

SOME NOTES ON DIALOGUE

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Including some notes on being scientific

By Aristo Tacoma, March 2020

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Dialogue is usefully distinguished (by the physicist and philosopher David Bohm and others) from its cousin 'discussion' in that dialogue (unlike the more conflict-oriented 'discussion') can involve not merely a harmony in between two or more people, but also a kind of 'social meditation'.

There are of course many types of social harmony--including when one, for good or bad reasons are happy about following the suggestions of another--or a group follows, obediently, the hints of a guru. In dialogue, we are speaking of something beyond obedience, beyond

persuasion, beyond emotional argument and story-telling, but which can involve the intellect in a really deep way--also so as to consider several points of view. To really consider alternative points of view to those held by oneself, one must suspend all desire for the outcome of the consideration. One must suspend judgement. One must suspend emotion. One must suspend even thought. That is something that requires an extraordinarily wakeful state of mind/brain, but it is the only way to be in true dialogue with oneself. And only those who are in true dialogue with themselves can be in true dialogue with others.

Put therefore dialogue in strong contrast to any form of conversation in which one person tries to change the behaviour or the opinion of another. Put it also in contrast to the situation in which a teacher poses a rhetorical question to his or her students, in order to simulate a conversation and elicit a certain answer.

A dialogue can be with oneself, with another, with several others. It is not ideal in a work situation: but it might be ideal before and after a work situation (but not necessarily so--it depends on true distance from a purpose-driven situation).

In a typical work situation, obedience to the boss, and, in case there are bosses under bosses, upwards in a hierarchy may be--and often is--a key factor in generating a meaningful type of coherent work. For all creative forms of work, this goes together with a 'dialogue with oneself' (and perhaps with some others) how to creatively and intelligently carry out the designated task. Hopefully, the bosses are good enough to direct in a meaningful way and in a way that complies with the values of society. In

any case, a conversation when 'something is about to be done' is usually characterised by a an impatience towards 'getting on with it', and such an impatience can narrow the field of attention considerably.

In dialogue, there may be a sense of something--this or that--or a range of things--going to be done in the future. But if it is a dialogue in the midst of a working-situation, it is extremely demanding on the participants: for they must both 'forget' and also not forget the working situation; they must 'forget' it in order to listen in the world of possibilities when somebody says anything, esp. when it challenges one's own assumptions--but also not forget that an agreement may have to be forged no matter what to get on with the task at hand. Purpose-oriented conversation therefore rarely can fall into the category of 'dialogue', when we seek to reserve the word 'dialogue' for a higher form of enquiry, whether by oneself or with a partner or in a group.

In a group, dialogue is much more complicated than with one partner; and by oneself, it is easy if one really is interested in reality and not merely in persuading oneself to stick to one's opinions no matter what. If the partner insists on provocative statements, it is however very difficult to create the atmosphere of dialogue. Add more people, and the complexities are correspondingly greater.

Only if every person in a group has had a strong passion to create inside his or her mind a sense of dialogue and meditation over a long, long time, can one meaningfully assume that a group can have dialogue. A group in which one person is revered with a kind of guru-like status is highly unlikely to enter into a state of genuine dialogue: it will rather be a rehearsal of obedience to a certain

pattern or the like—even when questions and answers are emerging as if in a meditative spirit.

So, I think David Bohm was wrong in suggesting that a dialogue group ought to have 'facilitators'. I also think that he was wrong in suggesting that such facilitated groups can act in a way that can create what he termed 'a revolution in consciousness'. It is more likely that a group of confused people who do not know dialogue with themselves will only create more confusion when they meet, and that the so-called 'dialogue facilitator(s)' will merely enact a (however subtly implemented) guru-like or priest-like function centre (or persons) from which a sense of power radiates. Harmozing the group to such a power centre does not equal dialogue. It equals something which is not genuine suspension of judgement or thought or emotion so as to foster insight, namely suppression and conformity. Thus, the only harmony such a confused group with an artful facilitator can obtain is the superficial, insignificant harmony of being consistent relative to the demands of the facilitator(s). The fact that the facilitator can encourage meditation and silence merely puts the facilitator in the role of a teacher of meditation, and no doubt on occasion a teacher of meditation should indeed teach meditation—but this is wholly other than having a genuine dialogue in a group of people. Rather, it is when people have taught themselves meditation and dialogue, and practised it within their own minds, successfully, for a very long time, that they can meet up with others to have a genuine power-center-free dialogue, and this dialogue will never even slightly call in any 'dialogue facilitator'. The fact that David Bohm did not see this I regard as a result of the fact that his chief training was in physics, not in sociology or psychology, and that he begun his work with dialogue

very late in his career, after having experienced decades of lack of dialogue in the physics community around his earliest works. In other words, his calling for dialogue was genuine, but the way he sought to implement it was immature and not worthy of being considered on the line with his perspective e.g. of his implicate order, or how he, through his publications in the early 1950s, helped de Broglie come to a more coherent nonlocal formulation of his pilot wave theory (which is not identical to the causal interpretation of quantum theory through Bohm's idea of a nonlocal quantum potential, but only in some respects similar--see writings on this in my www.avenuege.com/library).

So, those who are in a deep state of dialogue with themselves about all and everything, often, in a meditative sense, do not need a facilitator if they meet with others who do the same; and those who are not in dialogue with themselves will not get into such a dialogue when in the pressure of a group in which things they disagree to are uttered again and again and their chief emotion is e.g. irritation. Conformity can arise but this is not dialogue nor qualifies as social meditation in any significant sense; it qualifies not as coherence but merely as superficial consistency. One may as well chant "Aum" and have on orange robes; such conformity is not the arising of the creatively intelligent, liberated, awakened human individual who senses some enlightenment in brain, body, mind, both intellectually and emotionally and tantrically and on all levels. (A related question, not explored in this little essay, is whether the whole notion that human beings ever has had, or can, have total enlightenment is an illusion that prevents even relative enlightenment

from arising; relative enlightenment may be a human potential for some future era of humanity--let's say after civilisation have existed for a thousand millenia more).

A 'facilitator for group dialogue' is, therefore, as this writer sees it, merely a way to subtly try to present the role of something very much guru-like as something more praiseworthy (in this context) than a guru. The absolute absence of all gurus in all forms, and all dialogue facilitators is a necessary (but not sufficient) criterion for group dialogue to be coherent in any depth sense.

However, dialogue can, relative to oneself, or to one or two other people, be carefully built: by being aware of its importance and experimenting with it given some initial clues. And those who can meaningfully have it to one or two or three people can try to add to the number so also a larger group can have it. That could and would be a consciousness revolution, but it is empty of the need of any 'qualified dialogue facilitator'. Rather, it is in need that all such illusory notions around dialogue--including those the physicist David Bohm came with in the area of dialogue--that a facilitator for dialogue can be a possible job--are dissolved. Some of Bohm's impulses about dialogue were however masterfully formulated. This is my honest intuition about his work in this regard, and I have had great personal experience in meeting with Bohm on some occasions, as I've mentioned elsewhere.

Dialogue as a state of mind doesn't count the quantity of minds in it: rather, there is a sense of meditative quietness, as ripples from which new questions or answers

to previously put questions (when they are good) may emerge. In such a flowing state of social connectedness in which the intellect is called on, but also what we can call 'meditative silence' is called on--intuitions can arise.

On being scientific

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Thomas Kuhn is well-known for having made it clear that science does not necessarily progress in gradual rational steps but rather through a partly rational, and partly irrational, clinging to a forefront model or exemplar or 'paradigm', that is changed only when the pressures to change it have accumulated (together with the generational dying away of the last significant supporters of the previous paradigm), at the same time as a new, more comprehensive, more meaningful paradigm has arisen to encompass the previous findings but also some new findings not well expressed in the previous paradigm.

This is in the area of what we can call the 'social psychology of science'. It is put in an extreme way by some writers on science--some have even suggested that, as for science, 'anything goes'. But there is little doubt that the ideal of the scientific attitude has been expressed in coherent ways and is a corrective factor to the view of paradigm: according to Rudolf Carnap and many others, and perhaps more clearly than in all other writings

in the first half of the 20th century expressed by Karl R. Popper in his two World War II volumes on the science (or lack of it) in the teachings of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx [The Open Society and Its Enemies, 1945, listed by the UK newspaper The Guardian in 2016 as 'one of the 100 best nonfiction books']. The view these thinkers about the ideal attitude of a scientist can be summed up about like this:

a theory has meaning inasmuch as there is a way to check it; and that checking means not just that there may be instances of confirmation of it, but also that there can be instances of disconfirmation of it.

In the 1945 book by Popper, Popper also mention 'human intuition' (for instance connected to a theorem) as a source of confirmation or disconfirmation ('falsification').

The limitation of the approach of the early 20th century writers on the ideal scientific theory is however (as the undersigned sees it) that intuition is poorly understood. It is because it is poorly understood that larger questions--theories involving indeed what Kuhn later called 'paradigms'--cannot be judged between. It is by means of what Bohm called 'dialogue' (in the best sense of Bohm), that intuition comes forth; it does not necessarily come forth as the result of summing up of local experience through the senses. Indeed, the very assumption that only experiences through the senses, and summing up of these, can be a source of intuition is a metaphysical assumption, it is a theory, and if a theory is underlying our 'theory of theories', then we have a self-reinforcing circle of theories,--and this is the trouble of the so-called 'logical positivists', to which such as Carnap belonged.

In order for a layman to pass judgment on a theory that some people, perhaps through a hypnotizing video published on the net, claim has evidence in favour of it, then, these authors, writing about the ideal approach to theories, suggest;

- * there may be instances of confirmation, yes, but be sure this is not a 'proof'
- * are there also way to find instances of disconfirmation of this theory? If not it is not a theory; check these instances of disconfirmation and consider how significant they are; or whether they may arise as a result of wrongly interpreted sensory data

Once it is clear that every good theory has/can have both instances of confirmation, and instances of disconfirmation, we must both to the quality of these instances and to other factors. The ultimate judge is each person's intuition.

One of these other factors is: how elegantly does a theory sum up the scope of predictions?

The more elegant and beautiful theory is, the more interesting it becomes. The psychological fact of 'interesting' is actively discussed in some of the writings by those who write on the ideals of the attitude of the scientist. This also sometimes means 'simplicity'. However what is regarded as simple in one person's ideology may seem complex when regarded in the context of another person's ideology. Only the person who is in complete dialogue with himself/herself over a long time can be fully scientific in forming an accurate, trustworthy judgement, fully coming from a genuine intuition, as to what theory and what sub-theories to select for this reality. (Popper's argument against Marx was that his theory didn't have disconfirmation in it.)

Another factor is: have you considered the whole spectrum of theories? Each theory can be analyzed into a bundle of assumptions. Usually, each assumption can qualify as a theory in its own right, with a gradually finer and finer resolution level, until we 'touch the empirics'. Every one of these assumptions can be negated. As Arne Naess, a logician, pointed out (in private conversation): if a theory has 10 assumptions associated with it, then you can produce 1023 additional theories by negating each one of these assumptions in some combination (because 2 to the power of 10 is 1024).

Related to these concerns is the well-known fact that for each set of data, very many theories can be made.

When some people put forth a theory, for instance about how the planet after all might be flat, using extraordinarily complicated claims (such that airplanes that fly to far west side of the planet and appear on the far east side of the planet are quantum teleported via a sudden warp that always take place when the edges of the flat earth is reached), one should recognise that while it is always possible that the more elegant theory (namely, that Earth is sphere-like) is wrong, and possible that some far-out theory is right, the whole spectrum of theories and the whole spectrum of data ought to be viewed calmly and from a distance given good grasp of the importance of looking not only for confirmations but also for disconfirmation, blending this with an interest in an elegant theory.

However, when a recent YouGov statistics showed that one out of six adults in the U.S. are 'not entirely sure' of the theory that Earth is spherical, it means that there is a factor of video hypnosis at play: when a beautiful personal with a convincing voice and rich metaphorical descriptions explains, while 25 photos of well-made graphics roll out every second--giving the brain the illusion of movement we call 'video'--is ridiculing the mainstream theory that the Earth is round through a series of almost-reasonable sounding arguments, it can put people who haven't thought much about science off, and induce a sense that the mainstream has been indulging in a collective falseness. Brain researchers indeed show that the more video is used, the less the brain is active. Only by reading, watching still photos, listening, and writing, can the brain be intellectually up to the level of somebody who should be able to decide scientific questions. Videos are a scourge of the intellect, and sort of misinformation, and every decent society should cultivate alternatives to videos that involve genuine mind-activation rather than such passifying institutions.

Having said as much, let us also say that mainstream indeed can be, and at present is, often mis-informed.

So those who are firmly aligned to the mainstream opinions and its paradigms, should not wallow in the power structure of the paradigm if they wish to be maximally scientific. A theory remains a theory no matter how intensely it is believed in by a majority of living scientists. There is a dramatic difference in meaning between the word "evolution" and the phrase, "Mr./Ms. X's theory of evolution". Similarly, it is not scientific to say, "Relativity is a fact". It is scientific to say, "The theory of general relativity

by Albert Einstein has had a series of instances of confirmation." There are alternative theories both to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution in which random mutations over time play a role, and to Albert Einstein's theory of general and special relativity, which may turn out to be better theories.

There are other takes on science as well, of course. These other takes are (to interpret them in the best sense) meant to counter a false paradigm but do not really constitute any alternative to the set of ideals of what scientific theories and exploration and enquiry ought to be. For instance, those who have sought to further what they call a 'feminist science' have sometimes done so by pointing out how the phrase 'objective fact' has been (as it truly has been) overused--and typically by people who are, as most well-known people in humanity's past are, belonging to the male gender. However, the remedy towards having a more nuanced perception of reality, not biased because of testosterone or anything else, is not in calling into question very essence of that which allows dialogue, i.e., the questing into reality as greater than our opinions, and the allowing for genuine intuitions, as well as the listening in to arguments involving instances of confirmation and disconfirmation--but rather to practise a more nuanced perception.

The practise of a more nuanced perception, free from motives of past scientists (e.g., some scientists have deliberately sought to create theories of a type that would challenge church authorities), lead to a quality form of scientific work in which words are more carefully used, but without suggesting that a

word like 'fact' belongs more to some genders than to some others. The search for the objective is nothing but the search for a dialogic state of mind in which the opinions in one's own mind is quiet, and in which the love for reality can have its own voice. The word 'reality' does not signify 'a male reality' any more than the word 'subjective' a female reality. The movement from that which is merely subjective--in other words, merely existing as an opinion because the subject in question is not in contact with reality--to that which is both intersubjective and in some extent possibly objective, requires the highest of noble standards for the scientific attitude to be practised, without bias connected to political motives of any kind.

The scientific attitude, in its noble sense, does not go together with a political sort of polemics in which 'the battle' can be summed up in two or three slogan-like words. There is only those who are profoundly unscientific who claim that there a phrase like 'Evolution or Creation' has any meaning to it. Like other words of shallow meaning and little coherent scientific, paradigm-free thinking in it (which, in my analysis, include Stephen Hawking's use of half-digested, half-infinitude notion singularity to come up with the 'black hole' theory, from which the theory of 'big bang' was derived)--science does not lie in easy big words but in the ruthless insistence on clear ideas and checkable theories and willingness to keep in mind that there is no final proof, through science, of any theory. The alternative is to disregard science or (which is much the same) to succumb to a socialist notion that in science 'anything goes' and that it is

merely a social/political affair in which the quantity of people having an opinion decides.

Rather, only in each individual, through dialogue with oneself--in which all theories, and all sub-theories and super-theories, are suspended, and thus also all simplistic conflicts are suspended--can the genuine spirit of science arise.

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