<u>"True Dialogue in an Era of Synthetic Conversation: Religious Knowledge and Artificial Intelligence"</u>

Thank you very much. First of all, I wish to thank you for this wonderful conference and wonderful environment, and for inviting me to be part of it. I know people will talk about my coming here. I know this is true for me and of course for the organizers of these sessions and the academic part of this conference. Special thanks to the office of Frank Kaufmann for organizing this, and to Dr. Louise Hirschfeld for making it possible for me to arrive here. As you can tell, I'm not an expert in Rev. Moon's theology — I'm just an apprentice!

My title today is "True Dialogue in an Era of Synthetic Conversation." I want to talk about a story from the perspective of Martin Buber [the Austrian-Jewish "philosopher of dialogue" (1878-1965)].

Recently people have been thinking about spiritual knowledge and how it interfaces with artificial intelligence. From time to time I seem to hear a question echoing out of the depth of stillness. But the one asks it does not know that he is asking it, and he to whom the question is addressed is not aware that he is being questioned either. It is the question that the world of today in self-unawareness poses to religion. This is the question: "How do we remain human in circumstances where dehumanizing technology and social systems threaten our very humanity?" Perhaps the Power that created us can help me — can you? Religion teaches me to believe my humanity is a sacrosanct realm. For Martin Buber this is "the silent question" which he wrote right after the Second World War.

There is a certain Scriptural passage from Genesis we constantly refer to. This is very famous, of course: "In the image of God created He *them*..." Note that the Torah does not say "him." In this paper I would like to reevaluate the question of ethics and humanity through Buber's "The essence of human being." My aim is to ponder the humanity of human being in this age of artificial intelligence. I wish to consider the possibility of authentic conversation that we can truly call "dialogue" at this present time which I call "the era of synthetic conversation."

In more than one aspect these kinds of questions and this ethical context may rephrase the world of religion in general and Judaism in particular, as we confront the problems of technology in our time. For Buber, dealing with the problem of humanity in modernity was the essence of his calling. His main task in all his philosophy was to establish the way which he called "*A Believing Humanism*." As a Jewish thinker and Zionist, he pointed out in his works that the problematic task of Zionism was not political at all, but rather to construct a way of Hebrew humanism.

I would like to draw your attention to three domains of discussions, crucial and important, each of which requires us to think deeply about religion from a religious and an ethical perspective. The first discussion is the crisis of human being, which requires us to ask ourselves about the meaning of humanity in time of crisis: "What will happen to men in the age of artificial intelligence? Is there a way to remain human, an authentic human being, in an era when most of our life is surrounded by such a mechanized and electronically empowered environment?"

The second discussion touches the question and the options to continue dialogue in our time: "Is it possible to have direct and sincere conversation between people in our time?" — a time when there are screens, cellular phones, electronic surroundings, and algorithms that can guess what we are going to say.

The third topic for discussion is the ethical one — what I call the moral subject from a philosophical perspective: "Whether and how we should relate to the new artificially intelligent beings?" Ought we relate to them as ethical subjects? For example, do we have to regard robots as moral subjects? Of course, there are legal questions concerning these new developments, but I wish to focus on the basis, the ethical mode of thinking.

There are three domains of questions. The first is between one and himself, the second is between one and the other, and the third one is between one and the AI. Let's say I am the robot. By looking at your faces I can tell that

the third one is not very familiar to you, but it's important from an ethical point of view. Of course, these discussions are not separate but related to one another. In any case I would like to distinguish between these three topics.

The first one comes from the midst of crisis. Here I want to quote from Buber, from immediately after the Second World War. For the past three decades we have felt that we are living in the initial phases of the greatest crisis the world has ever known. It grows clear to us that the tremendous events of recent years can be understood only as symptoms of this crisis. It is not merely a crisis brought about by one economic and social system being suppressed by another more or less ready to take its place; rather, all world systems are freshly, newly and equally involved in this crisis. The question, thus, is nothing less than the very existence of all people in the world.

Before I launch into this discussion, may I say that for Buber politics concerns not merely problems the public is talking about; this is just the result of the problem. The crisis is the human being. What we see happening in geopolitics, politics, and between religions is just the result of human crisis. The cause is not political or something. Buber proclaims in precise wording and difficult language about the meaning of this crisis, the crisis of human being in our world during the 20th century. This was the period of atomic bombs, genocide, and the Holocaust.

But this was not the first time for us to talk about human crisis. It began with the opening of the 20th century. Here I may drop a problematic note: "The basis for him was the desire for the one, the passion for unifying existence, the search for what is common to the whole." But this is not enough: we must start by asking ourselves not about "unifying", "unity", "whole", "globalization"; rather, we have to deeply inquire, "What is the meaning of these words?" In well articulated terms, Buber is worried for the sake of the humanity of human being. He analyzes the problem of humanity, and his deep understanding of this crisis is based on alienation between people, between one another, between man and man, between humans and nature, and between human beings and divine entities.

According to Buber, the greatest difficulty of the modern age is this crisis — the alienation of human being. Generally, we think of "alienation" in terms of one in front of the other person; but there is also alienation between one and himself. At the fringes of alienation there is a distance between people. It's as if a tree has fallen smack in the most intimate relations between people in our age of alienation. A human being cannot be secure and safe in his life, and the result of such feelings is that he could lose his ability to live in the deeper sense of the word "living."

In Buber's magnum opus [great work] *Zwei Glaubensweisen* [*Two Ways of Faith*], to interpret phrases clearly, there is a change in the meaning of "subjectivity" in our time hinging on the meaning of "subjectivity of the subject." We distinguish two kinds of subjectivity, according to which kind of "I" we put forward when one man relates to an object and when one man relates to a subject.

For Buber the fundamental distinction is that of relation in terms of distance and relations in terms of motive. He called it "I and Thou," or in German "ich und du." In man-to-man relations, the terminology is twofold reflecting our twofold attitude. The attitude of a person is twofold corresponding to the twofold nature of the primary word: this the combination "I and Thou"; the other primary combination is "I and it." Without changing the primary word, one of the words "he" or "she" can be replaced with "it." You can relate to the other person as an object or a need, even in polite exchange. Between humans and robots or AI, which we have not analyzed sufficiently, probably the important point is the meaning of "I" according to whether you relate to the other as "I and thou" or "I and it."

We must read this section carefully, because the meaning of "I" has changed. The question is "How will I relate to the other person? Do I relate to nature as I relate to the divine?" We must ask the question, "What will build up the relation to the other as a person?" Or rather we should ask ourselves, "What is the meaning of subjectivity in dealing with AI?" Now there are technical mechanisms, artificial intelligence, and animated creatures. According to Buber the whole meaning of subjectivity completely changes based on the meaning of "I love my self" in this time of artificial intelligence. According to this fundamental distinction there is no option for genuine dialogue with AI;

instead I have to observe myself to seek any option for "I and you" dialogue between people in the first place, because of what has happened to the subject in this age of new technology.

Now we arrive at the second point for discussion: "Is there an option for dialogue?" I know that we are in a conference where dialogue is most important, so I question the meaning of such dialogue. You already know the technique of wonderful rhetorical manipulation and professional speaking. There are different ways to describe formal-style conversation. We cannot relate to the other person in real debate dialogue if we commit a faux pas.

So as we encounter the new technology in the age of AI, when you engage in a chat with virtual assistants, you don't know if there is a human assistant behind this set, or it is just a virtual assistant that you're talking with. This is just one example where we must question whether true, authentic dialogue is occurring.

I wish to return to the question of whether we can hold dialogue in our age, or truly talk about things. It's an urgent question we must deal with. The reason for the absence of mature dialogue between people may be consumer values and the lack of humanity in the classical humanistic sense. In a simple face-to-face meeting, there is confusion as to what constitutes genuine conversation. Is there any option to carry on real conversation?

Let us look at conversation in terms of how we would describe it. Let's say we are discussing the meaning of food. We enter dialogue and carry on a wide range of different conversations, where the rule is that we are not to hold real dialogue, but only conversation technically conducted so as to look like conversation, but something is missing. The grand rhetoric is just one way to construct a dialogue that is false.

Usually people are preoccupied with shielding themselves from the view of the other, avoiding genuine dialogue. We call it conversation, and while it is presented in the semblance of conversation, each person is constantly asking himself, "Am I really loved by this other person?" all the while taking into account all the context and details of the conversation. Sometimes it's more complicated when this man responds to the other person, taking all this into account along the way. But after all, his inward question is answered when he is accepted by the other person.

For Buber, in true dialogue one must open himself to the other person, staying in a mode of being exposed before the other or taking the role of being exposed. We suppose we are conversing between "I and the other." This is the basic assumption in normal dialogue where you share with another. This becomes impossible if one claims the role of parent; each is a person; only in that mode can we carry on authentic dialogue with sincerity.

Buber holds that people no longer engage in authentic dialogue with one another. This one of the most poignant symptoms of the pathology of our era. I expect this will emerge as that which makes the most urgent demand of us. Regardless of the environment, all people at this time can engage in genuine dialogue with each other, where each partner takes the position to confirm their counterpart or even opponent as an existential other.

Now we move to the third question. It's a bit strange in this setting, yet I wish to address this very important and perhaps most crucial question, which I only raise now. It concerns the question of how we regard artificial creatures and AI. Do we grant them status as moral beings with ethical imperative and moral obligation? In culture and philosophy this must apply to any entity with whom we relate. Thus the question: "In what relation are we committed to AI and artificial devices? What are our ethical obligations to this new type of creation, and what are theirs, in an age when there are intelligent beings not possessing the qualification of being fully human?"

We can regard AI as an extension of human will, and use Husserl's phenomenological method to analyze this. As armor is an extension of the skin, AI is an extension of the mind. We must ask, "When human beings like you and me possess new technology in our own bodies, what will be the status and significance of such extensions?"

I will make a small detour before undertaking to answer the question, to add a broader perspective for the sake of our discussion, mobilizing the tools and ideas we need to evaluate the issue.

"What is the place of religious concepts in this context?" Perhaps I need to articulate this question in terms of

the difference in the connection between three domains — ethics, religion, and technology.

I began my talk posing the question about the world. Buddhism is a religion with the facility to assist humanity. Religious thought can teach us to believe in human being in this age of artificial intelligence. Buber's most important task in his life was to address the question of humanity. To treat the human being in this time of crisis of humanity, we must rebuild the lexicon. "What is the meaning of being human in our life?"

We'll take the approach of the positive discourses of humanism, religion, and philosophy. At the end of each person's life this question will be asked. What can I present to characterize my own basic view and concept? It can only be the concept of the believing humanist, Martin Buber. He describes himself in 1963, two years before his death, upon receiving the Erasmus prize in Amsterdam. To summarize his entire concept of dialogue, let us take a look at the Buber's concept of believing humanism? I maintain that Buber brings his course of creative endeavor in full circle since he first took up the quest of "Biblical humanism" over 60 years earlier. Later it was called "Hebrew humanism" and since the end of life we began calling it "believing humanism."

Now I would like to approach my conclusion. Perhaps rather than a conclusion I wish to present these two kinds of humanism from the history of attempts to define the meaning of "to be human." What is the medical meaning of being human? Such an assay can best be achieved through literary activity, identifying what constitutes the classic humanist conception. This humanist culture has reshaped the concept of humanism and has planted our educational system in the soil of humanism.

Buber said, "Humanism is expressed in the face of a human being." Once AI appears, the meaning of "human" is up for debate. The face is rhetorically seductive, but this calls for reflection. We envision potentially problematic implications of this idea, and wonder how this concept applies to AI. The face is where a man becomes human. The face is not merely a biological feature to be classified as "human"; the face conveys one's title as a human being.

The significance of this attitude is that man is required to recognize and take into account that the achievements of humanism are not guaranteed; we may find ourselves sliding into a zone of inhumanity. If at such a time the danger looms that humanity will slip into the zone of inhumanity, then we must return by resorting to an earlier age when the human element of humanity was clear, in order to find the original driving force within myself. Through humanism we endeavor to renew the concept of humanity while in the shadow of the threat of losing it. Talking about humanism is not merely innocent and pretty speech as we are often tempted to think. Rather it stands in the looming shadow of the loss and the absence of humanism, and even emerges out of the struggle with its actual absence. We achieve the goal of humanism by talking with real persons! Thank you.

[Music]

Think back on the musician we listened to. This is not merely returning to the past; it serves to generate an image and normative value of the human *qua* human. The foregoing discussion enables us to understand the meaning of our project. Buber points us back to the Bible. The reason for this course is that romantic experiment of returning to the God of the glorious past, returning to the Jewish land and state. The Jewish people recognize this attempt to study the Bible. People are either friendly to the national historical perspective or view the issue in terms of ethics and identity with the normative values of the Bible. The essence of the biblical ethic is dialogue. With these words I end my talk. We stand at risk of losing our humanity in the age of AI. If the risk was great in the age of technology, then it becomes much riskier in the age of thought algorithms. With the ability that artificial intelligence possesses, with what can your "I" be preserved? Humanism and humanity in a non-human era is the special status which the Bible confers. The Bible calls us to ethical human being, and for man, both individual and public, illimitable humanism is internal to the life of dialogue. Thank you!