), Hammarskjöld recommended the continuation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Palestine and its work in the Palestine refugee camps within Arab countries. The report recommended not only aid for physical

23 This text is not available to the author, as it is published only in the revised paperback edition of Martin Buber's original (1948, hardcover), *Israel and the World. Essays in a Time of Crisis*, New York: Schocken Books.

24 Martin Buber, 'Israel's Mission and Zion', quoted by Friedman (1983: 341).

25 Golda Meir quoted by Fröhlich (2002: 305, note 339).

survival, but also argued that the refugees needed to be integrated into the economic life of the Near East, whether through repatriation or resettlement (Hammar-skjöld 1958c: 414–36).

In response to this report – and surely influenced by their Jerusalem meetings only some months before – Buber issued in the name of Ichud a press conference-statement on 15 September 1959, ‘On the Hammar-skjöld Report and the Arab Refugee Problem’. Besides, the UNRWA had been initiated by the first UN mediator, the Swedish Count Folke Bernadotte, during the first Arab-Israeli War of 1948–49 (Persson 2008: 22). The Ichud press conference was held in Buber’s home and the statement was edited by him:

‘Ichud’ welcomes the Hammar-skjöld report on the Arab Refugee problem... Drawing the problem out of its usual emotional, philanthropic and moralistic context and cleverly avoiding political bias and open political discussions he surveyed the economic facts which should make it desirable for the Arab States and Israel to work for a final solution of the Refugee-question. At the same time he showed that international money spent on UNRWA could be turned into a substantial help for the whole region’s development as providing training to the refugees which are ‘a reservoir of manpower which in the desirable general development will assist in the creation of higher standards for the whole population of the area’. For quite a considerable time we have demanded that in the approach to the Arab Refugee-Problem one should avoid its connection with final political

solutions in the area. Even before a peace solution and treaty are arrived at, one should start with practical work on the basis of real cooperation between all parties concerned: Israel, the Arab States, the refugees themselves, the U.N., the Great Powers and others... [By this], ‘progress regarding the political and psychological obstacles will be sought in a constructive spirit and with a sense of justice and realism’... We propose that Israel should formally invite all nations to join in an immediate and urgent action to resettle the refugees in Israel and the Arab States, according to the U.N.-resolutions and the principles of the Hammar-skjöld-report...provided they undertake ‘to live at peace with their neighbours’. Further, Israel will pay compensation to refugees settling in Arab States or elsewhere.²⁶

Unlike this positive response from one of Israel’s major opposition organisations, the Arab reaction to the Hammar-skjöld report was much more critical. Arab representatives suspected that the continuation of UNRWA for an unlimited time amounted to an attempt to postpone a solution for the refugees and the Near East conflict as a whole. This reaction, in turn, spurred Hammar-skjöld to deliver a clarification in a ‘Statement on the Continuation of UNRWA in the Special Political Committee of the General Assembly, November 10 1959’ (Hammar-skjöld 1959a: 491–93). Here, Hammar-skjöld passionately repeated his plea for his recommendations in his former report and

26 KBS DHS, Ichud, On the Hammar-skjöld Report and the Arab Refugee Problem. Statement made by the Ichud-Association at a Press-Conference held in the home of Prof. Martin Buber, Jerusalem, on 15.9.59.

the continuation of UNWRA ‘for all the time and to all the extent necessary’ (Hammar-skjöld 1959a: 491). Regarding the Arab criticism – which came, ‘frankly, somewhat to my surprise’ – he clarified:

When I have pronounced myself in favor of the ‘indefinite’ continuance of UNRWA, that obviously means that I do not – any more than anybody else, I guess – find myself in a position to say for how long such assistance will actually be needed. But I sincerely hope that the time will be short. As the recommendation aims at the continuance of the assistance until the underlying problem is resolved, it means that I try to relieve this issue of the fundamental uncertainty that has for so long enshrouded it (Hammar-skjöld 1959a: 492).

Thus, in these hostilities, Hammar-skjöld had a real and reliable ally in Buber and Ichud, especially during the period after their personal encounters. Unfortunately, a settlement on the refugee problem did not come about, as the ‘underlying problem’ could not be resolved and neither side was willing to separate the refugee problem from a final political solution, as Buber and Ichud had proposed. After Hammar-skjöld’s clarification and another 16 meetings, the Special Political Committee of the General Assembly extended the UNRWA mandate for three years, and after that again for three years, and so on up until today (Hammar-skjöld 1959a: 493).

Furthermore, Ichud – and Buber – had also a long tradition of protesting against the expropriation of land belonging to the Arab population now expelled from the territory

of Israel.²⁷ But all these demands had hurt themselves at the Ben Gurion government. We find further proof of the contrast Buber was made between statesmen like Ben-Gurion and Hammar-skjöld in a protest note he formulated in 1961, ‘To the Refugee Problem’. Buber criticised in the name of Ichud a speech of Ben-Gurion’s before the Knesset where the latter described free choice for the Arab refugees as an ‘insidious proposal’, urging the refugees instead to settle in Arab countries (Buber 1961: 370). In his very critical response to this, Buber wrote under points 2 and 4:

The position of the Prime Minister is not only contrary to repeated resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly, but also contrary to all principles that have been adopted by the civilised world, and contrary to the Declaration of Human Rights, on the basis of which masses of refugees, among them a considerable amount of Jews, have returned to their former residence... The solution of the Arab refugee problem is only possible in full cooperation with all parties concerned: Israel, the Arab States, the refugees and the UNO. To begin with, there should be established *common* technical committees. They should deliberate together the planning and the way of consolidation of the refugees with ‘constructive attitude and in the spirit of justice and realism’ (Hammar-skjöld), whereupon the economic, demographic, human and especially security conditions of such an operation have to be taken into account (Buber 1961: 371).

²⁷ See for example Ichud (1953), ‘Ein Protest gegen die Enteignung arabischer Böden’, in Buber (1983: 334–37).

Hammar skjöld, Buber and Psalm 73

So not only did Hammar skjöld use Buber in his practical political work, Buber also used Hammar skjöld in his criticisms of and demands directed at the Israeli government. But a considerable part of Buber's sympathy for Hammar skjöld did not arise from these political debates. Both had been influenced by Eckhart von Hochheim, known as Meister Eckhart (1260–1328), a medieval Dominican theologian. Eckhart was a Christian mystic who identified God with thinking, mental activity. For him, creation was an ongoing process – like thought – without beginning and without end. According to Eckhart, God could not be recognised through knowledge, but only in a mystical moment, a spark. Eckhart inspired Hammar skjöld to an understanding of mysticism that turned decidedly towards the world and that demands worldly deeds in order to follow Christ. Hammar skjöld took from Eckhart a concept of self-abandonment in the sense of opposing personal egocentrism; an understanding that God is ever anew born in the soul of a human being who is instinctively prepared and willing to sacrifice himself in order to receive the confidence of God, and to lead a spiritual life in this sense as 'habitual will' (Fröhlich 2002: 149–155; Nelson 2007: 102–06). As a Hasidim, Buber was interested in the more Jewish traditions of mysticism, but he already knew Eckhart's work very early in his life, notably from the rediscovery by his friend Gustav Landauer of this medieval heretic pursued by the Catholic inquisition, (Hinz 2000). Hodes raises this common interest of Hammar skjöld and Buber in his account:

Buber had a high regard for Hammar-

skjöld's intellectual abilities. Hammar skjöld, he told me, was an outstanding interpreter of the medieval German mystics, and in particular of Meister Eckhart. 'But he was not as austere as some people thought. In my talks with him I found him warm and capable of reaching a true understanding,' he said. 'Hammar skjöld told me,' he added, 'that there were two books he kept near him and read passages from almost every day. One was the writings of Eckhart. And the other was – can you guess? Not the New Testament. But the Psalms. He had a deep knowledge of the Psalms, and when I referred to Psalm seventy-three he quoted part of it to me. This is, as you know, my favourite among all the Psalms. And it was one of those to which Hammar skjöld too felt closest' (Hodes 1972: 161).

Psalm 73 was especially dear to Martin Buber. He read it at Franz Rosenzweig's funeral. Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), after Landauer, was the second most influential person and friend in Buber's life. During the Weimar Republic they both translated the Bible from the original Hebrew into German. Furthermore, four lines from Psalm 73 were inscribed on Buber's tombstone at his own request. These four lines are:

*And nevertheless I am always with you,
You have taken hold of my right hand.
You guide me with your counsel
And afterward you take me into honor.²⁸*

Buber gave an interpretation of this Psalm in one of his books, *Good and Evil: Two*

²⁸ Quoted by Friedman (1983: 410).

*Interpretations*²⁹, which has been summarised by Friedman (1983: 410–12). The psalmist says therein that if he – the psalmist – has a pure heart, God is always with him. This revelation, that God is continually with the psalmist is symbolised not as a word of God but as a gesture: that God has taken his ‘right hand’. Buber compared this to a father who takes his little son by the hand in the dark. God is giving a guiding ‘counsel’, but this doesn’t mean that the psalmist is relieved of the responsibility of directing his own steps and making his own decisions. The image was then applied to Buber’s perspective on death, identifying his own suffering with that of his people through the Holocaust and the war in Palestine – that suffering (as God, the continually Present One) now takes man away and accompanies him right up to his death. ‘Honour’, Buber finally claimed, does not lie in a heaven after death, nor in some glorious afterlife, but in the ‘fulfilment of existence’. The psalmist enters into a timeless eternity; the pure heart of man has vanished but so has the separation from God. So both Buber and Hammar skjöld were united in their knowledge of and interest in existential poetry and literature.

Hammar skjöld and his memorandum for the Nobel Prize Committee

Given the assumption that a considerable part of their sympathy for one another came from their love of poetry and literature, it

is no surprise that Hammar skjöld wrote in June 1959 a four-page memorandum on Martin Buber for the Nobel Prize Committee in Sweden (Hodes 1972: 62–67; Nelson 2007: 97–102; Hammar skjöld 1959b). Hammar skjöld showed therein his admiration for Buber, but at the end – and somehow in contradiction to his evaluation prior to his conclusion – he proposed Buber for the Nobel Peace Prize (to be decided by a special committee appointed by the Norwegian Parliament) rather than the Prize for Literature. Hammar skjöld started his evaluation by characterising Buber’s philosophy as ‘humanistic internationalism built on basic elements of Jewish thought’³⁰. Hammar skjöld was aware of the outstanding position of Buber within Jewish thought, which had been unjustly marginalised because of opposition to Buber within the Israeli establishment. Here, Hammar skjöld even stated that Buber was somewhat wiser in the long run than Ben-Gurion, maybe because of Buber’s clear and outspoken intentions to achieve reconciliation with the Arab population:

If Ben-Gurion and his predecessors have taken up the legacy of militant nationalism which characterized historic Israel, Buber can be said to have given new life to essential features of the prophetic inheritance. One might venture to predict that this time as well the voice of the prophet will be shown to penetrate further into the future than the voice of the military leader.³¹

29 Martin Buber (1953), *Good and Evil. Two Interpretations*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons. The interpretation can be found in the first of two essays, ‘Right and Wrong. An Interpretation of Some Psalms’, Ch. 4, ‘The Heart Determines (Psalm 73)’, pp. 31–50.

30 Aubrey Hodes gives the most extended account of the memorandum, including several quotations (1972: 162–67); this Hammar skjöld quote is on p. 162.

31 Dag Hammar skjöld, quoted by Hodes (1972: 163).

The hailing of the prophetic inheritance is astonishing here given the political implications of the prophetic tradition in Buber's philosophy, as has been widely discussed above. In his further review of Buber's writings Hammarskjöld paid for the first time special attention to *I and Thou* – the first edition for the United States was published in 1958 – and Buber's philosophy of dialogue, declaring the text to be a 'key work in Buber's philosophical writings'³². Echoing what he wrote to Erik Lindegren, Hammarskjöld went on:

Summing up the importance of Buber the philosopher in the context that interests us, one might say that...he has been fruitful and inspiring through his philosophical writings in spheres intimately connected with poetry. Further, on the basis of his philosophy, as a shaper of opinion, he has become one of those who has most eloquently defended those forms of contact between people which poetry wants to serve: and in so doing he has remained firmly rooted in spiritual realities... Nevertheless, the objections are obvious: he is a man of eighty, with his life's work behind him, and his creation falls only indirectly within the spheres covered by the Nobel Prizes... In spite of the admiration for Buber which these lines reflect, I would hesitate to see him rewarded with the Nobel Prize for Literature. A more natural form of recognition might be the Peace Prize.³³

Hodes has his doubts that Hammarskjöld pushed this recommendation as far as he really could, for then he would have written himself to the special Norwegian committee (Hodes 1972: 165). The Swedish Committee duly transferred the recommendation to the Norwegian Parliament, but the Peace Prize would have been given to Buber only if there had been an Arab counterpart, equally engaged in Arab-Israeli rapprochement as Buber. The Egyptian writer Taha Hussein was mentioned, but then dismissed because he had not advocated peace with Israel in a comparable way to Buber. Thus, the proposal was dropped because Buber was too far ahead of his time! Already in 1949, Hermann Hesse had initiated a campaign for Buber to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. At that time the proposal had been dropped because the Nobel Prize Committee did not want to award the prize to an Israeli as UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte had been murdered on 17 September 1948 by members of the Israeli terrorist organisation, the Stern Gang (or Lohamei Herut Yisrael, 'Fighters for the Freedom of Israel', LEHY):

It is now well established that the decision to kill the UN mediator was made by the Central Committee of the LEHY, which included Yitzhak Yezernitzky-Shamir. LEHY saw Count Bernadotte as the main obstacle to an Israeli annexation of Jerusalem and to Jewish control of *all* Palestine³⁴. [Yitzhak Shamir went on to

32 Ibid: 164. The topic of dialogue will be explored at length in the article on the second phase of their relationship.

33 Ibid: 164. To say that Buber's work falls only indirectly into the sphere of literature is – to my mind – to overlook the impact of his unique poetic art of freely adapting the Hasidic mystic tales and stories.

34 According to two plans of Folke Bernadotte from 27 June and 16 September 1948, Jerusalem should have remained an Arab territory (this first plan was rejected by both Israel and the Arab States) and then placed under UN control (this second plan was likewise abandoned after the assassination of Bernadotte) (Persson 2008: 22–24).

serve as Prime Minister of Israel in 1983–84 and 1986–92; L. M]. The man who held the gun is believed to have been Yehoshua Cohen (Persson 2008: 25).

Immediately after the assassination of Folke Bernadotte, Buber wrote an article criticising the fascination with the murder and the hero worship of the assassins within the Israeli population:

The heads of the assassins – or the assumed assassins – are today encircled in the eyes of the man in the street by the brilliance of lie, by the nimbus of abject romance. All of those who failed in the years of crisis to prepare and do the right thing, upraise now the real or alleged murderers into the status of heroes and standard bearers of the nation. But murder from ambush will always be only cruel and abhorrent, and every murder will only be crime and atrocity. A murder committed in the name of a people disintegrates the lives and the hopes of just this people. With the word ‘Thou shalt not murder!’ we also understand the commandment: Thou shalt not murder the soul of your people (Buber 1948a: 309).³⁵

Furthermore, as we have seen, Buber and Ichud were appealing publicly for the continuation of the UNWRA refugee relief programme that Bernadotte initiated. Thus, in the cases of nomination for the Nobel Prize Buber was punished twice despite his outspoken national self-criticism and his efforts for Arab-Israeli reconciliation. Although he did not really want to admit it, Buber was of course disappointed and sad

about this insensitivity. Apparently, here, in the field of personal authenticity, of poetry and literature, Buber lost the distance that he was able to maintain very well in his political debates and human rights engagements. It seems to me that in this regard he was too trustful of Hammarskjöld, up to the point of becoming vulnerable – something which had been registered by his friends and led to some strange behaviour:

Ernst Blumenthal, a friend of Buber’s from Jerusalem, learned about Hammarskjöld’s memorandum in the summer of 1959, during a visit to Sweden. He revealed some of its contents to Buber. But he never told him about the final paragraphs and Hammarskjöld’s reasons for not proposing him for the Literature Award and suggesting the Peace Prize instead. Buber’s friends concealed this from him: and as far as we know he never discovered the truth. It is not clear whether the Nobel episode created any breach between Buber and Hammarskjöld. What is certain is that there was no contact between them for the next two years (Hodes 1972: 167).

35 Buber (1948: 309), translated by Lou Marin.

Hammar skjöld wanted, nevertheless, to try to renew and restructure the political sphere via the United Nations. In his function he had no choice to this effort. But he had no real understanding of the differences between the spheres and dimensions of politics and society. Engaging in dialogue in society or a community was not the same as doing so in an institution dealing with the interests of superpowers. I think this was what Buber meant when, in his commemorative address in 1962 for the Swedish Radio, 'Memories of Hammar skjöld', he spoke about sensing something 'fateful that in some way was connected with his function in this world-hour' (Buber 1962a: 58). I guess, that here we have a glimpse into the natural 'nuances on other points' that Hammar skjöld referred to at the press conference in New York after the Jerusalem meetings.

That notwithstanding, Buber had a deep sympathy with Hammar skjöld's efforts to tame the superpowers, notably in a time of crisis and danger when the planet was on the brink of nuclear warfare, for Buber knew that his re-structuring of society from below would take time and could suffer setbacks (as could be shown, for example, today in the case of the finally diagnosable failure of the Kibbutzim movement). He felt sympathy for Hammar skjöld as a man of action in the sphere of politics who 'suffered the inner torments of an ethical mystic who had to grapple with always complex and often sordid political problems' (Hodes 1972: 161) and who was, Buber thought, doomed to failure in the end because his mission was impossible.

Dag Hammar skjöld and Martin Buber on the Arab-Israeli conflict

Attitudes to David Ben-Gurion

Aubrey Hodes in addition proposed a more psychological interpretation of that sympathy, deriving from Buber's constant disappointment concerning his relations with, and the politics of, the Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion (1948–53 and again 1955–1963):

I gained the impression that [Buber's] relationship with Hammar skjöld gave him that contact with an active man of State which he had despaired of having with Ben-Gurion (Hodes 1972: 161).

As a matter of fact, according to Hodes, during the two Jerusalem meetings

the conversation touched briefly on Israeli-Arab relations, and more specifically on the problem of the Arab refugees, on which Hammar skjöld was concentrating at the time... On 15 June 1959 Hammar skjöld submitted to the U.N. General Assembly a comprehensive report on the Palestinian refugee problem²¹. This incorporated some of the ideas he had discussed briefly with Buber during their talks in Jerusalem (Hodes 1972: 161–162).

This hints at a mutual influence between Hammar skjöld and Buber on that problem. In fact, there is much more to say on Buber and Hammar skjöld concerning the

²¹ Dag Hammar skjöld, 'Proposals Submitted to the General Assembly for the Continuation of United Nations Assistance to the Palestine Refugees, New York June 15, 1959', in Cordier/Foote (1974: 414–436).