

Order and Disorder in Intercultural Dialogue

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The emerging new world order (or shall we call it “disorder”?) that began to form after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the fading of the bipolar international arena that had dominated the planet for almost half a century after the end of World War II is still very unstable and far from having achieved a lasting shape, but various traits are recognizable. In the last decade of the 20th century, with the fall of the Iron Curtain, the process of globalization, which had begun, in its modern form, in the nineteenth century but had been halted by the “Thirty Years War” 1914-1945, accelerated again. The role once played by the British Empire was taken over by the USA, by now the sole superpower – something which some have called “hyperpower”.¹ However, the limits of American power soon became apparent. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, although they led to the quick overthrow of the local regimes against which they were directed, can hardly be called successful. The United States suffered a deep and lasting loss of diplomatic credibility after its flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations in 2003. The financial crisis of 2008, America’s unresolved problems of public and private debt, its enormous trade deficit and the bitter acrimony between its two political parties, which threatens to impair the proper functioning of legislation: all of these things have chipped away at both the reality and the perception of American predominance. While able to destroy enemy regimes, the USA has proven far less able to construct stable friendly governments in their place, and utterly unable to address some of the most urgent international problems without the cooperation of other states. The megalomaniac overreaching of the first decade of the twenty first century is over.

It is therefore fair to assume that we are moving away from the short era in which the world is dominated by a single hyperpower. China is the most likely candidate to become the second superpower, at least as long as the Euro-

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¹ See Eliot A. Cohen, “History and the Hyperpower,” *Foreign Affairs* 83/4 (2004), 49-63.

pean Union is not able to transform itself into a federal state with a truly unitary foreign policy. But America and China together, even if they manage to institutionalize mechanisms of cooperation, will not be able to exert control over the rest of the planet. So the return to a multipolar world is what we are facing, and it is not at all guaranteed that this will lead to more stability and peace. This pessimistic expectation is based on the fact that even the multipolar world of the Concert of Europe proved ultimately unable to prevent the outbreak of the First World War and that the new multipolar world will be much more heterogeneous than its European forbearer was, since it will include not only countries, such as the USA, Russia, and Brazil, with a strong European heritage but also Asian and perhaps African powers, such as China, India, or South Africa. What may balance this pessimism are three (or four) considerations. First, the degree of economic and cultural globalization humanity has achieved in the 21st century is much deeper than ever before in human history, and this renders going to war psychologically more difficult because it hurts more interests. Second, the development of an international law that no longer recognizes a right of sovereign states to wage war and the commitment of most of the world's governments, at least on paper, to universal human rights may inhibit the willingness of states to resort to violence. Beside this moral point there is, third, the widespread awareness that, with the emergence of weapons of mass destruction, the risk connected with a large war has become incalculable. A fourth point – that humans may learn from errors of the past – is, I am afraid, particularly weak given the obstinacy of human dullness. Still, it remains true that the possibility of learning from errors makes inductions to the future much more problematic than in the case of the predictions of the natural sciences.

Peace presupposes an agreement of wills. But why do people agree? Fundamentally, there are three causes of agreement.² First, there is the threat with evils that are feared. Potential criminals may agree not to rob a person because they know that with a relatively high degree of probability they will be subjected to a punishment if they try to do so or even after they have succeeded. Second, there is the allurements with desired goods – most people work because they are offered an appropriate compensation for it. And, third, people may be convinced that a certain behavior is good in itself: Voluntary service, for example, is normally not based on the hope for positive or the fear of negative sanctions. In fact, however, even positive and negative sanctions are usually themselves supported by normative beliefs. Societies accept the establishment of a penal system because they think that it is not simply in their own interest to have it installed but because they regard it as just that punishment be meted out to wrong-doers, and people ask for payment for

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² See the fifth chapter, on power, of my book: *Morals and Politics*, University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, 2004.

their work because they regard it as fair that their effort should receive some proportionate form of compensation. An ingrained principle of reciprocity is part of the make-up of humanity, and this renders stable interactions between people even from different cultures ultimately possible.

It is not difficult to see these three factors at work in the international arena. Threats with negative sanctions, usually by military force, promise of benefits, normally some form of economic cooperation, and consensus formation by intercultural encounters are the forces that shape the relations between countries. Being neither a military strategist nor an economist, I have to limit myself to the third aspect of international exchange. To be more precise, I want to analyze the nature of intercultural dialogue and look at the conditions that render it more likely that it will succeed as well as those that may cause it to fail. Of course, this statement implies that I do believe that a dialogue can succeed or fail. This, in turn, presupposes that most dialogues aim at something that they can either hit or miss. I do not deny that a dialogue can be worthwhile and play a positive function even if does not hit the mark it explicitly aims at; after all, there are unintended consequences of actions, and some failures are worthwhile: friendships may develop out of a failed discourse trying to solve a theoretical problem. But one must first look at the normal aim of an activity before one can study its side-effects. Since the intercultural dialogue is a special case of dialogue in general, I must first address at some length the latter (I) before I quickly zoom in on some special features of the intercultural dialogue (II).

Needless to say, I am aware of the fact that what I am doing is highly reflexive. Even if a lecture is not a dialogue, it is a preparatory step for a dialogue, and since I am speaking in a country and continent different from my own and in front of an international audience, I am myself engaging in some form of intercultural dialogue (one that I intend to be asymmetric only while I am lecturing). I can only hope that I myself will hit the end that I am setting out for dialogues. If I should get entangled in performative self-contradictions it will be unintentional – and, alas, I am not sure that any good consequences will flow from it.

I.

What is a dialogue, and what are its main shapes? Note, first, that I use the term here in a very different way than in my book *The Philosophical Dialogue*. There I dealt with the literary genre called “the dialogue” and insisted strongly on its difference from the extended verbal interaction, which I called “conversation”. Since the literary genre does not play any role in my reflections today, the term “dialogue” has been set free and may be used to denote the verbal interaction. This allows me, in turn, to restrict the term “conversation” to a special type of dialogue (in the sense in which I am using the term today),

namely the one that in *The Philosophical Dialogue* I called “chat”³ – a term that I dislike and that I am glad to be now able to dispose of. (Frankly, this is the main reason for the terminological reshuffling.)

As I already said, dialogues are a special type of social interaction. Social interactions are the basic events of sociology – events that occur between a plurality of intentional beings whose intentional states all refer to the social interaction.⁴ According to this definition, a lethal car accident caused by a failure of the breaks in front of a slope that kills both the driver and a casual bystander is not a social event, nor is the surprise killing of a person by shooting her in the back. However, two soldiers who take aim at each other on the battlefield *are* engaged in a social interaction. One will recognize that I follow Max Weber’s characterization of social relation (*soziale Beziehung*) in the third paragraph of the first part of his main work.⁵ Certainly, it could be useful to differentiate between social interactions and social relations, the latter of which emerge from the former. The teacher-pupil-relation, for example, is based on repeated social interactions that have the nature of teaching. But I will abstract from this differentiation here, since interactions are after all relations in the formal sense of the term, namely, *n*-place properties with $n \geq 2$, and use “social interaction” and “social relation” in this text as synonyms. As Weber rightly states, a social interaction does not presuppose reciprocity. If A punishes B or if A lectures to B, C, and D, the interaction is asymmetric but still a social relation. Dialogue, however, belongs to the vast realm of symmetric relations. This is an important, even if purely formal characterization. Thus, I will not speak of a dialogue between a woman and her dog, for even if the owner may speak with the dog and the latter can understand and obey commands, there is no way how the dog could address its master verbally. Analogously, I cannot call “dialogue” the addressing of a comatose patient by another person. In Pedro Almodóvar’s *Hable con ella* Benigno Martín talks *to* Alicia Roncero but he does not talk *with* her.⁶ I am, however, willing to speak of a dialogue if only one person speaks and the other listens and deliberately refuses to answer any question – for such a silence is also a speech act.⁷ Even when the addressee is capable of reacting verbally but what is expected from him is merely

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³ *The Philosophical Dialogue*, University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, 2012, 42 ff.

⁴ Note that this definition does not presuppose that the agents all belong to the human species, for it is more than plausible that higher animals have intentional states. (On primate intentional communication, see Michael Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication*, MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass., 2008, 13 ff.) Thus, the play of a human person with her dog may well be considered a (interspecific) social interaction. Needless to say, I do not believe that only linguistic beings can have intentionality. Small children clearly have intentions before they learn to speak – they can only learn to speak because they have intentional states to which they connect the sentences they hear.

⁵ Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck): Tübingen, 5th ed. 1980, 13 f. Weber’s further specifications are important to note: the element of meaning (*Sinngehalt*) of a social relation can change, can be expressed in maxims, and can be based on agreement.

⁶ I do not claim that no comatose patient has the capacity to understand what she is told. But since the person who addresses her cannot be sure about it and her silence is involuntary, no dialogue occurs.

⁷ See already Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Niemeyer: Tübingen, 15th ed. 1979, 164 f. – A dialogue occurs only if the silence is understood as a concrete speech act by the interlocutor. A deliberate silence may signal, according to the circumstances, either a rejection or a deep agreement that does no longer need words, which mean less than a harmony of emotions.

an action, as in commands or threats, or patient listening, as in a sermon, there is no symmetry of verbal interchange, and thus no dialogue. Note that the symmetry of the relation simply entails that the person talked to talks back; it does not imply that the interlocutors have equal power. A police interrogation falls under my definition of dialogue. It is a symmetric relation but an asymmetric dialogue.

If we look at the matter of the relation, what strikes first our mind? What I just said implies that what distinguishes a dialogue, say, from a fistfight or a sexual encounter is that it is essentially verbal; it conveys information by using a full-fledged language. The basic form of dialogue is oral communication between persons who can see and often even touch each other; but the channel of communication may also be only vocal-acoustic, as in a phone call, or only visual, as in an exchange of letters or an online chat in real-time. Therefore, I have no difficulties in calling also an exchange of letters a form of “dialogue”. Obviously, the same dialogue can change channel – two scholars, after a conversation, may send each other the essays they have written on the topic and continue their discussion by email. Despite the fact that such a dialogue may be interrupted by various extraneous activities, such as travel or sleep, it makes sense to consider it a single dialogue process, for there is no reason why such a process must be continuous. On the other hand, a continuous exchange of words may well constitute two different dialogues, if, for example, there is an abrupt change of topic.⁸ The examples I will give in the following will focus on oral dialogues. For the original sensory channel through which verbal communication was achieved was auditory, even if some parts of humanity now have been familiar with visual language for around 5000 years and blind people can learn tactile languages.

Of course, almost every verbal dialogue also involves nonverbal forms of communication, in the case of oral dialogues for example through kinaesthetic, tactile, and visual channels.⁹ I mention only posture, gestures, physical distance, touching, eye contact, not to speak of signals that are not limited to a specific interaction with a single individual, but to a whole situation, such as clothing, bearing certain marks such as weapons or conference tags, using a specific perfume etc. – factors that may convey more credible information than mere words, for example on the economic background of the speaker, her ability to use force, or her sex appeal. Sometimes the conveyance of the relevant information is intended by the speaker; sometimes it may well

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⁸ I must leave it open whether there should be a required minimum of verbal exchanges in order to be able to speak of a dialogue. Since both sides have to speak (or at least engage in a speech act), there must be at least two utterances, but one might want to refuse calling an exchange like “Do you have a second?” “Unfortunately not” a “dialogue”. The point, however, is only terminological and does not deserve further analysis.

⁹ See, for example, *The Sage Handbook of Nonverbal Communication*, ed. by Valerie Manusov and Miles L. Patterson, Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi, 2006 and Harriet J. Ottenheimer, *The Anthropology of Language*, Wadsworth: Belmont, 2006, 150 ff.

be that the speaker is not really aware of the signals he is sending – think of unconscious flirting. Displays are at the origin of animal communication, and in humans some acts that were once intentional may well become so habitualized that they function again as displays. Nonverbal communication is not limited to the sensory channels through which the verbal exchange does not occur. Spoken language has place for paralinguistic, non-phonemic properties, such as pitch, volume, speed and prosody; written language for non-graphemic properties such as the ink in which the letter is written, the margin left on it etc. But although the importance of the nonverbal aspects of communication should not be underrated, every verbal communication has a rational core consisting in propositional attitudes that are expressed linguistically. Among the propositional attitudes that render communication possible, there is one particularly important class: propositional attitudes about the propositional attitudes that other people have. For communication functions only if I am able and willing not only to focus on what I want to say but also on whether the addressee understands what I am telling him. Clearly, there is no *conceptual* limit to intentionality levels in humans, even if our mortality and dependence on periodic interruption of thought create very real limits, which, however, vary among humans. But all normal humans can form thoughts such as “I doubt that the interlocutor believes that I understood what he just declared.”¹⁰

Certainly dialogues may end in fistfights or fondling. But then they cease to be dialogues – for only when an exchange between people is mostly verbal should we speak of a dialogue. I agree that the definition, like so many others, is vague but I can live with that as long as we can at least work with the comparative concept “more dialogical than.” And clearly there are interactions that are not dialogical at all, such as acts of physical violence, even if they are accompanied by shouts and insults.

This definition of “dialogue” is still very broad – it covers all symmetric verbal communication, from the bargaining of a seller and a buyer regarding the price of a commodity to small-talk at a party about a colleague’s extramarital affair to the defense of a dissertation at a university. These interactions are so distinct from each other that it is crucial to articulate the genus “dialogue” into various species. We owe one of the most convincing subdivisions of dialogues to Friedrich Schleiermacher, in whose enormously vast oeuvre as philosopher, theologian, and philologist the discipline of dialectic plays a crucial role. Schleiermacher’s concept of dialectic is very different

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¹⁰ Robin I. M. Dunbar, “How humans came to be so different to other monkeys and apes,” in: *Biological Evolution: Facts and Theories*, ed. G. Auletta/M. Leclerc/R. A. Martínez, Gregorian & Biblical Press, Rome, 2011, 275-289 insists strongly on the number of levels of intentionality as crucial difference between humans and apes. He thinks that the limit for normal adults lies at fifth order – but of course this is a claim of sixth order, and mine of seventh.

from that of his rival and contemporary Hegel; for him dialectic is “nothing else than the art of leading a dialogue.”¹¹ In reality, since for Schleiermacher there occurs also a dialogue with oneself whenever we compare two diverging lines of thought in our solitary thinking,¹² his further development of the concept of dialectic leads quite away from a discussion of dialogue as I have defined it. But it remains true that Schleiermacher maintains an awareness of the intersubjective dimension of dialogue in which Hegel is not at all interested.¹³ What is Schleiermacher’s typology? For him, there are three main ways of leading a dialogue, corresponding to three basic forms of thinking.¹⁴ First, a dialogue may have the purpose to achieve an agreement of wills, just as certain thought processes aim at certain actions. Such dialogues are not ends in themselves; people engage in them because they are the easiest way to obtain what they desire – certain objects, activities done in common, at least the omission of interferences with their own plans. Second, there is what Schleiermacher calls the “free” dialogue. This sort of dialogue is an end in itself – the thoughts of one interlocutor stimulate those of the other, and this process comes to a conclusion only when the specific pleasure it generates has been exhausted. Finally, there is dialogue proper in which people try to obtain an agreement not with regard to a common action but with regard to truth. Like the second type, such a dialogue is not oriented toward an action as its outcome; its end is immanent to the dialogue, insofar as the grasping of the truth, if it occurs, happens in the process of the dialogue itself. Still, there is an end that this type of dialogue is after in a very different way than in the case of the second type. Since the first and the third type of dialogue serve an external purpose and may ultimately aim at private satisfaction, conversation is the type of dialogue that manifests most clearly communicative rationality in which people do not instrumentalize each other in order to achieve an end.¹⁵

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¹¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, ed. by M. Frank, vol. 2, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 2001, 47: “weiter nichts als Kunst, ein Gespräch zu führen”. – Frank reprints in the second volume of his publication the edition by Rudolf Odebrecht of Schleiermacher’s 1822 lecture course. Schleiermacher himself did not publish any of his lecture courses on dialectic; the first, insufficient edition was by L. Jonas in 1839. The only English translation that has appeared is of the 1811 notes on dialectic: *Dialectic, or, The Art of Doing Philosophy: A Study Edition of the 1811 Notes*, tr. T. Tice, Scholars Press: Atlanta, GA, 2000.

¹² The idea goes back to Plato (*Theaetetus* 193e, *Sophist* 263e), whom Schleiermacher famously translated and reinterpreted in a very innovative way.

¹³ On the complex relation between dialogue and dialectic, see Dmitri Nikulin, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2010.

¹⁴ The German terms are “geschäftliches,” “künstlerisches,” and “reines Denken” – business-oriented, artistic, and pure thought (see op. cit., 5-10).

¹⁵ On a phenomenology of strategic and communicative rationality, see my essay “Zur Dialektik von strategischer und kommunikativer Rationalität,” in: *Praktische Philosophie in der modernen Welt*, C. H. Beck: München, 2nd ed. 1995, 59-86. I am aware that Jürgen Habermas privileges the discourse in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 1981), but while this makes perfect sense from the point of view of validity, intersubjectivity in the

But strategic rationality is so inventive that it can high-jack a conversation for its own purposes – either to garner information about a person or, since spontaneity can be affected, to simulate certain traits one desires other people to assume about oneself. Then the conversation is in fact a strategic event in disguise, and a dishonest strategic event at that, since in this case people do not play with open cards but manipulate each other.¹⁶ Yet I must neglect here the motives for which people engage in the various types of dialogue even if they alone determine whether the action is communicative or strategic.

In the following, I want to call the first species of dialogue “talk,” the second “conversation,” and the third “discourse”. No doubt, as Schleiermacher himself hints, the boundaries between these types of dialogue are not always sharp – the three species are what Weber calls “ideal types” whose pure instantiations are rare. A job talk at a university is both a discourse and a talk – one wants to learn together about a topic, but one will base on the amount one has learned the decision whether to hire a person. A discourse on a philosophical topic may be more enjoyable and thus perhaps also more conducive to truth if people grant themselves the time necessary to get acquainted with each other, and certainly nothing is fitter for this purpose than effortless conversation. For while declarations about oneself are often boring and rarely sincere, the charm of the free flow of a conversation consists in the fact that it allows certain traits of character of the interlocutors to emerge, as it were spontaneously. Still, the grey zones between the three species of dialogue and their use for purposes different than their proper ones do not invalidate Schleiermacher’s taxonomy. There is a stroke of genius in it, even if it does not cover every form of dialogue and although different subdivisions according to other criteria are possible: In analogy to Aristotle’s typology of oratory in the *Rhetoric*, one could speak of dialogues oriented toward the future (such as talks preparing common actions), toward the present (such as party small talk), and toward the past (such as appraisals of actions already completed). If the evaluation is negative, and if the agent commented upon is the interlocutor or a friend of his, the dialogue may become an altercation and lead to the end of verbal exchange. Clearly, the emotional qualities involved in dialogues, which can range from love to hatred, or the greater or lesser degree of formality may also produce interesting subdivisions. But for my purposes Schleiermacher’s typology is good enough, and I do not see any better way to answer the question about order and disorder in dialogue than by distinguishing according to his three types. For order and disorder mean something very different depending on what type is at stake.

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discourse may well be only a means to discover truth while it is enjoyed as an end in itself in the conversation.

¹⁶ We owe an interesting study of how publicly organized “democratic” discourses serve the purposes of governmental power to Sergei Potseluev, *Politicheskie paradialogi*, Izd-vo IUzhnogo federal’nogo universiteta: Rostov-na-Donu, 2008.

In the case of a talk, the basic criterion of its quality is simply its usefulness toward achieving the end aimed at. Of course, this end may be of very different moral nature: It may benefit only one of the interlocutors, the other either not understanding that it is not in his interest to agree or having no real choice, if, for example, he desperately needs what the monopolist offers at an exorbitant price. Even if it benefits all the interlocutors, it may well be that it harms parties not involved in the talk – think about a gang planning a crime. The qualities of a talk belong thus to the realm of instrumental rationality: they are the same for all types of end. *A talk is the more ordered the more it is geared toward its end.* A talk succeeds if it leads to a result accepted by both parties, for example a contract. It fails if it does not. A negative result – there is no sense in continuing this talk with this person – is, by the way, still better than inconclusiveness about the issue whether the talk should go on; for at least, the negative result allows one to focus on other options. Since the end is an action resulting from the dialogue, the talk should be as short as possible – time lost in it will delay the achievement of the end. But it must be as long as necessary; and this does not simply mean: as is necessary to achieve a consensus but also as is necessary to plan ahead the course of action. For agreements to engage in actions, in the execution of which problems arise that could have been anticipated but now are difficult to tackle, because it is too late or because they have become more costly, perhaps also because communication regarding them is no longer feasible, are clearly disordered agreements – they do not facilitate the end result. In the corresponding communication, people have to speak as precisely as possible; they have to understand the other and make themselves understood. They should avoid falsehoods that endanger the achievement of the end (not necessarily other falsehoods) as well as obscurity of expression, ambiguity, and also prolixity, since time is money. Of course, you will have noticed by now that I am following Paul Grice’s splendid essay laying out the maxims of conversation (or dialogue, in the terminology used here).¹⁷ One problem with this essay is, however, that Grice does not offer a taxonomy of various species of dialogue, even if he is aware that his maxims do not have the same status and do not constrain all types of verbal exchanges – he recognizes, for example, that casual conversation may “leave very considerable latitude to the participants” (26). Clearly, the main case of dialogue he has in mind is what I call “talk” – where people do not simply cooperate in the act of talking but aim at some cooperative action after the talk.

Why do people engage in conversations that are not directed toward an external end? A simple answer is that they are usually more agreeable than talking business. Therefore, the ultimate criterion toward which it is ordered

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¹⁷ Paul Grice, “Logic and Conversation,” reprinted in: *Studies in the Way of Words*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1991, 22-40.

seems to be pleasure – a dinner party was a success if the interlocutors enjoyed it. As true as this answer is, it is not sufficient; for we want to understand *what* contributes to the pleasantness of a conversation, and *why*, and as rational beings we cannot help subjecting pleasures, our own and those of others, to a *moral check*. Even if some people may enormously enjoy a dinner conversation mainly devoted to malicious gossip or bawdy jokes, their enjoyment is despicable, and we hesitate to say that their conversation was an ordered one. I believe that conversation without a purpose has one of its roots in what Bronisław Malinowski has called the “phatic” function of language.¹⁸ Roman Jakobson has given it a place in his system of the six functions of language (referential, emotive, conative, poetic, phatic, metalingual), which enriches Karl Bühler’s famous tripartite organon model.¹⁹ “The endeavor to start and sustain communication is typical of talking birds; thus the phatic function of language is the only one they share with human beings. It is also the first verbal function acquired by infants; they are prone to communicate before being able to send or receive informative communication.”²⁰ Why is the phatic function so important? It signals the willingness to speak without yet having anything specific to say, as in the pseudo-questions that begin a British conversation: “How do you do?” – “How do you do?” Even if after this exchange a topic like the weather conditions today is addressed (“A wonderful morning today here in Johannesburg!” – “Yes, isn’t it?”), it is safe to assume not only that both parties are already aware of the weather so that no new information is passed on but also that the parties both presume the other side to be aware of the weather conditions. So there is no referential function involved, and not even an emotive one for the remark about the wonderful morning does not aim at expressing one’s joy but at capturing or maintaining the attention of the interlocutor. Thus, one could recognize a conative function in it, as we find it in imperatives, but it is a formal one – nothing concrete is asked for beside the request, “Please, continue to listen to me.”²¹ Clearly, a conversation cannot go on too long like that, the most important exception being flirtation, where verbal exchange may be a pure pretext for admiring the details of the potential partner’s body, sending sexual signals in the hope that they will be reciprocated, and beginning to imagine a physical embrace with the interlocutor. But even in this case intelligent people will evaluate what is being said, as little as it is, and infer from it certain properties

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¹⁸ Bronisław Malinowski, “The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages,” in: *The Meaning of Meaning*, ed. C.K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, Routledge: New York/London, 9th ed. 1953, 296-336.

¹⁹ Karl Bühler, *Sprachtheorie: die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache*, G. Fischer: Jena, 1934

²⁰ Roman Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics” (1960), reprinted in: *Language in Literature*, Belknap Press: Cambridge/London, 1987, 62-94, 69.

²¹ It would be worth investigating whether the three functions added by Jakobson somehow correspond on a higher level to the three functions distinguished by Bühler: the phatic to the conative, the metalingual to the referential, and the poetic to the expressive.

that belong to the rational and moral core of the person they are talking to – properties which will inevitably emerge sometime, at the latest shortly after the sexual encounter. What follows after the phatic phase in a conversation can vary greatly and depends on many factors, such as recent events, the prehistory of discussions between the interlocutors, the assumptions about topics that may be of interest to all present people, such as persons everyone in the group knows. Furthermore, there are issues that generate almost universal interest, such as amazing events that are worth being narrated or the moral evaluation of complex issues. Which issues emerge depends on the turns that a conversation takes, most of which are unexpected, even if some people may have entered the conversation with the intention to tell some stories or ask certain questions. But since already the stream of consciousness of a single individual is unpredictable, even if it is perhaps subject to some complex laws of association, the confluence of various such streams must be even more difficult to anticipate. Since it has no explicit goal, the end of a conversation is usually brought about by some external event – another appointment, bedtime etc. – not by an immanent conclusion.²² What would endanger the result of a talk constitutes the charm of a conversation, which often works like a kind of collective brainstorming and may lead to more intellectual innovations than the sum of the individual deliberations of all the participating individuals in isolation. Beside the pleasure of conversation the stimuli that one gets for one's further thought processes are an important cognitive criterion of the quality of a conversation. We value them because as humans we know our own limits and are grateful for chances to transcend them by being confronted with alternative points of view, even if at the end of the day we come to reject such points of view as ultimately inferior to our own. But explicit thinking them through usually enriches our own stance.

The free nature of the conversational exchange explains why in it some of Grice's maxims do not hold. Thus, in conversation fictional stories are welcome – sometimes even if not introduced as fiction but with the claim that they are faithful accounts of an event that really occurred. Of course, this claim belongs itself to the fictional universe, but how should the interlocutor know when the fictional bracketing sets in? Well, he has to rely on the same intellectual capacities that allow him to discover an ironic remark as ironic – general intelligence and familiarity with the tastes and belief system of the interlocutor etc. Two things have to be noted. First, it has often objected to philosophers from Grice to Habermas and Apel that their obsession with finding rational presuppositions of discourse has led them to ignore the role

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²² Dmitri Nikulin, *On Dialogue*, Lexington Books: Lanham, 2006, 55 ff. points to incompleteness and unfinalizability as features of the dialogue. The book contains important insights on the anthropology of the dialogue but would have benefited from an appropriation of Schleiermacher's differentiation between various types of dialogue.

that deliberate obscurities and ambiguities as well as ironies play in so many normal human interactions. I think the objection is fair as long as one recognizes that there are very different types of dialogues, in some of which Grice's maxims hold without any exception: ambiguities and ironies rightly grace a conversation but would be inappropriate in a legal agreement or a business plan. No perjurer will get away in a court by saying that he was in fact speaking ironically. But why is there a province of human dialogue where ironies and ambiguities are allowed and even welcome and encouraged? As far as I can see, there are at least three psychological forces motivating the use of irony. First, the speaker may want to show that he is more than a truth-producing machine – he has the freedom to distance himself temporarily from a norm that is reasonable but still requires his voluntary assent. While irony toward everything must lead to a moral paralysis,²³ this type of irony is completely legitimate and is often used with regard to obvious facts the statement of which is somehow demeaning. For even if everything that one says ought to be true, not all what is true ought to be said, for example if it offends or harms people, but also if the saying of it does not show a particular insight or teach anybody anything. Trivialities about today's weather fulfill a phatic function, as we have already seen, but I can somehow hide the superfluousness of my observation (beyond its phatic relevance) by remarking "Nice weather today," when it is raining cats and dogs. Second, critical remarks in ironic shape, even if they are understood as such, are often less hurtful than direct ones, and in a system that punishes frankness it is more difficult to persecute them. But also remarks that may render oneself vulnerable are often offered in an ironic form so that one may withdraw them without having to contradict oneself explicitly if someone abuses the occasion offered by a person opening herself. (Since rejection of an offer of love is particularly humiliating, such ironic circumlocutions play an important role during courtship.) Third and most important is the fact that complex ironies (which sometimes deliberately use ambivalences so that according to a certain, but not obvious sense of the words employed what is really intended is indeed expressed) manifest the intelligence of the speaker and test the intelligence of the interlocutors – who may pass the test in different degrees so that the ironic conversation may well fulfill the task to say different things to different people, if this is so desired. (This is a further reason for the use of irony in courtship.)

The second point to be said in favor of theorists of the rational presuppositions of dialogue is that, far from showing the ineludibility of contradictions in our relation to truth, all ambivalences and ironies can be rightly understood as such only because we presuppose the principle of non-contradiction. That Socrates' (and Plato's) praise of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in the *Euthydemus* is ironic follows from the fact that it contradicts all convictions

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²³ Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, § 140 f.

Socrates and Plato stand for. This, in turn, presupposes that we must regard certain assertions as non-ironic even if I cannot discuss here what allows us to distinguish ironic from non-ironic remarks. (Important aspects are the order and the frequency in which they are communicated.)

A conversation is not only treasured because of the ideas it engenders and the ironic play that it renders possible. No less important are the insights that it grants into the natures of our conversation partners. Also in a talk, we try to garner information about our interlocutors. We want to know whether they are honest, reliable, intelligent, diligent, and efficient. Why? Because these qualities will determine whether we will achieve our end. All further information regarding the interlocutors is normally useless, and since time lost in a talk delays our end, we look with diffidence at a business partner who begins to tell us about his difficult childhood and inevitably ask ourselves what his purpose is in telling us this. Does he want to excuse in advance his deficiencies in delivering? In a conversation, however, since there is no immediate aim in sight, we allow and even desire to see a personality manifest itself in the stories that our interlocutor tells and particularly in the manner in which she tells them. Such stories need not be personal ones in order to let complex character traits shine through, but often anecdotes about a favorite uncle may betray even more about a person, because they allow us to make inferences about the influences to which the interlocutor was subjected and which may go well beyond what she recognizes herself as such an impact. Sometimes these inferences must not be rendered explicit in the conversation, because this may hurt. It is exactly the presence of the personal dimension that renders tact necessary, that is, keeping certain things unsaid,²⁴ or at least that calls for the use of indirect communication mentioned earlier. By talks alone, without the personal dimension inherent in conversation, we could never make friends – at least if we do not subsume under the concept of friendship what Aristotle calls “friendships for the sake of utility”.²⁵ A friendship based on conversation may, to use his trichotomy, be either a friendship for the sake of pleasure or for the sake of the good. The latter usually presupposes that people engage together in a serious quest for the right life – that is, in a discourse.

The discourse shares with the talk the commitment to an external goal, but while in the case of talks the end is an agreement of wills, and ultimately a course of action, in the case of discourse it is an agreement of intellects. The fact that the discourse is directed toward truth makes it less prone to be subjected to interests and their power dynamics than the talk. Furthermore, since spontaneous agreement, for example on the evaluation of certain actions narrated in an anecdote, contributes to the shared pleasure gener-

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²⁴ See the fine remarks in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck): Tübingen, 4th ed. 1975, 13.

²⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1156a5 ff.

ated by the conversation, the discourse has something in common with the conversation. Still, truth is something different from intelligent pleasure, and in discourse concentration on the former makes it imperative, for example, to point out errors and contradictions of the interlocutor, which in a conversation are best overlooked or at least not focused upon. Intelligent ironies and ambivalences are allowed, but they should not involve the risk of causing serious misunderstandings, since this would harm the process of searching the truth together. Truth, furthermore, is impersonal, and thus manifesting one's character is not a legitimate end of discourse, even if inadvertently it will occur since one's personality traits inevitably influence the suggested avenues for the grasping of the truth. Probably the philosophical dialogue, which, unlike the scientific one, deals with questions that have a great impact on our self-understanding and way of life, can foster friendships at least as much as conversations. But the difference is noteworthy: In a conversation, we allow ourselves to be charmed by the traits of the other, which are sometimes the more fascinating the more they differ from our own; in a philosophical, and particularly in an ethical discourse, we experience community by subjecting ourselves to common norms and values. Still, in order to approximate truth, a philosophical discourse usually recognizes both the objectivity of some truth that transcends and connects us as well as the usefulness of perspectives different from our own.

The discourse can occur in a formalized setting, for example in the form of a debate at a university or a conference. In this case, all the participants are normally granted the same standing. The exam, on the other hand, is an asymmetric form of discourse, since, while everybody can talk, only one side, the board of examiners, decides whether truth was hit upon.²⁶ Such an asymmetry is unavoidable at the beginning of the process in which one acquires discursive capacities if true progress in the knowledge of truth shall occur. We have only a chance to discover new truths if we appropriate important parts of the knowledge that has passed the test of time; otherwise we would have to reinvent the wheel every day. But a discourse can also occur in an informal setting – imagine two scientists discussing the pros and cons of a novel theory while taking a walk. The content of discourse may cover all possible truths, concerning either causal relationships or value questions themselves. Insights regarding the former are gladly taken up by people engaged in talks, while the questioning of values is not something that can occur in a talk, since a talk inevitably aims at certain ends and would break down in the moment in which such questioning would be allowed. But the latter may well enter conversations and by this detour have an impact on the nature of future talks.

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²⁶ In an asymmetric dialogue, the party recognized as superior may either ask or answer questions – contrast an examination with the replies given to students after a lecture.

The nature of a discourse differs according to discipline. The criteria that allow grasping truth in mathematics are obviously different from those involved in literary criticism, and it is not my task to unfold such criteria. But in all cases, reasoning plays an important role. Reasoning has, generally speaking, the following shape: since you accept A, you should also accept B. The rules for reasoning are certainly more controversial than was traditionally assumed, especially if we include inductive and abductive as well as deductive reasoning. But even more important is the issue of what should be recognized as basic belief, since everything hinges on such beliefs. On this issue, various cultures and various ages have disagreed, partly because they recognized different sources of ultimate authority, such as religious leaders or sacred books. But even after the Enlightenment's shift away from authority to reason, one can hardly claim that we have reached universally shared basic beliefs in all areas – and this paradoxically holds also for epistemology itself, which is one of the philosophical disciplines regarding which there is least consensus. According to one theory, basic beliefs can neither be argued for nor overthrown; they are ultimate facts, and there is no way to produce agreement among people with different basic beliefs. Yet one may understand why other people, having different basic beliefs, arrive at different conclusions, but such an agreement is always hypothetical – if A, then B; if non-A, then C. But whether A or non-A holds remains controversial. Such an agreement on implications is doubtless important, for it upholds respect for the other side, whose internal coherence is at least acknowledged. Still, there is an inextinguishable desire for a consensus that goes beyond that. Although this desire has fostered the most awful persecutions, in both religious and secular ages, of people who challenged authoritative truth-claims of their time and place because such challenge shook the certainty with which one wanted to remain committed to what one regarded as truth, such a desire cannot be got rid of by shrugging off the idea of an intersubjectively valid truth. For truth is intersubjectively valid, or it is not truth.

When people disagree regarding their basic beliefs, there are three fundamental possibilities. First, we can rest convinced that we are right and that the other person is simply unable to grasp the truth. Such a reaction is often completely legitimate. One sometimes needs many years to master a discipline, and when a discipline discredits widely-held views, it is not surprising that people who did not have the time, the occasion, or the talent to study it are unwilling to give up convictions they have cherished from their childhood. Not everyone can understand the general theory of relativity, yet this does not endanger its intersubjective truth. But in some cases such a reaction is dogmatic because it refuses to even entertain the alternative belief (while in the case of the scientist, she often had cherished the pre-scientific belief herself before she gave it up). Even worse, sometimes the opponent is even morally denigrated, as is often the case in religious controversies, when the

persons not adhering to one's own religion are regarded as being in the grip of original sin as well as impervious to grace. It is important to note that entertaining a belief does not mean holding it – not even asserting that the correlative proposition occurs in a possible world, for it may well be that it proves to be contradictory. It means only that one does not yet know that it is contradictory, that is, false in all possible worlds.²⁷

The second approach is the radically skeptic one: There is no way to ever find out which of a given set of alternative basic beliefs holds. Since there can be no *reasons* for them (otherwise they would not be basic), it is tempting to look at discourses from the outside and focus on the *causes* that make people hold them. Power mechanisms, such as indoctrination, play an important role among these causes, and since the external observation of discourses shows us that even some highly developed cultures never raised certain questions, it is tempting to offer a sort of natural history of basic evidences. Foucault's archeology of the human sciences is the best-known recent example of such an approach, one which is deeply indebted to the late Heidegger. The main objections against this approach are as follows. First, Foucault exaggerates the degree to which what he calls an "episteme," a set of basic beliefs directing the discourse practices of an age, is closed in itself. Transitions from one episteme to another do occur, and usually by means of conviction, not of force. Second, his fundamentally empiricist methodology lacks any possibility of explaining why certain issues *cannot* appear within a certain episteme – and even more why the historical genesis of an episteme should entail that it will someday be replaced itself.²⁸ Third and finally, Foucault is unable to ground his own truth claim – and if a line of thinking ushers in the incapacity of doing so, this is certainly a good reason to drop it and look for alternatives.

The third approach is dialectic in Schleiermacher's sense. As long as we do not make truth a function of the discourse process, we may and should cherish the hope that by engaging with different points of view we all will come to modify our basic beliefs and that there thus will be a convergence of them. For only by thinking through various possible starting points, even if they are logically incompatible with each other, do we have a chance to decide why one is more fruitful than the other or why some encounter insurmountable contradictions. The criteria that determine the superiority of one philosophical theory over another are all theoretical ones, but in order to come to know the various philosophical theories, we need hermeneutical competences, and thus the true philosopher unites logical and hermeneutical talent.

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²⁷ See Gottlob Frege's distinction between thinking (*Denken*) and judging (*Urteilen*) in "Der Gedanke. Eine logische Untersuchung," in: *Logische Untersuchungen*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 2nd ed. 1976, 30-56, 34 ff.

²⁸ See Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, Gallimard: Paris, 1966, 15 f., 398. We owe a remarkable constructive criticism of Foucault to Fernando Suárez Müller, *Skepsis und Geschichte*, Königshausen & Neumann: Würzburg, 2004.

She must think on her own and she must be able to listen. The enormous advantage of this third approach is that it allows us to learn from each other, neither simply relegating the other to the sphere of ignorance and wickedness or giving up the search for truth altogether. Indeed, the ultimate justification of Schleiermacher's dialectic is an ethical one. It consists in condemning indifference toward the opinions of the other and thus making the search for a consensus a prima-facie duty.²⁹

II.

Intercultural dialogue in a broad sense is every dialogue between people from different cultures, but in a narrow sense it must also address cross-cultural issues. Thus, a discourse between a Chinese and a South-African scientists on elliptic functions is an intercultural dialogue only in the first sense, while a discourse between a Russian and an American on the differences between their politics is an intercultural dialogue in the narrow sense. In the case of the intercultural dialogue we can easily differentiate between talk, conversation, and discourse. International business transactions aiming at a joint venture, discussions between tourists and natives in a café on local customs, international academic conferences on comparative history are instantiations of the three types. Order and disorder are measured by the same criteria as those that hold for dialogues within the same culture: achieving a practical end, enjoying the company of others by manifesting aspects of one's own culture, and agreeing on truths. Yet in all three areas intercultural dialogues face particular difficulties that arise from the difference of language and culture. In every dialogue, the interlocutors must aim at two basic things: making themselves intelligible and understanding the other. This is facilitated by sharing a common native language, and where this is not the case, either one or both sides have to be able at least to understand a language not their own, or a translator becomes necessary. Since there is no one-to-one correspondence between the words of two different languages, almost every translation risks missing something of the original meaning of what has been said, and since furthermore the literature of a language bestows a connotative meaning on many expressions that their counterparts in the other language do not have, only real experts on a language and its culture grasp the "coloring" of a statement.³⁰ This problem is most easily overcome in talks since the

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²⁹ See Schleiermacher, op. cit., 49 ff. It can only be a prima facie duty, for one cannot speak with everybody, and it is legitimate to focus on those interlocutors the discussion with whom will enlighten at least one of the dialogue partners.

³⁰ I refer again to Frege, who speaks on *Färbung* of terms in "Über Sinn und Bedeutung" (in: *Funktion, Begriff, Bedeutung*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 5th ed. 1980, 40-65, 45) and in "Über Begriff und Gegenstand" (ibid., 66-80, 70).

orientation toward a limited and evident end reduces both the vocabulary and the connotative force of terms. But also here disorder can easily ensue if there is a lack of understanding of the rhetorical role of certain expressions – “I’ll do my best tomorrow” may be the correct literal translation of an expression that in a certain culture only implies that someone will give the issue some thought in the not too distant future. Since a talk aims at a practical result, a talk is disordered also if it agrees on initiating an enterprise that cannot be expected to be completed. And while the primary responsibility for an action falls on the person who commits himself to it, one must expect from an interlocutor that he does not knowingly propose enterprises that go beyond the partners’ capacities and to which they will assent in order to maintain their self-respect.

No less important are the cultural norms that direct the flow of a conversation. There must be universal a priori principles that render dialogue possible both *in* all cultures and *between* cultures, such as Grice’s maxims. But while tact, for example, is an anthropological universal, since nobody likes to be addressed in a way that hurts her intimate sphere, the concrete determination of what this intimate sphere is and what therefore has to be rejected as tactless speech varies strongly from culture to culture. Thus acquiring intercultural sensibilities has much to do with perceiving which types of irony are both intelligible and permissible and what has to be left unsaid when relating to a different culture. The development of a more reflexive form of subjectivity in the West has enlarged the area of what interlocutors regard as legitimate, perhaps even mandatory, topics of conversation in a way still hard to digest for people educated in a non-Western system. Remarks that insult a person’s culture are often even less likely to be forgiven than personal slights, partly because even a generous person may not think himself entitled to forgive what concerns not himself alone, partly because the individual can work on himself but hardly change his national character. Although an invasive curiosity can manifest lack of respect, non-committal small talk that avoids every slippery topic often betrays even less respect, in the form of complete indifference toward the other culture. One of the aims of a conversation is to learn about the interlocutors, and so an intercultural conversation is ordered only if it contributes to a better understanding of the other culture. Note, however, that what I said above about the strategic use of a conversation applies also to intercultural conversations – people may want to learn about a culture in order to understand how it can be better manipulated. The dense web of connections between the study of the Orient by the British and French and their colonial domination of Oriental countries is well-known.³¹ Colonel Creighton in Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* is both an ethnologist and an agent of British imperialism. Yet the charm of the book consists in the fact that Kim,

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³¹ See Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books: New York, 1978.

while working as a spy for the British, has a true and deep affection for Teshoo Lama. He not only wants to learn *about* Buddhism, he wants to learn *from* it.

Since discovering truth is the aim of a discourse, an intercultural discourse is successful when it ushers in an agreement on the truth of a controversial proposition or theory. The agreement must be sincere, that is, based on insight, not on the anticipation of certain benefits arising from it or on the fear of sanctions in the case of a disagreement. Therefore a necessary condition of a discourse, even if it is rarely completely fulfilled, is the absence of negative and positive sanctions. Since agreements are difficult when the interlocutors do not share basic beliefs, and since people belonging to different cultures share fewer basic beliefs than persons educated in the same culture, intercultural discourses need more time in order to reach a consensus. But if a consensus is reached, it enhances the probability that truth was discovered – for the consensus is not based on common prejudices. The triumph of modern science all over the globe is a mark of its truth. No doubt, this consensus was facilitated by the fact that there is experimental evidence for science and the fact that mathematics is based on (but not reducible to) logic. Since ethics cannot be grounded on these two sources of knowledge alone, it is not surprising that here a consensus is more difficult to reach. But the more important reason for this lack of consensus is that changes of values challenge more interests and address deeper strata of the person than revisions of our theoretical knowledge. People already have an interest in avoiding diseases, and thus in the long run they tend not to resist empirical evidence that certain behavioral changes will increase their life-span, at least provided that the behavioral changes are not too demanding. (In this case, cognitive dissonance often occurs.) But putting forward, say, new norms of justice between the sexes or between generations cannot appeal in the same way to an existing interest. How should one proceed in such a situation? Wherever this is possible it is imperative to include persons in such a dialogue who are particularly concerned with the proposed changes – such as women in the first case. (In the case of future generations, an integration into the discourse process is much more difficult since they do not yet exist.) Whenever a culture accepts certain authorities as valid sources for normative claims it is crucial to look at them in order to find possible support for one's claim. Clearly such a procedure constitutes only an *argumentum ad hominem* (or, better, *ad culturam*) but even those who do not wish to base ethics on authority will only be able to involve people living in cultures determined by authorities into the discursive process if they can make use of what I want to call "authoritative justifications of reason" (such as the injunction to "examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good" in Paul's *First Letter to the Thessalonians* 5.21). Furthermore, we only have the right to expect people from other cultures to consider our way of thinking as a possible alternative if we are doing the same, and this means that we should acquire some knowledge of the great

philosophical traditions and the value systems of other cultures. A study of the changes that have occurred in these cultures, of which they themselves are not always aware since the emergence of a historical consciousness already presupposes a crisis of traditionalism, can sometimes help to bring alternatives to the fore that are not perceived as threat from outside. But it is crucial to create a common trust concerning three transcendental presuppositions of every intercultural discourse. First, there is a truth about norms that can be grasped by human reason. Second, we can understand each other's contributions in this quest. And third, it is a valuable enterprise to engage in this common quest. Accepting these propositions does not guarantee that people will hit upon the truth toward which discourses are ordered but denying even one of these presuppositions condemns discourse to an irredeemable disorder.