

A Precursor to Dialogical Philosophy? Buber's Ambiguous View of Socrates

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Martin Buber's reception of Socrates is complex and its emphases shifted over time. In the present article I first demonstrate how Buber included Socrates in his project of dialogical philosophy and depicted him as an ally in his confrontation with monological philosophical paradigms. Subsequently, I highlight those aspects of Socrates' doctrine which Buber considered problematic, often discussing them in connection with Jewish spirituality. I continue by analyzing Buber's ideal of dialogical education, in which his confrontation with Socrates plays a central role. Finally, I present an overall evaluation of Buber's reception of Socrates, commenting on its development and dynamics.

Keywords: dialogical philosophy – education – Socrates – Martin Buber

Introductory Remarks

The most succinct description of Buber's relation to Socrates can be found in *Philosophical Interrogations* in which Buber answers a series of questions posed by experts from different fields of study. In the section devoted to education Robert M. Hutchins asks a question in which he likens Buber's mode of teaching to that of Socrates. Buber's reply is telling, as it expresses both his closeness to and distance from Socrates: "I know of very few men in history to whom I stand in such a relation of both trust and veneration as Socrates. But when it is a matter of using 'Socratic questions' as an educational method, I am against it" (Buber 1970, 67). The statement testifies to Buber's genuine respect for Socrates as a person and a thinker while also pointing to a key area in which Buber developed his thought in a critical confrontation with Socrates. This area was education, or more precisely: adult education.

It is clear from Buber's comments throughout his oeuvre that he was familiar with depictions of Socrates stemming from different ancient authors. He refers to those of Plato, Xenophon and Aristotle, openly admitting their inconsistencies (Buber 2011b, 201). He was also aware of modern attempts to integrate these depictions into a "coherent" image of Socrates, citing the example of Julius Stenzel's article on Socrates in the *Pauly-Wissowa Realenzyklopädie* (Buber 2011b, 201). Buber's main source of information on Socrates were Plato's works, several of which he explicitly mentions, the *Apology of Socrates*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Theaetetus*, the *Republic*, and the potentially inauthentic *Theages*. In two instances he also draws on Nietzsche's interpretation of Socrates.

Buber acknowledged Socrates' paradigmatic, even civilizational importance, and ranked him among the great figures of human history. He mentioned him repeatedly alongside founding figures of both Western and Eastern religious traditions: Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Confucius and Buddha. This shows that he viewed Socrates as a genuinely religious thinker. He confirms this in "Eine Feststellung" (1914), where he claims that Socrates lived a deep Greek religiousness, just like Buddha lived an Indian one, and Jesus a Jewish one (Buber 2011a, 76).

I. Socrates as a Dialogical Figure

Socrates plays a role in Buber's development of dialogical philosophy, traces of which can be found even in his pre-dialogical authorship.¹ In some of Buber's writings Socrates is presented as a dialogical figure and dialogical elements of his approach are highlighted, which does not prevent Buber from criticizing him in other writings.

The earliest instance in which Buber depicts Socrates in a way that has dialogical overtones is a passage from his seminar paper "Zu Schopenhauers Lehre vom Erhabenen." The paper likely originates from the winter semester 1897/98 when Buber was still a student and attended a seminar on Schopenhauer led by Paul Barth at the University of Leipzig.² In the last section of the paper entitled "The Ethical-Sublime" he deals with the issue of a sublime character. He argues that according to Schopenhauer such a character would be someone who programmatically refuses to enter into a close relation with

¹ The year 1916 is commonly considered a watershed in Buber's thinking when he begins to formulate his dialogical philosophy.

² When introducing the historical context of Buber's writings I make use of the valuable commentaries in *Martin Buber Werkausgabe*.

other humans and the world. Instead of seeking inner connection with others, he approaches them in an objective way without personal involvement. Buber remarks that such a disinterested attitude is typical of Montaigne, but is clearly incompatible with Socrates or Christ (Buber 2001, 146). The critique of *acosmic* relationality will play an important role in Buber's dialogical oeuvre.

Buber's most famous treatment of Socrates can be found in his dialogical manifesto *Ich und Du*. In this work he lays the groundwork of his entire dialogical thought. A basic premise of this thought is that "in the beginning is relation" (Buber 1958, 18, 27). With this slogan Buber emphasizes the fact that the foundation of human life is the *I-Thou* relation which manifests itself in different forms from the prenatal stage to adult life. Human life develops in connection with other beings: nature, humans, human creations and God. The *I-Thou* relation is the primary reality, the emancipated and separated *I* appears only later. Such an *I* steps forth after *I-Thou* has been dissolved and the *I* has extricated itself from the relation. Now it perceives its surroundings as a set of objects that can be experienced and used. Thus, the conscious act of the *I* represents "the first form of the primary word *I-It*" (Buber 1958, 23). The *I* originated in the milieu of the relation as "the increasingly distinguishable feature of that which reaches out to and yet is not the *Thou*," but its gradual untangling from "the web of the relation" enabled it to create the sphere of *I-It* (Buber 1958, 28 – 29). However, the possibility of addressing other beings as *Thou* is not eliminated once the world of *It* has been constituted, one is still able to enter into the world of relation. This possibility is anchored in the "*a priori* of relation" (Buber 1958, 27), one can continually meet other beings in a dialogical way.

Buber's ontology, which is based on the human being's twofold attitude to the world, also presupposes a twofold *I*. Buber claims, "[t]here is no *I* taken in itself, but only the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* and the *I* of the primary word *I-It*" (Buber 1958, 4). This basic claim of the dialogical project represents the point of departure for Buber's assessment of Socrates. For Buber, Socrates is a paradigmatic representative of the dialogical *I*, he meets others in an authentic way addressing them as *Thou*:

[H]ow lovely and how fitting the sound of the lively and impressive *I* of Socrates! It is the *I* of endless dialogue, and the air of dialogue is wafted around it in all its journeys, before the judges and in the last hour in prison. This *I* lived continually in the relation with man which is bodied forth in the

dialogue. It never ceased to believe in the reality of men, and went out to meet them (Buber 1958, 66).

Socrates' way of philosophizing is interpreted as being in line with Buber's idea that philosophy should contribute to curtailing the ever increasing dominance of the world of *It*.³ Socrates' immense impact on western thinking has perpetuated his dialogical legacy and has drawn the attention of numerous thinkers to this key role of philosophy: "This is the sound through the ages of the 'sufficient, true, and pure' saying of the *I* by those persons who, like Socrates...are bound up in relation" (Buber 1958, 66).

Socrates is depicted in a similar fashion in Buber's lecture *Monologisches und dialogisches Leben* which he delivered on June 13, 1928 in Zurich. Here he introduces an intriguing opposition between Socrates and Epictetus with the former standing for a dialogical and the latter for a monological philosophical paradigm. Buber describes Platonic dialogues as real dialogues insisting that Socrates is interested in the concrete persons with whom he conducts his conversations. He does not use his dialogue partners for his own purposes or treat them as mere representatives of opinions and worldviews. By contrast, Epictetus' dialogues are "completely fictitious," his counterparts are invented and no real *Thou* is present (Buber 2019a, 337). Buber considers Epictetus an influential promoter of the notion of monologue: he teaches his readers how to talk to themselves. This monological line of Stoic philosophy reaches its peak in Marcus Aurelius, who even composes monologues of Socrates (Buber 2019a, 337).

Buber points to the dialogical dimension of Socrates' personality and philosophy also in his discussion of the (pseudo-)Platonic work *Theages*. He deals with this work in his lecture *Volk und Führer* which he gave in 1940 at the Beth Israel Synagogue in Jerusalem. This was two years after he had immigrated to Mandatory Palestine. He focuses on a scene from *Theages* in which a father brings his son to Socrates to become his pupil. The young man

³ Maurice Friedman argues in connection with Buber's presentation of Socrates in *Ich und Du* that "Socrates is not...an adequate image of the life of dialogue." Friedman points to Socrates' excessive emphasis on dialectic and asserts that it is "a moving forward through the opposition and interaction of different points of view, rather than an interaction between really other persons" (Friedman 1996, 19). I consider this criticism to be more in line with Buber's later view of Socrates, although even then he describes Socrates' relations to his disciples as "genuinely personal," as I will show below. I agree with Laurence J. Silberstein who in connection with *Ich und Du* claims that "[i]n Socrates Buber saw the epitome of relation as it pertains to human conversation...Socrates personified the I-You mode of being" (Silberstein 1989, 132).

makes a bold statement that is clearly at odds with dialogical principles: "Each of us would like to be lord of all men, if possible, and, best of all, God!" (Buber 1957, 160). Buber highlights the way in which Socrates responds to his counterpart, attempting to correct his arrogance. Instead of contradicting him directly, he draws his attention to the great Greek leaders Themistocles and Pericles, whose approach to others differed markedly from the one suggested by the young man. Neither of them "could be rightly represented as wanting to become lord of all men, much less God" (Buber 1957, 160).⁴ Socrates rejects the view which presents others as mere means to one's selfish ends, proposing instead a vision of dialogical synergy. For Buber, the scene from *Theages* is highly topical, as the contemporary ideologies of Fascism and Nazism attribute to their leaders almost divine status.

Socrates' dialogical orientation comes up also in the later work *Das Wort, das gesprochen wird* which was published in 1960. In this lecture Buber criticizes philosophers associated with the existential tradition for abandoning the dialogical vision of philosophy promoted by Socrates and opting for unproductive monologism. He maintains that "[m]any modern – and that means often de-Socratizing – philosophers have fallen, with the totality of their thought world, into a monologizing hubris" (Buber 1965, 113). This is a veiled attack especially against Heidegger, whom Buber earlier described as an epitome of modern philosophical monologism (Buber 2002b, 199).

II. Problematic Aspects of Socrates' Doctrine

In his essay "Nachahmung Gottes," which was published in the Jewish monthly *Der Morgen* in 1926, Buber discusses a Socratic doctrine which appears repeatedly in his writings. This doctrine – which he introduces in different variants – says that the knowledge of the good prompts one to do good. In the essay Buber brings up the doctrine when discussing the notion of the imitation of God claiming that according to Socrates one ought to become just and pious through right knowledge. This is how Socrates conceives of human imitation of God (Buber 1948b, 66). Buber integrates his observations about Socrates into a broader reflection in which he contrasts Greek theories and practices of the imitation of God to Jewish ones. While he ultimately considers the latter more appropriate, he does not explicitly criticize Socrates.

Buber returns to the Socratic doctrine in a speech delivered at the *Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt which was subsequently published in *Jüdische Rundschau*

⁴ For more details on Socrates "avoiding the corruption of power," see Breslauer (2019, 82 – 86).

in 1934. In this text, entitled "Die Lehre und die Tat," he continues his comparative reflections on Socrates' thought and biblical Judaism. He examines the relation between doctrine and action, or put existentially: between what one learns and what one does. He contrasts *the Socratic man* to *the Mosaic man*, expressing his preference for the latter's approach: "The Socratic man believes that all virtue is insight, and that knowledge of what is right is sufficient to do it. Not so the Mosaic man. He has the profound experience that no knowledge is sufficient...that his elemental wholeness...must surrender to the spirit in order for actualization to occur" (Buber 2005a, 260). Here, Socrates' teaching that the knowledge of the good prompts one to do good is found to be lacking. Instead of relying on the power of knowledge – from which action would *ipso facto* follow – Buber highlights the wisdom of the Torah which places parallel emphases on learning and doing.

The third instance in which Buber tackles the same doctrine appears in his essay "Weisheiten aus China" which was originally published in Hebrew in 1944. The subject of his scrutiny is an ancient story, in which Confucius is asked what should be the first step of a state reform. Confucius replies that the very first step should be the correction of inadequate designations. Buber agrees that as long as things are not called by their proper names, no real reform can take place. In this context he mentions Socrates and points to his doctrine that "whoever knows what is good also tends to do good, since right thinking produces right action." He calls it "a sublime misunderstanding" acknowledging Socrates' good intention but dismissing his overly optimistic view of the role of knowledge (Buber 2013b, 292). He considers Confucius' approach to state affairs more practical and realistic.

An ambiguous picture of Socrates appears in Buber's article "Falsche Propheten" from 1940. Here again he avails himself of Socrates when dealing with Jewish spirituality. He is concerned with the issue of false prophets, exploring particularly the dispute between the Old Testament prophets Jeremiah and Hananiah. The prophecy of the latter, predicting the end of the Babylonian captivity of the Jewish people, turned out to be false. Jeremiah's prophecy was much darker but truthfully communicated God's message to his people. Buber sees the difference between the two prophets in their approach to listening. Hananiah relies on his own judgement, believing his situation to be akin to that of the prophet Isaiah, thus formulating his prophecy along the same lines as Isaiah did. This turns out to be a mistake, since the situation has changed dramatically. Jeremiah knows this and therefore listens patiently,

waiting for God to speak to him. Buber finds similarity as well as dissimilarity between Jeremiah and Socrates:

One must go one's way and listen all over again. There were things Jeremiah did not know, and knew that he did not know. Socrates has told something similar about himself. But Jeremiah differed from Socrates in that he realized that from time to time he could learn something new. Socrates too – so he tells us – occasionally heard the voice of Daimonion, but it always told him only what he was not to do. The voice which instructed Jeremiah told him what he was to do and say (Buber 1948a, 114).

Thus, both Jeremiah and Socrates go their ways and listen. They are not like false prophets who present their spontaneous impulses as God's messages. But the voice talking to Jeremiah has more to say than the one talking to Socrates. The message of the first one is positive and constructive, while the message of the other is purely negative.

There is yet another instance in Buber's work in which a comparison ends up not being in Socrates' favor. This time Buber compares him to Kierkegaard when elaborating on the notion of the single individual. Buber acknowledges that both philosophers address the single individual and attempt to distance him from the crowd which prevents him from being himself. Both identify a religious element in the single individual's quest for authentic existence. Socrates suggests that the divine provides him with special signs. According to Buber, Kierkegaard's idea of the single individual's communication with God is more complex and more similar to that of Abraham than Socrates (Buber 2002a, 48 – 50). In line with what Buber claims about Jeremiah, he insists that the Jewish or Christian individual stands alone before God, who takes into account his will and decisions. Positive mutual exchange of words and thoughts is possible.⁵ In this sense, Kierkegaard's concept of the single individual's communication with God is more interactive than the one proposed by Socrates.

Against this background Buber explains that Kierkegaard and Socrates understand the process of becoming differently, as they associate it with different goals: "Kierkegaard's 'to become a Single One' is, as we have seen, not meant Socratically. The goal of this becoming is not the 'right' life, but the entry into a relation" (Buber 2002a, 58). Thus, Kierkegaard's concept of becoming is more relational, as it presupposes a connection with another. It is a *becoming for something*, which cannot be fulfilled by simply relating to oneself.

⁵ The notions of mutuality and responsibility in Buber have been elaborated in depth by Michal Bizoň (2017 and 2023).

This moment of transcendence leads the single individual to an exclusive relation with the divine *Thou*, who gives ultimate meaning to his existence. According to Buber, the Socratic becoming lacks a comparable emphasis on dialogical relationality.

III. Buber's Main Focus: Socrates and Education

The area in which Buber deals with Socrates' philosophical legacy in most detail is that of education. He highlights a number of positive aspects of Socrates' theory and practice of education, while also taking great pains to distance himself from what he considers the shortcomings of the Socratic way of educating others.

During a 1959 speech at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem Buber referred to "the great tradition of education" mentioning four foundational figures: Confucius, Socrates, Comenius and Pestalozzi. He suggests that these educators distinguished themselves by bringing "eternal values" to their students (Buber 2019b, 465). These are values that transcend individual groups or nations, connect humankind and persist throughout history. The aim of the great educators was to lead by example, showing to students their own faith in these values. By loving and enacting the values the educators enthused their students to follow suit. In this context, Buber emphasizes Socrates' close relation to his pupils, which he mentions also in "Antwort," where he claims that these relations were "genuinely personal" (Buber 1967b, 696). Socrates' paramount importance for the history of education is underlined also in "Erwachsenenerziehung," where Buber calls Socrates "the father of adult education in the West" (Buber 2005c, 372).

Buber identifies three crucial contributions of Socrates to the field of education. First, Socrates based his education on the principle of "the cultivation of intellectual spontaneity" (Buber 2005c, 374). While this was not Socrates' invention, his merit lies in making the principle central to his dialogues and thus popularizing it significantly. Buber traces the principle all the way to Confucius and associates it with societies which recognized the importance of the individual's contribution to public life. He sees, however, a considerable difference in how the principle was applied by the two great educators. Denoting Confucius' approach as static, he points out that he used to gather his students in a circle and instruct them in traditional wisdom contained in poetry, rites and history. Socrates, on the contrary, was a dynamic educator, searching for pupils in diverse environments and refusing to present a unified corpus of doctrine (Buber 2005c, 373 – 374).

Second, Socrates strongly emphasized in his teaching the need for clarification of concepts. Again, this is something that he has in common with his eastern predecessor Confucius. At the root of Socrates' efforts was the conviction that the being of humans can be perfected by the improvement of their knowledge. Conceptual clarity enables one to grasp the truth, and thus helps him to advance on the path of moral formation (Buber 2005b, 357; Buber 2005c, 372). While Buber agrees that clarification of concepts is necessary for the clarification of human realities, he adds that simultaneously the function of concepts must be critically examined (Buber 1970, 67).

Third, Socrates' most decisive impact was not produced by what he taught, but by his way of teaching and his personality (Buber 2005b, 350). Buber appreciates the fact that Socrates taught first and foremost "a way," not "knowledge" (Buber 2013a, 190). This is in line with Buber's conviction that a good teacher focuses not just on instruction, which develops the student's thinking, but also on education, which affects his whole existence. Thus, an existentially oriented teacher teaches also outside the official framework of instruction, his entire presence is formative for his students.

While Buber acknowledged Socrates' substantial contribution in the area of adult education, he was critical of a number of aspects of Socrates' approach to education. His first point of criticism concerns Socrates' emphasis on clarification of concepts. While the emphasis itself is correct, Buber believes that Socrates does not pay sufficient attention to the subjective dimension of communication in the process of education:

Socrates overvalued the significance of abstract general concepts in comparison with concrete individual experiences. General concepts are the most important stays and supports, but Socrates treated them as if they were more important than bones – that they are not (Buber 1970, 67).

Buber's main criticism is directed against the use of the Socratic method in the educational process. In several of his writings he deals with Socratic questions and shows why they are at odds with the ideal of modern dialogical teaching that he promotes.

In "Erwachsenenbildung" (1950) Buber distinguishes three kinds of questions that are to be used in adult education generally, and more specifically in the *Lehrhaus* in which he teaches. The first kind are questions of examination, by means of which the teacher ascertains what the students know. The second kind are Socratic questions which make the students realize that they lack true knowledge. And the third kind are completely genuine questions which enable the teacher to

gain new knowledge about the experiences and opinions of his students (Buber 2005b, 356–357). Buber is most concerned with the third kind, since such questions do not seem to be sufficiently present in institutional education.

In “*Erwachsenenerziehung*” (1961) Buber mentions the same kinds of questions, but this time his verdict on their use is different. He emphasizes the fact that in contemporary adult education the teacher needs to prevent any semblance of superiority. Thus, he should avoid questions of examination, since these simply focus on memorized knowledge without reference to the students’ lived experience. He should also avoid Socratic questions, which lead to answers that “ultimately prove to be unfounded and only serve to encourage further questioning and research” (Buber 2005c, 381). He should only ask questions which prompt the students to answer in a personal way and on the basis of their own reflection. Moreover, the teacher should ask as someone who is himself in the process of learning and should welcome unexpected and surprising elements in the students’ answers.

Buber’s criticism of the Socratic method grows even stronger in *Philosophical Interrogations* (1970). Here he places the second and the third kind of questions in opposition:

Socrates conducts his dialogue by posing questions and proving the answers that he received untenable; these are not real questions; they are moves in a sublime dialectical game that has a goal, the goal of revealing a not-knowing. But when the teacher whom I mean (apart from the questions he must ask in examinations) enters into a dialogue with his pupil and in this connection directs a question to him, he asks, as the simple man who is not inclined to dialectic asks (Buber 1970, 67).

In this reflection Buber acknowledges the legitimacy of the first and the third kind of questions which he introduced in “*Erwachsenenbildung*.” He problematizes only Socratic questions to which he attributes a tactical character that is undesirable in modern dialogical education.⁶ When pondering on the characteristics of a dialogical teacher he insists that he needs to focus on the student’s experience. He should help the student gain a deeper insight into his experiences, describe and communicate them, thus achieving a greater “clarity of existence” (Buber 1970, 68). At the same time, the educational process must not remain one-sided. It provides the dialogical teacher with an opportunity to

⁶ Kenneth Paul Kramer notes that for Buber genuine dialogue with a student “does not embody trying to obtain a prior goal but remains open to the possibility of a change of viewpoints occurring on each side” (Kramer – Gawlick 2003, 122 – 123).

witness and learn from the student's development as a human being. In this way, the teacher "learns what no man ever learns completely, the particular, the individual, the unique" (Buber 1970, 68). To be sure, there remains a degree of asymmetry between the teacher and the student, but there is also reciprocity and genuine dialogue.

Buber's complaint that Socrates approaches his pupils as a trained dialectician with a particular tactic echoes in another late text: in the note "Über Leo Schestow" from 1964. Here Buber claims that when educating others, Socrates "knows the right answer and at first 'ironically' withholds it from his partner in dialogue" (Buber 1967a, 60). This is not in line with the approach of the modern dialogical teacher, who asks plainly and transparently, without tactically steering the course of the conversation. Buber's vision of dialogical education diverges from what he considers to be Socrates' dialectical vision.

Conclusion

While there are some references to Socrates in Buber's pre-dialogical oeuvre, the vast majority of references stems from his dialogical authorship. There is no work dedicated specifically to Socrates, but his philosophy is discussed in more than thirty texts. In a few works there are longer passages dedicated to Socrates, but a large number of references are *membra disiecta*: brief mentions without further systematic elaboration. There are three areas which seem particularly important to Buber, when dealing with Socrates.

First, Buber considers Socrates an important ally in his development of the dialogical project. In his magnum opus *Ich und Du* Buber mentions only few thinkers by name, but Socrates is among them. He is presented as a man of endless dialogue, a kindred spirit, who promoted the dialogical approach at the dawn of western philosophy. His dialogical contribution to the history of philosophy is highly appreciated. As we have seen, Buber points to Socrates as an ally also in his campaign against philosophical monologism, both ancient and modern. Buber's attack against the Stoics makes use of an opposition in which Socrates and Plato are contrasted to Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. Monological paradigms appear throughout the history of philosophy and in Buber's time the best known one is represented by Heidegger. Buber describes him as a de-Socratized philosopher, who lost the sense of the importance of dialogical relationality. While Buber exalts Socrates' contribution in the confrontation with his philosophical rivals, in other instances he insists that Socrates does not always live up to the ideals of modern dialogical philosophy.

Second, when taking a close look at Socrates as a person and a thinker, Buber notices a lack of emphasis on some issues that are crucial to him. In particular, he points to a lack of existential emphasis as well as a lack of relational emphasis. The former manifests itself in Socrates' preoccupation with epistemological processes in which he fails to take into account the practical side of things in a sufficient measure. Socrates highlights the power of knowledge and its role in shaping our actions, but his unbalanced focus on knowledge devalues the sphere of action, which appears to be largely derivative. Similarly, Socrates is intensely preoccupied with abstract general concepts and their impact on our lives. But the sphere of individual experience, in which existential formation takes place, is not adequately considered. It appears obscure and inferior to the sphere of general concepts, from which clarity originates.

Socrates' lack of relational emphasis can be seen in his concept of becoming. The goal of this process is right life without a specific regard for otherness. From the point of view of modern dialogical philosophy this is an obvious omission, as becoming necessarily reflects our interconnectedness with others. Even Kierkegaard – whose notion of relationality Buber sharply criticized – is seen as having a better understanding of this fact than Socrates. Here, we can see a tension in Buber's interpretation of Socrates as a dialogical figure and simultaneously as someone who does not always think according to basic tenets of dialogical philosophy. Socrates' lacking notion of relationality is, from Buber's perspective, even more obvious in the area of religion. While Socrates is depicted as a genuinely religious person, his relation to transcendence is marked by negativity and passivity. His communication with transcendence is limited to receiving warnings and signs. To Buber, this is in clear contrast to Jewish and Christian dialogical views of human relationship with God. According to these views, one can approach God as a person, share with God one's life, thank and ask, give and receive. The relation is mutual and interactive. Socrates' view of one's relation to transcendence lacks these dynamics.

Third, Buber sees Socrates as a towering figure in the history of education but struggles with his relevance for modern dialogical education. He is particularly concerned about the role of Socratic questions in an education which focuses on a dialogical relation between the teacher and the student. An increasing aversion to Socratic questions can be detected in his reflections. At first he considers these questions to be an integral part of the educational process, but later associates them with the teacher's superiority or even with the teacher's tactical dialectical game. The Socratic method is thus at odds with

the spontaneous character of dialogical education which concentrates on the students' subjective experiences and opinions. This criticism does not mean, however, that Buber completely abandons his view of Socrates as a dialogical thinker. In his works from the 1960s we encounter not only the aforementioned critiques but also his insistence that Socrates' relations to his students were genuinely personal. Thus, his late view of Socrates is ambivalent and nuanced.

Overall, we can say that Buber retained his view from the early 1920s that Socrates was a key precursor to dialogical philosophy. Nonetheless, he also continued to discuss the points of divergence between Socrates' views and approaches and those of dialogical philosophy. He identified several lacunae in Socrates' doctrine and strengthened his conviction that the Socratic method was incompatible with the ideal of modern dialogical education.

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