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The Journal of Dialogue Studies is a multidisciplinary, peer-reviewed academic journal published twice a year. Its aim is to study the theory and practice of dialogue, understood provisionally as: *meaningful interaction and exchange between people (often of different social, cultural, political, religious or professional groups) who come together through various kinds of conversations or activities with a view to increased understanding.* The Journal is published by the Institute for Dialogue Studies, the academic platform of the Dialogue Society.

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The Dialogue Society is a registered charity, established in London in 1999, with the aim of advancing social cohesion by connecting communities, empowering people to engage and contributing to the development of ideas on dialogue. It operates nation-wide with regional branches across the UK. Through discussion forums, courses, capacity building publications and outreach it enables people to venture across boundaries of religion, culture and social class. It provides a platform where people can meet to share narratives and perspectives, discover the values they have in common and be at ease with their differences.

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The Dalai Lama's Dialogues

Stephen J. Laumakis

The purpose of this paper is to construct and critique the Dalai Lama's conception and practices related to dialogue. I shall attempt to construct his 'theory' by simultaneously looking at both his practice and his writings. I will then offer a critique of his views. I hope to be able to show that His Holiness offers a profound understanding of dialogue—which, if put into practice, offers a number of fruitful consequences.

The central thesis of this paper is that one of the best ways to understand and make sense of the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue is to see his beliefs and practices as particular instantiations of broader Buddhist teachings. In other words, one way of thinking about the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue is to see his practices as instances of some basic Buddhist beliefs. Without going into an exhaustive account of these various beliefs, I want to suggest that four of them, in particular, are useful for understanding His Holiness's approach to dialogue. The four are: meditative practice, interdependent arising, compassion, and expedient or skillful means.

Key words: Dalai Lama, dialogue, meditation, interdependent arising (*pratīca-samuppāda*), compassion, skillful means (*upāya*)

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to construct and critique the Dalai Lama's conception and practices related to dialogue.¹ This is a worthwhile exercise not only because of the international influence of the Dalai Lama as a religious leader, but also because his beliefs and practices compel serious consideration in themselves (because of their sophistication and practicality), to say nothing of their truth and benefits.

Nevertheless, such a project is fraught with serious potential pitfalls, including, misconstruing the Dalai Lama's understanding, his practices, or both, and the very real possibility of merely characterising his views in a superficial way, because he does not offer a complete, self-contained discussion of the nature, purpose, and

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- 1 For my purposes I shall understand 'dialogue' to refer to 'meaningful interaction and exchange between people of different groups (social, cultural, political and religious) who come together through various kinds of conversations or activities with a view to increased understanding.' This is the provisional understanding specified by the *Journal of Dialogue Studies*.

goals of engaging in dialogue in any of his numerous publications. Furthermore, one must always keep in mind both the form and content differences among the various writings and teachings of His Holiness, as well as the differences among the various audiences to whom his messages are addressed. In short, one must be aware that the Dalai Lama does not speak the same way to every audience.

In order to mitigate these potential problems, I shall attempt to construct the Dalai Lama's 'theory' by simultaneously looking at both his practice (what he does) and his writings (what he says and teaches) in order to assess their coherence and consistency. I will then offer a critique of his views. I hope to be able to show that the Dalai Lama offers a profound understanding of dialogue which if put into practice offers a number of fruitful consequences.

The Central Thesis: the Dalai Lama and the Buddha

The central thesis of this paper is that one of the best ways to understand and make sense of the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue is to see his beliefs and practices as particular instantiations of broader Buddhist teachings. In other words, one way of thinking about the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue is to see his practices as instances of some basic Buddhist beliefs. Without going into an exhaustive account of these various beliefs, I want to suggest that four of them, in particular, are useful for understanding the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue. The four are: meditative practice, interdependent arising, compassion, and expedient or skillful means.

Meditative Practice

I have argued elsewhere (Laumakis 2008) that the single most important or most basic insight of the historical Buddha is the claim that who we are, and what we think exists, is a function of our mind and its cognitive powers. In other words, it is our mind and our various uses of it that determine how we see and understand our self, the world, and other things. Let me propose an analogy in order to help clarify what I take the Buddha to be claiming.

In the same way that I can maintain, shape, and transform my physical body through a proper diet and a serious weight-training and exercise program, I also can maintain, shape, transform, and indeed strengthen, improve, and perfect my mind by meditative practices and exercises. It is precisely this insight and power that the Buddha himself is said to have experienced and exercised under the Bodhi tree. In fact, it was Siddhattha Gotama's experiences with his first teachers, Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta, and their yogic meditative practices, that formed the foundation of both his enlightenment experience and his own understanding of the value of meditative practices.

It is not surprising that the Dalai Lama is firmly committed to this same belief and begins every day with two hours of prayer, meditations, and prostrations. He also ends each day with prayers and meditations, and has spoken on numerous occasions and written extensively about the value and power of meditation (Gyatso 2001a; 2000; 1999a; 1991a; 1984). In fact, one of his most recent books, *The Mind's Own Physician: A Scientific Dialogue with the Dalai Lama on the Healing Power of Meditation* (2011), is a perfect piece of evidence and example of his commitment to both the value of meditative practice and the importance of dialogue. There is no doubt that the Dalai Lama's beliefs and practices in this regard can be traced all the way back to the earliest teachings of the historical Buddha.

Interdependent Arising

The second basic Buddhist belief that provides the background for understanding the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue is the Buddha's account of causation. Without going into all of the details of this rather complex teaching, the simplest formulation of *paticca-samuppada* or 'interdependent arising' (which may be found in the *Nidanavagga*, or the *Book of Causation*, in Part II of the *Samyutta Nikaya*) says: 'Thus when this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.' (Bodhi 2000, 533-620)

Historically, the Buddhist tradition has generally interpreted the Buddha's teaching on 'interdependent arising' in one of two ways. First, it is considered to be an account of causation or the process by which 'things' come to be, exist, and change. Second, it is a claim about the ongoing ontological status of all beings, all phenomena, and all 'things' that exist, whether these 'things' and phenomena are beings of the mind or beings of the world. The former view, typically associated with the early Theravada tradition, tends to focus on the metaphysics of being and becoming, or more generally, the relationship of causes and effects, especially with respect to the generation and corruption of particular beings, i.e., human beings. The latter view, which is common among various Mahayana Buddhist traditions, focuses more broadly on the continuing existence, from moment to moment, of the entire network of extra-mental beings and mental phenomena as well.

The Dalai Lama is part of this latter tradition, and as a result, his teachings tend to focus very broadly on how 'things' and mental phenomena arise 'interdependently' or, more technically, how our interactions with 'things' (as well as our subjective reactions to them) arise out of causes and conditions that do not exist as 'independent agents' or discreet, particular substances, but as nodes in a fishnet lattice of dynamic happenings or events. This rather rich conception of causation also helps explain the Dalai Lama's ongoing dialogues with various constituencies (i.e., religious leaders,

scientists, political leaders, and common folks²), because he is firmly committed to the view that all such efforts will produce positive karmic consequences that will profoundly affect all participants who act peacefully with wisdom and compassion.

Compassion

The third basic Buddhist belief that provides the background for understanding the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue is the Buddha's teachings on compassion. Like his teaching on 'interdependent arising,' there are two main interpretations of the Buddha's teachings on compassion or *karuna*. The Theravada interpretation sees compassion as one of the four 'divine abodes' (i.e., what makes our minds like divine beings) along with loving kindness, equanimity, and sympathetic joy. According to this tradition, these four habits and the meditative practices from which they arise not only help one overcome one's own negative mental states and expand one's mind and feelings outward to all beings, but they also lead to happiness in this life, a divine rebirth in the next, and ultimately to *nibbana* for the followers of the *arahant* path. The Mahayana tradition, on the other hand, sees compassion as the necessary complement to wisdom for those who follow the *bodhisattva* path. The basic difference is that the former, from the point of view of the latter, is self-centred in its focus and intentions, while the latter sees itself as selfless in its concerns to liberate all sentient beings from suffering. The Dalai Lama follows the latter interpretation and consequently has much to say about how wisdom and compassion are necessary for both happiness and the elimination of suffering (Gyatso 2013; 2006; 2005a; 2005c; 2005d; 2004a; 2003a; 2003b; 2001b; 1999c; 1997a; 1997b; 1995c; 1990b; 1984). In fact, one might say that wisdom is the aim of his many teachings and dialogues, while compassion is the outward manifestation of the content of that wisdom. They are, so to speak, two sides of the same coin, and arise interdependently in those who practise meditation; they are, for the Dalai Lama, both the seed and the fruit of meditative practice precisely because they lead to inner tranquility and well-being.

According to the Dalai Lama,

From my own limited experience I have found that the greatest degree of inner tranquility comes from the development of love and compassion.

The more we care for the happiness of others, the greater our own sense of well-being becomes. Cultivating a close, warm-hearted feeling for others automatically puts the mind at ease. This helps remove whatever fears or insecurities we may have and gives us the strength to cope with any obstacles we encounter. It is the ultimate source of success in life.

2 See Gyatso 2010; 2009; 2008; 2005b; 2001b; 1999b; 1999c; 1998b; 1998c; 1990a.

As long as we live in this world we are bound to encounter problems. If, at such times, we lose hope and become discouraged, we diminish our ability to face difficulties. If, on the other hand, we remember that it is not just ourselves but every one who has to undergo suffering, this more realistic perspective will increase our determination and capacity to overcome troubles. Indeed, with this attitude, each new obstacle can be seen as yet another valuable opportunity to improve our mind!

Thus we can strive gradually to become more compassionate, that is we can develop both genuine sympathy for others' suffering and the will to help remove their pain. As a result, our own serenity and inner strength will increase. (Gyatso n.d.a)

Clearly the Dalai Lama's understanding of compassion is anchored in his own personal experiences of its benefits, which he insists will not only put our own minds at ease but also help us remove the pain and suffering (*dukkha*) of others. As a result, his teaching echoes the Mahayana view that *dukkha* arises interdependently and is eliminated by both meditative practices and the cultivation of *karuna*.

Upaya

The fourth and perhaps most important background Buddhist belief (because of its practical rather than theoretical influence) for understanding the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue is to see it as an instance of *upaya* or 'skillful means', the traditional practice of the Buddha himself suiting the message of the Dharma to the capacity of his audience in order to lead them to enlightenment. There are at least three good reasons for this claim: two internal to Buddhist beliefs, and the other external to them.

The first piece of internal evidence, peculiar to Tibetan Buddhism, but also shared by other forms of Mahayana Buddhism as well, is the belief that the Dalai Lama is the fourteenth reincarnation of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, who made a vow to postpone his own Buddhahood until he assisted all sentient beings in achieving Nirvana. According to the Dalai Lama's official web site (n.d.), 'The Dalai Lamas are believed to be manifestations of Avalokiteshvara or Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion and the patron saint of Tibet. Bodhisattvas are believed to be enlightened beings who have postponed their own nirvana and chosen to take rebirth in order to serve humanity.'

The second piece of internal evidence can be found in the Dalai Lama's three main commitments in life: the promotion of basic human values or secular ethics in the interest of human happiness, the fostering of inter-religious harmony, and the preservation of Tibet's Buddhist culture, a culture of peace and non-violence (Official website of His Holiness the Dalai Lama n.d.). These three main commitments are

further specified by the Dalai Lama's efforts to promote the universal values of compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, contentment, and self-discipline (or what he refers to as 'secular ethics'), as well as his beliefs that all human beings are the same, and that all human beings want happiness and do not want suffering. In fact, his web site asserts, 'He remains committed *to talk about* the importance of these human values and share them with everyone he meets.' (Official website of His Holiness the Dalai Lama n.d., emphasis added) This commitment leads directly into his actions as a religious practitioner who is committed to promoting religious harmony and understanding among the world's major religious traditions. Although he recognises that there are real and serious philosophical and religious differences among the major world religions, the Dalai Lama is nevertheless committed to the view that all of these religions have the potential to help their followers become good human beings. As a result, he believes that it is 'important for all religious traditions to respect one another and recognise the value of each other's respective traditions.' (Official website of His Holiness the Dalai Lama n.d.) In fact, his commitment to fostering inter-religious harmony is the clearest evidence of his belief in and practice of *upaya*, because of his recognition of both the individual's concerns about the particular truths of his or her own traditions and beliefs, and the necessity of several truths and various religions in the larger world community. Finally, the Dalai Lama, as a Tibetan, is committed to working to preserve Tibet's Buddhist culture, and its beliefs and practices in cultivating peace and non-violence.

The third, external piece of evidence of the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue as in instance of *upaya* or 'skillful means' is the obvious pedagogical necessity of suiting one's teaching and message to one's audience. No one, for example, would begin to teach children how to play baseball by beginning with the infield fly rule, any more than one would begin teaching someone about Christianity by talking about the metaphysical subtleties of Transubstantiation or the mystery of the Trinity. The basic pedagogical truth, recognised by all great teachers, is that one must approach one's audience at their level of understanding in order to lead them to the truth of one's message. This is precisely what the Buddha himself did after his enlightenment, and it is the same kind of practice that the Dalai Lama is committed to in his own teaching practice and dialogues with others. It is to these particular dialogue practices that we now turn our attention.

The Dalai Lama's Practice

If I am correct about the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue as an instance of *upaya* or 'skillful means' then one would expect to find evidence of this throughout his various books and public discussions. In fact, this is precisely what I think we find when we look at the practices of the Dalai Lama. In order to support this claim I will focus on just three areas of the Dalai Lama's teachings, because these three areas

provide clear and ample evidence of the Dalai Lama's practice. The three areas are inter-religious dialogue, science, and politics.

For those who are familiar with the teachings and writings of the Dalai Lama it should be obvious that he is deeply committed to promoting and fostering religious harmony and understanding among not only the world's major religious traditions but also among those who do not believe in any religion. However, in this section, I want to focus on the Dalai Lama's actions or practices before we turn to consider his writings.

As previously noted, the Dalai Lama's actions are informed by serious meditative practices. Although the Dalai Lama sees himself as 'a simple Buddhist monk', that assertion is clearly contradicted by his schedule and numerous speaking engagements. Even though his web site offers an account of his routine day, it is obvious from his schedule and travels that his 'routine day' is the exception, rather than the rule of his daily activities. For example, forty years ago, the Dalai Lama made his first visit to the West, when he visited twelve countries in seventy-five days. During the last ten years alone, he has made more than 110 trips to various countries, including: Italy, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands, France, Switzerland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Poland, Latvia, Hungary, Mexico, and the UK. In addition to these visits—which often extend for days and even weeks—he also spends a great deal of his time visiting numerous cities throughout India where he lives in exile.

He has met with presidents, princes, Prime Ministers, Nobel Laureates, chancellors, governors, Popes, Archbishops, Imams, Kings and Queens, and various other governmental Ministers from countries around the world. He also has held audiences and delivered numerous talks to millions of ordinary people throughout the world, and his teachings and messages can be easily accessed at his official website.

Inter-Religious Dialogue

As is to be expected, his messages include a variety of talks on Buddhism, compassion, religious harmony, world peace, and Tibet. His efforts at inter-religious dialogue, in particular, have tended to focus on the idea of religious harmony and how to promote it, and he has claimed that the basic cause of most, if not all of our problems and conflicts, is our inability to control our agitated minds. In fact, he asserts that one of the most important features of all religions is that they offer strategies for controlling our mind and its biased and unsettled states. However, he also recognises that we naturally tend to play religious favoritism and focus on

the unique features of our own religious beliefs and traditions and, perhaps most importantly our differences with others, instead of making every effort to calm the source of all of our suffering—our agitated minds. As a result, the very thing that ought to be helping us achieve both inner and outer peace by teaching us how to settle our agitated minds leads us into more conflict and troubles.

Almost all of the Dalai Lama's efforts at achieving religious harmony tend to focus, at least to some degree, on the fundamental Buddhist idea that happiness is the result of an enlightened mind while suffering is caused by a distorted mind. The Dalai Lama, like the Buddha before him, asserts, 'A distorted mind, in contrast to an enlightened mind, is one that is not in tune with reality.' (Gyatso n.d.b) In short, an agitated or distorted mind simply cannot grasp reality, and as a result he urges all of us to use our own religious traditions and practices to settle our minds and ultimately achieve inner peace and social harmony. This is what he does every day.

Scientific Dialogue

In addition to these topics, he also has spoken about the environment, ecology, spirituality and nature, and reincarnation. With respect to the subjects of science and technology in general, and biology, psychology, and neuroscience in particular, and their value and uses, the Dalai Lama maintains that these pursuits have made tremendous advances and could provide profound benefits in terms not only of improving our understanding of ourselves as human beings but also with respect to our knowledge of and responsibilities toward the world and the environment. The Dalai Lama readily acknowledges his debt to his various teachers and eminent scientists (i.e., Carl von Weizsacker and Davis Bohm in physics and quantum mechanics, and Robert Livingstone and Francisco Varela in biology, psychology, and neuroscience), and admits that his conversations, conferences, and dialogues with them through the auspices of the Mind and Life Institute (<http://www.mindandlife.org>) have helped inform his own understanding of the value, uses, and indeed, convergence of science and spirituality.

According to the Dalai Lama,

Although Buddhist contemplative tradition and modern science have evolved from different historical, intellectual and cultural roots, I believe that at heart they share significant commonalities, especially in their basic philosophical outlook and methodology. On the philosophical level, both Buddhism and modern science share a deep suspicion of any notion of absolutes, whether conceptualised as a transcendent being, as an eternal, unchanging principle such as soul, or as a fundamental substratum of reality. Both Buddhism and science prefer to account for the evolution and emergence of the cosmos and life in terms of the complex interrelations of the natural laws of cause

and effect. From the methodological perspective, both traditions emphasise the role of empiricism. For example, in the Buddhist investigative tradition, between the three recognised sources of knowledge - experience, reason and testimony - it is the evidence of the experience that takes precedence, with reason coming second and testimony last. This means that, in the Buddhist investigation of reality, at least in principle, empirical evidence should triumph over scriptural authority, no matter how deeply venerated a scripture may be. Even in the case of knowledge derived through reason or inference, its validity must derive ultimately from some observed facts of experience. Because of this methodological standpoint, I have often remarked to my Buddhist colleagues that the empirically verified insights of modern cosmology and astronomy must compel us now to modify, or in some cases reject, many aspects of traditional cosmology as found in ancient Buddhist texts.

Since the primary motive underlying the Buddhist investigation of reality is the fundamental quest for overcoming suffering and perfecting the human condition, the primary orientation of the Buddhist investigative tradition has been toward understanding the human mind and its various functions. The assumption here is that by gaining deeper insight into the human psyche, we might find ways of transforming our thoughts, emotions and their underlying propensities so that a more wholesome and fulfilling way of being can be found. It is in this context that the Buddhist tradition has devised a rich classification of mental states, as well as contemplative techniques for refining specific mental qualities. So a genuine exchange between the cumulative knowledge and experience of Buddhism and modern science on wide-ranging issues pertaining to the human mind, from cognition and emotion to understanding the capacity for transformation inherent in the human brain can be deeply interesting and potentially beneficial as well. In my own experience, I have felt deeply enriched by engaging in conversations with neuroscientists and psychologists on such questions as the nature and role of positive and negative emotions, attention, imagery, as well the plasticity of the brain. The compelling evidence from neuroscience and medical science of the crucial role of simple physical touch for even the physical enlargement of an infant's brain during the first few weeks powerfully brings home the intimate connection between compassion and human happiness. (Gyatso n.d.c)

Given these claims, there can be little doubt that His Holiness is firmly committed to the convergence of science and spirituality, and that this belief is anchored in the fruits of his own dialogues and discussions with scientists (and for which he was named the 2012 Templeton Prize Laureate). In fact, he has openly and readily admitted, on numerous occasions, that if particular claims of his own Buddhist tradition are out of harmony with the best scientific data and evidence, then he is willing to modify and even reject authoritative textual claims in precisely the same

way the Buddha himself did when he taught,

Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of scriptures, by logical reasoning, by inferential reasoning, by reflection on reasons, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think 'The ascetic is our teacher.' But when you know for yourselves,...then you should do or do not. (Thera and Bodhi 1999, vol. 3, 65)

Political Dialogue

Finally, in the realm of politics and, in particular, with regard to the status of Tibet, the Dalai Lama continues to insist that he is committed via any peaceful means possible to preserving Tibet's Buddhist culture of peace and non-violence. He has made numerous appeals to world leaders, to all Tibetans, to the Chinese people and their government leaders, to the United Nations, and to all people of good will who have expressed concerns over the tragic events in Tibet, for peaceful and meaningful dialogue as the only way to achieve a lasting solution for his people. In fact, His Holiness has gone so far as to relinquish his political and administrative position and authority as head of state in favor of democratically elected leaders of the Tibetan Parliament-in-exile and the Central Tibetan Administration. As a result of his ongoing efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution to this matter he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 and the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal in 2007.

Most recently, His Holiness has been engaged in dialogues and discussions with his own people and the Chinese government over issues related to the matter of his reincarnation or the incarnation of the next Dalai Lama.

According to the Dalai Lama,

When I am about ninety I will consult the high Lamas of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the Tibetan public, and other concerned people who follow Tibetan Buddhism, and re-evaluate whether the institution of the Dalai Lama should continue or not. On that basis we will take a decision. If it is decided that the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama should continue and there is a need for the Fifteenth Dalai Lama to be recognised, responsibility for doing so will primarily rest on the concerned officers of the Dalai Lama's Gaden Phodrang Trust. They should consult the various heads of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions and the reliable oath-bound Dharma Protectors who are linked inseparably to the lineage of the Dalai Lamas. They should seek advice and direction from these concerned beings and carry out the procedures of search and recognition in accordance with past tradition. I shall leave clear written instructions about this. Bear in mind that, apart from the reincarnation recognised through such legitimate methods, no recognition

or acceptance should be given to a candidate chosen for political ends by anyone, including those in the People's Republic of China. (Gyatso n.d.d)

The Dalai Lama's Writings

In view of the evidence presented above, it is clear that the Dalai Lama is firmly committed to dialogue and discussion as a necessary vehicle for conveying truth and understanding. It should also be obvious that the Dalai Lama's teachings and views are informed by some of the most fundamental Buddhist beliefs (i.e., the importance of meditative practice, interdependent arising, compassion, and *upaya*). In fact, I want to argue that his public audiences, international visits, and published writings are really just so many different attempts to expediently adapt his message with respect to his three main commitments (i.e., the promotion of basic human values or secular ethics in the interest of human happiness, the fostering of inter-religious harmony, and the preservation of Tibet's Buddhist culture of peace and non-violence) to his various audiences. In order to support this claim, I will focus my attention on just three³ works: *Toward a True Kinship of Faith: How the World's Religions Can Come Together* (inter-religious dialogue), *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality* (Science), and his *Five Point Peace Plan* (Tibet).

In *Toward a True Kinship of Faith: How the World's Religions Can Come Together* (Gyatso 2010), the Dalai Lama explores how differences between religions can be genuinely appreciated without serving as a source of conflict. In it, he also asserts that the establishment of genuine harmony is *not* dependent upon accepting the claim that all religions are fundamentally the same or that they lead to the same place. According to the Dalai Lama, many religious believers fear that recognising the value of another faith is incompatible with having devotion to the truth of one's own. However, the Dalai Lama insists that a sincere believer can, with integrity, be a pluralist⁴ in relation to other religions without compromising commitment to the essence of the doctrinal teachings of their own faith. In fact, His Holiness often suggests⁵ that it is possible to see the truths of other religions through one's own eyes. In other words, he thinks it is possible to be a committed believer and simultaneously respect the beliefs of others and, perhaps most importantly, he

3 There are obviously many other writings that one could consider with respect to each of the three subjects that I am interested in. See the bibliography for more titles.

4 A pluralist is someone who is committed to the belief that more than one religion can lead its followers to ultimate truth. An exclusivist, on the other hand, thinks that only one particular religion is and can be true.

5 For example, in *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus* (Gyatso 1996), His Holiness not only reflects on the teachings of Jesus but also affirms the sacred in all religions.

thinks this is the only way to cultivate peaceful coexistence.

In this particular work, the Dalai Lama tries to show how the challenges and opportunities of globalisation and technological developments can move us away from traditional religious conflicts and cultural clashes and instead help us peacefully connect with one another in our shared humanity. He not only readily acknowledges that all religions confront the same perennial questions (i.e., Who am I? Where do I come from? Where will I go after death?) (Gyatso 2010, xii) but also admits that they each offer their own distinct responses to these questions. Moreover, he insists that this diversity of insight into the questions and problems that we confront has the potential for inspiring heartfelt dialogue that can enrich everyone's pursuit of wisdom and happiness.

The Dalai Lama further claims that all faith traditions, in one form or another, appeal to compassion as a guiding principle for living a good human life. He firmly believes that it is the duty of all people of faith who aspire to spiritual perfection not only to affirm the fundamental value of compassion, but also to work to develop a profound respect and appreciation of the value of other faiths. On the basis of these beliefs, he thinks it is possible to cultivate both genuine respect and peaceful coexistence.

In *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality* (Gyatso 2005b), the Dalai Lama is concerned with how the different approaches of science and religion to understanding ourselves, our universe, and one another can be brought together in the service of humanity. After forty years of study with some of the greatest scientific minds as well as a lifetime of meditative, spiritual and philosophical study, the Dalai Lama offers an account of why both disciplines—science and spirituality—must be pursued in order to arrive at a complete picture of the truth. According to the Dalai Lama, science offers us various ways of interpreting the physical world, while spirituality helps us both understand and cope with reality. He also insists, quite appropriately, that the extreme view of privileging one at the expense of the other is impoverishing and falsifies reality. In fact, he insists that the purely scientific view that everything is reducible to matter and energy leaves out a huge range of human experience: emotions, yearnings, compassion, and culture. At the same time, he also recognises that holding unexamined spiritual beliefs, beliefs that are contradicted by evidence, logic, and ordinary experience, can lock us into narrow-minded fundamentalist misconceptions.

Through examinations of Darwinism and karma, quantum mechanics and philosophical insight into the nature of reality, neurobiology and the study of consciousness, the Dalai Lama draws significant parallels between a contemplative and a scientific examination of reality. 'I believe that spirituality and science are

complementary but different investigative approaches with the same goal of seeking the truth,' His Holiness writes. 'In this, there is much each may learn from the other, and together they may contribute to expanding the horizon of human knowledge and wisdom.' (Gyatso 2005b, 4)

At the very end of this book the Dalai Lama writes,

My plea is that we bring our spirituality, the full richness and simple wholesomeness of our basic human values, to bear upon the course of science and the direction of technology in human society. In essence, science and spirituality, though differing in their approaches, share the same end, which is the betterment of humanity. At its best, science is motivated by a quest for understanding to help lead us to greater flourishing and happiness. In Buddhist language, this kind of science can be described as wisdom grounded in and tempered by compassion. Similarly, spirituality is a human journey into our internal resources, with the aim of understanding who we are in the deepest sense and of discovering how to live according to the highest possible idea. This too is the union of wisdom and compassion.

Since the emergence of modern science, humanity has lived through an engagement between spirituality and science as two important sources of knowledge and well-being. Sometimes the relationship has been a close one—a kind of friendship—while at other times it has been frosty, with many finding the two to be incompatible. Today, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, science and spirituality have the potential to be closer than ever, and to embark upon a collaborative endeavor that has far-reaching potential to help humanity meet the challenges before us. We are all in this together. May each of us, as a member of the human family, respond to the moral obligation to make this collaboration possible. This is my heartfelt plea. (Gyatso 2005b, 208-209)

Finally, in his *Five Point Peace Plan*, the Dalai Lama offers a practical plan for addressing the situation on Tibet. Before considering the particulars of his plan, however, it is important to keep in mind that the Dalai Lama's efforts at preserving Tibetan culture are directed to a number of different audiences. His speeches, messages, and appeals (which are perfect examples of his own use of *upaya*) are directed to 'all Chinese spiritual brothers and sisters—both inside as well as outside the People's Republic of China and around the world,' to 'all Tibetans,' to 'world leaders, Parliamentarians, NGOs and members of the public who have expressed their concern over the recent deeply saddening and tragic events in Tibet,' to the Members of the European Parliament, and also to the Assembly of the Tibetan People's Deputies (Gyatso n.d.e). His consistent message, skillfully adapted to these various audiences, has been the freedom of Tibetan people and the preservation of their Buddhist culture and identity.

His *Five Point Peace Plan*, which was addressed to the U.S. Human Right's Caucus in 1987, contains five basic components: first, the transformation of the whole of Tibet into a zone of peace; second, the abandonment of China's population transfer policy which threatens the very existence of the Tibetans as a people; third, respect for the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms; fourth, the restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment and the abandonment of China's use of Tibet for the production of nuclear weapons and dumping of nuclear waste; and fifth, the commencement of earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet and of relations between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples.

The Dalai Lama clarifies and explains each of these components and, as previously noted, his basic goal throughout the plan is the freedom of Tibetan people and the preservation of their Buddhist culture and identity. In order to support his claims, His Holiness appeals to the Buddhist notions of the value and importance of meditative practice, interdependent arising, and compassion precisely because each of these contributes to his on-going goal of achieving peace and non-violence.

According to the Dalai Lama,

We wish to approach this subject in a reasonable and realistic way, in a spirit of frankness and conciliation and with a view to finding a solution that is in the long term interest of all: the Tibetans, the Chinese, and all other peoples concerned. Tibetans and Chinese are distinct peoples, each with their own country, history, culture, language, and way of life. Differences among peoples must be recognised and respected. They need not, however, form obstacles to genuine cooperation where this is in the mutual benefit of both peoples. It is my sincere belief that if the concerned parties were to *meet and discuss* their future with an open mind and a sincere desire to find a satisfactory and just solution, a breakthrough could be achieved. We must all exert ourselves to be reasonable and wise, and to meet in a spirit of frankness and understanding. (Gyatso n.d.f, emphasis added)

The Goals of Practice and Writing: Harmony and Happiness

Even the most casual and superficial survey of the titles and topics of the Dalai Lama's numerous writings and speeches (see his official website for details) reveals his basic focus on doing everything he can to cultivate international peace, global harmony, and human happiness. In fact, one need go no farther than his homepage, www.dalailama.com, where one finds the following prominently displayed quotation (in Tibetan, Chinese, Hindi and English) from Shantideva, 'For as long as space endures, and for as long as living beings remain, until then may I too abide to dispel the misery of the world.' One cannot help but hear the echo of the teachings and

actions of the historical Buddha in this quotation, and there can be little doubt that these teachings and actions continue to inspire the His Holiness's ongoing efforts to promote both personal happiness and social harmony in the world.

Nevertheless, there appear to be some rather obvious criticisms that one might raise with respect to the Dalai Lama's conception of and practices related to dialogue. It is to these criticisms that I now direct my attention.

The Limits of Practice and Writing: What Have You Done for Me/Us Lately?

The most obvious criticism of the Dalai Lama's understanding and practices related to dialogue is that they are really just so much talk—with or without theoretical justification (depending on one's understanding of the teachings of the Buddha), but most definitely talk with too little or even no action. In other words, the real standard for judging the effectiveness and truth of one's teachings and practices with respect to dialogue is simply the pragmatic goal of producing effective, real world change. According to this view, words and good intentions may be necessary, but they are clearly not sufficient, to validate one's views and actions, because one's ultimate goal is not merely to change minds, but to change the world.

A second, practical, criticism of the Dalai Lama's understanding and practices related to dialogue is that they are simply too superficial—with little empirical evidence to show their potential to produce both long-lasting effects and the kinds of changes necessary to achieve all of his desired ends. In fact, it is precisely because so little has changed in Tibet during his exile, as well as the ongoing troubles seen throughout the rest of the world, that one cannot help but believe that there will always be those who simply refuse to be persuaded or motivated to change their thoughts and habits.

A third, more theoretical criticism of the Dalai Lama's understanding and practices related to dialogue is that they are too dependent on 'Buddhist' beliefs and principles that some would question as unjustified at best or find laughable at worst. Who, for example, given the Dalai Lama's own commitments to science (assuming he is to be believed) would take seriously his claims about reincarnation? Furthermore, it is easy to see how anyone who had serious reservations with respect to the question of reincarnation could easily doubt the veracity of other Buddhist beliefs and principles. After all, people of the world have had ample opportunity (more than 2000 years!) since the time of the historical Buddha, to put his teachings into practice, yet things definitely do not appear to be getting any better either on a global level, or especially in supposedly Buddhist countries. So why, one might wonder, ought anyone accept the teachings of His Holiness, especially because it is

rather obvious that they simply do not work?

Results Do Matter: Change Your Thinking and Change the World

As a tentative response to the previous objections, I would like to suggest that despite these criticisms, the Dalai Lama's teachings, like those of other great religious leaders, continue to be relevant today not because they have been tried and found wanting, but more precisely because they simply have not been tried—at least on a scale large enough to produce obvious and lasting results. Putting aside the subject of reincarnation, I think there continues to be a growing body of evidence⁶ that some of the basic teachings and principles of the Buddha are true. These include his teachings on the value and benefits of meditative practices, his teaching on interdependent arising, and the necessity of compassion.

The Dalai Lama's understanding and practices related to dialogue seem to me to be informed by what I claimed at the beginning of this essay to be the single most important or most basic insight of the historical Buddha, namely, that who we are and what we think exists is a function of our mind and its cognitive powers. If I am correct about this foundational idea, then one would expect the Dalai Lama to teach us how to shape, form, and use our minds in order to bring about the kinds of changes he thinks will happen, if we just change our thinking. And that is precisely what we see His Holiness doing in his writings and other activities when he meets with and discusses his views with people throughout the world.

Yet it is absolutely crucial to keep in mind that genuine dialogue can only lead to understanding when both or all parties to it are fully committed to realising that aim by taking the necessary steps to acquire the knowledge and understanding that will ultimately lead to the changes that are being sought. Perhaps it is equally important to recall and keep in mind the basic truth that no genuine teaching and learning takes place without the interdependent cooperation of both the teacher and his or her students. Both must do their parts, or the practice will fail. It seems that the Dalai Lama has done and continues to do his part. The real question is whether his audiences have done theirs.

For anyone who has had the opportunity to experience His Holiness in person, there can be little doubt that he radiates a certain undeniable quality or charm that exudes an aura of peace and tranquility. Those who have been in the presence of

6 See for example, most recently, his *The Mind's Own Physician: A Scientific Dialogue with the Dalai Lama on the Healing Power of Meditation* (2011) and other evidence at <http://www.mindandlife.org>.

Mother Theresa, Pope John Paul II, and other spiritual leaders and practitioners have reported similar kinds of experiences. Fortunately, I have had the opportunity to experience this first-hand at a public talk with the Dalai Lama in Washington, DC and at papal Masses in Rome and Philadelphia.

Whatever the ultimate explanation for these experiences turns out to be, I can personally testify to their power and pervasiveness. In fact, even though I know there are purely psychological or other 'scientific' explanations for the phenomena, I do not and cannot doubt the veracity of my own experience. Perhaps the simplest explanation is that, like the Buddha, the Dalai Lama has convinced me that if I want to change the world, I have to change my thinking. The truth of that insight is the ultimate priceless fruit of genuine dialogue that is so much more than mere words.

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Bohmian Dialogue: a Critical Retrospective of Bohm's Approach to Dialogue as a Practice of Collective Communication

Olen Gunnlaugson

In this chapter, I will offer both an appreciative and critical examination of David Bohm's vision and practice of dialogue and how it relates to the field of dialogue studies. Bohm's conception of dialogue was ground-breaking in its time due to its emphasis on consciousness and unfolding a fundamentally different order of communication mediated by collective awareness and insight into the nature of thought and the dialogue process as a whole. Bohm's conception and process aspired to bring the human project of sharing meaning, values and learning forward by introducing practices or ways of being with the dialogue process that interrupted conventional practice at that time. In this paper, I examine key contributions of Bohm's work as well as a number of critiques and limitations of the practice. Finally, I comment briefly on the feasibility of Bohm's practice as a transformative approach to dialogue.

Key words: dialogue, suspension, wholeness, proprioception, inquiry, collective learning

Introduction

Nearly twenty years ago, David Bohm put forward his vision and practice of dialogue. Bohm's conception offered a number of important contributions to the field of dialogue studies, which this paper will address more at length. The main focus of his work on dialogue was to shed insight into a particular way for participants to give their attention to the dialogue content, and the subtle moment-to-moment unfolding process of thought itself. Bohm's conception of dialogue attempted to illuminate the deeper tacit assumptions underlying our thoughts, feelings and the psychological and sociological pressures behind these assumptions for the purposes of realising greater insight into one's self, society and culture and to uncover a social leverage point for deeper change and the renewal of timeless values. Bohmian dialogue (BD) practice involved inquiring into the individual and collective presuppositions, ideas, beliefs, and feelings for the purposes of uncovering a less conditioned and more creative form of collective knowing, learning and thinking together. In this sense, Bohm proposed a form of group communication (committed to a long duration and no agenda) where the objective was not to

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defend opinions and assumptions in a personal way but reveal them in a more impersonal manner (Bohm 1996) that coheres more with the underlying nature of self and world and our deeper participation in it. For the purposes of this paper I will highlight what I perceive to be key contributions of BD to the field of dialogue studies. I will then go on to address a number of critiques and limitations of the practice and comment briefly on the feasibility of BD as a more personally and socially transformative approach to dialogue.

Contributions of Bohmian Dialogue

Suspension

A foundational practice within Bohm's dialogue is the attention-based practice of *suspension*. Suspension helps participants cultivate a firsthand experience of the nature of thought, the limits of rationality, and the creative possibilities of a consciousness-informed process of inquiry. Over time, suspension practice helps individuals become less identified with their habits of mind and points of view. Learning to be less embedded or reified in one's perspective and way of thinking about the world, participants gradually develop a more flexible basis of relationship to their reasoning and emotional processes, as well as how they come to know these processes. Kegan's (1982) language for this process is that we learn how to *have* our thoughts rather than *be* our thoughts, discover how to *have* our feelings rather than *be* our feelings. Or to put this yet in another way, suspension facilitates a shift from a more identified first-person perspective to a witnessing third-person perspective of the very contents of our mind and consciousness. With ongoing practice, suspension gradually changes our fundamental relationship to the thinking process and the underlying habits of mind and points of view in which we are imbedded by putting them in high relief against a background of awareness. By interrupting the engrained tendency to become reified in our ideas and beliefs, suspension facilitates a less attached, yet poised and attentive relationship with our knowledge, beliefs and perspectives. Suspending our thought and emotional processes when encountering moments of difference, dissonance, judgment, requires slowing down our stream of consciousness and mind for the sake of authentic, in-the-moment discoveries and learning. Suspension of our judgments or reactions requires learning to bracket or dis-identify with our views and be open to being influenced by neighbouring perspectives as important partial illuminations of the larger gestalt of the group subject or issue as Bohm elaborates:

Suspension is not easily grasped because the activity is both unfamiliar and subtle. Suspension involves exposing your reactions, impulses, feelings and opinions in such a way that they can be seen and felt and also be reflected back by others in the group. It does not mean repressing or suppressing or, even, postponing them. It means, simply, giving them your serious attention

so that their structures can be noticed, while they are actually taking place. Suspension may permit you to begin to see the deeper meanings underlying your thought process and to sense the often incoherent structure of any action that you might otherwise carry out automatically. (Bohm, Factor and Garrett 1991)

By slowing down the inquiry and more carefully observing our thought processes, Bohm's notion of suspension invites us to pay attention differently to both ourselves and to other dialogue participants by temporarily loosening our habitual hold and identification with our views and beliefs. As a clearing for inquiry opens through suspension, this creates a shared willingness to be tentative, curious and ultimately less invested in either asserting our perspectives or refuting others' perspectives.

Proprioception

In learning how to suspend our views and opinions in dialogue, we create the conditions for *proprioception of thought*. Bohm remarked that 'the point of *suspension* is to help make proprioception possible' (1996, 25). Bohm borrowed the term proprioception from neurophysiology to convey the significance of giving sustained attention to the movement of our intellectual, emotional and kinaesthetic processes as these unfold in real-time. Bohm's (1996) following example conveys an analogy of the failure of proprioception of the body:

We know of a woman who had a stroke in the middle of the night. She woke up and was hitting herself. People came in and turned on the light and that's what they found. What happened was that her motor nerves were working, but her sensory nerves were no longer working. So she probably touched herself, but she didn't know that she'd touched herself, and therefore she assumed that somebody else was touching her and interpreted this as an attack. The more she defended, the worse the attack got. The proprioception had broken down. She no longer saw the relation between the intention to move and the result. When the light was turned on, proprioception was established in a new way, by sight. (25)

Bohmian dialogue helps develop our capacity for proprioception of thought, which he claims is needed to offset the fact that most human problems can be traced back to this lack of fundamental awareness (Bohm et al. 1991). Proprioception allows the physiological correlates of our thoughts to enter more clearly into felt awareness in the moment, in turn helping us understand more fully what is taking place by orienting differently by experiencing this deeper connect with the underlying ground of wholeness, which day to day reality is imbedded in.

Lee Nichol (2005) elaborates, 'it is something more like a figure-ground reversal, in which our typical structure of our awareness – with thoughts far more dominant

than our physiology – is reversed, with the physiological responses now coming to the foreground’ (23). Given that our bodies live within the spatial-temporal horizons of the present moment, developing the capacity for proprioception of thought helps participants experience a more integrated sense of wholeness by expanding our horizons of personal identity to include greater dimensions of what is real. Furthermore, within the dialogue context, this modality of sensing with one’s body in relation to the dialogue helps bring about the conditions for insight and learning to take root, in turn supporting the possibility of transformative shifts in individual and collective consciousness. Proprioceptive awareness is not memory based, but follows from Bohm’s proprioception of thought. Isaacs (1996) elaborates:

Typically we simply see our thoughts as emerging ‘from nowhere’ and do not detect our own fingerprints on them. In dialogue we seek to cultivate both levels of awareness – reflective awareness and proprioceptive awareness – which could also be stated as awareness of what one is doing as one is doing it. Typically our thinking processes move too quickly, or we do not have the luxury of time, to perceive these forces at work. We have argued that organizations and institutions have a genuine need now to expand their repertoires – make room for inquiry of this sort. (24)

By cultivating proprioceptive awareness, participants within BD groups learn how to break out of the solipsistic representational world of images, meaning and thought, which tends to originate from past experience, however not always. As a way of differentiating this representational world from the unfolding territory of everyday experience, Bohm (1996) distinguished *thoughts* from thinking and *felts* from feeling. For Bohm, *thoughts* and *felts* are an active response of memory and the past. By being attentive to the influences of past conditioning through proprioceptive awareness, transformative possibilities for in-the-moment reflection can occur.

Primacy of Meta-Awareness (Versus Thought/Feeling) in Bohmian Dialogue

With practice, Bohmian dialogue develops the ability to witness our processes of knowing, feeling and being. Though the witnessing capacity has been with us as a tribe, nation, or species for millennium, BD relies on meta-awareness as fundamental to the collective learning processes of dialogue. As I have explored above, suspension and proprioception of thought gradually help participants create the conditions for a transformed understanding of how they engage with their thoughts and feelings and how they hold perspectives in BD.

Meta-awareness is distinct from proprioception of thought or metacognition in that metacognitive processes involve awareness within the context of cognition, whereas meta-awareness includes, yet extends beyond, the categories of cognitive

reasoning. From these expanded horizons of embodied awareness, participants learn to be *meta-aware* of different intelligences, faculties of knowing, and ways of being in the dialogue.

Meta-awareness contributes to the project of deconstructing rational knowing as the highest faculty of knowing by giving participants the experience of being aware of their epistemological, ontological and existential processes. That is not to say that rationality is marginalised, but rather one of Bohm's key interests was to explore a fundamentally different order of relationship with the thinking process in order to understand its conditioned nature along with its relevant but limited functions.

In part, the meta-awareness process involves becoming aware of the movements of our discursive mind in conversation with others in such a manner that imparts new insight into the role of the intellect as limited servant of a greater unfolding process of co-intelligence. BD works with cultivating an *embodied* meta-aware position to facilitate a less identified way of holding and identifying with our perspectives as primary. This in turn helps create a dialogue environment that is more receptive to difference and diversity. Put in another way, becoming meta-aware shifts our thinking from a mental-reflective mode to a more contemplative, construct-aware mode of knowing and being. Associated with this experience is the transition from being an 'identified being' to 'creative being' (Reams 2003). In this sense, participants discover through BD practices how their habituated process of being identified with their thoughts and feelings tend to block creativity and insight. In developing the capacity not only to dis-identify with their polarised positions (Isaacs 1996), but also to witness the process of learning, participants shift from 'ideas and the subject being the common center' (Arnett 1992, 28) to exploring ideas and the subject in the common centre of *collective awareness*.

In the context of BD, the traditional cycles of action and critical reflection are supplemented with an additional cycle of meta-awareness. Before the emergence of the meta-aware position, participants' attention tends to be quite absorbed by the emerging content of the dialogue itself. With the cultivation of meta-awareness, less of our attention becomes bound up in the discursive realm of thought and the emotional forms of reactivity that tend to be embedded in our thought patterns (Bohm 1996) as conveyed in the last section on suspension.

From experiences facilitating and participating in BD, I have found that meta-awareness can take numerous forms within the individual and the dialogue. In the latter context, meta-awareness often simply involves venturing a meta-conversation about the existing conversation. Within BD, there is a need for recursive conversations about what was just talked about, felt, intuited, or sensed. These recursive conversations may initially bring about frustration for participants who

may claim to experience the dialogue as not going anywhere. This frustration often dissipates if the group can let go of the need for task-oriented objectives in the interests of serving inquiry oriented processes. By attending to these assumptions and processes through a form of collective mindfulness, Bohmian dialogue cultivates an awareness of the distorting factors of memory and disembodied communication (i.e. when the thinking process is divorced from the senses and moment to moment attention).

Limitations of Bohmian Dialogue

In addition to the above mentioned contributions of Bohmian dialogue, there are a number of limitations to Bohm's approach to dialogue that merit addressing.

Diminishment of the Personal Dimension of the Dialogue

Bohm's definition of thought encompasses different personal dimensions of our experience (e.g., physical, emotional, intellectual and intuitional). However, Bohm's labelling of the expressions of these domains as forms of 'thought' tends to overlook vital distinctions, thus limiting the expression and validity of these respective experiences and ways of knowing on their terms. This tended to bring about an implicit reductionism of human experience as 'thought'.

Bohm's (1996) emphasis on creating an 'impersonal fellowship' was intended initially to help people transcend the limitations and reactive conditioning that arise when individuals are identified with the more personal or egocentric aspects of self and dialogue. This identification tends to take the form of unreflexively taking a position in an argument and advocating for the particular perspective one adheres to. To Bohm, such a position was nonsensical or a dramatic and often quite distorted illustration of the reflexes of thought in action. For Bohm, a true dialogue required moving beyond the ego and memory informed domain of thought and its conditioned processes to arrive at a more intentional, presence-oriented process of communication that was to a degree at least, free of the fundamental conditioning influences endemic within argument and debate culture.

Nevertheless, by emphasising the need to go beyond the personal or to build a kind of transpersonal or post-personal fellowship, this often led to diminishing the significance of personal experience within Bohmian dialogue circles and in some cases marginalising it. While this may not have been intended, Bohm's preoccupation with observing and learning about the process of thought itself left BD groups prone to abstract and idiosyncratic forms of contemplation that at times lacked skilful awareness of how to work with and potentially transform the widely prevalent conditions of conversation that inhibit deep dialogue when members are overly identified with their experience, thoughts or emotions.

Although suspension was useful in relaxing this identification, Bohm did not bring about a practice to help participants *re-identify or re-claim their views* from a more liberated or empowered place informed by a transformed understanding that is capable of drawing upon the less- or non-egoic dimension of our personal experiences without being overly identified with this aspect. Because suspension encouraged a disidentification with thought and emotion, participants at times found it difficult to know how to skilfully work with their own feelings and thoughts as an authentic and empowered expression of their lives in the world, and so this tended to create an impaired or limited capacity to influence and work with people who were not familiar with the processes of Bohmian dialogue, which is of course most folks.

Inadequate Understanding of How to Support Generativity in BD

Bohm's preoccupation with transcending thought and emotion led to an underdeveloped awareness of how to work with creative emergence in conversation. For example, redirecting one's awareness to different perspectives or places within one's self and the emerging dialogue involves learning to subtly move our attention to sensing the source of the stream of shared meaning of what is trying to emerge through the greater dialogue group as people share their contributions. Put in another way, redirection involves literally redirecting one's attention to the newly emerging content and 'to the source of the mental process rather than the objects within it' (Varela 2000). Bohm's thinking tended to be focused on transforming our relation to the objects within the mental process, but often did not go far enough upstream in our awareness to get at the source of creative emergence itself. Attention was not generally deployed to apprehend something new directly, but rather indirectly through suspension and insight from a focus on transcending past understandings and shared meaning.

As such, Bohmian dialogue process tended to arrive at the new through the disentanglement with our conditioned, reflexive process of thinking and feeling in the conversation. It moved into this emergence through a kind of *via negativa*, that is through eliminating *what isn't*, we arrive or step back into *what is*. However, the challenges with such a process is it tends to involve an ongoing re-orientation from what came before or a sensitivity to what is obscuring the unconditioned or source of thinking and feeling directly.

There is a subtle but significant difference in this practice in contrast to say a *via positiva* practice such as presencing (Scharmer 2007), which aspires to bring about a direct apprehension of the possible arising future through the present moment. The differences in orientation are subtle, however where BD begins with the past, presencing begins with the present, sensing into the arising future. Where BD is

strengthened by encountering the new through the old, presencing is strengthened and empowered by becoming the new directly in the communication process, i.e. *Self as source*. BD processes such as suspension are steeped in an implicit separation or dualism between one's self and what is arising. As such, suspension gestures involve an ongoing deconstructing, removing and cleaning the dialogue of its 'impurities' or 'habits of mind'. Bohmian dialogue thus struggled with 'seeing from within the source of what is emerging, letting it come into being through us' (Senge et al. 2004, 45).

The present and emerging future are left open to explore as Bohm was reluctant to posit a methodology or practice for creativity or engaging creativity directly in communication, arguing that this would be yet another by-product of our conditioning, of the inherent limitations of thought itself. By interfacing with the present through the past, BD participants are left to develop the capacity to engage their awareness in a distinct manner from say presencing, where there is an interest in voicing what participants intuitively sense is trying to emerge – whether in the form of emerging knowledge or meaning about a given subject, or an insight into the group process of learning itself. BD opens a social space of learning into the nature of how collective mind and consciousness function, but the practice falls short of empowering BD participants to cultivate a generative way of knowing and learning from what is not yet manifested (i.e. the emerging future).

BD Tends to Produce Disorienting Dilemmas and Confusion for Groups

Examining the tacit assumptions underlying our views can be prone to triggering disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow 1978), which are internal ruptures or interruptions in our taken-for-granted understandings of our self and worldview. Proprioceptive awareness enables individuals to explore unfamiliar ways of knowing (epistemology), being (ontology) and learning, in turn offering participants a practice to reconsider previously held views in the present, enabling new perspectives to emerge. Bohm was greatly invested in the notion that thought functions much like a system and that it needs continual contact with awareness to see the larger whole of reality out of which thought makes abstractions.

As such, his dialogue process tends to focus a lot more on this exploration of the nature and process of thought, often inadvertently leading groups into a reflective condition where individuals become more invested in teasing out nuanced distinctions and deeper meaning that lead to further iterations of abstraction.

As I have observed, this can at times amount to obscure forms of philosophising or an overreliance on certain aspects of BD, which can lead individuals to get tangled up in their meta-processes, producing a non-versatile and at times idiosyncratic form of conversation that is arguably no longer serving the subject or the lives of the participants in ways that were originally intended. Bohm's (1996) conception

supports a restricted form of initial facilitation in the interests of helping participants distinguish between dialogue and other modalities of conversation. Bohm refrained from 'proposing means, methodologies to help the vast majority of people understand and make sense of the experience of dialogue' (Cayer 2005, 168). According to Cayer (2005), this led others to misunderstanding and diluting Bohm's original vision of dialogue within different settings of practice.

However, preliminary facilitation could have been extended into later stages of BD to address the periods of confusion and disorientation that arise during different stages of the dialogue. In my experience facilitating and teaching BD, dialogue is commonly experienced to be an unpredictable and at times perplexing process of conversation that has no goal or preconceived outcome. Because of Bohm's more idealistic and less pragmatic objectives, he was less concerned with how to integrate BD into work settings for example.

Following Bohm's initial work, the two year MIT Dialogue Project overseen by William Isaacs and colleagues attempted to build a new actionable theory of dialogue. During the mid nineties, disagreements of interpretation between advocates of BD and scholar-practitioners drawing from the research from the MIT Dialogue Project arose from differing assumptions about the purpose and intent of Bohm's conception and how it might be integrated into organisational contexts. Though Bohm differentiated dialogue from debate and discussion, he didn't offer frameworks or theory to support adequate scaffolding for participants to establish the conditions for dialogue to emerge, particularly in the contexts of organisations where results and team learning are important.

Summary and Recommendations for Further Research

Bohm's conception of dialogue was initially introduced from his work with groups and extensive conversations with the world philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti. For his conception of dialogue to be useful to the emerging field of dialogue studies, I believe there is in part a need to continue to reframe, redistill and reinterpret Bohm's work within a larger conversation of dialogue-based thinking so as to optimally place his contribution in service of a more generative communication offering. The subsequent work of Isaacs and Scharmer has in part attempted this via the MIT Dialogue Project in the 90s; however a more comprehensive undertaking could be of great value to learning organisations and communities, particularly those groups who are committed to embodying deeper practice-based communication processes within more practical contexts of work where the quality of results and outcomes are as important as the quality of processes that led to their emergence. In this sense, further research is needed to better understand the ways in which Bohmian dialogue processes are capable of advancing collective wisdom and collective aspects of leadership development in organisations.

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‘Just Send Me Word’: the Promise of Dialogue

Nicholas Davey

This paper specifically concerns an aspect of the central place given to dialogue in Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. Though understanding is presented as the unquestioned achievement of dialogue, there is scant attention to a prior question: ‘What draws us into dialogue in the first place?’ Gadamer’s treatment of dialogical understanding as an event tends to obscure the necessary pre-conditions of its emergence. He correctly assumes that texts, artworks, literature speaks directly to us, even disarm us by their address. Yet, what disposes us to listen? Even if we hear nothing in a dialogical claim, what impels us to listen again or more closely to what might be being said? The paper attempts to answer this question and throw light on this, an obscurer aspect of Gadamer’s thinking. We will argue in the vein of philosophical hermeneutics and seek an answer to the question its approach to dialogical understanding supposes but seems neither to ask nor answer. Our central argument is that within the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics, the importance of dialogical exchange lies not in what is transmitted between interlocutors but in the respective hermeneutic effects of that exchange. In dialogue there is no literal ex-change of ‘hermeneutic content’ between one speaker and another. We shall argue that it is not what is literally exchanged that matters but, rather, what participation in that exchange can unexpectedly bring about within the understanding of each speaker and often contrary to their willing and doing.¹

Key words: dialogue, hermeneutics, understanding, transformation, experience, language

Cicero and Heinrich Kleist had common experiences of the law and the demands of writing. When confronted by uncertainty about what they thought, both deployed different but related tactics. Cicero is famed for the aphorism: ‘When uncertain in thought, start a fight’, the point being that the toing and froing of argument would bring him eventually to an articulation of what, in a certain sense, he already knew but could not quite articulate in verbal form (Harris 1988, 49). Cicero’s experience is common enough: ‘I know what I mean but I don’t know how to say it.’ In a similar manner, Kleist’s tactic was to test what he sensed were his proposals in a conversation with an obviously tolerant sister. In the essay ‘On the Gradual Formation of Thoughts in the Process of Speech’, Kleist describes how after many hours of work, exasperated, he would fail to arrive at a clear articulation of the

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- 1 This paper is a significant development of the closing section of Davey, N. (Forthcoming 2014) ‘Hermeneutics, Structuralism and Post-Structuralism’, in J. Malpas (ed.), *Handbook to Hermeneutics*, London: Routledge.

subject-matter at hand. And then, he continues: ‘Look what happens: as soon as I talk to my sister – who is sitting and working behind me – about this matter, I (come) to realise what hours of hard thinking had not been able to make clear to me’ (Kleist 1966, 810-814).² Taking solace from the likes of Cicero – ‘I believe that many a great orator, when he opened his mouth did not know what he was going to say’ – Kleist acknowledges how initially he would have ‘some vague thoughts connected with what I am looking for’ but it was only when he entered dialogical engagement that his initial ‘hazy imaginations’ were brought into a complete clarity (Kleist 1966, 810-814). The question is how did Kleist come to recognise what he never actually knew as that which he wanted to know?

The cases of both Cicero and Kleist anticipate aspects of Gadamer’s dialogical model of the relation between words and thought. On one level, Cicero and Kleist are involved in the use of words to recover a dimly sensed or anticipated thought that eventually comes to be recognised as ‘exactly that which I was wanting to get at’. However, in an important sense, Gadamer reverses Cicero’s and Kleist’s tactic. It is not really words that dispel cloudy thoughts but, rather, it is the proper marshalling and expression of one’s thoughts that leads to a better clarification of the meanings that are *already* in language. It is thought that recovers the meanings that are antecedent to it in language. The axiom that language precedes individual thought rests at the foundations of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics and is emphatically stated throughout *Truth and Method*. Two key points are pertinent. (1) Kleist’s supposition that there is a system of truths as a pre-given set of possibilities for which the right verbal signs have yet to be found, is judged by Gadamer an abstraction (Gadamer 1989, 417). (2) The horizon of language which precedes thought has both its own ideality of meaning and stock of possible meanings which ‘thought can turn to for its own instruction’ (Gadamer 1989, 429). Thought is conceived of as the process of explicating in words the range of actual and possible meanings that language already holds within itself. This Gadamer describes as ‘the logical achievement of language’ (Gadamer 1989, 428). The ontological priority of language over subjective consciousness is, then, fundamental to articulating how dialogical exchange can give rise to transformative understanding. Gadamer comments that ‘to reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but (a matter of) being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were’ (Gadamer 1989, 379). However, this takes us back to Cicero’s and Kleist’s struggle to articulate what they sensed they thought.

Accepting Gadamer’s caveat that language precedes subjective thought, how does dialogical exchange bring both Cicero and Kleist to recognise the thoughts they

2 I am grateful to my colleague Dr Cornelia Sollfrank for introducing me to this piece.

dimly anticipated but could not articulate as the thoughts they were searching for? Both affirm that participation in dialogue allows them to recognise and realise the thoughts that they could previously only sense obscurely? Two questions are relevant. (1) Kleist acknowledges that it is only talking to his sister rather than what his sister says that brings him the desired clarification of thought. What then is it about the engaging a play of words with his sister that enables him to re-cognise the thoughts he pursues? (2) Despite the emphasis Gadamer gives to conversation and dialogue, his account of conversation suggests that: 'Understanding is not based on transposing oneself into another person' (Gadamer 1989, 383). It is not a question of 'getting inside another person and reliv(ing) his experiences' (Gadamer 1989, 383). 'Conversation,' he remarks, 'is a process of coming to an understanding' and this 'always includes application' (Gadamer 1989, 385). In other words, it is not just a matter of understanding the words articulated by my dialogical partner but more a question of understanding what those words effect or bring about within my shared horizon of understanding irrespective of what my partner may have intended. This is the basis of our claim made in this paper that in dialogue there is no literal ex-change of 'hermeneutic content' between one speaker and another. It is not what is exchanged that matters but what participation in that exchange can bring about within the understanding of each speaker. Why, then, is it that it is the *words* of the other rather than the other who speaks them that I seek in dialogue?

Gadamer is quite clear that if understanding were a transposition of mental states, understanding would be impossible. Can we ever be sure that what we think we have entered as another's mental state is indeed another mental state rather than one constructed from within our own perspective? If understanding is not a question of grasping the interiority of an *other* but of comprehending the *words* they use, then, why is it that on certain occasions those words directly *speak* to us? Not all human discourse is significant. Michael Oakeshott complains of those bores who use conversation for self-display rather than genuine and risky exchange (Oakeshott 1981, 198). Martin Heidegger notes how everyday talk (*Rede*) peddles second-hand experiences and vacuous opinions whilst Nietzsche also warns of ordinary language as expressing the sentiments of the market place.³ Nevertheless, as Buber and Gadamer also know, dialogical exchange can be inspirational and is, as Oakeshott surmises, central to the development of human kind. The question remains: why does a sudden phrase or word pattern suddenly speak to us? Is it because certain words and certain constructions of those words contribute to what

3 On Martin Heidegger's concern for language, see Richardson, J. (1986) *Existential Epistemology*, Oxford: Clarendon, 41-2.

Stefan Rosenzweig described as the selfification of the self?⁴ Such a perspective concurs with the ontological priority Gadamer gives to language: the self is not a pre-condition of dialogical exchange but is very much its product. If so, we can re-state our central question, ‘What is the promise of dialogue?’ To propose an answer we need to consider the nature of the hermeneutic *cogito* more carefully.

When Gadamer insists that the hermeneutic *cogito* – my sense of being as a conversant self – is not prior to language but a consequence of dialogical engagement, he is making a fundamental ontological point. After all, is the notion of a cognitive subject at all thinkable as prior to language? Given his commitment to the co-existence of language and thought, Gadamer is led to deny this possibility. However, epistemologically speaking, the occurrence of particular dialogues does indeed pre-suppose the prior existence of hermeneutic agents capable of bringing something to dialogue. Accordingly both Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur insist against their structuralist critics that it makes no sense to ask who is speaking if, as structuralism claims, the semiological function of language provides a system without a subject (Ricoeur 2004, 253). Gadamer makes an additional point: ‘Artificial signs and symbols alike do not ... *acquire* their functional significance from their own content but must be taken as signs or symbols ... Signs only have a function *when they are taken* (by a hermeneutic *cogito* or interpreting subject) as a sign’ (Gadamer 1989, 137). An agency is implied. Gadamer and Ricoeur recognise that in linguistic fields of indeterminate meaning, establishing new or alternative meanings is inconceivable without the intervention of a hermeneutic *cogito*. Ricoeur makes an additional point: in the absence of any final meaning, the process of recovering new meanings from available ones requires some notion of subjective agency. Nevertheless, in all these cases such a *cogito* does not have to be conceived as a transcendental subject (Ricoeur 2004, 244). The hermeneutic *cogito* is, clearly, psychologically prior to any given dialogical engagement: the perspective the *cogito* brings to the exchange arises from precisely from that priority. However, and this is the vital point for philosophical hermeneutics, the hermeneutic *cogito* is not possessed of any logically *a priori* capabilities although it certainly has a set of orientations and concerns shaped by the historical, linguistic and cultural horizons out of which it clearly emerges. We would not have any hermeneutic orientation

4 ‘The self never consolidates into an identifiable, let alone ultimate shape. Instead it passes through endless configurations of itself ... The “selfification of the self”, as Rosenzweig calls it, proliferates into a continual reconfiguration. Each individual manifestation of such an unfolding sequence of “selfing” is nothing but a transition, leading to another shape of the self that “man” is set to become. Because each individual shape of those configurations remains transient, the non-Nought of man’s essence is drawn out into ever new configurations.’ See Iser, W. (2000) *The Range of Interpretation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 133-4.

were it not for the fact that our being is a *being grounded* in the linguistic and cultural horizons that transcend us collectively. In conclusion, there is no hermeneutic *cogito* prior to the contingencies of history and language and yet the existence of that *cogito* is a pre-condition of the very inter-active engagements it partakes in. As we shall see, each dialogical exchange offers every *cogito* the promise of becoming more itself, the promise of an ever increasing selfication of its particular selfhood.

How might the hermeneutic *cogito* be conceived? Nietzsche argues all that is required is cluster of inter-dependent interests (a horizon or alignment of loosely unified concerns) which *act* together as if they were a subject.

The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general ... My hypothesis: The subject as multiplicity. (Nietzsche 1968, Section 290)

The sphere of a subject constantly growing or decreasing. (Nietzsche 1968, Section 488)

Gadamer insists, of course, that hermeneutic engagement is dialogical which is another way of saying that it is an inter-active occasion in which one horizon of meaning (the reader's) is re-arranged by exposure to another (the text's). The hermeneutic *cogito* is a certain site of inter-active meanings, values and interests. The horizons of meaning which come to constitute a given subjectivity mean that such a *cogito* embodies a sensitivity and a vulnerability to those given alignments of meaning which embody its primary concerns be they religious, political or existential. These constitute the orientation of its tradition. This is to grant that such a way of life – a given hermeneutic – has its vulnerabilities. Given alignments of concern establish themselves as an interactive subjectivity, a subjectivity that is both subject to other alignments of meaning and capable of subjecting them to its own norms. It can be argued that for such dialogical creatures as ourselves, *being* and *being-human* is essentially being subject to subjectivities of meaning.

Wolfgang Iser offers an insightful account of how such dialogical interaction between 'subjects' can be described in terms of semantic exchange (Iser 2000). His analysis is of value in that it offers an insight into how dialogical exchange can be conceived as transformational for a hermeneutic *cogito*. His account of the inter-active interpretation of subject-matters (*Sachen*) is a crucial prelude to the key argument. The argument offers a clue to our primary enquiry: 'What is it about dialogical exchange that attracts the hermeneutic *cogito*?'

Iser's invocation of the hermeneutic differential reveals the gap between what a subject-matter (primary topic, concern, or concept to be investigated) (a) has been

taken to mean and (b) might yet come to mean. Not only does the process of interpretation open this space, but transformational understanding requires the instabilities of meaning such a space generates. Phenomenologically speaking, subject-matters denote the central pre-occupations of a practice whether political, artistic or academic. Their indeterminacy of meaning dictates that though they can never be fully articulated, they can always be brought to better articulation. Indeed, when subject-matters such as openness, justice, integrity, or transparency acquire normative status in a practice, commitment to them will demand a more comprehensive understanding of what can, by definition, only be partially understood. The range of application subject-matters can sustain will never be known *a priori*. Only subsequent questioning and experience will reveal their hitherto unseen possibilities. Such 'immeasurables' prompt a proliferation of interpretations, 'each of which must give way to another because of its inherent limitations' (Iser 2000, 141). Whereas a philosophical critic like Derrida would contend that it is '*différance*' *per se* that renders any hermeneutic object, text, or subject-matter ungraspable, for Iser it is the process of interpretation itself that forever proliferates fleeting figurations of meaning each of which 'is either modified or cancelled by what is to follow' (Iser 2000, 158). Any attempt of the hermeneutic *cogito* to grasp its object through interpretation thereby only serves to disperse that object once again. However, hermeneutic understanding does not have to be understood as the impossible quest for *the* meaning of a text or artwork. It can also be thought of transformatively, that is, as a process whereby in coming come to think differently (though never definitively) about a text or subject matter, our understanding of that text and/or ourselves 'moves on'. As we shall suggest, the hermeneutic *cogito* is as much an unfolding immeasurable as the subject-matters it strives to understand.

Subject matters which ground the practices of a 'form of life' indicate, as we have suggested, fields of normative vulnerability. Since such subject-matters shape and form our practices, we are clearly sensitive to the implications of any change in their meaning. Such alterations either threaten the interests embodied in them or promise to extend them. The process of interpretation understood as pursuing how an 'immeasurable' at the root of one of our practices might be developed, 'is basically performative in character'. 'It makes something happen, and what arises out of this performance are (other) emergent phenomena', elements in what we might call the selfification process (Iser 2000, 253). Interpretation can induce the appearance of new and unexpected determinations of a subject-matter's meaning. As we shall see, the performative aspect of dialogue plays a significant role in our argument concerning what a dialogical exchange can effect within the understanding of its participants.

Interpretation is performative precisely because it is inter-active. Interpretation is not, in this context, a question of a hermeneutic agent projecting on to an alien subject matter its own perspective. It is, essentially, an inter-action between the horizons of meaning attached to a body of work and those which characterise of the outlook of the reader or spectator. Both horizons of meaning may embrace shared subject-matters but configure them differently according to their grounding orientation. The subject-matter operates as a place-holder between both alignments of meaning, allowing each alignment to be transposed and altered. The connection between vulnerability and transformation becomes clear.

Precisely because of its normative commitment to a subject-matter, a life form will seek out in other and strange alignments of cultural meaning new determinations of its principal meanings (concerns). Interpretive engagement with other literary or historical forms of that subject-matter can generate unexpected determinations of meaning. This 'fission' (rather than fusion) of hermeneutic horizons exposes that life-form to unforeseen re-alignments of its constituent values. It is the position of a subject-matter as a placeholder between two horizons of meaning that allows the alignment of meaning around the subject-matter in one perspective to be infused with counter-part alignments transforming a hermeneutic *cogito's* initial understanding of the subject-matter in question. The transformed horizon has not grasped *the* meaning of the subject-matter but has, as a result of the interaction, acquired a different grasp of it which can, in turn, expose the limitations of previous suppositions concerning it. Its understanding has not achieved closure, but movement. Ricoeur offers a helpful remark at this juncture.

In the essay 'The Question of the Subject: the Challenge of Semiology' Ricoeur argues that: 'Language is no more a foundation than it is an object; it is mediation, a 'milieu' in which and through which the subject posits himself and the world shows itself' (Ricoeur 2004, 250). This throws an informative light on Iser's argument concerning transformative engagement. Ricoeur in his criticism of structuralism's exclusion of the subject from its analysis of *langue* notes that 'what is admirable is that language is organised in such a way that it allows each speaker to appropriate the entire language by designating himself as the *I*' (Ricoeur 2004, 248). At this point our argument turns full circle, returning in a more insightful way to the cases of Cicero and Kleist.

In Iser's terms the 'I' is an 'immeasurable': the ground from which we spring is not fully available to us. This is not a negative conclusion for either Ricoeur or Gadamer. When in language 'the subject posits him or her self as "I"', the entire speech-created world (the life of embodied meaning) also appears. *In principium erat verbum* implies for both thinkers the co-determinacy of both the subject and the speech-created world. Gadamer insists that language is the medium in which

'I' and 'world' meet or manifest their original belonging together (Gadamer 1989, 442). In Gadamer's *Sprachlichkeit* the two are inseparable. As an 'I', the hermeneutic *cogito* is grounded in a formative tradition which lies ahead of it. Both Ricoeur and Gadamer contend that when we speak of ourselves, we do not speak in terms of interior noumenal spaces but in the language of beings *already* related to world they are in. This confirms the mutuality between the language of self and the language of (the speech-created) world. The hermeneutic *cogito* finds itself *already* grounded in collective stories and narratives the being of which extend well beyond its horizons. The grounding of the 'I' in cultural tradition implies that first-person descriptions will always contain an implicit understanding and, hence, relation to third person descriptions of the world. Conversely, and precisely because of that relationality, changes in world descriptions can, in principle, imply changes in self-descriptions. Since *Sprachlichkeit* entails for Gadamer an infinity of potential meaning configurations, it follows that the totality of possible self-descriptions is implicitly held within everything that can be said about the world and, hence, Gadamer's affirmation of the dialogical inseparability 'I' and 'world'. Who I am reveals me to be an endless conversation with the world around me. How such an 'I' or subject grasps itself it will be within a *determinate* set of incomplete self-descriptions. As an 'immeasurable' however, it will seek to extend its self-understanding. The dialogical dimensions of such self-descriptions are critical.

Though incomplete, such descriptions anticipate their completion albeit that such completion might never be fully realised. This touches upon an important aspect of Gadamer's speculative conception of language. The most well known version of this notion involves the idea that all linguistic meaning points beyond itself. This entails the argument that the intelligible meaning of a spoken assertion actually depends upon acquaintance with an extensive horizon of unspoken meaning. A classic formulation of the position appears in *Truth and Method*:

Language ... is speculative in that the finite possibilities of the word are orientated toward the sense intended as toward the infinite.

To say what one means – to make oneself understood – means to hold what is said together with an infinity of what is not said in one unified meaning and to ensure that it is understood in this way. Some one who speaks in this way may well use the most ordinary and common words and still be able to express what is unsaid and is to be said. (Gadamer 1989, 469)

A second version suggests that a fuller sense of what is presently stated can be anticipated in what has yet to be articulated. Gadamer cites the case of sensing what someone with weak powers of expression is struggling to say, anticipating what they are trying to say and then completing their utterance for them. Such an 'anticipation of completeness' is presented by Gadamer as an important feature of

hermeneutic understanding. He speaks of the '*Vollzug des Sprechens*', that is, of the capacity of a 'pointing' word to realise some of the possibilities of meaning inherited from the past which are constantly in play within present experience (Gadamer 2007, 198). Related to these remarks is an additional claim: to understand a thinker or artist is *to think with* him or her even when entering strange territory. Such thinking-with requires an empathy or a 'feel' for the *epistémè* in which that artist lives as well as a knowledge of what concepts within a given life-world can plausibly be embraced in an interpretation of a work. Having an intuitive feel for a way in which an artist or a poet works by no means needs to invoke the psycho-logistic form of interpretation associated with Wilhelm Dilthey's historical hermeneutics. It has, arguably, much more to do with Wittgenstein's notion of entering a 'form of life', that is, of understanding a pattern of thought sufficiently well so as to know 'how to go on' within it, sensing where it leads, and what it suggests as the next move. Anticipating the inherent logic or rhetoric of a writer is, in other words, not to be associated with possessing 'psychologicistic' gifts but with anticipating where open and inclusive thought patterns are pointing. Here we can make several salient remarks.

Like Heidegger's description of language, our self-understanding is already underway though never conclusive, definitive or closed. Self-understanding is a composite of incomplete stories, broken perspectives, former departures and non-arrivals. Some accounts of selfhood will dominate over others whilst others are not so much forgotten as 'withheld' in our subconscious. Arguably, the sense of self that we have is, indeed, anticipatory, always an indication of what we might plausibly become though we rarely can put our finger on precisely what outcome it will be. In other words, our sense of self is more a sense of possibility, of having a vague feel for where all the different and inconclusive narratives which shape our being could be pointing.

Buber remarks: 'All real living is meeting' (Buber 2011, 17). His statement brings back into focus a central point. 'Understanding is not based on transposing oneself into another person' (Gadamer 1989, 383). It is not a question of 'getting inside another person and reliv(ing) his experiences' (Gadamer 1989, 383). Dialogue is always potentially transformative not just because of the capacity to understand the words used by an other but more because of what the meeting with those words effect, trigger or bring about within my horizon of understanding irrespective of what that other may have intended to say. This is the basis of our claim that in dialogue there is no literal ex-change of 'hermeneutic content' between one speaker and another. It is what participation in that exchange can bring about within the understanding of each speaker that matters. This is the performative element of dialogue mentioned above.

What is it then that I listen out for in the words of the other? From an existential point of view I never enter a dialogue without a set of pre-understandings. Linguistic capacities or the values of an ethically shaping tradition are not the type of pre-understanding that is presently important. The pre-understanding that is important concerns those open, unresolved and dimly sensed anticipations of self which invariably carry unreflectively into our dialogical engagements. Gadamer's phenomenological account of experiencing reality suggests accordingly:

'Reality' always stands in a horizon of desired or feared or, at any rate, still undecided future possibilities. Hence it is always the case that mutually exclusive expectations are aroused, not all of which can be fulfilled. The undecidedness of the future permits such a superfluity of expectations that reality necessarily lags behind them. (Gadamer 1989, 113)

The promise of dialogue and the true gift of the other concerns the emergence of those words from within an exchange which can (albeit transiently) fulfil those dim and half remembered anticipations of completeness that were always, already, formatively at play within our self understanding. It is, in other words, our partial grasp of the unfolding narratives and structures of identity already and always at play within our ever shifting self-understanding that makes us susceptible to those 'turning' words which can suddenly complete and make whole a sequence of meaning that we may have had a dim premonition of but can now properly apprehend.

What is suggestive about the argument is that the recognition is not a recovery or remembrance of a forgotten thought as in the classical Platonic doctrine of *anamnesis*. To the contrary, Gadamer's anticipatory account of *mimesis* concerns recognising in what has come to pass (the completed meaning) the thought we knew previously but only as a dimly felt premonition or inarticulate anticipation. The effect of the words of the other (what they bring about irrespective of the intentions of the speaker or author) lies in their capacity to bring us albeit momentarily to a rare moment of fulfilment in which what was previously only sensed and anticipated as a possible outcome of meaning is now recognised as that outcome fulfilled. *Mimesis* for Gadamer is future-orientated. As a hitherto incomplete narrative is brought to completion, the narrative becomes more strongly what it always was potentially. No wonder, then, that we should hang on the word of the other for in that word (what it brings forth in us) lie new possibilities for self-understanding. As we have previously argued, in a speech-created world a hermeneutic *cogito* will always be exposed to and be vulnerable to alignments of meaning other than its own, configurations of meaning capable of challenging and transforming its initial understanding of itself. This is, arguably, where Derrida completely misunderstood Gadamer's hermeneutic 'good will' (Michelfelder and Palmer 1989, 137). Openness to the other is not

a matter of drawing the other into dialogue on one's own terms alone (the will to power). It concerns a dialogical recognition that in the words of other and in the otherness of the speech-created-world, unrealised determinations of meaning capable of transforming both my self-understanding and my understanding of the world lie in ambush: 'if we understand, we understand differently' (Gadamer 1989, 237). The openness of Gadamerian dialogue is, therefore, not a surreptitious power stratagem as Derrida and Foucault suggest but involves a kenotic attentiveness to the other's *words* as potentially holding a key to unrealised possibilities of understanding within my self-understanding. Because of language, the extent to which I can find myself in the world, and find the world in me, is infinite. The meanings I associate with my own self-descriptions are constantly challenged by variations of those meanings found in texts and artefacts. It is, indeed, in and through language that human beings find, lose and produce themselves. The word is the medium of understanding's movement, a movement discernible only to a subjectivity whose being is rooted in language. The allure and promise of dialogue for the hermeneutic *cogito* lies in the fact that in the *words* of the other resides the possibility of becoming *other* to ourselves; completer, clearer, perhaps even more ourselves.

The claim of this paper has been that from within the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics the importance of dialogical exchange lies not in what is transmitted between interlocutors but in the respective hermeneutic effects of their exchange. In dialogue there is no literal ex-change or transference of 'hermeneutic content' between one speaker and another. We have argued that it is not what is literally exchanged that is of primary importance but what participation in that exchange can unexpectedly achieve within the understanding of each dialogical participant irrespective of what either may have meant to say. The ontological priority of language over subjective consciousness is, as we have suggested, fundamental to articulating how dialogical exchange can give rise to transformative understanding. Such exchanges can both trigger developments within and transform the narrative structures of the understanding already at play within us. Appreciating the hermeneutic effect of the words used within dialogue is key to grasping how transformative understanding can occur. It is in the hermeneutic effect of words that the promise of dialogue lies, a promise which in the experience of Cicero and Kleist could always be redeemed by prompting and engaging us in dialogue.

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A Critique of Dialogue in Philosophical Hermeneutics

Hans-Herbert Kögler

The idea of dialogue occupies arguably the most central position in Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer 1960/1989). Dialogue is here not understood merely as the conversation between two subjects about something of common interest in a shared medium of understanding, but rather as the foundational phenomenon within which objects and themes, subjects and perspectives, and common interest and shared understanding are grounded. The foundational character of dialogue derives from the fact that all experience is understood to be linguistically mediated, while language as a medium exists in its true and essential form as dialogue. The strongest support for this approach comes from a phenomenological perspective on understanding, i.e. on what really happens when we understand something, when we make sense of something by interpreting it. Bringing together the encompassing and foundational role of dialogue with its concrete origin in the act of interpretation will yield, as I will show, a post-metaphysical concept of understanding as dialogue. Gadamer's own philosophical-hermeneutic conception of dialogue both suggests and yet misses its full articulation, as our analysis of the idea of dialogue in philosophical hermeneutics, the question of the metaphysical grounds of understanding in language, and the issue of the epistemological significance of dialogue will show.

Key words: dialogue, hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer, language, agency, metaphysics

The Idea of Dialogue in Gadamer's Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is generally known to be concerned with the interpretation of texts, which we can put more systematically as the interpretive understanding of symbolic expressions by a human agent (Schrift 1990; Grondin 1994). The main question is what conditions or processes have to be in place so that someone is able to comprehend adequately what someone else has meant, i.e. what he or she intended to say when uttering (writing or saying) something. Historically this became a methodological issue in the context of the emerging human and social sciences, namely when historically or culturally distant and strange texts (or speech acts, practices, artworks, etc.) constitute the objects of understanding (Schleiermacher 1819/1957; Dilthey 1883/1959; 1910/2004). In these cases, understanding what was said or meant via the symbolic expression clearly involved interpretation, as either the strangeness of the form and assumptions expressed in the texts, and

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also the reflexive knowledge that those texts derived from historical and cultural contexts vastly different than our own, required a more explicit and methodological approach. Symbolic expressions by another human subject needed to be approached such that the self-understanding of the other was, as much as possible, respected; it required to reconstruct or even re-live the thoughts or experiences of the other such that the other's perspective could bring itself to bear onto one's own understanding of things—and thus allow the understanding of the other. Hermeneutics as the art of such an interpretive and reflexive understanding understood itself mainly as a methodological discipline, as a scientific support structure for accessing the beliefs and assumptions of the other in order to make sense of them.

For Gadamer, to conceive of interpretive understanding as dialogue—as a dialogue with the text—means to break with such a methodological conception of hermeneutics. Promoting dialogue to the centre stage is, in turn, based on a phenomenological analysis of the process of understanding and interpretation, i.e. an analysis of what really happens when we understand a text (Gadamer 1960/1989). While dialogue now emerges as the overarching medium of understanding, and indeed of human existence, it is important to never lose sight of its phenomenological origin. The *phenomenon* of interpretation involves someone approaching a text, or any symbolic expression of the other, in order to understand it, to make sense of it. Now accessing, or relating to, this sense obviously deals with an entity, a text or symbolic expression that is *about something*. To express something is to say something about something. This aboutness of the text is its intentional orientation, which Gadamer calls 'the thing itself' (*die Sache selbst*). If we are to understand symbolic expressions, we do so by understanding what they say about something. Yet in order to understand the beliefs and assumptions expressed by the other, we have to connect them to our beliefs about the subject matter. Yet in order to do that, we have to bring into play our own beliefs and assumptions, and then compare, adjudicate, revise and transform them as we continue to understand. Interpretation is thus the continuous improvement of our sense of what the other says about something, such that the subject matter becomes clearer. Yet this is (like) dialogue. Interpretation of a text or of the actual speech acts of a present other is dialogical since it is two perspectives about a shared issue that are conjoined in this endeavor.

Gadamer's analysis of the relation between an interpreter and a text is convincingly modelled after the real conversation between two subjects, because as in real dialogue we are aiming to understand what the other says by following his or her thoughts and to engage in an exchange that mutually adjusts and respects the two perspectives: our own and the one of the other. Yet using the actual conversation with the other as a model for textual understanding also illuminates what goes into any real conversation between two actual agents: the dialogue between agents is itself based on a pre-understanding of each one with regard to the relevant subject matter; a successful

dialogue will always transcend the individual perspectives involved and enlarge the views of each participant, whether it leads to a new shared view or whether it brings out irreconcilable differences; and a real dialogue is always *an event* that is based on prior background understandings that help actualise a process that is beyond the subjective control of each of the agents involved. Dialogue thus emerges as an inter- and trans-subjective phenomenon that precedes and transcends the individual agents and their perspectives by establishing a temporal process that lifts them onto the higher and still historically and culturally situated plane of *mutual understanding*.

Dialogue is thus the real agent of interpretation, which accounts for much of the anti-methodological thrust that defines philosophical hermeneutics. Yet I want to emphasise nevertheless the *phenomenological origin* of this concept of understanding because it helps us avoid abandoning the subject entirely, giving up or neglecting the role of reflexive agency in this process. The fact that interpretive understanding approaches a symbolic expression via its relation to the subject matter, to *content*, means that the intentional self is represented in this process. The self finds itself defined by its cultural and historical background understanding and nevertheless understands what is said; it realises the meaning of the text or symbolic expression, and it is thus actualised and enhanced, and not reduced or eliminated, by this process. Furthermore, the process comes only fully into its own when the reflexive interpreter is aware of the conditions that enable her to understand, when she can see herself as situated in an 'effective history' (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) which is both beyond her control and yet shapes her perspective. Indeed, the effective realisation of one's embeddedness in one's context of tradition contributes to an *epistemic humility* towards what the other has to say, as one now understands one's beliefs and assumptions as necessarily situated, limited, and incomplete, thus as always ready for improvement. The resulting 'ethos of openness' is thereby grounded in a non-defeatist self-conception of situated reason, in which I need the other's beliefs and assumption to reach a better and deeper understanding of the issues at stake. The phenomenological grounding of interpretation as dialogue succeeds in retaining the connection to the *interpreter's reflexive self-consciousness* all the while it understands that this consciousness is part of a process that transcends its constrained and situated existence.¹

1 In terms of social theory, I suggest addressing the agency-structure problematic—i.e. that social reality transcends the reality and consciousness of individual agents and yet remains dependent for its reproduction on their acts and intentions—by means of the phenomenological anchoring of the act of understanding, which as such is irreducibly situated in a reflexive self, while this self is situated in trans-subjective contexts and practices, the reflexive analysis of which is the goal of hermeneutic self-understanding. Here the role of dialogue as a medium in which such a reflexive self-understanding can be achieved is at stake.

To insist on the phenomenological origin of hermeneutic experience is crucial since it situates the dialogical principle in the unique intermediary position between a metaphysical and an empirical concept. Dialogue now emerges as a post-metaphysical concept in which the philosophical aim at grasping the totality of being and existence is inseparably conjoined with a reflexive understanding of the contingent and contextual nature of experience.² Dialogue, or the interpretive process of a dialogical happening between the interpreter and the other, is thus both an encompassing fluid structure and yet never to be abstracted from the concrete situated beliefs and experiences of the agents. The dialogical process happens in a historical time and a cultural place, but via its orientation vis-à-vis the subject matter, it brings into play beliefs and perspectives that transcend the *locus particularis*, that go beyond the contextual here and now by addressing claims that pertain to truth and validity. The truth in turn is of this world; it is a productive opening towards the world, towards the dimensions of whatever is discussed, and thus remains grounded in the particular contexts. And yet, by addressing the views of another vis-à-vis something, the interpreter opens herself up to new and different perspectives, potentially reaching a different and transcending vision. A mediation of *the temporal and the ideal*, therefore.

Yet the dialogical event also mediates and thereby transcends the division between *the subjective and the objective*, because the situated subjective view opens itself to what the other has to say, which for Gadamer again means the opening of oneself to the truth. Yet this truth is not anything objective in itself, as it is inconceivable without being disclosed by the situated perspectives which themselves turn out to be the result of previous dialogues and experiences. What is usually considered 'subjective' reveals itself as the shared yet socially evolved perspective that is advanced and improved by the view of the other vis-à-vis something. Therefore, we have here a transformation of our understanding of the subjective and the objective by conceiving the encounter of the interpreter with the text as that of a socially embedded subject with another perspective that is itself socially embedded. The dialogical process thus enables a more 'objective' view (only) in the sense of a more encompassing, reflexive, and critically transformed understanding of something that is socially shared.

- 2 The first and most prominent use of 'postmetaphysical' is found in Jürgen Habermas (Habermas 1996). However, while Habermas emphasizes the 'post' in 'postmetaphysical', suggesting a stage beyond metaphysics that is now to be occupied by a fallibilistic social theory and science, my use emphasizes equally the metaphysical aspect in 'post-metaphysical', suggesting that the role of philosophical hermeneutics is to be a metaphysics beyond and after metaphysics, that is, it is still a comprehensive doctrine of one's existence and being in the world, however without assuming an essentialist or infallible position vis-à-vis its concrete content and formulation. It aims at the whole, at totality, but not within a developed system, but as an approach that grounds how open-ended and 'dia-logical' experience can be possible.

Finally, the dialogical process also entails the mediation between *the individual and the general*, since the individual interpreter finds him or herself oriented towards something on the basis of previously acquired, culturally shared beliefs and assumptions. What may be considered ‘individual’ is therefore the perspectival and situated slicing of something larger, more general, commonly shared, of a *sensus communis* that nevertheless only exists by means of the individual acts of understanding. The linguistic mediation of all understanding therefore situates the individual in an open-ended process that advances towards more general truths but that nevertheless does so only on the basis of situated selves.

While we thus derive a foundational and yet post-metaphysical conception of dialogue, as the interpreter is situated in a trans-subjective process of understanding that nonetheless actualises the situated self-understanding of the subject, we have not yet unfolded how exactly the claims advanced by this approach can be substantiated. Indeed, what I introduced as a promising post-metaphysical principle of dialogue in philosophical hermeneutics does indeed so far only promise that dialogue can fulfill this role. Now Hans-Georg Gadamer’s philosophy advances dialogue to a central position in hermeneutics, but it ultimately fails to articulate the intermediary ontological position of dialogue between metaphysics and experience. As I will show, Gadamer’s grounding of interpretation-as-dialogue in a hermeneutic ontology of language leads him to under-develop the dialectical relation between the trans-subjective process of understanding and its individual embodiment in concrete reflexive agents. Accordingly, the grounding of interpretation in such an ontology has problematic consequences with regard to the epistemological function of dialogue. I will thus structure the remainder of my discussion around two related dimensions in hermeneutics, namely, first, the issue of a metaphysical grounding, and, second, the issue of the epistemological problem of understanding.³ My critical reconstruction of Gadamer’s approach and its problems is aimed at introducing a post-metaphysical conception of dialogical interpretation that can support our epistemic aims with regard to understanding and interpretation. My critique of Gadamer’s conception of dialogue ultimately aims at strengthening the potential of dialogue as an encompassing philosophical idea, as it pushes towards a more contextual, situated, and socially reflexive conception of dialogical interpretation.

3 A third and equally important dimension of philosophical hermeneutics consists in the ethical meaning, scope, and implications of the principle of dialogue. For further analysis, see Kögler (2014a) ‘The Crisis of a Hermeneutic Ethic’, *Philosophy Today*, as well as the forthcoming (Forthcoming 2014b) ‘Ethics and Community’, in J. Malpas, H.-J. Gander (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Philosophical Hermeneutics*.

The Metaphysical Grounding of Dialogue

Language is the all-encompassing horizon within which anything that can possibly be experienced can come to light. Language opens up the world to the self, since without language there is no world, no experience (Heidegger 1971; Humboldt 1988). Experience is specifically human by being both immersed into whatever it is that is understood, and yet it is also reflexive, things are *understood* as something. Human experience is both situated in the world—it is, as Heidegger said, from the start *Being-in-the-World*—and yet the world is not merely an environment, a natural habitat, but defines a realm of significance, domains of intentional understanding within which the self naturally moves and acts (Heidegger 1927/1962). Language is the master-medium of human experience because it creates a holistic web that is constantly open towards, and in interaction with, the world. And yet, it uniquely mediates our experience of anything possible by constructing frames of reference—conceptual schemes which are both implicit, taken-for-granted, and potentially reflexive, representable. These interpretive schemes create the specifically human way of finding oneself in a world, by being simultaneously able to reflexively distance oneself, transform and change, and reinvent one's understanding. Language thus does not define merely this or that, but defines us, our experience. It shapes and 'discloses' whatever appears, and so has a universal significance for human understanding: 'Being that can be understood is language.' (Gadamer 1960/1989, 474)

Gadamer attempts to bring out this universal character of language in a variety of ways, including the self-forgetfulness of language when we think and speak (implying that any thought unconsciously draws on language), the uncontrollability of dialogue as the medium in which thoughts are formed (thereby designating concept formation as essential for experience and showing that it depends on language), and the interpreter's dependency on background knowledge (which exists in terms of pre-judgments which are necessarily linguistic which thus makes all interpretation language-dependent) (Kögler 1999). The major thrust of the metaphysical analysis of language is to further ground the phenomenological findings that interpretation happens in a way that supersedes the conceptual framework of subject/object and methodological control. Language is a medium that encompasses both subject and object, the self and the other, and as such promises to provide a new ground for self-understanding. Metaphysically speaking—as we already noted the fluid, open (and therefore also open-ended), and situated nature of language as dialogue—this presents a somewhat groundless ground, a post-metaphysical metaphysics of an essentially temporal, historical and cultural being. It defies ever being captured in a transcendental or universal realm of ideas, forms, God, innate ideas, or a priori structures of any kind. And yet language—the symbolically mediated background understanding that pre-defines how the subject understands 'the thing itself'—

has a transcendental function in Gadamer, since its pre-mediation of meaning is inescapable. And at the same time, the 'transcendental' (since insurmountable) role of language is understood not in a strictly transcendental, namely a Kantian way, i.e. as a necessary constrain of possible experience in the mind of the subject. Rather, language (which exists only in its concretely dialogical mediations in place and time) provides the necessary condition of all experience because it alone allows us, the self, to come into a conscious understanding of being, which means that the merely temporal, momentary, or fleeting event is transformed into a conceptual understanding that captures something as *being what it is*—which always means capturing it in terms of some concept.

Language is intrinsically dia-logical because it is intentionally oriented towards its content which it is and it is not at the same time. The word 'tree' intends to mean the tree and not the idea or the concept of tree, and thereby allows all to understand the tree as a tree. Here all share in a common understanding of the object tree, which is made possible by the linguistically enabled concept 'tree.' Language thus provides humans—which thereby alone become human—with a form or medium that *intends* the object which becomes what it is for the conscious understanding via the conceptual form. This is the birth of the symbolic expression. Something—a symbolic form or item—stands for something else—the designated object, whatever it is—and thereby allows a shared understanding among differently situated interpreters. The fact that we as humans always already exist within a realm of understanding, that fact provides us with a 'world' that we can truly share with others. It is this symbolico-ontological fact on which our shared experience within language is based, and it gives language an unparalleled status in the economy of human experience.

The issue is now to see whether Gadamer was successful in articulating this role of language for human experience. There is no doubt that what we have said is deeply indebted to Gadamer, and yet we must say that Gadamer's specific reflections on language leave room for serious criticisms. Gadamer develops an 'ontology of language' whose function is to provide the new grounding in order to overcome the Cartesian subject/object split, and which promotes language itself to the new master position (Gadamer 1960/1989). There are at least four serious problems that such an approach entails, problems that if not addressed threaten to dispense and lose the immense potential that a hermeneutic conception of language and dialogue may entail.

Language Between Event and Experience

The first of these has to do with a conceptual tendency to disavow the ontological commitment to a true mediation between language as a trans-subjective event and

the *situated experiences of the actual subjects* who understand. As is well known, Gadamer's view on language is strongly influenced by the late Heidegger—and this influence topples unfortunately the also highly present Humboldt. For Humboldt, language is both *ergon* and *energeia*, both structure and act, sedimentation of agency in form as well as active agency in its transformation (Humboldt 1988). For Heidegger, language is 'the house of being,' but as such it is an event that surpasses intentional acts, expressions, or intra-worldly experiences. Rather, language sets frames of reference, in what Heidegger calls 'the history of being,' which provide epochal ontologies of understanding for whole cultures and generations (Heidegger 1977). Gadamer does not accept Heidegger's master-narrative of a forgetfulness of being that requires a return to Pre-Socratic philosophers in order to overcome, bluntly put, Western metaphysical essentialism. But Gadamer overplays in Heideggerian fashion the role of language as trans-subjective happening (*Sprachgeschehen*) versus the situated, reflexive, and intentional subjects as speakers and interpreters. Heidegger clearly rejected, with good reason, a view that makes language merely the instrument of a self-sustained subject, either as a means for subjective expression, objective representation, or intersubjective communication. Language is instead ontologically constitutive by means of its holistic and reflexive mediation of world as such (Heidegger 1971). Yet this insight, which amounts to an understanding of the role of the (symbolically mediated) background for all intentional thought, cannot lead to the conceptual elimination of the subject (Dreyfus 1980; Searle 1983). The intentional and reflexive use of language by subjects against the backdrop of their holistic embeddedness in language and tradition requires reconstruction, not deconstruction. At worst, Gadamer has thrown out the baby of a dialogically situated subjectivity with the Cartesian bathwater of a self-sustained pre-social subject. At best, Gadamer's reinterpretation of the role of language in interpretation provides us with a vast construction site. We need to avoid conceptualising our understanding in tradition as a phenomenon that constitutes nothing but the '*Einrücken in das Überlieferungsgeschehen*', the integration into the *overbearing event* of tradition. Rather, we need to find the sources of situated autonomy and reflexive agency in the tracks and pathways that an overarching and at times overbearing history of ourselves presents us with.

The Metaphysical Reification of Language

The problem of a true mediation of the role of language as encompassing horizon on the one hand, and the active and dialogical challenges of a situated agency on the other hand, also express themselves as *the problem of the metaphysical reification of language*. This means that we now thematise language as that which makes understanding possible, that which 'grounds' it—and now we have created a new transcendental signifier, a new super-noun, a master-concept grounding a new master narrative. Yet this contradicts the hermeneutic turn towards the concrete,

the event (with a small e), the situated encounter between self and other that, however mediated and tied to vast conceptual and historical horizons, nevertheless constitutes the one most insurmountable presence and reality.⁴ The reification problem indicates that what can never be lost or forgotten is the intermediary, relational character of language that really has no entity-existence in itself. Language for Gadamer is missed in its essence if it is identified with forms, rules, grammars, or lexica. The act of bringing something into understanding, the synthetic identification, or symbolic pregnance (Cassirer) of an experience in what it is, is what defines language. This in turn means that language exists as such in its *function of opening*, of providing a mediated yet crucial access to the world. This, however, implies that 'being that can be understood' is not per se language, in that it is not defined as language while being ontologically enabled by language. The *conceptual synthesis* that expresses itself in language vis-à-vis Being, which is always encountered in terms of concrete beings, articulates what the reality of that which is encountered means, but it is not therefore suggesting that this act is itself the total reality. If this distinction is not made, Gadamer faces the charge of *linguistic idealism*. This would mean that the ultimate reality of anything that is, is its linguistic form. But that would imply an analogous problem to Berkeley who held that because everything has to be perceived to be understood as real, everything real, and the only thing real, is perception. Yet being that can be understood in language is being that is articulated as that which presents itself to us in the encounter with (the) being, without being thereby defined as linguistic in turn. It is language-dependent because it can only be articulated in language, but this mediated access to the sharedness of the experiential content does not make further claims about reality. Language functions like a window which makes us see, and which shapes what we see through its form, colour, density, and situation, without us therefore taking all we see to be glass. Gadamer's position is unclear as to how it addresses the issue of linguistic idealism with regard to that which is understood via language but not ontologically constituted as language. The position would need to be advanced towards an internal or hermeneutic realism such that the linguistically mediated nature of understanding does not compel us to the anti-realistic absurdity of claiming that all that is real is linguistic.

The Social Conditions of Dialogue

The third problem relates equally to a certain linguistic idealism in the dialogical ontology of language, albeit this time the idealistic danger is with regard to the *social conditions of dialogue*. In Gadamer's version of philosophical hermeneutics,

4 The phenomenon of understanding encompasses a non-separated, non-alienated subjectivity in the act of understanding something as something, in which I understand X as X—without the 'I' thereby having to be reflexively divided from the fully immersed awareness of the X being X, or its meaning.

tradition which is grounded in language provides the source and medium within which dialogical events actualise and transform its content. Yet since this dialogical actualisation, which consists in the infinite acts of interpretation through which texts and practices are appropriated by the situated agents, is theorised as the truth-oriented opening towards the claims of the text, it appears that the language medium is one in which a harmonious and truth-producing 'fusion of horizons' takes place towards the better and transformed insight about the subject matter. The micro-model may here be the successful philosophical seminar discussion of exceedingly difficult texts that leave everyone transformed and elevated. But if such an idealised image of dialogue, however valuable and rewarding, is ontologically promoted to the all-encompassing process of being/understanding, concern is in place. What is missing is the fact that dialogues happen in non-ideal times, places, and situations—if they happen at all. The issue is thus the extent to which a normatively idealised, and in certain contexts attainable, model of dialogical truth-finding is generalised such that the socially existing constraints on dialogical self-understanding fade from perception. Philosophical hermeneutics realises that all understanding involves interpretation, since it is necessarily perspectival, and all interpretation therefore involves application, because the meaning has to be related back to the concrete context in order to make sense. Yet if anyone seriously considers what application to real contexts must mean, the lacunae of a conception of constraints and power that undermine 'the opening towards the claim of the other' becomes apparent.

Now ever since Habermas' famous review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, this issue is known (Habermas 1988; Schrift 1990). It has been widely acknowledged that the hermeneutic ontology of language remains incomplete if not accompanied by some conception of the non-dialogical social context. The issue should, however, not be conflated with the issue of how to provide a normative standard that can universally criticise unjust power practices. Gadamer has replied to the normative charge that any so-called universal standard will itself make its claim against the backdrop of tradition—a point vividly brought back to mind in intercultural debates about what counts as right or wrong, as good or bad in certain contexts. This does not mean that 'anything goes', but it means that one's own concrete beliefs and assumptions about the good and just should be made subject to dialogical assessment (as suggested by the epistemic humility above), while the meta-norms of such a dialogical exchange may indeed provide an abstract-formal indication of a set of normative assumptions to which all can (or should) agree. But by leaving the normative issue on the side, what is at stake in the ontological discussion is whether the conceptualisation of the event of understanding as linguistic can be sufficient. It clearly cannot, in my view. What is required instead is a reconceptualisation of what constitutes the *background that grounds all understanding*. This background

encompasses symbolic assumptions and individual perspectives, but also real social practices and institutions (Heidegger 1927/1962; for a critique of Gadamer on this point, see Kögler 1999). Those practices and institutions have a threefold influence of the understanding of ‘the thing itself’ in the allegedly open and truth-oriented dialogue. First, the background is pervasively shaped by deep-seated assumptions and values that generally do not reflect the idealised conditions of dialogue, but the power-hierarchical forms of social organisations and roles. The linguistic mediation here provides the involved agents with an ideological background that due to its symbolic sublimation appears as insight and intuition where formerly power and domination reigned. Second, the actual dialogues in a social setting pre-determine to a large extent who can speak when about what to whom and in what capacity. The dialectical interchange between the tradition as the medium and public sphere in which all share, and the expert leaders who can determine the particular trajectories by occupying the relevant tracks, needs to be unfolded. Third, even if dialogue in its most truth-oriented mode of open exchange may be allowed to happen, the agents who can participate are shaped in their symbolic horizons both via content and via discursive capability to engage the other in a certain way. It would take an additional critical-hermeneutical mode of reflexivity to distance oneself from one’s power-ingrained habits and practices to allow for the possibility of a truly transformative dialogue.

The Dialectic Between Historical Ground and Individual Agency

Finally, Gadamer’s conception of a tradition-based dialogical understanding does not unfold *the dialectic between holistic background and individual agency*, but rather distorts its dynamic towards a one-sided master-narrative of the tradition as subject. The complex notion of a situated pre-understanding that is both grounded in a holistic and encompassing background, and yet dependent on the concrete re-actualisation and innovation via individual interpretations, would have allowed to overcome the stale and misleading alternative between autonomous self-constitution and heteronomous determination. Yet instead of emphasising how both background and foreground mutually re-enforce and shape one another, Gadamer stresses the role of tradition vis-à-vis individual subjectivity:

‘The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being.*’ (Gadamer 1960/1989, 276-7)

Gadamer is keen to say that self-consciousness—the ‘self-awareness of the individual’—is an overrated concept when it comes to the power of history, which as it were sweeps up individuals in their ‘closed circuits’ such that what

they tacitly assume defines their core more truly than what they explicitly know and think. Yet this late-Heideggerian rendering of prejudices into a trans-subjective power fails to bear out on a phenomenological level. Not only are conscious self-understanding and intuitive background intrinsically conjoined in hermeneutics, so that the playing off one against the other fails to account for the intertwining of conscious revision and unconscious intuition in interpretation that defines the actual hermeneutic experience. It is also ontologically counter-intuitive to assume that history develops, as it were, behind the backs of the subjects via a 'superpower of prejudices' that are, while 'shaping' the judgments of agents, nevertheless beyond their reach.⁵ The true insight here, namely that each individual act draws on a shared and therefore trans-individual *sensus communis*, gets instead overplayed by suggesting the linguistic background constitutes an ontological realm *sui generis*. The conceptually erroneous tendency of the ontology of language is here, again, to separate the phenomenologically accessible sphere of hermeneutic experience, which can never do without the irreducible core of individual *Befindlichkeit*, from the conceptually inferred trans-subjective ground that establishes in thought the possibility of true sharedness. While the sharedness of the pre-understanding is never found in one individual as such, and could never be derived from a mere aggregate notion of many individuals combined, the experience of what it *means* to share something with someone is possible only for the situated and concrete individual. It is this individual, and the dialectic with which it is situated in the larger whole of tradition, that Gadamer's hermeneutics fails to fully articulate.

The Epistemological Significance of Dialogue

Dialogue is the process through which knowledge is gained in interpretation. It thus has an epistemological significance for the human and social sciences, since their claim to existence is based on the possibility of gaining access to their object domain via an understanding of symbolic expressions. Philosophical hermeneutics reconstructs the condition on the basis of which such an access is possible, in which ever way subsequently the meanings or discourses are reconstructed within the respective historical, cultural, and social contexts and disciplinary domains. To be sure, to claim such epistemological significance does not mean to fall back into a transcendental approach that delineates specific universal criteria or rules. Similarly,

5 To clarify, this is not to deny two structural phenomena that transcend the immediate self-reflexive capacities of agents: unintended consequences that cannot be foreseen by agents as well as the structural habitus-formations that due to their meaning-conferring function usually remain 'out of sight' while constituting the subject's vision. Yet what I claim is that the hermeneutic project aims at ultimately reconstructing those dimensions such that they become part of one's social self-understanding, be it retrospect or with social self-reflexivity, or be it with regard to an ethos of openness that is experienced enough to understand the non-finality of one's current views and insights.

the phenomenological insight into the dependency of the interpreting subject on the background rules out any consciously controlled methodology, any step-by-step program that would yield necessarily true and adequate interpretations. Yet despite hermeneutics' anti-methodological thrust, and despite the lack of a separate transcendental realm of a priori forms, the dialogical approach makes a real difference with regard to human-scientific interpretation.

To be sure, Gadamer's approach has always given rise to concerns about a certain ambiguity, namely to either accept the language-ontological concept of interpretation as event and therefore to forego any epistemological or methodological claims to reflexive interpretation, or to accept the project of a human-scientific methodology and therefore to revise or abandon some of the ontological claims regarding interpretation. The truth is that Gadamer seems to oscillate between two approaches: to suggest that his reflection does not entail any concretely methodological consequences, and to suggest that a new and reformed way of understanding emerges from hermeneutics. The two options are both entailed in his work, since after all, Gadamer addresses human-scientific interpreters about their own methodological self-understanding and about what happens with them when they approach the text or symbolic expressions. A major thrust, indeed the core drive of his philosophical hermeneutics, is the overcoming of the spirit of objectivism, which is borrowed from a badly misconstrued ideal of knowledge in the natural sciences. Hermeneutic philosophers before Heidegger and Gadamer, as well as much of the disciplinary self-understanding in the human and social sciences, was defined by the aim to access their object domain in an objective manner such that its internal content or essence reveals itself. In contrast to this methodological self-understanding, dialogue is introduced as a counter-concept, as a reflexive revolution in how we understand what happens when we understand. The model of dialogue is seen to best capture what we actually and always already in some form do when we understand, and therefore interpret and apply. It is therefore indeed a social-ontological event and thus prior to any explicit methodology.

But it is also coherent, I would claim, to suggest that a reflexive self-understanding of this reality of dialogue enhances the dialogical experience, brings it so to speak into its own. True, there is *always*, to some extent and unavoidably, a fusion of horizons happening when an interpreter approaches a text in order to understand it. This is so because every possible understanding of a symbolic expression has to relate within linguistic mediation to the content of what gets expressed; here, beliefs and speech acts interpret themselves mutually: I understand what you say if I understand what you state *about something*. The understanding of symbolic expressions is therefore tied back to the interpreter's linguistically mediated web of beliefs, which means (1) that any interpretation of the other's statements will always

be in relation to my own understanding of the subject matter, (2) the interpretation is influenced by a host of implicit background assumptions since those assumptions always determine how I understand things, and (3) the interpretation of the other's statements is involving a normative dimension vis-à-vis the other's rationality since I can only disclose the other's meaning if I make sense of it, but making sense means that it is coherent and plausible to me. To approach the other, the text, therefore entails a certain anticipation of rational coherence, or a pre-conception of completeness, as Gadamer says.⁶

The principle of dialogue thus serves as a reflexive reminder of what happens structurally when we really get to understand something, when we succeed in making sense of the text or the other's symbolic acts. Yet becoming reflexively aware that this is happening makes us not only wary of chasing after misplaced objectivistic ideals of knowledge and understanding; it also entails a new epistemic ethos of openness, a readiness to interpret the text such that the other's claims and experiences are able to assert themselves against us in order to challenge and change us. Gadamer aptly perceives that unacknowledged prejudices exert their power all the more effectively if they remain undetected, if we are complacent with our interpretations and perspectives which are taken for granted and thus function as undeniable truths. A reflexive awareness of one's dependency on an always particular effective history thus leads to an opening towards the other, to a rejection of dogmatic assumptions, and to the abandonment of objectivist methods which can now be seen to seal us off from a true challenge by the other, instead of leading to objective social facts.

Now these formulations represent the constructive insights of Gadamer's dialogical hermeneutics, without addressing yet the problematic dimensions of his approach to interpretation. As before, we can delineate four areas of concern. We will see that the particular version of language-based truth-understanding falls short of encompassing the full range of hermeneutic experiences to which the humanities and social sciences can lead, without therefore ceasing to have established the broadly dialogical approach as guiding.

6 This 'dialogical recognition of the other' entails equally epistemic and ethical aspects. In order to make sense of the other's statements, I have to approach them as potentially meaningful, which is as rational and coherent; this is a cognitive requirement in order to make sense, because in order to make sense I have to make the other's symbolic expressions coherent, and to do so I have to relate them to my own taken-to-be-true beliefs and assumptions; yet approaching the other in this subject-matter based dialogical manner alone fully recognizes the other as an equal agent that I deem worthy of saying something to me, of having something to say to me—and thus to be an equal relational partner in dialogue. See Kögler (Forthcoming 2014c) 'Dialogue and Community', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*.

Alterity and the Symbolic Violence of Immediate Judgment

The first issue consists in the danger of linking the evaluative assessment of that which is understood, that is the beliefs and perspectives expressed in the text about the subject matter, with the reconstruction of what the other's beliefs and assumptions suggest as the rationally defensible and valid view. The issue can be articulated in a variety of ways, which includes perhaps most importantly the issue of the otherness or alterity of the other. Gadamer is fully aware of the need to respect and interpretively take into account this otherness. Based on one's pre-understanding, this otherness can show itself only as other for us, not as other in itself. It is therefore already dependent on some shared assumptions as we need those to make sense of the other's view at all. Yet the task now is to avoid a facile assimilation that would reduce what is challenging and different, and in the end only accept what is acceptable by our standards. Now we can see that Gadamer not only raises this issue himself as one of respecting alterity, but in addition he also demands that we 'suspend' judgment, that we open ourselves to the other by taking her perspective. Yet the linguistic mediation disallows any pre-linguistic projection into the other's mind or experiential states which therefore means that the other's perspective is always already the other's-perspective-for-us. Now combine this with Gadamer's claim that interpretation is essentially without the control or input of the interpreter—that is, for the very reason just mentioned, always a fusion of horizons, then the other's horizon is always already pre-mediated by the interpreter's own cultural and historical background, and thus never a pure or immediate other. All this is still good, as we can conceive on this basis a to-and-fro movement that may, or may not, lead to a new substantive insight into the subject matter. Gadamer himself, however, also distinguishes understanding as the understanding of (possible) truth, as grasping the truth claims made by the other as plausible and justified. Here it all depends what we can accept as 'plausible' and as 'justified.' Gadamer at times overplays his hand by suggesting that a truth-oriented interpretation succeeds only or most fully if it reaches a new truth about the subject matter. This, however, given that 'the prejudices far more than the judgments' define the 'historical being'—and thus interpretive horizon—of the interpreter, means that the plausibility of what is to be understood will in the end be evaluated by one's own standards or 'prejudices.' Yet this conclusion does not and should not have to follow from the hermeneutic fact of the necessary interpreter-relatedness of the understanding of the other. We can avoid what I would call the *hermeneutic violence of immediate judgment*—namely the symbolic violence of an interpretation that conflates the act of making sense with the act of understanding such that one oneself can accept the other's view as true. In order to do this, we need to conceive of the dialogical process in more robust terms as a continuous process of perspective-taking that allows for a variety of results, one of which can be a new shared truth, but which entails other options such as are alternative ways of understanding an

issue or irreconcilable ways of making sense of X. The strong motion towards a shared truth about X is perhaps motivated by the aim to establish a temporal and yet anti-relativistic concept of truth as an ongoing process. But if it focuses and thus potentially narrows interpretation towards a consensus about the subject matter, it unnecessarily curtails the experiential options that dialogical understanding entails.

Language as Self-Contained Medium

The problem of a harmoniously constructed fusion of perspectives is ultimately, I believe, due to the ontological predominance of language as an essentially self-contained medium. Instead of seeing language as deeply intertwined with the practical and institutional contexts, language for Gadamer provides a kind of immanent transcendence from the merely empirical shackles of our existence. While rejecting Hegel's 'absolute knowledge'—since there is no end of history and no escape from the ongoing interpretations that define our being—Gadamer still maintains the privileging of language as the medium of an absolute spirit that allows for synthesis. Yet the phenomenological analysis of hermeneutic existence does point to the background as a complex compound involving subjective-emotional, social-practical, and symbolic-conceptual strands (Heidegger 1927/1962). We approach meaning usually in a tuned mood within some practical context based on our perspectival beliefs and assumptions. The task of the human sciences is to articulate the experiences and meaning contained in symbolic expressions that themselves have been articulations of such situated human existence. But this means that the full scope of the experiential dimensions should and can come into play. Gadamer's conception of a truth-oriented dialogue that addresses the highly articulate claims in philosophical texts or major artworks needs then to be expanded to include also the everyday, the quotidian cultural and social practices, all the religious, legal, aesthetic etc. expressions in which experience has objectified itself. In all these analyses, the linguistic mediation will continue to be grounding important perspectives, not only because the symbolic conceptual frames do synthesise and texture the fabric of emotional states as much as social settings; but also because the fact of symbolic mediation means that all these states and practices can become the reflexive target of a human and cultural studies that thereby enhance the reflexivity and scope of the otherwise less knowledgeable agents. Because the linguistically mediated background is richer and more than just being linguistic, the focus of dialogical interpretation has to go beyond a conceptually shared truth and include the reconstruction of the actual situations and practices within which agents symbolically express themselves.

The Misplaced Rejection of the Social Sciences

Yet if we have thus expanded the realm of hermeneutic experience, we also now need to re-allow *a pluralism of methodological perspectives* to deal with the different realms.

This is a crucial point that *prima facie* seems to dovetail well with Gadamer's approach to openness. Openness in Gadamer, however, is clearly demarcated as the openness towards the claim that tradition makes on us. When it comes to the alternative view regarding understanding and interpretation, Gadamer's magnanimity gives way to a trenchant critique of objectivistic attitudes in the humanities and social sciences. Gadamer argues that particular methodological approaches entail a non-dialogical objectification of the other, and as such are impermissible (Gadamer 1989; see Kögler 2010). A sociological consciousness that reduces the concrete other to a socially determined case of a structurally pre-existing social context fails to adequately understand the other as a human being. Similarly, a historical consciousness that empathetically understands the other as a unique individual into whom it immerses itself in order to re-live the other's thoughts, abstracts from the intersubjective relation and thus ultimately also objectifies (Gadamer 1989, 358 ff.). In both cases, Gadamer argues that the hermeneutic demand, the claim made by tradition or the other, namely to take the other's claims expressed in the text seriously, is missed. While this move allows Gadamer to make an interesting point regarding the ethical nature of interpretation—as he realises that the dialogical recognition to understand the other always entails an ethical component since I thereby recognise the other as my rational equal—the point is misplaced in the methodological context. Here instead a clearer differentiation between life-worldly attitudes of objectification and human-scientific approaches toward understanding and objectification would have helped. For instance, if a social scientist analyses the social agent in terms of objective social structures—say in terms of a class-based habitué that derives from objective social structures (Bourdieu 1990)—she will take into account, or even causally reconstruct, the impact that empirical factors have on the agent's self-understanding. However, whether this scientific analysis includes a problematic reductionism towards the background, that is whether the agent is turned into nothing but a passive effect of objective social processes or structures—that itself depends on *how* the social scientist conceptualises these factors. Causally analysing the background does not necessarily imply reductionism, but can rather, as in critical social theory, be understood as the reflexive self-objectification that unearths hitherto unacknowledged factors of one's meaning-forming background. Similarly, the empathetic transposition into another individual's real life context, which anyhow is mediated by one's own historical context, must not mean that the other is inadequately psychologised or individualised; it can rather be seen as the opening of the interpreter's to the full biographical existence of another, which now is related back to oneself as an existential claim how to live, as a version and a challenge to realise the good life in one case.⁷

7 I have developed this idea in Kögler, H.-H. (Forthcoming 2014c) 'Dialogue and Community: The Ethical Claim of Tradition', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*.

Dialogue and the Detachment of Writing

The crux of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as an approach for cultural studies is its ambiguous, and easily misunderstood, conception of dialogical interpretation. The use of an actual conversation between two subjects who are seriously engaged in an exchange suggests that dialogue and hermeneutic experience are indeed grounded in the actual life-contexts of agents. Despite the orientation towards truth claims, which introduces an idealised moment from the start, the emphasis seems nevertheless on the situatedness in an effective history that disavows the hybris of the self-sustained subject and embeds the interpreting self in a real life-context of ongoing interpretations. When Gadamer criticises the objectivism of historicism, he sounds just like it: 'Hence historical research is carried out by *the historical movement of life itself* and cannot be understood teleologically in terms of the object into which it is inquiring.' (Gadamer 1989, 284-5, my italics) Yet Gadamer's version of dialogue is much less than it appears defined by the idea of a real conversation between two flesh-and-blood agents as actualised in merely contextual circumstances. We already saw that Gadamer's conception of dialogue is strictly oriented towards the subject matter, just as much as understanding is always about what the text says. Therefore, understanding 'is not really a relationship between persons, between the reader and the author (who perhaps is quite unknown), but about sharing in what the text shares with us.' (Gadamer 1989, 391) It turns out that what is going on in the *dialogical interpretation between reader and text* is better expressed by the mediating role of *writing*, which at first seems secondary to speech with regard to language:

Certainly, in relation to language, writing seems a secondary phenomenon. The sign language of writing refers to the actual language of speech. But that language is capable of being written is by no means incidental to its nature. Rather, this capacity for being written down is based on the fact that speech itself shares in the pure ideality of the meaning that communicates itself in it. *In writing, the meaning of what is spoken exists purely for itself, completely detached from all emotional elements of expression and communication. A text is not to be understood as an expression of life but with respect to what it says.*

Writing is the abstract ideality of language. (Gadamer 1989, 392, my italics)

Gadamer emphasises that writing achieves the detachment from both writer or author and from recipient or reader because 'what is stated in a text must be detached from all contingent factors and grasped in its full ideality, in which alone it has validity.' (Gadamer 1989, 394) The grounding of historical research in 'the movement of life itself' does not mean to anchor and reflexively relate it back to contexts, but to rather unleash the orientation towards the subject matter that sets language free as a shared realm in which everyone can participate: 'What is fixed in writing has raised itself into a public sphere of meaning in which everyone who can

read has an equal share.’ (Gadamer 1989, 392) Yet the hypostatisation of language into a sphere of meaning in and of itself that merely requires to be actualised, but that also is immediately accessible by whoever can read, only repeats the idealistic fallacy of an ideal sphere of communication that is already, without further ado, available in this world. Gadamer’s conception of dialogical interpretation opts out of the struggle for adequate interpretations of our current contexts by means of a transcendent dialogue that catapults its subjects into a freer and purer world of meaning, rising straight up into the ‘abstract ideality of language’.

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Theorising Dialogue for Community Development Practice – an Exploration of Crucial Thinkers

Peter Westoby

Both dialogue studies and the field of community development are reasonably well developed ‘communities of practice’, however, there has been little direct interplay between the two whereby a theory of dialogue for community development is articulated. This article then attempts to break new ground, setting up a ‘dialogue’, so to speak, between dialogue studies and community development theory and practice.

The article consists of a systematic exploration of some of the crucial work on dialogue that the author has concluded is relevant for community development theory and practice. The perspective taken draws on the work of leading thinkers from different places and disciplines, including Hans-Georg Gadamer, Martin Buber, David Bohm, Paulo Freire and Mikhail Bakhtin. Each contributes insights that enhance an approach to community development that centres dialogue within its theory and practice.

Key words: community development; dialogue theory and practice

Introduction

Both dialogue studies and the field of community development are reasonably well developed ‘communities of practice’, however, there has been little direct interplay between the two whereby a theory of dialogue for community development is articulated. This article then attempts to break new ground, setting up a ‘dialogue’, so to speak, between dialogue studies and community development theory and practice.

Having said this, and for people less familiar with the field of community development, whilst acknowledging there are various traditions and frameworks of community development (Campfens 1997), there are numerous agreed upon orthodoxies (Ife 2002). For example, the set of skills and knowledge commonly associated with community development, which can be construed as a mix of propositional and procedural knowledge, usually portray a set of social practices

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through which community development workers assist, enable, and facilitate groups of people or community members to build relationships, develop analyses and work together to address issues impacting on their lives. This often requires some change in societal structures. In a sense then, community development is a social practice that works collectively with small groups of people to bring about social change. Whilst dialogue is *implicit* within most community development practice, as there are important communicative processes at play, this article attempts to make the dialogue theory and practice more explicit.

In doing this, I focus on what is understood as a normative perspective on dialogue. I say perspective to simply signpost that there are many ways through which dialogue can be seen, each focusing on different aspects and implications of this multi-dimensional, dynamic and subtle concept. For example, other ways of thinking about dialogue could be through linguistic-structural, phenomenological, dramaturgical and deconstructive perspectives (Flecha, Gomez and Puigvert 2003). The linguistic-structural perspective would focus on understanding dialogue in *relation to another idea* - something considered non-dialogical. Dialogue, as a linguistic device, is thereby considered meaningless outside of the structural relationship of another idea. From a phenomenological perspective dialogue is understood as an 'ideal type' of practice, that is, practice *given meaning* through practitioner consciousness and their making it conscious in conversation with others. Some of the theorist's views of dialogue explored below are clearly phenomenological. A dramaturgical perspective would focus on the performance of dialogue - how practitioners embody dialogue in particular settings and contexts, also with awareness of settings and contexts whereby such dialogical performance is probably difficult, if not impossible. Finally, a deconstructive perspective would ask: what does the word dialogue do? Within this frame there is no metaphysical presence of meaning to the word dialogue; it is the language itself that creates the presence of dialogue. Such a deconstructive 'reading' of dialogue within community development would also look for cracks in what is inevitably set up as a binary of dialogical versus non-dialogical. It would ask about the silences within the article - the tough stuff, or grey areas usually overlooked.

However, returning to the primary perspectives applied in this article, the notion of normative is used to discuss how some theorists argue dialogue 'should be' - their perspective of an ethical imperative. Yet even my understanding of this is informed by a decision about whether to subscribe to what could be called a shallow as opposed to deep normativity. Shallow normativity is a way of thinking about dialogue and community development in terms of a limited normative set of principles or orthodoxies. The discourse of such approaches would be something like: 'dialogue is *always*...'. Within this approach the norms and customs, that is,

normativity, of such dialogue thinking-practice, is considered shallow because there is no discussion of where these norms come from. They are discussed as being self-evident and are usually framed a-historically.

Alternatively, deep normativity is a way of rethinking dialogue and community development in terms of diverse sets of norms and customs that are situated within diverse cultural, literary or historical traditions – hence my use of the language of ‘tradition’ when thinking of community development. The norms and customs of practice, also potentially discussed in terms of principles, ethics and orthodoxies, do not claim to determine what dialogue or community development is but rather to describe what a *particular tradition* or genre of dialogue and community development is. There is depth to the norms, because they are grounded in historical and other dimensions that are particular and that have stood the test of time. For this reason I am careful to identify the author/theorist informing the discussion, also locating their discipline of thought and the geographical ‘home’ that I contend infuses and informs their way of understanding dialogue.

Also, I want to resist articulating anything that can be easily ‘lifted from the text’ so to speak, reduced to an ahistorical and decontextualised definition. So instead, and from a dialogical perspective, I offer a Freirean code (Freire 1975) that hopefully triggers further consideration about what dialogue *within community development* might mean.

With this caveat in mind, I then understand dialogue normatively as a deep, challenging, responsive, enriching, disruptive encounter and conversation-in-context; and also a mutual and critical process of building shared understanding, meaning and creative action amongst groups of people. The actors in such dialogue can include community development practitioners and also members of groups, communities or community-based organisations.

To unpack this code I now trace some theorist perspectives on dialogue, while also beginning to explore implications for what I call as a shorthand ‘dialogical community development’ (Westoby and Dowling 2013). Having said this, I have not attempted any systematic comparative or critical analysis of these authors. I am not trying to build an over-arching theory of dialogue for community development. Instead the article has been laid out as a systematic examination of some of the crucial work on dialogue that I have concluded is relevant for community development theory and practice. My choice of ideas discussed has been grounded in an iterative dialogue between, on the one hand, my own experience of community development and the reading of the community development literature, and on the other hand, my reading of the dialogue literature. This iterative process implies resonance, whereby I have read each of the theorists and considered their key relevance to

an interpretation of community development theory and practice. Clearly other choices could have been made.

An Orientation: Turning to the Other – Reaching for Understanding

My understanding of dialogue at its very core is informed by the seminal work of German phenomenological philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975), who articulated the need for people to engage one another in dialogue by *turning to the other* and *reaching for understanding* (Gadamer 1998, 98; Maranhão 1990, 4).

Community development is a people-centred practice grounded in particular kinds of relationship between people. Gadamer is then drawn upon to highlight that from a dialogical perspective, within community development, the kind of relationships between practitioners and community members, and between community members themselves, is other-oriented, whereby people disrupt self-orientation and instead ‘turn to the other’, and in that other-orientation there are attempts to reach for mutual understanding of the other. Turning to the other and reaching for mutual understanding requires engaging with other perspectives, or what Gadamer calls ‘horizons’ (Gadamer 1975, 303ff).

Drawing on the work of Gadamer, anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano asserts such turning to the other requires a reaching to understand the other that is ‘immediate, open and authentic’ (1990, 272). This reaching for understanding invites each party within the dialogue to be aware of their own prejudices, their horizon so to speak, but also being open to the other parties’ questions and claims, allowing themselves ‘to be conducted by the object’ of conversation (Gadamer 1975, 33). Furthermore there is recognition that there will inevitably only be a *provisional* mutual understanding, recognising that any understanding can only be fleeting, because people, perspective and context change.

For Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, reflecting on Gadamer’s contribution to the human sciences, such turning to the other also requires openness. This implies openness to shifting our own views and more significantly, our own identity. For example, he argues that, ‘[t]aking in the other will involve an identity shift in us’ (Taylor 2002, 141). Taylor goes on to assert that, ‘[t]his is why it is so often resisted and rejected. We have a deep identity investment in the distorted images we cherish of others’ (Taylor 2002, 141), and it could be added, ourselves. Dialogue in community development then requires a stance of intention to understand, but also of provisionality and uncertainty, recognising that any attachment to beliefs, ideas, identity-constructions and so forth will undermine capacities for dialogue.

Grounding this in a story of practice, for example, in 2012 I was involved for several

weeks in a community-based education and training process located in a dense urban area of south-east Queensland. The process included twelve residents of local public housing, a colleague and myself as facilitators meeting once per week for eight weeks. The purpose was to explore a vision for community life, examine the issues the people in the group faced and consider collective ways forward. However, during one morning tea some people were engaging in 'idle chatter' commenting about people of colour in the neighbourhood. After morning tea the group gathered and one man, from a pacific island heritage, announced that he was offended by the idle gossip he'd overheard at morning tea and was considering leaving. As a facilitator I was aware, in the silence that occurred after his announcement, that here was a significant dialogical moment for this group. Would they respond to the radical invitation of otherness, calling for genuine multicultural celebration of 'other' or were they going to retreat? It was a moment inviting a shift in the dispositions of the majority participants. I sat on the edge of my seat aware that despite the official community development process – an education and training process to support these public housing tenants develop relevant projects to their lives – here was a moment of dialogical community development *in* the process.

As a community practitioner intrigued by dialogue I have observed that it is often the kinds of relationship that honour difference (perspectives, traditions, claims) while searching for mutual understanding that create both an openness and solidarity. These are important ingredients for collective practice. This is not to suggest it is easy to forge such relations. The story accounted above is illustrative of just how difficult and fragile this relational work can be. Many practitioners and community members stay attached to their own pre-judgements and find it very difficult to remain open and therefore forge solidarity. For Gadamer the imperative to ensure such dialogue is possible is tolerance and openness to one another's perspectives. This in turn requires a willingness to enter the uncertainty of different perspectives and acknowledge the provisionality of any mutual understanding that might be forged (Gadamer 1998, 84ff). Without such tolerance dialogue becomes very difficult, signposting the limits of a dialogical approach to community development and the value of focusing on other approaches in some circumstances.

A Tension: 'Community as dialogue' and Strategic Dialogue

Building on Gadamer's notions of 'turning towards the other' and 'reaching for understanding' I turn to the philosopher Martin Buber, who offers wisdom around what can be identified as a central tension of dialogue within community development (discussed below). Buber has been used extensively within philosophy, communication, educational theory and other fields. Inspired by and drawing on the work of one of my Australian colleagues Anthony Kelly (2008), I have attempted to make sense of what Buber's philosophy of dialogue might mean for community development.

The tension that Buber alerts us to is that within dialogical community development people are invited to 'turn towards each other' (Buber 1947, 25) with an attitude of *authentic encounter*, being open to what can be referred to as an experience of 'community as dialogue'. At the same time there is the need to also be conscious of the *strategic element* of dialogue as a conscious intention to connect and communicate in a particular way named by Buber as 'technical dialogue' (Buber 1947, 22).

To unpack this tension I start with Buber's understanding of community as dialogue. In this sense, community is an experience of dialogue, both in everyday practices of being present to one another, and also in extra-ordinary moments when people experience 'deep presence' with one another (Buber 1947; 1958). For Buber this is ultimately an unconscious experience – to be in dialogue with someone is to be *not* conscious of the dialogue per se, which would undo the presence and instead focus on the dialogue. People are aware of having had this kind of encounter only after the encounter is over. Siri Hustvedt puts it beautifully, arguing that for Buber, 'the ideal relation between human beings resulted in "a change from communication to communion, that is, in the embodiment of the word dialogue"' (2012, 201). This dialogical moment is experienced as an 'in-between' space, emerging from the dialectic between what Buber understood as I and Thou (Buber 1958). It is a third space where neither party to the dialogue gives up their own point of view and yet both experience one another as whole.

This perspective of community has profound implications for dialogical community development. For Buber the dialogic attitude cuts through a world-view that is founded on separateness, which has clear distinctions between subject-knowers, and objects-known, discussed by Buber as a world-view of 'I-It' (Buber 1958). While avoiding some of Buber's more mystical orientation (deeply influenced by Judaism) I draw on his humanising vision with a secular sensibility and also acknowledge the contribution of his spiritual impulse towards holism.

This humanising vision and holistic focus puts the emphasis within community development on a particular understanding of 'community' or more accurately 'communion' rather than 'development'. In fact I often think about the work as 'developing community' rather than 'community development', or at least hold both ideas in tension. Reflecting on the question, 'How does community originate?' in 1930 in a series of published letters, Buber argued, 'nothing but remnants are left nowadays, because everywhere the aim is to rationalise life instead of humanise it' (Glatzer and Mendes-Flohr 1991, 41). He understood community as a humanising experience (with people not treating one another as objects) that was under assault in his lifetime. His reflections invite a process of re-humanisation and resistance to such rationalising assault. Like Buber, I propose that human community, as dialogue, is still possible.

However, and returning to the issue of tension within dialogical community development practice, a reading of Buber also offers up the idea of not only holding the humanising process of community as dialogue, but also holding the strategic element (White 2008), articulated by Buber as ‘technical dialogue’ (Buber 1947, 22; Arnett, Fritz & Bell 2009, 83). While community as dialogue is an embodied attitude and experience, technical dialogue is a conscious intention within community development to connect and communicate in a particular way. There is a tension between both ‘letting go’ so to speak and ‘being in the flow of dialogue’ versus the strategic and intentional technical elements that give community development purpose to the dialogue.

Thinking through this tension, again acknowledging Anthony Kelly’s (2008) work in interpreting Buber’s ideas for the purposes of community development, I consider this element of dialogue practice through the idea of the movements in working relationally with people (Buber 1947; Kelly and Burkett 2008; Westoby and Owen 2010; Owen and Westoby 2012). Relational community work focuses on the subtle, dynamic *and* at times *conscious* processes of valuing and nurturing relationships between people. Within community work this valuing and nurturing invites an orientation toward the triad of:

- Connection – building relationships of care;
- Communication that is oriented towards learning – which requires, ‘withholding the impulse to tell until one understands the context, topic, and the persons’ (Arnett et al. 2009, xiii); and,
- Commitment – acknowledging the need for people to work together for change.

Community development practice informed by technical dialogue and this triad engages people with a commitment to both *the practitioner’s own* agenda of community and development, but holds that agenda lightly while intentionally listening to people’s stories, attempting to understand their concerns and perspectives and therefore engaging with *their* agendas. This engagement requires adeptness in dialogue – an ability to engage text and sub-text while accounting for context. In other words it requires practitioners to be cognisant of what is said, what is potentially meant and what shapes the meaning. There is the need for skilful listening, not merely responding to people’s abstractions and generalisations, but purposefully attending to specific words and sentences. It is through artful, careful listening and purposeful response that the movements of dialogue are sustained and connection is co-created (Owen and Westoby 2012; Kelly 2008).

Within community development such tension is most obviously manifest when a

community development practitioner is employed by an organisation (usually an NGO or government agency) to go into a community and 'implement a project or process'. Clearly the worker has an agenda shaped by the mission, vision and donor imperatives of that agency. However, community development as a discourse and set of practices is also guided by the notion that 'the people know best' and that 'people should shape their own development processes'. One can typically frame the accompanying tension through the somewhat over-repeated lens of 'top-down' versus 'bottom-up' energies and approaches. Drawing on Buber's ideas, as articulated above, this tension is then negotiated through the practitioner's commitment to both 'community as dialogue' and 'strategic dialogue' whereby they 'hold the agenda' of the donor-implementing agency lightly, giving space for genuine encounters with and between people, thereby honouring the need for people to be able to draw on their own energies and ideas for collective action. However, within the joining process between practitioner and community member, there is also the need for the practitioner to be able to 'bring their own agenda' into the process – that is, the agenda given to them by their donor agency. There is then a process of negotiating the 'I' (practitioner agenda) and 'You' (agenda/s emergent from community dialogue) to find a 'We' (a shared agenda that is reflective of both agency-practitioner concerns and community concerns).

This dialogical process creates the possibility of what is often discussed within community development practice as 'a common agenda'. Again, there is a fundamental tension here. While dialogic practice reaches for understanding and coherence, community development theory and practice requires something else. People need to not only connect and understand one another while also reaching for coherence; they also need to reach some *mutual agreement* to propel joint action. However, dialogic practices tend not to seek agreement – they seek understanding. Agreement is usually the realm of dialectic conversations where people reach between thesis and antithesis, seeking synthesis (Sennett 2012; Kelly and Sewell 1988). It seems prudent to therefore acknowledge that embedded within dialogical community development there are both dialogic and dialectic logics – and an awareness of when each is at work is crucial to skilful practice.

A Reaching: for Collective Coherence and a Participatory Consciousness

Building on this challenge of finding a 'common agenda', I turn to the North American physicist David Bohm whose seminal work on dialogue invites consideration of the importance of reaching for collective coherence (Bohm 1996). His work is particularly pertinent for the group processes that are often central to community development and often relate to difficult, if not intractable social challenges. Recognising that people can get stuck within their own presuppositions and perspectives, Bohm suggests it is only through genuine group dialogue that

people can disrupt their individually oriented, entrenched thought. Yet, to consider creative ways to respond to difficult and intractable social challenges requires this kind of disruption. He identifies ways in which a new collective coherence can emerge from the flow of meaning that happens when defensiveness is reduced and many perspectives are shared within a group.

Bohm's understanding of coherence is illuminated by his physicist's comparison of normal diffused light with focused laser light. For Bohm, coherence (importantly for our purposes this is not necessarily agreement) signifies focused analysis, insight, and thought. Bohm's idea of thought as a complex system (Bohm 1994) is significant because, within his understanding of dialogue, to mistake your own thinking for thought is to be unaware that individual thinking is located (or constructed) within a larger 'structure' of thought emergent from society, tradition and history. To become conscious of this structure or system is a step forward, and requires a letting go of attachment to one's own thinking.

Community development workers are often accompanying people, usually within groups or community-based people's organisations, attempting to engage with entrenched social or community issues. Therefore the need to imaginatively reach for collective coherence is crucial. In a nutshell, Bohm's contribution is that dialogue within groups can shed real light on difficult issues. Sometimes within community development practice I refer to such collective coherence as a 'narrative thread' emerging from the interplay of centrifugal forces (diffusing diverse ideas and perspectives) and centripetal forces (drawing together of ideas and perspectives). The idea of collective coherence and narrative thread recognises that the 'truth of the matter', an analysis of what could be done, rarely emerges from one person, truth or perspective, but from the flow of meaning-making emergent from deep listening and attention to the collective meaning making possibilities.

For many years I have been a part of a collegial community of interest, the South East Queensland Intercultural Cities Forum (SEQICF), which aimed to encourage deep intercultural dialogue and engagement across the region. Several years ago SEQICF designed and facilitated a dialogical process, 'Out of the Shadows', which brought people together for two days with the aims to: identify new and emerging intercultural issues in south-east Queensland; document differing perspectives on these emerging issues; and be a catalyst for coordinated responses to prevent inter- and intra- cultural conflict. The 'Out of the Shadows' process created a safe space for dialogue, where people from different religious and cultural backgrounds, with a variety of ways of understanding inter-cultural conflict and different roles and responsibilities, could meet and hear one another's experiences and perspectives. Participants included families, young victims and young perpetrators of violence, cultural elders, community representatives, frontline workers, academics, policy

analysts, and government workers in multicultural affairs, police, social policy, community development and community safety.

There was a process of community engagement in the months before the event, and an invitation to participants explicitly stating 'principles of dialogue' that they accepted as a condition of participating in the two days. The main activities through the two-day event were 'fishbowl sessions', a series of facilitated dialogues with between eight and ten key informants in the centre of the room, with another sixty or so people watching and listening from rows of seats on either side. In terms of outcomes, the analysis provided a rich depth of material that informed new directions in policy and practice. Some of the more promising directions emerged precisely from the points of unresolved tension and contested understanding that were highlighted in the dialogue, but from which a narrative thread emerged.

Such a story, drawing further on Bohm's work, signposts the importance of thinking holistically. Critiques of modernist, reductionist ways of thinking and working in community work are echoed in Bohm's insights into the fields of scientific thinking and working. However, with that critique he offered an alternative – that of dialogue and holism (Bohm 1980). His idea of 'taking part in the truth' recognises that there is always a broader complexity within the work than any one person can understand. He acknowledges therefore the need to think holistically, but he also argued that people can never 'see the whole' because 'the whole is too much' (Bohm 1996, xii). Instead he offered the idea of a *participatory consciousness* emergent through dialogue with one another, whereby '[e]verything can move between us. Each person is participating, is partaking of the whole meaning of the group and also taking part in it' (Bohm 1996, 31). In this dialogical space people are not trying to convince or persuade each other of 'their truth', but are reaching for a common coherence.

Again, within the space of community development such practice is not easy. People rarely come to a group with the stance of reaching for such coherence, but rather tend to be habitually attached to their own ideas and perspectives. Hence, dialogue requires community workers to clearly present and model new ways of practising, ways that disrupt the habitual tendencies to be self-oriented rather than other-oriented, and persuasion-oriented rather than coherence-oriented. In the above story several months of work were required to create the climate for dialogue and then within the dialogue two-day event explicit principles of dialogue were discussed to draw people into this new mode of 'participatory consciousness'.

An Intention: Transformation and Questioning

Gadamer, Buber and Bohm argue that dialogue, as they describe it, requires transformation. If someone genuinely turns towards the other, opens themselves to the flow of conversation and difference, then there will be a disruption to their perspective and experience of the world. This is personally transformative, and is hopefully experienced in many people's everyday life through conversation. However, it is the Brazilian Paulo Freire who best articulates the role of dialogue as a catalyst for social and structural transformation (Freire, 1972). Freire, best known as an educationalist, has deeply influenced many fields of inquiry and practice, including community development. Contemporary examples of that application to community development would be Anne Hope and Sally Timmel's *Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers* (1984) and Margaret Ledwith's *Community Development: A Critical Approach* (2005).

From a Freirean perspective dialogue very deliberately and carefully fosters a critical and transformational space. Within such a space people set out to do what Freire (1972) calls 'naming the word and the world', thereby being able to ask strategic questions and challenge de-humanising social relations. From Freire's perspective dialogical practice is not only about 'turning to the other', listening, connecting, learning and finding collective coherence and potentially shared agendas. Applied to community development it is also about practitioners eliciting a mandate from the people they are engaging with. This is a mandate to do critical analysis together, pushing the boundaries of how people together interpret the shared world, and then creating 'other' spaces of awareness and possible action. For liberation psychologists Mary Watkins and Helene Shulman (2008) what is crucial about Freire's contribution to dialogue is his emphasis on context. For them, Freire's work emphasises 'coming to understand the context one is in, gaining voice to address this context, and being able to creatively engage in efforts to transform it' (Watkins and Shulman 2008, 192). Contemporary initiatives such as REFLECT groups exemplify this understanding of transformational dialogue focused on context.

For example, within REFLECT groups, supported by several INGOs around the world, but particularly ActionAid, people come together to explicitly question the social, economic, cultural and political forces that shape their world. The internal assumptions such as, 'we are poor because we are stupid or ignorant' are, through the Freirean kind of questioning, disrupted, leading to potential transformational agendas.

For Freire dialogue therefore requires a process of careful and critical questioning (Freire 1975). This is a crucial contribution to an understanding of dialogical community development, albeit his understanding of dialogue is shaped by

dialectic logics. Freire's idea of dialogue involves careful and critical questioning, not only by community development practitioners to community members, but between the two, understood as *mutual* critical questioning. A dialogue oriented towards the critical but also inviting mutuality requires practitioners to understand the 'delicate relationship' (Bell, Gaventa and Peters 1990; Freire and Horton 1990) that they are engaged in within transformational practice. It requires exercising some authority as an 'expert' in dialogue (guiding a process) but not allowing a drift towards authoritarianism (Bell et al. 1990; Freire and Horton 1990, 61). Skilled practitioners offer their own perspective and questions lightly, and are receptive to the perspectives and questions of others. As Watkins and Shulman put it, 'the animator [practitioner] co-creates with the group participants a space in which dialogue becomes possible' (2008, 193). This critical dialogue can only occur when people no longer see the given world as normal or natural (Freire 1974/2005, 57), but instead understand the world as emerging from historical and cultural processes that are open-ended, open to questioning, and able to be transformed.

I now step back briefly. Freire importantly sees the world as historically and culturally constructed to be understood through questioning. Is Freire arguing that his notion of dialogue is a-historical? To pause and reflect on that question I turn to the work of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), considered by some to be the first to coin the word 'dialogic' (Sennett 2012, 19).

A Reflective Pause: Genres and Culture

One of Bakhtin's contributions to thinking about dialogue is that there are many genres of spoken and written communication – each with different implications for dialogue. By genre I mean a particular style of communication, with characteristics that 'fit' that style. Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) adds to this, arguing that real understanding might only occur in dialogue when people correctly identify a conversation to be in a particular genre. Bakhtin himself wrote that, 'we choose words according to the generic specifications' (Bakhtin 1986, 87). Within dialogue there is the particular conversation at play between two or more parties, but the 'rules' or characteristics of that conversation are contextualised by the genre, which is in turn historically and culturally constructed.

Returning to Freire, clearly his notion of dialogue as careful, critical and mutual questioning represents a particular genre of dialogue, different to that previously discussed in relation to say Gadamer and Buber. For example, as already mentioned, Freire's genre of dialogue would have been powerfully shaped by the rules of Marxist dialectics. This insight of Bakhtin's is very helpful for community workers, ensuring that they not only partake in dialogue, being open to encountering the other, but that they also attempt to understand the genre of dialogue that they are a part

of. Genres or the ‘rules of dialogue’ can be very subtle, varying within and across cultures and often it requires painstaking efforts to learn about the situation at hand.

For example, a Western Australian colleague David Palmer shared with me how in the Kimberley desert indigenous people have a cultural practice of ‘side ways talking’. This refers to the idea that it is often considered rude to come straight out and tell someone something directly, particularly if it has to do with their lack of knowledge or a mistake. Instead people often tell stories about a fictional third person, for example, ‘I know this other bloke who came up and did this thing once...he didn’t know it but he was really causing offence’. For the astute person who is open to, and understanding of the local rules of dialogue, the story initiates space for the person to re-consider their actions. Awareness of such rules, or more often awareness that people often do not know the rules, alerts community development workers also to the illusionary hope of complete understanding.

Positionality: a Responsive Dance

Continuing this examination of how notions of dialogue relate to community development, I turn to a second idea elicited from Bakhtin’s work – that of the community practitioner’s awareness of their own *positionality*. Community development *practice* is often described as ‘skilful means’, understood particularly as an ability to skilfully dance the dance of relationship, being present and responsive to the other and the moment.

Bakhtin explicitly talks about people’s social life being the product of ‘a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies’ (Bakhtin 1981, 272), particularly understood as the tensions between the centripetal and the centrifugal (discussed above in reference to Bohm’s work). This idea has been crystallised through further reflection on Bakhtin’s dialogics by New York based sociologist Richard Sennett. Central to Sennett’s interpretation of Bakhtin’s work is the idea of dialogic whereby, ‘no shared agreements may be reached, [but] through the process of exchange people may become more aware of their own views and expand their understanding of one another’ (Sennett 2012, 19). From this idea Bakhtin developed the concept of ‘knitted together but divergent exchange’ (Sennett 2012, 19), perhaps more easily imagined the way Sennett explains it, likened to musicians playing jazz, each bouncing off one another, eliciting nuanced responses as complexity flourishes (2012, 19). Within this bouncing and responding something happens.

Two useful ideas for dialogue within community development can be pinpointed from this wisdom. The first is that Bakhtin’s work suggests a skilled community

practitioner needs to be conscious of self in relation to the practice *and* relationships formed within the practice. This is the jazzy exchange – conscious of self as musician/practitioner and also conscious of the exchange with others in creating the jazz piece. Secondly, I find it helpful to understand this particular exchange as an *embodied dialogue* and to imagine it metaphorically as a responsive dance (see also Poulos 2008, 119).

Understanding this particular exchange as embodied dialogue foregrounds the idea that while community development practitioners need to learn the faculties and skills of dialogue or exercise their dialogical muscles, so to speak, there is a sense in which the faculties and skills eventually inhabit the practitioner¹. Like when playing jazz, a musician has to become technically proficient, but that alone does not make a good jazz player. The skills get inside the jazz player and are drawn out or evoked in a context of resonant exchange.

In a similar way practice as a responsive dance requires the technical proficiency of the dance moves, but also requires a letting go of the focus on skills only, and instead becoming aware of a dancer's own movement in relation to the other dancer. A responsive dancer gets into the flow of dance. Community practitioners, embodying dialogue, then are not so much conscious of dialogue but are in a state of responsivity and flow, attentive to a diverse ecology of relationships.

Such practice is crucial in community development enabling practitioners to not become stuck or focused on pre-determined goals or strategy, but instead opening themselves up to the flow or fluid like shifts that are subtle but quintessential to social processes. To position oneself in a responsive embodied stance enables the practitioner to be attentive to the narrative thread that is emergent from the tensions between centripetal and centrifugal tendencies (see Westoby and Kaplan 2014).

Summing up

This article has considered some traces of dialogue theory relevant for community development. I began with Gadamer's orientation of turning to the other and reaching for understanding, Buber's paradoxical understanding of community as dialogue but also the potential for strategic dialogue, and Bohm's insights into collective coherence and participatory consciousness. I then considered Freire's articulation of dialogue as a catalyst for social and structural transformation, triggered through careful, critical and respectful questioning, and paused to reflect on Bakhtin's understanding that genres of dialogue are culturally constructed. The

1 For this insight I acknowledge the conversation of 27 community practitioners, facilitated over three days by Allan Kaplan and Sue Davidoff during July 2012.

normative understanding is finally rounded out with Bakhtin's understanding of positionality and its implications for dialogue imagined metaphorically as a responsive dance.

In attempting to break new ground, setting up a 'dialogue' so to speak between dialogue studies and community development theory and practice, I would also suggest more work needs to be considered in this area. For example, whilst this article focuses on theorists, future studies could be conducted that are more empirically oriented, studying for example the kind of dialogue occurring, or not, between community development workers and constituents of communities or other stakeholders. This is occurring in work that might be named as, amongst others, assets-based community development, sustainable livelihood work, community-led development, collective narrative practice (story-telling approaches) or community organising (as per the Industrial Areas Foundation of the USA, or more recent manifestations such as London Citizens). Other work could also focus on how community workers negotiate the kind of tensions I have identified between community as dialogue and strategic dialogue emergent from Buber's theorising, or how practitioners remain responsive to the social situation at hand when most 'development theory' is oriented towards pre-determined goals and strategies.

As per my comments within the opening paragraph of this article, I have not attempted any systematic *comparative* or *critical* analysis of these authors. I am not trying to build an over-arching theory of dialogue for community development. Instead the article has been laid out a limited yet systematic introduction to some of the crucial work on dialogue that I have concluded is relevant for community development theory and practice.

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Building Capacity for Dialogue Facilitation in Public Engagement Around Research

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This paper shares our experiences and reflections on a training programme which seeks to build capacity, across the public research sector in Scotland, for developing and facilitating dialogic approaches to public engagement. We came to an interest in dialogue and deliberation by different routes, but got the opportunity to collaborate on this thanks to institutional funding for culture change around public engagement in the sector. The analytical framework from which we developed the training focuses especially on the micro-politics of communication patterns in deliberative and dialogic engagement processes. The training programme thus sought both to raise awareness of the principles and practices of dialogue, and to build skills in the demanding craft of facilitation. Our training approach has two key features: it integrates theory and practice; and it endeavours to make the general themes of dialogue and deliberation relevant to the specific context of public engagement activities in universities and research institutes. Feedback from participants over four years indicates that this approach is working: awareness and skills are growing in quite concrete ways. In addition, there are encouraging signs of shifts and reflection over the 'expert culture' in this community of practice.

Key words: dialogue training, public engagement with research, micro-dynamics of communication, dialogue practice, facilitation skills

Where the Course, and We, Came From¹

Our training course arose in the context of efforts to make public engagement a central mission in the UK public research system, and a growing sense that 'dialogue' has to be part of this. The emphasis on public engagement has come from concerns to strengthen public accountability around government-funded research, to maximise its relevance and uptake. In the case of scientific research,

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there have also been concerns about low levels of scientific literacy, often linked to a loss of public trust in scientists (Bates et al. 2010). The earlier (from the 1980s) emphasis on fostering public understanding of science was strongly criticised by social scientists for its ‘deficit model’ of *one-way* communication (Bauer et al. 2007; Wynne 2006; Burchell et al. 2009; Irwin 2006; Stilgoe and Wilsdon 2009). The public engagement agenda took a more constructive path, by encouraging researchers to engage publics in *two-way* communication – hence the interest in dialogue in science. But ‘dialogue’ also has relevance in other policy-related fields where the language of knowledge exchange and stakeholder engagement is more commonplace.

Public engagement has become inscribed in UK policy, research narratives and funding streams since the mid-1990s (Pieczka and Escobar 2013), materialised through the proliferation of ‘hybrid forums’ (Callon et al. 2009; Escobar 2013). In 2008, six ‘Beacons for Public Engagement’ were established by the major UK funders of higher education and research.² Their shared aim was to change the culture within the sector so that researchers take more seriously the task of engaging with wider publics³ about their work. The Edinburgh Beltane Beacon for Public Engagement (Edinburgh Beltane) was formed by a partnership between five Scottish academic institutions and nine non-university partners.⁴ It was built on an ethos of collaboration and engagement. Being close to the Scottish Parliament, a major theme was to encourage citizen and stakeholder engagement in, and understanding of, research areas relevant to public policy. In addition, Edinburgh Beltane saw dialogue as a key part of the culture change it sought to achieve, and thus pioneered training in the university sector around the concept and practice of dialogue in the context of research and public engagement.

The story of this training programme is also a story about the confluence of three academics, with very different journeys to an interest in fostering dialogic ways of practising public engagement, who were brought together through Edinburgh Beltane. Since this is a practitioner paper, we share these journeys here.

2 The Research Councils (RCUK), the Wellcome Trust and the Higher Education Institutions Funding Councils for England, Scotland and Wales (HEFCE, SHEFC and HEFCW).

3 We adopt the plural ‘publics’ in recognition that ‘the public’ is hugely diverse; and we include within ‘publics’ groups with an interest or stake in particular research.

4 Including, for instance, University of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh Napier University, Queen Margaret University, University of the Highlands and Islands, National Museums Scotland, Royal Society of Edinburgh and Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

Heather Rea trained in mechanical engineering and worked in manufacturing, where she researched knowledge management in engineering design systems. She was drawn to public engagement through opportunities to work with the Edinburgh International Science Festival and local schools, to inspire children to appreciate the impact engineering has in their lives and to consider it as a potential career option. When she became deputy director in the Edinburgh Beltane Partnership, 'dialogue' was seen as the new direction for public engagement, but few were familiar with its principles and processes. So she set out to learn.

Wendy Faulkner trained in biology in the 1970s. She was active in the radical science movement of the time, which envisioned a democratic 'science for the people'. Consequently, her academic career took her into social studies of science, technology and innovation. Her interest in dialogue originated in a collaborative project which sought to conduct and research public engagement around the controversial field of stem cell research.⁵ This brought together diverse stakeholder groups and wider publics to learn about, and reflect on, some very complex and sensitive issues. In the course of this work, the team gravitated to a common sense understanding of dialogue, seeking to nurture mutual listening and understanding, but they were unfamiliar with the large body of literature and practice on the topic. Faulkner remedied this after leaving academia, and now works freelance designing, facilitating and delivering training on dialogic conversations.

Oliver Escobar trained as a political scientist in Galicia and participated in the Spanish universities' assembly movement of the early 2000s (Escobar 2011, 7). Shaped by the divides underpinning Spain's Civil War, dictatorship and democratic transition, he was fascinated by the transformative potential of dialogue and deliberation. Early research on policy-making heightened an interest in the challenge of turning participatory ideals into practices. He then moved into communication and interpretive policy analysis, in which policy worlds are understood as being made up of conversations, agents and networks entangled in ongoing meaning-making processes. In Scotland, he worked at Queen Margaret University's Centre for Dialogue and Edinburgh University's Public Policy Network. His recently finished doctorate is an ethnographic study of participation practitioners in local governance.

In 2009, Edinburgh Beltane funded Escobar to run a course on 'Dialogue and Public Engagement' bringing together researchers and practitioners from academia

5 This project was conducted between 2004 and 2007, and funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council. Dr Sarah Parry, Professor Sarah Cunningham-Burley, Professor Austin Smith, Dr Fiona Harris, Ana Coutinho, Dr Stephen Bates and Dr Nicola Marks all contributed. (See Parry et al. 2012)

and other sectors (including Rea and Faulkner). In five half-days over 5 months, he shared his understanding of the literature, drawing on examples of how dialogue and deliberation are being used worldwide to build trust, deal with conflict, make policy or generate innovative solutions to a wide range of issues. The participants brought to the course their diverse experiences, nurturing a practice-oriented thinking space. Rea felt researchers would appreciate this approach and how the course evidenced the value of dialogic and deliberative approaches. However, the course was strongly theoretical; researchers would need more tools and techniques to translate the theory into practice. For this, we all attended the International Association for Public Participation (www.iap2.org) course run by Vikki Hilton; Faulkner also benefited from that on Stakeholder Dialogue run by Diana Pound of Dialogue Matters (www.dialoguematters.co.uk).

From these converging journeys, we came to collaborate in developing a training approach which we felt would work for academic researchers doing public engagement. We were well aware of the tendency of academics to 'talk at' people. And we recognised that for many, especially scientists, the main (if not only) point of public engagement is to *inform* people about their work – often because they feel misunderstood, and often with scant awareness that they might learn something valuable from other groups. We also brought a critical awareness of power imbalances in lay-expert encounters. For these reasons, we knew we had to work hard to convey the deeper message about dialogue and to develop practical skills for nurturing mutual listening and understanding. The outcome was a two day training programme, piloted in June 2010, which combined Escobar's framework, written up as a booklet (Escobar 2011), with our practical training from the world of public participation, written up as a handbook by Faulkner (2011). Before describing the course and its impact, we outline the thinking that informed it.

Our Framework for Dialogic Public Engagement

Participatory and Deliberative Democracy

The last three decades have ushered a global revival of participatory ideals developed since the 1960s (Pateman 1970; Barber 2003), now revamped through the ideals and practices of deliberative democracy that have flourished since the 1990s (Dryzek 2010; Elstub 2010). Participatory democracy is an umbrella term with a long tradition that foregrounds civic participation, active citizenship, power inequalities and social struggles. Deliberative democracy as a framework shares similar concerns, but emphasises the discursive dimension of the public sphere, that is, the way certain types of communication and interaction shape institutions, civic spaces and, more broadly, social worlds.

These overlapping concerns are reflected in myriad practices of citizen participation

at community level, and of collaborative governance at institutional level (e.g. Barnes et al. 2007; Leighninger 2006; Briggs 2008). These practices are posited as an antidote to a range of malaises – not least, the elitist and technocratic nature of many policy-making processes, which exclude alternative voices and ways of knowing (e.g. local, experiential, emotional); and the loss of public legitimacy of electoral democracies based on party politics, shallow mediated debate and hollow consultation exercises. As noted earlier, the case for greater public engagement around public sector research was in part a response to concerns about accountability and trust. But it is also a response to the critique of ‘expert fixes’ in decision making (Fischer 2003; 2009), and a recognition that heterogeneous mixes of expertise and insights are needed to grapple with the world’s pressing challenges (Williams et al. 1998).⁶

Whilst opportunities for public participation have increased, often required by law (Escobar 2014), the quantity of those opportunities has not been matched by an equal emphasis on their quality. Paradoxically, as public institutions seek increasingly to involve or at least consult citizens, many have grown weary of such processes. Three broad critiques can be identified. First, participatory processes can be tokenistic, manipulative or narrowly framed (e.g. Cooke and Kothari 2001). Citizens are invited to ‘have their say’ on topics where decisions have often already been made and public bodies only seek nominal approval, rubber-stamping, by selected publics (Cornwall and Coelho 2007; Cornwall 2008). In such cases, engagement processes have little or no impact on decision making. Second, they are not very inclusive. This critique highlights how publics are constructed, summoned and performed (Barnes et al. 2003; Barnett 2008; Newman and Clarke 2009; Mahony et al. 2010) – or the craft of public-making by which official public engagers decide who is organised in and out of participating (Escobar 2014, Chapter 5). Third, there is serious scepticism about the quality of many public engagement processes. For instance, poor quality of planning and facilitation can result in negative experiences for participants, which in turn can hinder future engagement (Escobar 2011; Mutz 2006; Forester 2009; Spano 2001).

Our work as public engagers and trainers addresses these three interrelated dimensions, but focuses especially on the micro-politics of face-to-face interaction. It is sometimes assumed that once you manage to gather a range of participants (e.g. citizens, officials, stakeholders, researchers), meaningful conversations will simply happen. As those involved in organising public forums know all too well, this is not always the case (e.g. Kadlec and Friedman 2007, 12-13). Such encounters can

6 For this reason, Fischer (2003; 2009) proposed ‘the transformation of the detached expert-adviser into a facilitator of public deliberation’ (Wagenaar 2011, 305), raising challenges we return to later.

go awry due to bad facilitation, confrontational dynamics, rehearsed monologues, shallow exchanges, and the invisible barriers erected by specialised jargon and expertise (Escobar 2011, 12-13; 2013). The paradox is striking: the very animal that became human through the power of speech and interaction often struggles to find ways of talking across a growing number of contemporary divides.

This is one reason for the growing interest in deliberative democracy. It is no longer enough – or worse, it can be counterproductive – to open up spaces for collective inquiry or problem solving whilst overlooking the communication dynamics that unfold within such spaces. This realisation begs a shift in emphasis from the earlier demands for a more pluralistic distribution of ‘places at the table’, to a demand for more meaningful patterns of interaction once a range of voices are ‘around the table’. It obliges us to pay attention to the interpersonal dynamics of participatory encounters, so that what happens at the micro level does not replicate the very inequalities that characterise policy and decision making at the macro level (see Young 2000, chapter 2). The point is to avoid the inequalities of power that prevented diverse voices from *having a place at the table* getting surreptitiously transformed into equally exclusionary practices now enacted through micro-political *dynamics around the table*. It is precisely this focus on the quality of interpersonal communication which has brought dialogue and deliberation to the centre of participatory practices.

The Dialogic Turn in Deliberation

In common usage, ‘dialogue’ often refers to both dialogic and deliberative approaches (Escobar 2010). By contrast, the framework for our training draws an analytical distinction between dialogue and deliberation and, at the same time, makes the case for combining them within public engagement practice, to ensure that any deliberation is built on foundations of dialogic communication.⁷ Perhaps because studies of dialogue and deliberation have evolved in parallel in different disciplines – deliberation within political science and dialogue within communication studies – the potential for cross-fertilization remains under-explored (but see Forester 2009). Our framework structures dialogue and deliberation into an episodic process with spaces for a range of ‘communication patterns’ (Pearce 2007). It is a heuristic tool for thinking about communication-related choices we make when we design and facilitate public engagement processes.

Put simply, dialogue seeks to increase understanding and relationships whereas deliberation seeks to reach some sort of conclusion or decision (Escobar 2009; 2011). The word ‘decision’ comes from the Latin *decidere*, which literally means ‘to

7 For the fuller account of this ‘D+D framework’, see Escobar (2009; 2011).

murder the alternative' (Isaacs 1999, 45). When participants engage in deliberation, their goal is to weight alternatives and make choices. Dialogue, on the other hand, is oriented towards discovery rather than decision-making (Yankelovich 1999). Not being pressed to 'murder the alternative' is what makes it possible to explore multiple choices and perspectives without making judgements about them, through reciprocal exploration, active listening, honesty and disclosure. Accordingly, the flow of communication differs substantially. Dialogue stimulates a *divergent flow of communication* where the conversation can take many directions and conclude with a polyphonic representation of diverse voices, issues and perspectives. In contrast, deliberation stimulates a *convergent flow of communication* where the conversation is oriented towards some kind of resolution on the basis of public reasoning. This give and take of reasons in order to persuade others is what makes it possible to critically challenge assumptions and views, and thus make informed collective decisions (Gutmann and Thompson 2004).

Unfortunately, dialogic patterns of communication can be elusive in deliberative processes. When debate and advocacy dynamics become the dominant forms of interaction, the co-inquiry dynamics which characterise dialogue get blocked. The aspiration that participants may change preferences through learning and reasoned deliberation, which is central to deliberative practice (Fishkin and Laslett 2003), can be lost if space is given to advocacy at the expense of inquiry and participants focus chiefly on persuading each other. Advocacy seeks resolution whereas inquiry seeks exploration, but arguably both are necessary in deliberation. If inquiry and advocacy dynamics are not balanced, learning is prevented, polarisation increases, oversimplification kicks in, shallow exchanges proliferate, and the whole engagement process can become meaningless or, worse, divisive and counterproductive (Escobar 2011).

Different flows (convergent/divergent) and patterns (advocacy/inquiry) of communication create different engagement dynamics. They can all play a role in fostering meaningful communication in public forums, when combined in ways that are fit for purpose. Our 'D+D' framework – which one could call dialogic deliberation – is premised on the basic notion that dialogue can open up space for more meaningful deliberation. The idea is to infuse deliberative processes with spaces for a range of communication patterns. Dialogic communication patterns can be especially helpful early on, for instance, in a preparatory phase where participants share personal stories and map the landscape of perspectives and feelings, or go through a process of envisioning a better future. The goal here is to allow participants to learn about diverse understandings and experiences of the issue in a setting where automatic (pre)judgement is suspended. Fischer (2009, 290), similarly suggests an 'expressive stage' in which participants can convey their

feelings and explore their social identities in a safe space. Reference to expressiveness highlights another distinction of relevance here: namely that dialogue seeks to foreground personal stories, beliefs and the like, whereas deliberation seeks to foreground public reasoning.

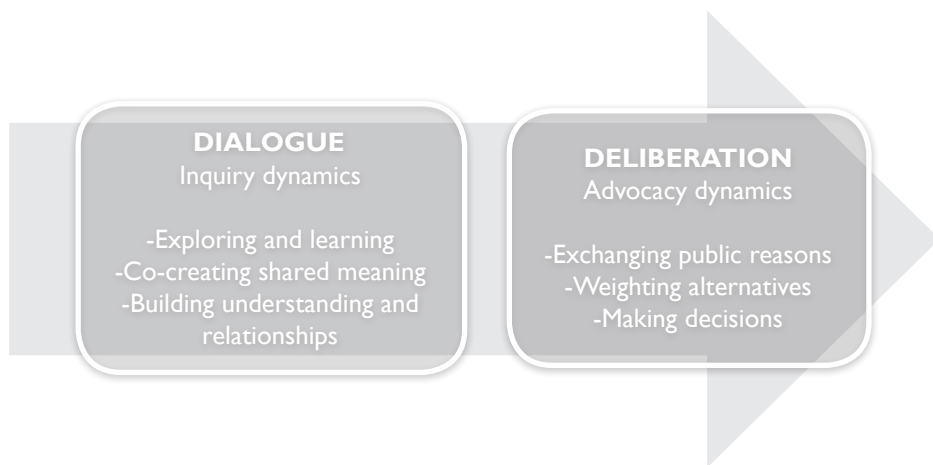


Figure 1. The D+D process

Figure 1 portrays the kind of staged process we have in mind, which also takes into account previous scholarly reflection on the ‘sequencing’ of deliberative processes (see Goodin 2005; Curato 2012; Curato et al. 2013). In this D+D framework, dialogue constitutes more than a programmatic complement to deliberation. If deliberation is the art of scrutinising alternatives in order to make decisions, prior dialogue enhances that process through the open exploration of languages, worldviews, visions, values and experiences that underpin the alternatives. As dialogue formats strive to enable safe spaces for dissent and difference, they can foster the creation of shared meaning on the basis of disparate forms of knowing and experiencing. Crucially, the mutual trust, understanding and respect built through a prior dialogue stage can provide a basis for the difficult task of deliberatively weighing alternatives and, thus, potentially achieve a ‘better’ outcome. It is likely to generate deeper understandings of different perspectives, needs and interests, and a broader range of perspectives. Participants buy in to the process because they’ve heard and been heard, which in turn can also stimulate unexpected collective creativity (Isaacs 2001).

Finally, our D+D framework takes seriously the often overlooked role of emotions in citizen participation (see Fischer 2009; Morrell 2010). There is evidence that citizens seem keener to engage in initiatives that involve like-minded individuals than with people who think differently and challenge their views. The prospect

of confrontational encounters can deter some from wanting to participate (Mutz 2006). This represents a significant barrier to the aim of fostering inclusive spaces where citizens learn from their differences and work through conflicts. It also diminishes opportunities to value pluralism and diversity, to meet those ‘others’ that are easy to dismiss or despise when they remain faceless stereotypes. If one of the factors that keep citizens from engaging is the perception that the process may be threatening, then caring about communication patterns becomes fundamental for public engagement practitioners. Mutz’s research is based on deliberative processes where debate and polarised argument prevail. It therefore underlines the need for practitioners to craft safe spaces for dialogue, where participants can welcome dissent and difference as part of a learning experience. This brings us to the challenges of facilitation.

Facilitation

To recap, our core concern in developing this training was to improve the quality of what happens at the micro level of public engagement processes, by caring about the appropriate choices of communication dynamics and patterns, and about keeping encounters safe and respectful for participants especially when perspectives and views differ greatly. We see the ability to nurture real dialogue as a crucial skill for engagement practice, including deliberative processes. Of course, the non-judgemental exploring and meeting of minds does not generally happen automatically. Concerted effort and example are required if participants are to put aside, even briefly, the cultural norms of adversarial debate and advocacy-based decision making.

Typically, dialogic processes use facilitators and collectively agreed ground rules or guidelines to do this. Care is also needed in the design of appropriate processes: how to frame the encounter and encourage mindsets that will enable a meeting of minds rather than a contest of opposites, that will help participants to:

- talk across social and disciplinary divides;
- involve a variety of ‘knowledges’ and ‘ways of knowing’;
- listen to and engage with voices that challenge us;
- create shared languages beyond our multiple specialist jargons;
- understand different values and worldviews;
- find common ground that is sensitive to difference;
- learn to explore and deal with conflict without confrontation;
- channel the energy that stems from conflict into creative solutions;
- harness our collective capacity for joint puzzling and problem solving.

Answering these challenges is the exciting task that practitioners and scholars of public dialogue and deliberation around the world are taking up.

The role of dialogue facilitators is to keep the group collaboration (whatever it may be) on task and inclusive. The latter requires modelling and encouraging an ethic of non-judgemental respect, building a safe and trusting space in which every voice is heard and every contribution valued. This typically demands that facilitators of dialogue do not contribute substantively to the discussion; they must be impartial about the topic, but they are not neutral about the process. Ideally, groups develop productive patterns of communication on their own, and indeed the ultimate goal of a facilitator is to help this happen and so to disappear. But when this is not possible, facilitators can help to detect and alter unwanted dynamics.

Facilitation is political work: you are creating an artificial situation, orchestrating materials and artefacts, and seeking to enable dynamics that would not happen otherwise (Escobar 2014, 130-176). In the case of very ambitious processes, you may be trying to reorganise a social world. Facilitation, therefore, requires reflective practice (Schon 1983; Forester 1999). You must be aware of the powerful position that you momentarily occupy. This may sound obvious, but we have seen processes ruined by reckless facilitators who either became dominant speakers, or unashamedly silenced or disrespected some participants' views (e.g. Escobar 2011, 56). At every step when you design and facilitate a public engagement process you are making political choices: from the location and timing to who is organised in and out, to what knowledges are included or what patterns of communication are fostered.

We find it useful to think of participatory processes as 'theatres of collaboration' (Williams 2012), where the facilitator's job comprises both backstage and frontstage work (Escobar 2014). In the backstage, facilitators design processes, negotiate agendas, align purposes, recruit participants and orchestrate the material choreographies that will structure interaction. In the frontstage, once the 'performance' starts, facilitators seek to materialise the 'script' created backstage (Escobar 2014, chapter 6), and to shape the micro-politics of the encounter by trying to distribute opportunities for intervention, keep the flow of communication going, observe communication patterns, and enable participants to change them when unproductive dynamics block the flow. Once the frontstage phase is over, there is more backstage work, engaging in the 'politics of filtering and distilling' inscriptions from the process (Escobar 2011, 55) or trying to make the results count – what Kadlec and Friedman (2007, 19) call the engagement practitioner's 'activist phase'.

In our framing, the underlying goal of a facilitator is to help participants move

the conversation along by avoiding obstructions in the flow of communication, and by serving simultaneously the needs of each participant and the group. Both the flow of communication and the needs of participants vary from dialogue to deliberation. In moments of dialogue, we seek understanding of meanings, sentiments and perspectives. Accordingly, we need ‘skilfully attentive and probing facilitators to help us clarify meaning rather than have hot-button words lead us astray’ (Forester 2009, 184) In contrast, to foster deliberation ‘we encourage parties to sharpen their arguments, and we need skilful work not so much of facilitating but of moderating an adversarial series of claims and refutations, counterclaims and counterrefutations.’ (Forester 2009, 184) Note that even when choices have to be made, the imperative to keep the space safe and exchanges respectful remains.

Surprisingly little detailed attention is paid to the role of facilitators in the literature on participatory and deliberative democracy (but see Forester 1999; 2009; Cooper and Smith 2012; Escobar 2013; 2014; Moore 2012). True, facilitators have a vast range of tools and techniques at their disposal (see Faulkner 2011; Escobar 2011, 46-57), but these are rarely analysed in terms of underlying communication patterns and dynamics, and how to use these tools and techniques in ways that will maximise dialogue. Moreover, whilst the principles of facilitating D + D can be read up, the practice of facilitating remains a craft that can only be refined and developed through reflective learning by doing. There is still much to be done to build capacity around what is arguably the most important skill never included in official education programmes.

The Training Programme

Our overarching aim in developing this training programme was to improve the quality – in the current institutional framing, the impact – of researcher’s public engagement efforts by building capacity in two areas: *raising awareness* of the potential for dialogue to enhance those efforts, and *building skills* in the challenging tasks of facilitating dialogic public engagement. Our strategy for doing this was to mobilise our expertise about the micro-dynamics of communication in engagement encounters and make this relevant to university and institute researchers seeking to engage stakeholders and wider publics around their work. So the programme integrates what we understand of the principles of dialogic practice with what we know of the particularities of the public research sector and of researchers as a community of practice. Substantively, our focus was on agents and dynamics rather than structures (Forester 1999; 2009; Williams 2012). And we took inspiration from Dewey’s pragmatism and ideas such as the ‘community of inquiry’ (Shields 2003; Kadlec 2007; Escobar 2013), drawing on and adapting learning from a range of disciplines to articulate possibilities that might be useful in our context.

An important consideration here is that there was (and still is in some circles) a job to be done in increasing researchers' basic capability in public engagement. For instance, thinking about who your publics are and learning to 'think from the other' – in terms of why these publics might want to engage with your research and what communication approaches might work for them – as a vital first step in designing a process. Starting from where our trainees were meant that our training needed to build awareness and skills in dialogue *as part of* a structured programme to build up capability in the kinds of public engagement activities that are pertinent for public sector researchers.

Public engagement in this sector takes many forms. There have been some highly publicised experiments with deliberative mini-publics on issues related to science and technology (e.g. Pidgeon and Rogers-Hayden 2007; Blok 2007; Dryzek and Tucker 2008), and some large public consultations such as the UK *GM Nation?* debate (e.g. Horlick-Jones et al. 2006). But such activities are the exception to the norm (Pieczka and Escobar 2013; Burchell et al. 2009). Depending on the discipline and particular research, the vast bulk of researchers' public engagement seeks to:

1. *inform and inspire* wider publics about the research (classic science communication);
2. *converse* about ethical or other issues arising from the research;
3. *involve* particular groups in research (as subjects, user groups or stakeholders);
4. *collaborate* to 'co-produce' the research, technologies or policies.

As yet, there are few deliberative engagement processes in the mainstream activities of the sector. Accordingly, the focus of our training is on dialogue and on how it might enhance the range of public engagement activities – including, but not only, deliberation. We maintain that all of these engagement activities are more likely to meet their objectives, and meet them more deeply, where dialogic steps are part of the process. We nonetheless address deliberation in the programme, and in doing so we make our larger political commitments clear to participants: we favour participatory politics and deliberative policy making over elitist politics and technocratic policy making.

With respect to the community of practice, we are mindful that widening and deepening public engagement in and around research can challenge those with specialist knowledge. The cognitive authority that comes with expert status (Irwin 2006; Wynne 2006), the presumption that technical knowledge should trump other kinds of knowledge, and the professional habit of talking *at* people can all be

barriers to dialogue. The training therefore foregrounds ‘multiple realities’ in the heterogeneous mix of different publics and types of expertise; and it encourages participants to reflect on their own entrenched behaviours and mindsets and how these might be experienced by others.

The programme is entitled ‘Dialogue in Public Engagement’. Its stated aims are:

- To introduce the principles of dialogue and explore how dialogic approaches might enhance different public engagement agendas and activities;
- To provide practical experience in some techniques used to nurture dialogue, and in thinking about what techniques to choose for which purposes and groups;
- To build skills in facilitating dialogue and in designing dialogic public engagement activities;
- To encourage participants to reflect constructively on their own public engagement practices, and be responsive to their experiences and concerns on this topic.

A key feature of our training approach is that it combines theory and practice. The programme is delivered by deploying most of the skills, tools and techniques we talk about, as an integral part of the orientation provided, starting with a sliding scale and metaplan to benchmark the course. Participants therefore gain hands-on practical experience throughout. We often work on ‘exemplars’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001) to illustrate and consolidate this learning, drawing extensively not only on our experiences but also on the wealth of the course participants’ own knowledge and stories. Thus, short talks and practical exercises are interwoven with less structured periods for reflection. Participants receive the booklets developed by Faulkner (2011) and Escobar (2011), providing a resource to refer to later for practical advice and deeper learning on all aspects of the course.

The course structure was designed to be progressive. It is delivered to between eight and twenty participants over two days in four half-day parts.

Part 1 addresses *Why dialogue in public engagement?* It opens with a carousel discussion of three questions: What do you want from engaging with publics? Who are your publics? Why should your publics engage with your work (what’s in it for them)? The point of this exercise is threefold. First, by revealing the diversity of motivations behind researchers’ public engagement efforts, the exercise signals a spectrum of possible public engagement activities, which we use to point out

the need to make and honour a realistic ‘promise to your publics’⁸. Second, the exercise highlights the diversity of possible publics and encourages participants to start ‘thinking from the other’ – i.e. where their particular public(s) will be coming from. Third, the exercise highlights the need to address these strategic questions from the outset in designing any public engagement activity. We then introduce the principles of dialogue, highlighting the defining aims of building understanding and relationships, and inviting participants to consider appropriate ‘ground rules’ for our own dialogic interaction in the course. Following a buzz, a listing or mapping exercise is used to get participants thinking about how dialogue might enhance the different types of public engagement identified in the carousel discussion.

Part 2 addresses *Facilitation skills: how to nurture dialogue*. We start by thinking about what constitutes effective communication and what the barriers to this may be (using nominal feedback from small group discussions). Following some basic orientation, participants then get the opportunity to experience facilitating small group conversations addressing the practical challenges of ‘how to ensure all voices are heard’ and ‘how to maintain and encourage a non-judgemental ethos’. This is followed by group reflection on each person’s facilitating. Subsequent commentary from ourselves highlights active listening and the framing of questions as key skills in the facilitation of dialogue. In the second half of the session we use a case study to highlight potential benefits and challenges of doing dialogue with mixed groups, especially where these come from very different educational backgrounds and standpoints.

Part 3 addresses *Choosing techniques: which to use for what purposes*. We open with a table of techniques from Faulkner’s handbook (2011) to review how participants experienced the techniques used thus far (e.g. carousel, metaplan, listing, nominal feedback). In plenary, we explore the pros and cons of different large and small group formats, and of sessions with very mixed groups or with like people together. We then introduce the principles of deliberation, and give people the chance to experience future visioning coupled with a metaplan clustering, and a thinking hats (De Bono 2010) approach to discussion on a controversial topic. Our future visioning question gets participants to think about where they would like their own public engagement efforts to go. The topic for the latter is chosen by the group, with members getting a second opportunity to practise facilitating – more challenging than the first because they choose a topic on which there are conflicting or emotionally-charged views within the group (some examples have been nuclear power, the Arab spring, genetically modified crops, Scottish independence and public sector funding cuts).

8 An expression borrowed from the IAP2 course in public participation.

Part 4 addresses *Process planning: how to design a dialogic public engagement activity*. Before the end of session 3 participants are briefed on strategic and practical considerations in designing and planning a dialogic public engagement process. In this closing session, they are charged with practising these skills on a potential or actual case, either a public engagement effort from our or their experience or one they are about to undertake. The brief contains the objectives of the organisers and a list of the publics they hope to engage. In teams of three or four, they have forty-five minutes in which (1) to decide what challenges they see in the brief, especially whether any of the publics would be hard to reach or need particular care to nurture the kind of respectful and inclusive atmosphere necessary for dialogue; and (2) to develop a detailed timeline for the activity. This must indicate a progression of sessions defined by appropriate questions or activities, plus the groupings and techniques to be used for each session. These timelines are presented for discussion by the whole group, each team having half hour slots for this.

There have been fourteen iterations of the course in the last four years, involving over 200 participants including scientists, engineers, artists, historians, policy workers, social scientists, science communicators, public engagement practitioners, doctoral researchers, knowledge brokers, health and social care practitioners, and community activists. Most of them were based in academic or research institutions, working on a range of topics and policy contexts. Our courses have been developed for academics, researchers and staff in the Beltane partnership. Other networks and institutions are beginning to take an interest in our training.

We have experimented with targeting different groups. In general, we have more success recruiting postgraduate and junior researchers than senior researchers. The latter either ‘don’t get it’, think they don’t need it or don’t feel they can afford the time. Notable exceptions were a handful of (mostly women) senior academics who have come with members of their research team. When targeting research students, we generally recruit across fields. Although some science students haven’t liked mixing with social scientists, we feel this diversity results in a deeper appreciation of the range of public engagement activities as well as a wider set of perspectives and approaches. When targeting research staff, we opted for single or related subject areas, in the hope that training senior and junior researchers who work together would increase the ‘multiplier effect’ of the course in terms of capacity building, with two or more people having proportionately more impact than one in spreading the word. We achieved a particularly successful ‘hybrid’ model when we held day one separately with engineers and with social scientists, and then brought them together for day two.

The basic structure of the two-day course has remained unchanged, following some early learning and adjustments. More recently, several one-day versions of

the course have been developed – for knowledge exchange and public engagement professionals (focusing on impact), for a dedicated research institute or subject area (focusing on their needs) and for experienced engagers (focusing on the micro-dynamics of facilitation). In each grouping, participants shared and reflected on stories of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ conversations (e.g. mixed group, lay-expert) from their own experience. As well as continuing to offer the two-day programme to postgraduate researchers, and targeting specific research groups, we hope to offer more one-day versions to follow up and deepen our work in that most challenging area – the craft of facilitation.

Reflections, Learning and Evaluation

Before addressing our own reflections on the training programme, we outline participant feedback. This is collected through individual responses to a feedback form plus a period of reflection and group discussion in plenary at the end of each day. For the first two years, a detailed feedback form was circulated and completed on each day (before the final plenary); subsequently, a simpler form has been circulated electronically to be completed after the course.

Participant Feedback

Our participants have come with a range of interests and differing levels of experience. Amongst the research staff, those already doing public engagement have quite specific skills they want to pick up or improve on. Others, including most of the research students, have little or no public engagement experience and simply want to increase their general awareness and skills in this area. Few come with an understanding of what is meant by ‘dialogue’ or ‘deliberation’, so public engagement is the hook by which we introduce these practices and the facilitation training. The engagement and knowledge exchange practitioners generally come with a more explicit interest in dialogue and deliberation and improving their facilitation skills.

In spite of this diversity, participant feedback has been consistently positive. Only a handful of participants responded negatively to the question ‘Did the course meet your expectations?’ and many participants on each course indicated that they gained more than they had imagined. Our before and after sliding scales confirm that both self-reported awareness of dialogue and skill in dialogic approaches to public engagement have increased as a result of the training. The training approach and delivery is invariably commended – the pacing and variety that comes from interweaving practical exercises with orientation and reflection. When asked for three words to describe how they experienced the course, the words ‘informative, enjoyable, interesting, thought-provoking, useful, inspiring, engaging, practical’ recur.

The learning points noted by participants concern four topics in varying proportions: public engagement, dialogue, facilitation skills and specific techniques. On public engagement, several gained a wider view of what public engagement might involve – activities and agendas that are different from their own. One knowledge exchange practitioner wrote,

I realised that I could organise dialogue events around the political ethical topics around research. I had felt restricted to ‘informing’ events as I didn’t feel the public could influence research design, but now I realise that a valid outcome could just be researchers having a greater understanding of public perceptions.

Commonly, participants report that our opening carousel questions on ‘Who are your publics and what’s in it for them?’ really made them think differently about their practice, and the closing exercise of process planning makes them realise just how much thought and preparation is required to design a successful public engagement event or activity.

A small minority of participants remain confused on the subject of dialogue. But at the other end of the spectrum, many tell us spontaneously and with mounting excitement how dialogue is something which can enhance communication in all aspects of their work, even in their private relationships. And many articulate the challenges of doing dialogue as learning points:

That it’s important to *listen!!* You need to listen to others and not have a prejudged attitude towards others.

I think it [the course] pulled into focus that effective dialogue is complex and challenging; that there isn’t necessarily a way to ‘get it right’. In other words, it’s a qualitative method with similar issues, complexities and, importantly, value. Reflection is needed after events.

The main learning point for me was the importance of the emotional content of dialogue, and the understanding that I need to be aware of both the emotional content and the factual content in group discussions and to be able to act on both as a facilitator.

Facilitating small groups discussion is not something that is learnt in a day, but several things give us confidence that in most cases we do succeed in increasing participants’ awareness of the value and demands of facilitation, and their willingness to keep practising. Although the practice session is brief and somewhat artificial (a friendly group), the feedback and review held afterwards is very valuable; many say they would like more time just for this. Participants often mention very specific things they’ve learnt in this connection – for example, that saying something

positive as a facilitator in response to a contribution is still judgemental and may act to close down a dissenting or alternative contribution from someone else, or how 're-framing' can turn a negative intervention from one participant into a positive challenge for the whole group.

The opportunity to practise designing and planning a public engagement process – another crucial facilitation skill – is also very instructive. Participants frequently comment that they didn't realise how many things have to be taken into account. The very quality of both the plans presented and the attention to detail in the discussion of these demonstrate that the course has expanded participants toolbox of techniques, and helped them think critically about which are appropriate for what purposes and groupings. Memorable favourites amongst those used on the course include the carousel discussion, future visioning, metaplan and thinking hats.

The knowledge exchange and public engagement practitioners naturally draw some different things from our courses. Several of them came to realise that they already knew or were doing aspects of dialogue, which was empowering for them. A typical comment, in response to a question about what was most valuable for them personally:

An awareness of the 'dialogic approaches' I already work with. Before this session, I was unsure what techniques would be considered dialogic, but I am leaving with confidence that we are using tools and techniques in this way.

And there was much evidence of a direct impact on practice, for example:

I enjoyed sharing experiences with other people working in knowledge exchange/public engagement realising that similar issues affect us all, and that there are common approaches we can use.

I've really enjoyed the course and will be sharing the content with my colleagues.

It's given me more confidence in putting dialogic approaches into practice, and also communicating to others the purpose and value of dialogue

[I] gained from all the sessions to build on previous experiences. [I] can see the overlap between work with colleagues and also the wider community – therefore [I] will use skills/knowledge in both areas.

There is a clear multiplier effect on this 'train the trainers' version of the course, as there has been when we delivered the training to a single institute (agriculture) and subject group (fine art). The opportunities for ongoing reflective learning and for

‘spreading the word’ open up when people are able to work together in this area.

Our Reflections and Evaluation

We had a two prong approach to capacity building: we sought to raise awareness about the potential for dialogue to enhance public engagement, and to build skills needed to facilitate dialogic processes. So how well has the training programme met these aims, and what learning can we share as a result?

With respect to raising awareness about dialogue, participants’ reactions constantly remind us that for most people ‘dialogue’ is simply not on the radar.⁹ They ‘don’t know what they don’t know’ – until they encounter it and experience that revelatory moment of sensing how valuable dialogue could be in all of their relations. So our training programme does succeed in opening eyes to the general potential of dialogue, very powerfully for some. The fact that a minority of participants leave with a rather woolly grasp of the principles and practice of dialogue arguably reflects, in part, just what a shift it requires from the norms of most everyday communication. For instance, some research students come to us in the belief that learning to communicate or engage publics better means learning to make better presentations – a telling indication of just how entrenched the ‘talking at’ habit is in academia!

Participation in the training programme has produced several encouraging shifts and moments of reflection around the kind of entrenched behaviour and mindsets that make it difficult for researchers to engage in dialogue. Where we address ‘lay-expert’ divides, for example, it is apparent that many participants had not considered how people without the same level of education might experience the authority they wield as experts. Where we talk about multiple realities, some (usually scientists) rejoin that surely ‘facts’ should prevail – and we are able to share cases where diverse knowledges have been needed to resolve a difficult problem. And when we collectively reflect on their facilitation practice, it becomes clear that the requirement for facilitators to be impartial about the topic can be particularly challenging for researchers. The conversations we’ve had around this have often shown a nuanced understanding: Does it help if the facilitator knows something about the topic? Should they, as specialists, actually not facilitate but find someone more removed from the topic to focus on process?

We are convinced that our strategy of linking the training on dialogue to the context of public engagement practice and agendas in the sector is correct. As noted above, addressing particular challenges for this community creates space for reflection, just

9 In recognition of this, we have removed ‘dialogue’ from the header for the course publicity: we now call it ‘Making Conversations Count’.

as mobilising concrete examples of researcher engagement provides a meaningful focus for what might otherwise remain too abstract. Much of what virtually all participants learnt about public engagement concerns practices which lay the foundations for more dialogic approaches. We are thinking here, for example, of the need to see even the simple 'informing' types of public engagement as necessitating a two-way conversation; the insistence that engagers think about their publics and where they're coming from before designing a public engagement process; or the notion that good communication is as much about listening as talking and the practice of using ground rules to help keep a conversation respectful.

We are similarly convinced that our training approach of combining theory and practice is adequate. The craft of facilitation is only learnt through practice, and the evidence from participant feedback signals that the opportunities provided by the course to practise and reflect on facilitating dialogue have resulted in some quite deep learning and reflection. Informal discussion indicates that many were actively thinking where they could use what they'd learned in future public engagement efforts. At the very least, participants now have a far richer understanding of 'communication', and have been sensitised to some of the subtle ways that they may open up and close down dialogue. They have experienced and thought about the work required to nurture an inclusive and egalitarian ethos in any group work. As a result, they are more likely to 'self-regulate' in such settings and to recognise when skilled facilitation is needed. We often encourage participants to spread the word amongst their colleagues about how crucial skilled facilitation is to getting positive outcomes from public engagement – and to be willing to pay for this input if necessary.

Of course, there's always more to learn in facilitation, as many come to recognise. We've seen some encouraging signs of ongoing capacity building. First is the multiplier effect of shared learning and reflective practice that has resulted from our courses with practitioners and with the individual institute and subject group. Second, the training programme has generated a growing network of budding facilitators across research and policy domains, who we contact when further opportunities arise to practise and develop facilitation skills. Former participants have volunteered as facilitators in a range of initiatives: the People's Gathering, a citizens' assembly that kicked off the Electoral Reform Society's Democracy Max process (Electoral Reform Society 2013); So Say Scotland's 'Thinking Together' citizens' assembly, inspired by Iceland's constitution-building process (SoSayScotland.org n.d.); plus ongoing events organised by the Genomics Forum (n.d.), Gengage (n.d.) and the Citizen Participation Network (n.d.). These are nurturing a sense of community of practice amongst participants, through face-to-face networking.

The job continues. After pioneering training around dialogue in public engagement

for researchers, since 2012 we are also delivering an extended version of the programme as a core module on the University of Edinburgh's new MSc in Science Communication and Public Engagement. We are delighted to be the first in the UK to have the opportunity to add dialogue and deliberation to the mainstream formation of a new generation of public engagement practitioners! The relative ease of attracting early career participants to our two day course¹⁰ is also a hopeful sign of a new generational mind-set. Needless to say, the continuing difficulty of recruiting more senior participants reflects in part that the hoped-for culture change around dialogue and deliberation in public engagement still has some way to go in the UK.

Coda

Taking stock of our training programme: We have shown how our efforts to get participants thinking about and facilitating dialogue and deliberation *is* raising awareness and building skills in quite concrete ways. Many now have an expanding toolbox with which they can broaden the scope of their public engagement efforts, and a stronger sense of the ethics and practices required to deepen what happens in them – to truly build understanding and relationships, so that respectful collaboration and problem solving can happen. We hope that, as they translate and adapt these ideas in their contexts, others will be inspired to join in and innovation will emerge.

Nudging academia to actively foster dialogue and deliberation with other publics is not an easy task. There are obvious differences between researchers talking 'down' to the world, and trying to create spaces for collaborative inquiry. Many public engagers work in institutions that do not see citizens, stakeholders, communities or publics as partners in a collaborative relationship. Facilitating civic participation is rarely on the agenda, and many researchers work comfortably within technocratic cultures that privilege elite-led policy-making and research. Nonetheless, there are growing numbers of researchers and practitioners who strive to create the sort of spaces for dialogic inquiry that would very much benefit other contexts in our democracies. Culture shifts don't happen overnight, but building and nurturing a community of practice with the needed capabilities has to be a central plank in that project.

10 This recruitment is greatly helped by the fact that training in both academic and life skills is now an institutionalised expectation for junior researchers.

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BOOK REVIEW

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Dialogue Theories

By Frances Sleap and Omer Sener, edited by Paul Weller

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This book is part of a wider project to establish Dialogue Studies as an academic field, of which this journal is a part, and so must be seen within this context. The book examines a broad range of theorists and practitioners including sociologists, scientists, philosophers and scholars of religion, suggesting that if such a field emerges it would need to be multidisciplinary, or interdisciplinary. At the same time, the book also sees itself as being a useful handbook accessible to practitioners of dialogue by introducing them to a range of dialogue theories. These two aims form something of a tension that resides within this text, but one that is broadly speaking well managed.

We meet a broad range of ten theorists/practitioners, set out alphabetically, and with their own chapter: Karen Armstrong, David Bohm, Martin Buber, Donal Carbaugh, Fethullah Gülen, Tenzin Gyatso, Jürgen Habermas, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Maura O'Neil, and Daniel Yankelovich. For each figure we find the same plan, which starts with a biography, proceeds to set out their theory of dialogue, before moving onto the actual practice or application of this. Each chapter also includes a useful set of questions for reflection, alongside both a bibliography and suggestions for further reading which generally includes the thinker's own works, secondary literature, and works on the practical application of their ideas. The sheer diversity of figures, and their varied approaches makes it difficult to pick out general themes, while any discussion of specific individuals and their often exciting and stimulating ideas would necessarily be arbitrary. As such, I will make some general points about dialogue as it appears in the work. First, the very diversity raises an issue recognised by the authors, which is that: 'we cannot assume that everyone means the same thing by "dialogue"' (17). Indeed, some of the writers examined do not use the term "dialogue" to describe their own work. As such, this signals a very broad and far reaching conception of what this term means, and by extension what Dialogue Studies may investigate. This certainly opens up a potentially exciting set of exchanges on how dialogue may be envisaged in diverse disciplines.

This very diversity provides one of the book's strengths, and I doubt there are many people who could not learn much from it. For myself, I was acquainted with some new names, learnt more about others I already knew something about, and even for those I was most familiar with new insights were brought up. This diversity also signals a strength in the way it does not limit discussion on dialogue as mentioned above. Again, the clarity of language and presentation make this an excellent tool for practitioners, whether individually or in group sessions, to reflect upon the way they understand and conduct dialogue. Finally, particularly in a work on dialogue, it is good to see the way biography, theory, and practice are brought together which helps give a sense of the person's work both in the context of their own life and how ideas and practice may come together. Too often ideas are presented as if they came from disembodied, free-floating theorists, so this helps give a fuller idea of the figures discussed.

Turning to the book's weaknesses a number of points can be raised. First, if it is to contribute to promoting a new academic field then it is a rather lightweight piece of research. While its research is solid, and as I have noted can teach those who already have familiarity with the figures, it is primarily descriptive rather than analytic, and does not dig deep into the secondary literature. However, as a criticism this must be balanced against its aim to provide an accessible introduction, and these two aims will always be in tension. As an aside, I do not think solid academic research should be obscure, but the weight and density of analysis and referencing that a more solid piece of work would engage in would probably be off-putting to the general reader. Second, there is the inevitable criticism about who is not included, and perhaps the most obvious missing name is Daisaku Ikeda, the current head of the global Buddhist network Soka Gakkai International, who has been pursuing dialogue initiatives for many decades. Again, given that any selection will always have to leave certain people out, I believe this is a balanced group, except that in one area which is gender representation. While two women are included it would certainly have been good to see more. Finally, for a text on dialogue it is odd that there is no dialogue between the figures presented, and it certainly struck me that a rich chord could be sounded by comparing Habermas and Yankelovich. This perhaps reflects a tendency towards the practitioner agenda in the book's writing, rather than the academic one, and such analytic dialogue would certainly not make it such a useful tool to the former audience.

In summary, I believe the book is a useful bridge between academic discussions on dialogue and actual practitioners. Given this, I must congratulate the authors and editor for what is a useful contribution to discussions on dialogue, and I think whatever limitations it has must be understood in the context of the balance it is seeking, and of course those limitations are, from another angle, its strengths, while it certainly gives plenty of suggestions and scope for further study in this area.

BOOK REVIEW

Ronald Arnett

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Buber and Education: Dialogue as Conflict Resolution

By W. John Morgan and Alexandre Guilherme

Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014

Hardback, 178 pages, \$145.00, ISBN: 9780415816922

W. John Morgan and Alexandre Guilherme invite the reader into an excellent reminder of the creative range of Martin Buber's dialogic scholarship. I offer a brief glimpse of the content of each chapter and then conclude with an assessment of the thoughtful importance of *Buber and Education: Dialogue as Conflict Resolution*.

The introduction of the volume reminds us about Martin Buber's life by emphasizing his expansive influence on scholars and politicians, most notably Dag Hammarskold, the Secretary-General of the United Nations (1953–1961). The introduction situates Buber and the question of conflict resolution within 'the search for internal *peace*' (8). Chapter 1 connects Buber to his historical situation, which called for the necessity of dialogue as an alternative emphasis to psychological individualism.¹ Buber functioned as a communicative 'prophet in the wilderness,' unwilling to withdraw as a 'silent spectator' (25). Chapter 2 on the utopian ideal examines how some tried to turn against such terms with a "method of annihilation by labels" (35). For instance, Marx and Engels derisively used the term 'socialism'. Buber thought utopian socialism was possible via community and sociality, in opposition to a manic desire to overrun history. Community heals with a common centre that unites difference. Chapter 3 surveys a dialogic response to pacifism. Buber contended that genuine conversation is a vital human counter to violence. However, in his exchanges with Gandhi, Buber rejected the use of *satyagraha* against the Germans. When the oppressors are far removed from humanity, it is unlikely that nonviolence will spur a human spark within their souls.

The next chapter, 4, pushes the question of violence with a comparison of Frantz Fanon and Buber. Fanon stated that only violence could stop violence. Buber, the philosopher of dialogue, and Fanon, the philosopher of 'defiance' (59), differed in their response to violence. Fanon contended that only violence can curtail

1 See Arnett, Ronald C. (1986) *Communication and Community: Implications of Martin Buber's Dialogue*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

the vestiges of colonialism; Fanon's position was echoed by Sartre, who wrote the introduction to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. Violence was understood as psychological emancipation. Buber, on the other hand, who did not assume dialogue was always possible, still encouraged being open to the possibility of dialogue within the unexpected. Buber's dialogic framework is not the answer, but openness to possibilities of dialogue trumps Fanon's totalizing position on violence.

Chapter 5 continues with the theme of violence, examining Buber's response to the Holocaust. Specifically, the authors review Buber's response to Eichmann and his trial. Buber led a group of professors from Hebrew University, who argued for clemency for Eichmann. Buber opposed the trial, stating that the effort would 'expiate the guilt' of the German people (83). Buber did not want to reify the event by taking away the ongoing 'saying', a story about great violence and evil. Arendt, whose book on Eichmann has generated much debate, found Buber's positions without foundation. She stated that the law of humanity requires us to 'accuse and judge, and condemn' (84). Arendt was dumbfounded by Buber's position; his dialogic philosophy was 'unsatisfactorily' problematic (84).

Chapter 6 is an explication of what Buber attempted to do in relation to Eichmann—offer moral education. Buber rejected the extremes of education, those principally centred on the teacher and those targeted to the student alone. His conception of education was relational, unresponsive to the extremes of both teacher-centred and student-centred orientations toward learning. The centre of Buberian education was relationship. His view of education, like his understanding of dialogue, balanced on the 'unity of contraries', which is neither individualistic nor collectivistic. Education and dialogue unite the importance of relational communion and direction. Buber framed the importance of relational engagement with a student without losing the importance of ideas and the separation of roles; the teacher must remain a teacher.²

Buber's understanding of the role of the teacher is further manifested in Chapter 7, which details his commitment to adult education. Buber did not want the educational relation to 'deteriorate into friendship...' (112). Buber, like Paulo Freire, understood the importance of literacy and how it is the baseline for participation in the ongoing life of a society. Buber viewed non-formal education as a way to facilitate health and conflict resolution between and among different communities.

Chapter 8 assesses Buber's political stance on peace in the Middle East. Buber's

2 This perspective on education guides the orientation of Dialogic Education: Conversation About Ideas and Between Persons. See Arnett, Ronald C. (1992) *Dialogic Education: Conversation About Ideas and Between Persons*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

position on dialogue rejected ongoing efforts at confrontation. His commitment to peace and adult education is epitomized by sponsored conferences on the hope of peace in the Middle East; unfortunately, governments did not attend to his message or his implied warnings. What Buber called was for an alternative to a Hobbesian worldview, stating the dialogic importance of concern for the Other, which requires attending to the face of the Other:

We have already stated that, for Buber *I* only realize 'my own personhood through the realisation of the [O]ther's personhood.' The implications of this for peace education and for Israeli-Arab/Palestinian relations are fundamental. It means that concrete opportunities for individuals to *meet* and *dialogue* must be encouraged through both formal and non-formal educational opportunities, as such endeavors put a face to the Other and facilitate the rise of mutual respect and of true *ethical relations*. (131)

The book ends with a discussion of Buber's international reach, specifically into the intercultural dynamics of Brazil. The chapter argues for interculturalism as a dialogic alternative to multiculturalism. The example of Brazil offers a distinction between the act of tolerance and communicative act of dialogue that invites interculturalism.

W. John Morgan and Alexandre Guilherme in *Buber and Education: Dialogue as Conflict Resolution* offer a thoughtful guide to the scope of Martin Buber's life and work. From the basics of Buber's I-Thou, to application of his ideas in an array of contexts, we are given a historical understanding of Buber's dialogue in application. The book provides the reader with unexpected dividends of insight that clarify the scope of Buber's work and its applicability. This volume is a creative read for persons immersed within multiple levels of dialogic theory sophistication. The authors afford each reader a considerate *bienvenue* that sparks imaginative dialogic interest.

BOOK REVIEW

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The Misty Land of Ideas and the Light of Dialogue. An Anthology of Comparative Philosophy: Western and Islamic

Edited by Ali Paya

London: IACS Press, 2013

Paperback, 406 pages, £25.00, ISBN: 9781904063575 (hardback ISBN: 9781904063582)

In the introduction, the book's editor, Ali Paya, talks about comparative philosophy as a dialogue aiming to share the solutions of and insights into the *real problems* with which the compared philosophers are grappling. Paya claims that the subject matter of philosophy is the 'response to the challenges each (compared thinker) faced in the context of his own particular problem situation' (20). Despite this overture to context sensitivity, Paya claims that the 'real problems' are common to all human beings, insofar as we all share many 'common traits' and 'common concerns' (17). So the task of the 'good' comparative philosopher (i.e., the one who mediates the dialogue between the philosophers of the different traditions) is to be guided by the problems and clear away linguistic and other contextual obstacles so that the 'interesting ideas' advanced by each philosopher or philosophical tradition is made accessible to the other (17). Of course, since the objective is to address common problems of humanity, a potentially large number of people benefit from this exchange (16).

There can be little doubt that the philosophers in traditions addressed in this book, Western and Islamic, are committed to the importance of reason and Paya's invocation of a rationalism committed to problem-solving seems to fare well in developing a framework for comparative philosophy. However, we should not rush to accept Paya's account of comparative methodology without some reflection. For one thing, 'reason' is not unambiguous. While some empiricists, for example Hume and Ghazali, treat reason instrumentally (as a faculty given to problem solving), rationalists – like Kant and Avicenna – consider it as a faculty that does not receive its mandate from the interests that come from outside it. Rather, reason's prescriptions are categorical (not hypothetical). The rational agent – in the Kantian picture, for instance – ought to act from reasons alone, and his reason is not prudential, not in the service of other interests, but answerable to the interest of reason – the unconditional good. Could one not say that the Kantian reason is also

solving problems? For example, is not a Kantian concerned about the *problem* of how to act properly, that is from reasons alone? There is some indication that Paya is endorsing this rationalist approach when he claims that it is a category mistake to 'assign goals and aims other than truth to the pursuit of knowledge, e.g., pragmatic success, fame, position, influence, etc.' (19)

If Paya is advocating a robust rationalism, then I am not clear whether, as he claims, 'the efforts of comparative philosophers could be appreciated by a (potentially) large number of people' (16). Rationalist philosophers are in the business of cultivating their interlocutors (through a dialogical process) into a standing in the *autonomous* 'space of reasons' – a term coined by the American philosopher, Wilfrid Sellars, to identify the stance of the Kantian rational agent. The philosophers and their interlocutors are constantly battling the drag that pulls the agent away from the space of reasons, and then they are, once liberated from the monopoly of non-rational wants, working out the terrain of the space of reasons and its conceptual structure. Paya's comparative philosopher wants to learn from the approaches of philosophers from other traditions but that presupposes an already cultivated philosophical stance. If the comparative philosopher is not a philosopher, then comparing is an escape from the actual task of philosophizing. If the comparative philosopher is a philosopher, he will learn from the comparison of the work of 'other' accomplished philosophers, but then his audience is by definition narrower than what Paya envisages.

Mahmoud Khatami's article on comparative philosophy, 'On the Very idea of Comparative Philosophy,' is important in showing that once a philosopher takes on the task of comparative philosophy, she needs to draw on many of the human sciences other than philosophy to complete her task. Paya had argued that the comparative philosopher may not even know the original languages of his interlocutors (17). Therefore, Khatami's account seems to me to be a better assessment of the scholarly burden on the comparative philosopher, but I disagree with Khatami that comparative philosophy is distinct from philosophy proper (152). In my view, the comparative philosopher must also be a philosopher; otherwise, the resultant work is of philological value, but not necessarily philosophically significant. Khatami's article brings to view the complexity and the difficulty of the task of comparative philosopher and that again makes the case that the scope of the availability of such work may be narrower than suggested by the editor.

The comparative articles in this volume, just like the methodological ones, are an exhibition of the work of accomplished philosophers who are also erudite scholars of Arabic, Persian, Near-eastern history, etc. Contributors include prominent specialists in the Abrahamic medieval philosophy: Lenn Goodman, Oliver Leaman, Sari Nusseibeh and David Burrell. There are scholars of continental philosophy,

who are also well-versed in Islamic philosophy, like Muhammad Kamal and Roy Jackson. Craig Streetman specializes in Ancient philosophy and Islamic philosophy. Latimah-Parvin Peerwani, Mahmoud Khatami and Muhammad Legenhausen draw from their wealth of scholarly research into the Islamic tradition, and last but not least, Ali Paya engages the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy in relation to Islamic philosophy. Most of the essays are metaphysical in orientation and examine topics in general metaphysics – such as the meaning of being, the distinction between existence and essence, causation, and necessity – and themes in special metaphysics – that is, psychology, physics and theology. In addition, there is an essay in comparative epistemology and another on comparative political philosophy. The authors bring into dialogue a wide range of Islamic philosophers, including Avicenna, Ghazali, and Mulla Sadra, with prominent Western thinkers, such as Aquinas, Leibniz, Heidegger, and Popper. Again, the essays are of superb quality and the editor has done an extraordinary job in presenting them meticulously. I strongly recommend this work to scholars and specialists but the interested layperson may find the material too academically dense to penetrate.

The Journal of Dialogue Studies is a multidisciplinary, peer reviewed academic journal published twice a year. Its aim is to study the theory and practice of dialogue, understood provisionally as: meaningful interaction and exchange between people (often of different social, cultural, political, religious or professional groups) who come together through various kinds of conversations or activities with a view to increased understanding. The Editors welcome vigorous discussion of this provisional description, of dialogue's effectiveness as a means of increasing understanding, and of other fundamental questions.

The Journal brings together a body of original scholarship on the theory and practice of dialogue that can be critically appraised and discussed. It publishes conceptual, research, and/or case-based works on both theory and practice, and papers that discuss wider social, cultural or political issues as these relate to the evaluation of dialogue. In this way, the Journal aims to contribute towards establishing 'dialogue studies' as a distinct academic field (or perhaps even emerging discipline).

The particular focus of this second issue is the critical examination of key dialogue theories. Questions explored include the following:

- How far are dialogue theories relevant/useful to dialogue in practice?
- Do dialogue theories make sense in relation to relevant bodies of research and established theories?
- Do dialogue theories sufficiently take account of power imbalances?
- Do normative dialogue theories have anything to offer in challenging contexts in which circumstances often suggested as preconditions for dialogue (for example, equality, empathetic listening, the bringing of assumptions into the open, safety) simply do not obtain?

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