

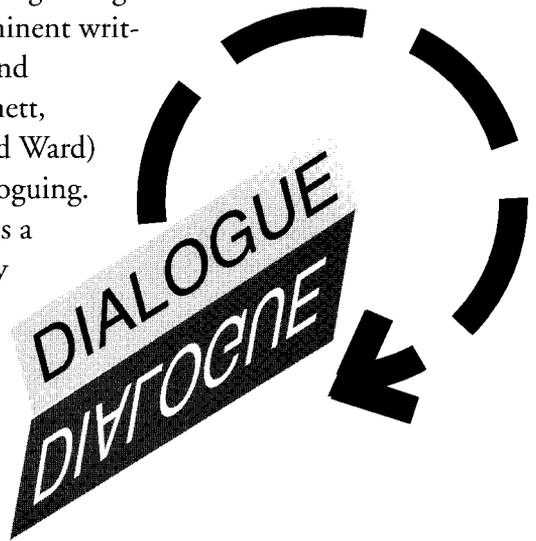
A DIALOGUING WE SHALL GO?

By Donald Roy

In a small city on the coast of Greece where land (culture) and water (commerce) meet, two persons sit at an outdoor cafe during one of those resplendent days when you know that all is right in the heavens (thus the sun's brilliance), if only not here on earth. Their idle conversation turns unexpectedly into a pointed dialogue. Something is in that sea air breeze that beckons. . . .

ODD: How odd it is, all those books and articles with titles using the term "dialogue" and all the calls to "dialogue," yet who and how many are actually writing dialogues to provoke further dialogue? Prominent writers such as Buber, Habermas, and Gadamer (less prominently Arnett, Clark, Johannesen, Stewart, and Ward) call for dialogue but do no dialoguing. Did you know that there even is a Canadian journal of philosophy called *Dialogue* that never has published any dialogues? How about a dialogue to provoke further dialogue, dialoguing about dialoguing about dialoguing. . . ? A wonderful infinite progress.

EVEN: Even so, there is always a dialogue going on in the heads of writers, and some of those you mention think they are doing their part in a hypothetical dialogue. Do not writers and speakers anticipate and react to their potential critics in the process of writing and speaking? Do not most writers and speakers take up their task because there is this *implicit* dialogue, i.e., they believe they are responding to certain writers and speakers other than themselves? Writers and speakers are just keeping up their own side



or part of the matter at hand.

ODD: Yes, but their preference is for the monologue, which is to say, the long, uninterrupted, one-way speech that tends to silence a real interchange. Listeners/readers just approvingly nod off, or they respond with a countermonologue. This “implicit dialogue,” as you call it, is no real back-and-forth dialogue at all. Frequently, the “other” becomes either the adversary dismissed in passing, or some “straw person” disposed of in absentia.

The monologue serves well our conceited egos: take a stand and stand your ground. There is some kind of reluctance and aversion to acknowledging that there are credible, other sides to an issue. Instead, pseudoliberal democratic pluralists that we are, we play King of the Mountain and present ourselves as if talking treatises.

EVEN: Are you claiming that there is some kind of political dishonesty, hypocrisy, bias, or even conspiracy going on? How else but in a straightforward monologue and treatise can opinions and arguments be developed at length? Research findings cannot be presented in a dialogue. Yet most scholarly articles analyze and critique the writings and positions of other scholars as a matter of course. In response, an interior dialogue or conversation goes on as well when we intelligently read any research, essay, etc.

ODD: You have correctly identified the problem: not a conspiracy but an institutionalized mode of discourse rigidly adhered to, originally fronting as philosophical communication and today posing as scientific method. A scholar and academic must adhere to these professional conventions to have any credibility. Woe to the independent, free-lance, loose fish, who we once called a respected public philosopher. Of course, some exceptional philosophers of old wrote dialogues: Plato, Aristotle (all of his dialogues, sadly, are lost), Augustine, Aquinas (his *disputatio* mode is dialogic, I would contend), Berkeley, Hume, and Diderot. This group would altogether form, with all their substantive differences, a great dialogue or “meeting of the minds.” (Do you remember Steve Allen’s television program of the same title?)

How ironic that scientific research findings are presented to us nondialogically! Would not we learn a lot more about the process of scientific discovery if we were privy to the dialogue going on among scientists, or even just within the head of a scientific researcher? What about all those hypotheses and experiments

before a scientist “hits on” his validated explanation? Is not science basically a rigorous endeavor to disprove hypotheses? Instead, we are left with the totally misleading impression that the subject matters of science and mathematics are cut and dried, conclusively certain, and fixed. As a matter of fact, fascinating disputes exist among scientists and mathematicians. Yet we operate with a bottom-line, textbook-terminal mentality, and then we wonder why so many minds (especially young ones) are uninspired and bored.

EVEN: It is only reasonable to expect that people deliver results. On the basis of such results we have the building blocks to construct edifices. Perhaps your dialogic position has usefulness as a pedagogical device to spur interest and activate unaroused minds. Otherwise, you appear to be some sort of intellectual Luddite, another postmodern deconstructionist, more driven by wrecking foundations than by achieving anything constructive.

ODD: Your rejoinder assumes that all intellectual activity is a human construction, even though there are some (mainly ancient) thinkers who contend that we discover (not invent and construct) existent order (since nature exists independent of us and is intelligible/rational). I bring this up solely to indicate that one of the great benefits of dialogue is that no one speaker can get away with making statements based on unexamined assumptions. All assumptions need to be brought out in the open and challenged. It may not be a bad idea to have a few postmodern deconstructionists around, if only to prevent us from getting too self-assured and stodgy. However, dismantling and unraveling everything so that nothing stands is not the purpose of *true* dialogue. I see myself more as a provocateur and evocateur than a Luddite.

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EVEN: Dialogues, as you describe them, are more trouble than they are worth. In any academic study and in politics, we do not need more controversy that unsettles and confuses everything. People want to reach agreement that is based on facts and beliefs and that allows us to live and work together harmoniously. Dialogues incite conflict and divisiveness. A political speech that rallies and mobilizes people is what we need to get on track to resolve our political problems. Otherwise, people will find dialogues to be no more than some distracting war of words, no better than the talk shows recycling our personal lives amok.

ODD: You do not have a very high opinion of people. In a democracy we need to provide spaces where people can meaning-

fully participate. A “true dialogue” does not degenerate into the rantings and ravings of those who bare their psyches for exhibitionist media entertainment and a financial payment. On the other hand, a true dialogue offers reasoned-out choices for listeners/readers, as well as the possibility of entering the dialogue and enjoining arguments on the various sides. Maybe you will hear your own voice in a true dialogue, or if not, at least you will be provoked to respond so that you can be heard.

EVEN: But these dialogues of yours are like a game playing with people’s minds, or a contrivance bearing no relation to real discussion, which is very contingent and messy. I always had suspicions about Socrates being a manipulator bent on showing up others by refutations that were not always all that “logical.” It is more natural to retire to one’s desk and work out one’s own position as a consequence of what one has read and discussed. Can anyone truly present the “other side” in all its strengths? To have a devil’s advocate about might be useful, but in all seriousness, we each have the responsibility as individuals to clarify what we believe. Much of what you scourge as monological is a necessary first step to laying the groundwork for further discussion.

ODD: No doubt, dialoguing has its dangers. Those who feel the necessity of defending some status quo will find dialogic skepticism and aporia threatening, and they may extend the cup of hemlock to terminate such dialoguing. It is a serious matter, even in such a modern libertarian society as ours, to think about parameters, places, and persons when resorting to dialogue. A true dialogue that results in a relatively equal standoff may discourage some to the degree that they go nihilistic, as if all arguments are equal and nothing at all can be true. They conclude that whoever wields the biggest club (might makes right, not right makes might) wins the political prize. Power is the bottom line, not deliberation and persuasion. A dialogue that short-circuits (and actually ends) dialogue in just this “empowering” way is no true dialogue.

There are numerous ideals that we aspire to — justice, equality, civility, decency, the public good, peace — that have no definition outside an engagement of many diverse voices. These *idealistic* norms are no more than will-o’-the-wisps, if we do not engage each other in an effort to find out where we agree and where we disagree. Learning and education are fundamentally communal and not as individualistic as you would have, retiring us

to our writing desks. That is why all those political science textbooks are deadeningly wrong when they give their reductionist definitions of politics as the pursuit of power and self-interest. Who has the opportunity to oppose such totalistic subsumptions? No one is present to question such all-encompassing utterances seemingly not subject to any possible instance of refutation. Monological absolutism at its finest hour! If politics is so reducible to power and coercion, then why even bother to deliberate and persuade? And then these same political scientists wonder why Congress (one important public space for rational deliberation and persuasion) is such a mess, and the presidency is subject to so many circumstances of power misuse, to put it delicately. Recent presidential administrations have become more defined by how many around the president have ended up on trial for wrongdoing. The rest of the president's so-called advisors have their heads stuck in the latest public opinion polls. Some meeting of minds!

EVEN: You are on quite a rhetorical roll and threateningly monological at that. Do you presume to do away with the reality of power and the pursuit of self-interest? What fantasy world have you conjured up? Your idealism puts on the political table the utterly undecidable — who has ever known what justice or the public good is? Such dialoguing promises interminable disputation. All too often these “norms” of yours have been masks for someone's power and self-interest, not to exclude the possibility that unresolved contention makes power wielding all the more attractive to those who quickly tire of such pointless wrangling.

ODD: Yes, indeed, and so it goes. But we can avoid the outcome of cynicism that I hear in your own postmodern voice by avoiding both the extremes of idealism and the extremes of realism. This outcome is precisely what dialogues achieve. Strictly speaking, true dialogues do not predetermine or favor any one side or outcome. All sides have something to contribute. Yet there may be no splitting the differences; we can be stuck with fundamental irreconcilables (i.e., in the abortion debate). Other times it is possible (if a person finds it reasonable) to combine the best of different sides (i.e., idealism and realism) and actually find an in-between or compromise position. In sum, in a true dialogue there are discernible points of divergence and points of convergence.

Further, you cannot be an idealist and a realist at the same time, but you can be one or the other at different times and on

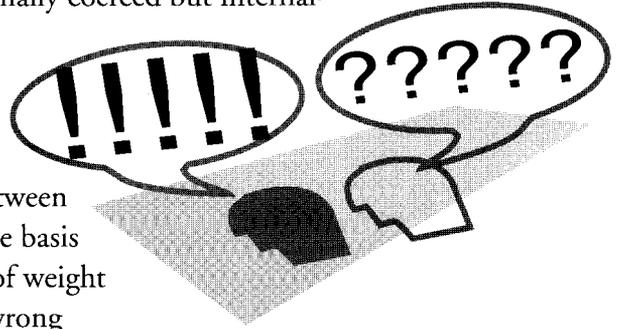
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different issues. Perhaps a person can afford to be an idealist in domestic politics, but only a realist in international politics. Absolute consistency across the board is highly overrated (and dangerously ideological) in politics. Additionally, many of us can and should be willing to let the other side have its day to determine within certain controlling guidelines and standards whether, for example, proposed campaign spending reforms and budget deficit reduction plans can succeed. Sometimes we have no choice but to join the “loyal opposition” and await evaluation of outcomes, since public opinion, the electorate, or a working majority does not now support our own policy plans.

As for “justice” and the “public good,” we naturally appeal to each other’s sense of justice and the public good when their opposites, injustice and private greed, overwhelm us. No one, on their lonesome, has divined the meaning of these terms. It takes a rational, deliberative process among a diverse cross section of people to work out dialogically what justice and the public good are. In every particular instance of a conflict or dilemma, we have to initiate the process all over again. Yes, abstractly and theoretically, there are defining and competing general characteristics of justice and the public good. But politically we are expected to make decisions and act (praxis), which means we have to apply ourselves in a dialogical way such that diverse voices are heard and weighed. In the end, dialogues offer an open and public path of rational deliberation that should prevent masks of deceit characteristic of propagandistic lies.

EVEN: I do not see how you have escaped (or even transcended) self-interest and power considerations. There is no such “reason” independent of rational calculations regarding personal power and self-interest. You can categorize this as reductionist; I would counter that it is just the typical and expectable operations of the human mind. Few among us are saints. And when we reason or calculate together, we respond to the forcefulness of the arguments of others. Persuasion, even if on occasion it has nothing to do with our power and self-interest calculations, is the stronger, that is more forceful, argument. Thus, there is this kind of force or power to rational argumentation. It is not odd for a person to state that a certain argument is compelling. Perhaps the key point is that arguments that are persuasive, in the sense of being forceful and compelling, are arguments that we choose or allow to compel

us. Thus, we are not externally coerced but internally compelled. Such is the freedom and respect we have for human dignity in a political democracy.



ODD: Choosing between different arguments on the basis of persuasion is a matter of weight not force. “Force” is the wrong metaphor and suggests a subordination of reason, a kind of overwhelming that may relate more to propaganda, mass psychology, and the bandwagon. On the other hand, “weight” suggests meanness and substance, as if the mind’s reason had some kind of scale. Of course, the weightiness of an argument needs to be explained, since not everyone has the same sense of weightiness. There is no universal, metric scale. It is through discursive, dialogic reason that a lot of “whys” are explained, and the argument always goes on.

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For the most part, people will weigh consequences, and the “if . . . , then” statement will be decisive, especially in political arguments. Quasi-causal types of argumentation, such as if we raise the minimum wage, then (a) people will have a better living wage, or (b) employment opportunities in low-level entry jobs will decrease, are typical in politics. However, strictly moral argumentation may center more on principles, as well as the argument from authority (i.e., the Bible, the Constitution, public opinion polls, research findings, etc.). It is always a curious matter whether the pragmatism of a person favoring “if . . . , then” arguments overrides the theoretical and contemplative priority of principles.

EVEN: It is of limited value to focus solely on the *logos* of argumentation as you do. This argumentive logocentrism enables you to flaunt an objectivity regarding argumentation that is at best only a part of the game. The two other prongs of the argumentation triangle are *ethos* and *pathos*. *Ethos* refers to the speakers’ or arguers’ character and image, i.e., their self-presentation. Listening to Allan Bloom or William Buckley, Jr. can be quite an experience (*pathos*) in obnoxiousness, no matter how much their arguments alone lift you up and away from liberalism and do not close your mind. Therefore, *pathos* is just such an audience response to arguments. Both *ethos* and *pathos* tend to be subjective factors. More manipulatively rhetorical persons avoid the off-putting elitist snob-

bery of Bloom-Buckley. For me, the real dialogue is in the dynamics between caller (speaker) and responder (audience) and not in any abstract and oracular *logos*.

ODD: The true dialogue occurs among friends or relative equals. You are far more of an elitist than I because you depend on (or is it prey on?) the inequality between the speaker and the audience to constitute your so-called implicit dialogue. What a charade of monological (one-way) domination. A true interchange or *pilpūl* is a back-and-forth, give-and-take, forget about personalities, let it out, self-revelation, that is open and willing to let the argument (*logos*) go wherever it may. Such is the *agon* (contest) as well as the *aporia* (bewilderment) that occurs when so much dialogic argumentation transpires.

In the best possible dialogue situation, arguments collide and sparks fly. Insights occur that otherwise would never have been possible. Socrates and Plato were amazed by this and clearly St. Thomas' *disputatio*, which presents a series of objections (negatives) to a philosophical/theological teaching of the Church, likewise relishes the mental stimulation of an erstwhile interlocutor. While reading Plato's Socratic dialogues in the original Greek, a person is amazed at the gerund fecundity of the Socratic *zetema* (inquiry) — groping, longing, straining, desiring, reaching, and so on — all the “ing” words of an erotic philosopher who is seeking more and more. . . .

EVEN: But Socrates, with his persistent questions and dismissive retorts, was quite offensive to just about anyone. No wonder the Athenian *demos* had enough of his mock inquiries. I. F. Stone had the effrontery to counter the rigged (by Plato) nature of beloved Socratic discourse and uncover the antidemocratic implications of Socrates' queryings. (It surprises me not at all that our law schools brag about their Socratic method!) And Aquinas, such an authoritarian, dogmatic Scholasticist! You do seem to have a predilection for the party of authoritarian order over the party of democratic liberty.

ODD: There is nothing inherently elitist, antidemocratic, and authoritarian about dialogues. In fact, the dialogues of Berkeley, Hume, Diderot, Cranston, and Gay are respective of the liberal Enlightenment and deeply skeptical of dogmatism.

EVEN: Nevertheless, it was safest for Berkeley, Hume, and Diderot to present their fundamental doubts in the form of a dialogue, where they would not have to be first-person accountable for

their controversial personal beliefs. All such dialogue writing seems to be a way of avoiding getting oneself pinned down in writing. Plato was especially wary of writing and, of course, Socrates wrote nothing down at all. All of this may suggest that the truth is something secretive and esoteric. Can we afford such distance, indirection, and standoffishness today? There is no hemlock or guillotine for saying and writing just what one holds.

The problem of modern liberalism, the international relations paradigm, and the division between Jews and blacks, is related to both their successes (their enemies are routed) and their failure to accommodate internal differences. No one should underestimate a squabble within a family. You seem to expect that dialogues will cause people to rise to the highest level of moral and political principles. However, there are only perspectives, and all perspectives are relativistic and contingent. Dialogues may allow a needed confrontation to prevent discourse ossification. Perhaps we have found a common ground, if this is what you mean by the aporetic lessons of dialogues.

ODD: *Aporia* is only the beginning of wisdom, not the conclusion in some sort of relativistic perspectivalism that you seem to be recommending. If the standoff that dialogues originates is to have any promise, then we need to proceed beyond temporary paralysis. Aristotle offers us an insight with his proposal of the Golden Mean between the extremes of excess and deficit. In general, dialogues caution against extremes. Extremists drown out opponents in order to have any chance of victory. Dialogues contrariwise encourage finding a middle ground where possible, which is not necessarily or desirably splitting differences. As Aristotle says, this Mean is not an average or midpoint, but transcends the plane of what today we could label a Benthamite calculus.

EVEN: For a brief moment, I thought you were a flaming radical. How conservative your absolutism is now creeping back into the picture, what with your First Principles and your mysterious Golden Mean. The provocation of dialogues turns out to have fuzzy centrist consequences.

Some time ago, Walter Bagehot in a spree of liberality spoke of the coming "age of discussion." Don't you think it may be upon us now that just about all of us are (or soon will be) wired electronically? Michael Kinsley's SLANT on the Internet is in search of serious readers that think about what they read. Is this the *via media* that will knock down socioeconomic barriers to communication?

ODD: Aren't we all tired of reading book after book that exists for the most part in its own little self-defined world? Maybe we fail to discern this to the degree we read books that conform to what we already are thinking. The self-satisfied and smug will always resist dialoguing. Dialogues are multidimensional and public, whereas monograph writing is one-way and private. At a time when the level of political discourse has sunk to the hawking of consumer goods and the demise of public intellectuals seems irreversible, we need a public space for an engaging public mode of discourse.

I am not impressed to date by what politically spews over the Internet, including Kinsley's SLANT. Who is going to harvest and distill the fine wine (if there is any) from this harvest of opinions? Mouting out communication has more relevance to therapy sessions than real dialogue. Far better would it be to use a Web site to identify those qualified persons knowledgeable of particular issues, who then can be brought together for a dialogue that all others could beneficially access once completed. First, the dialogue among top-notch participants, then the pointed communication back and forth among additional participants. An editor could fix the eventual, completed dialogues so that all others could have a pivotal springboard for all kinds of diverse issues. Most of us first need to get our bearings and decide on what perspective to take on controversial issues. Perhaps to you democracy is a free-for-all, just as libertarians exalt capitalism because it is so wonderfully laissez-faire. But no healthy democracy is possible without qualified leaders who give focus and direction to public issues.

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EVEN: Your idea of dialoguing is too restrictive and sounds like a board of philosophic elders that Plato would empower. You are vulnerable to that distance and alienation that intellectuals and experts are so prone. The example of former governors Jerry Brown and Mario Cuomo, both of whom use radio talk shows to engage and connect with ordinary people, is the kind of democratic leadership that I advocate and admire. You can't have public philosophers (or public intellectuals) without including the public at their level.

ODD: Brown and Cuomo are coming to public philosophy from careers as inveterate politicians after having been politically only so successful. I do not sense that the public cares much to have them in public office. Nevertheless, they would be great interlocutors. However, I am looking for those who would be

more skillfully interposed between philosophy and the public.

Today, the public is turned off (or deviantly entertained) by the rantings and ravings of the many voices that soon begin to resemble distraught monologues. There is no public forum that can handle all these private interests and concerns. On the other hand, when two or three or more of the right people are brought together, they rise to a higher standard of public discourse if indeed they are knowledgeable.

While the public philosopher indeed will be connected and engaged with the public, s/he will not be at the public's mercy. Too often the public philosopher has to be the critic, the dissenter, the bearer of unwelcome news. Remember we are talking about a diverse, open, many-fangled dialogue, not advertising.

EVEN: I can honor the process of dialogue more by way of actual face-to-face encounters than in books. Dialoguing is a method or procedure that simply reflects the human situation of personal social interaction. Rules of discourse (civility, listening as well as exhorting, admitting weakness and error, being attuned to positive sum or variable sum relationships as opposed to zero sum relationships) have to be established and enforced. I am much more doubtful and suspicious of presumed substantive end goals. In our practice of law today and in our democracy, we respect due process first and foremost, since when it comes to conflicting values we cannot terminate this substantive conflict without violating someone's rights.

ODD: Dialoguing is not just a method or procedure. It is an end in itself, if it is true that we all have a rational, social nature that requires development and exercise by way of dynamic conversation. Dialogue is pragmatic not utopian. Sure, the best dialogues may be quite extemporaneous and personal, but the habit of dialogue and the rigors of written dialogue are best instilled when books are dialogic and not just monologic. Too much of our lifeless (and frequently dumbed down) education is by way of monologic textbooks. Our young people deserve much better.

In the end and beyond the wordiness of dialoguing there is the silence that passeth all understanding, beyond which, but from which, dialogue proceeds. This is not the same as silencing anyone; rather it means listening to that silence, as if hearing the birdsong through all the din and clatter of our industrial human contrivances. *Anamnesis*. We hear, we remember, we see. Thus, we

have the experience of knowing far more than we ever knew or imagined we knew. Such a pathos or receptivity to learning is a mighty radical challenge to prevailing human conventions, and yet it is antithetical to the constructivist stance of willful (define-everything) radical projects. There is this community of humanity that Promethean impulses cannot find any substitute for.

EVEN: Your mysticism of silence seems a very odd way to have the last word bringing our dialoguing to a close.

PROLES, ENTREPRENEURS, OR PUBLIC SCHOLARS?

By Mary B. Stanley

This January as I was preparing to write this piece, I was delighted to discover that Gary Trudeau was rerunning as a “Doonesbury” flashback, his series on the state of working conditions in higher education. Few faculty who saw the series can forget the strip where faculty are positioned as migrant day laborers, waiting to hop on the back of an open truck while a bull-horned dean, “boss man,” calls out needed academic specialties to the response of “I’ll work for food.” Seeing it again I was reminded that a good political cartoonist (in my community the morning paper runs “Doonesbury” on its editorial page) is among the best public scholars we have. Indeed, I thought that my entire article could be a commentary on Trudeau’s strips on the state of higher education.

Instead, as an introduction to my argument, I will begin by unpacking one aspect of that series, Trudeau’s depiction of faculty as increasingly being treated as serfs. I’ll leave most of the academic turf explored by Trudeau untouched.

My argument is fairly simple. I am claiming that because of institutional and macroeconomic changes, faculty in higher education are positioned either to fall into the category of what Marx termed the proletariat or to rise (although some would say also fall) into that of entrepreneur. This is in part the result of the increasing inability of faculty in the academic disciplines to use the logic, rhetoric, and practices of professional expertise to maintain autonomy over the conditions and ends of their labor. And, finally, I will argue that the default position for faculty at this point in our cultural history (although some, including myself, would say the preferred and actively sought alternative) is to reenter public space and reconnect with the public as public scholars.

