

# **‘DEEP-DIALOGUE’ AS A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR A MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND LOCAL CULTURE**

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## **Abstract**

The subject of this article is a method that points at a mutually transforming effect. It is concerned with the mental construct (model) on how we understand “reality”. Reality is mediated by “meaning”, a meaning that we give it in the context of our culture or our historical period, interpreted from our own scientific horizon and in our own religious thought forms. The dialogical model presents a way of thinking that is strongly reflective as Asians do to grasp “reality”, their world. It radically shifts our entire view of reality and immensely expands and deepens our grasps of the meaning of life in order to grow in the perception and understanding of reality and then to act accordingly.

**Keywords:** model, dialogue, conversation, critical-thinking, reflective

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In 1882, when Charles Darwin died, his family planned to bury him in the local churchyard. Their wishes were overridden by English popular opinion, and Darwin was awarded a large public funeral in Westminster Abbey, London. On that occasion, the dean of St. Paul delivered a eulogy in which he explicitly contrasted the initial reception of *The Origin of Species* (1859) with the view of the 1880s: the theory of evolution was no longer seen as a threat to religious belief.<sup>1</sup> So the Anglican Church made its peace with Darwin.

The conflict between C. Darwin (1809-82) and religion has become emblematic of the relations between science and religion. It took many decades for both science and Western culture to assimilate the more radi-

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1 Philip Kitcher, “The Many-Sided Conflict between Science and Religion,” in William E. Mann, ed., *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, 266.

cal aspects of Darwin's theory. In some ways, Darwin provided a common assumption that scientific work entails 'the autonomy of earthly affairs.' From the early development of modern science at the start of the seventeenth century, it seems that the scientific investigator is free to construct any scenario likely to explain phenomena without needing to have recourse to some 'supernatural' element which would intervene as a special complement to a series of 'natural' causes. Such an attitude deliberately separates science from the quest for meaning. However, today such attitudes – which could vary from indifference to prudent distancing – are less common than they used to be. Advances in science, particularly in the domain of bioscience, raise question about human destiny – about what it is to be properly 'human.'

Regarding the contextual background, in this article, I would like to propose 'Deep-Dialogue' as a methodological approach in which we can construct a meaningful engagement with science, religion, and local culture.

## 1. The Concept of 'Deep-Dialogue'

The word *dialogue* stands for a discussion between people in which opinions are exchanged. The adjective *deep* brings forward the importance of reflective and intelligent action for the process of dialogue. In this way, there develops a synthesis between one's own point of view and the points of view of others as well. In the Hegelian sense, the 'Deep-Dialogue' is not just attempting to put things together in a kind of compromise but of developing, in a creative dialectic, something that is acceptable to all standpoints. Dialogical logic characterizes logical constants (such as 'and', 'or', 'for all') by their use in a critical dialogue between two parties: a proponent who has asserted a thesis and an opponent who challenges it.<sup>2</sup> There are at least six different perspectives in which they reflect the idea of 'Deep-Dialogue.' In brief, they are *historicism, intentionality, sociology of knowledge, developmental psychology, limits of language* and *hermeneutics*.

Historicism. In the nineteenth century, many scholars came to perceive all statement about the meaning of something as partially the product of their historical circumstances, their historical 'setting in life' (*sitz im leben*). The composite nature of the human context as the situation in which people live determines the fact about the statement under study. The understanding of the text could be found only in *con-text*.

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2 W. Felscher, "Dialogues as a Foundation for Intuitionistic Logic," in D. Gabbay and F. Grenthner, eds., *Handbook of Philosophical Logic*, Vol. 3, Dordrecht: Reidel, 1986, 341-72.

Intentionality. Max Scheler (1874-1928) suggested that all knowledge is concerned with the future, not the past. It has an element of intentionality at its base, as being oriented ultimately toward action, or *praxis*.<sup>3</sup> We perceive certain things as questions to be answered and set goals to pursue specific knowledge because we wish to do something about those matters. Accordingly, a statement has to be understood in relationship to the action oriented intention of the speaker.

The sociology of knowledge. Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) insisted that all statement about the meaning of things is fundamentally related to the standpoint (*standortgebunden*) of the speaker.<sup>4</sup> All reality, such as the culture, class, and gender, is perceived from the perspective of the perceiver's own worldview.

Developmental psychology. Jean Piaget (1898-1980) explained human growth as personal competency through a structurally maturation process. He explains the process of obtaining knowledge that is decisive for social judgments as the progressive development of individual competency.<sup>5</sup> In the course of an increasing differentiation of personalities, the child develops a mental attitude that consists in a step-by-step dismantling of childish egocentrism. Relatively early, children notice that their parents are neither almighty nor omniscient (infallible), nor ubiquitous, so that they are not gods. In parallel, the childish worldview becomes extensively overcome as a whole, including that of belief in an animated nature, as seemingly outfitted with intentions. At the age of about eleven to thirteen years, children grasp that social rules cannot only be laid down by authorities (parents, gods), but also freely negotiated.

The limitations of language. Following Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), many thinkers have come to see that any statement about the truth of things can be a partial description of the reality that it is trying to describe. Although reality can be seen from an almost limitless number of perspectives, human language can express things what we call "scientific truths" from only one perspective at once.<sup>6</sup>

Hermeneutics. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) and Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) led the way in developing the science of hermeneutics, which suggests that all knowledge of a text is at the same time an interpretation

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3 M. Scheler, *Problems of Sociology of Knowledge*, translated by M.S. Frings, edited by K.W. Stikkers, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.

4 Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, "Karl Mannheim," in H.D. Betz et al., eds., *Religion Past and Present*, Vol. 8, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2010, 3.

5 Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977.

6 R. Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1990.

of the text.<sup>7</sup> This basic insight goes beyond knowledge of texts and applies to all knowledge. All knowledge is interpreted knowledge; the perceiver is part of the perceived. Knowledge comes from the subject perceiving object, but because the subject is also part of its object, the two (both subject and object) are in that sense one. The various aspects of nature are observed through the categories we provide, within the horizons we establish, under the paradigms we use, in response to the questions we raise, and in relationship to the connections we make. Hence *knowing* is a process of the two *becoming* one: the object perceived by the subject becomes a new entity that is knowledge.

‘Deep-Dialogue’ is a way of gathering and assessing information and submitting it to the critiques of our peers, others thinkers, and scholars. They complement our worldview with statements from their “standpoints” as a philosopher, a scientist, or an adherent of a certain religion. An engagement with different cultural, philosophical, social, and religious viewpoints makes us to complete our perception on the meaning of things. If we are not engaged with such method, we will be trapped within the perspective of our own “standpoint.” It will be our lack.

## 2. Dialogical Model as the Performance of ‘Deep-Dialogue’

A model is “a relatively simple, artificially constructed case which is found to be useful and illuminating for dealing with realities that are more complex and differentiated”.<sup>8</sup> Model plays in the “understanding of reality and how to live accordingly”.<sup>9</sup> It has immense practical consequences. For example, in Western medicine, the body is conceived as living machine (as a highly nuanced); therefore, if one part wears out, the obvious thing to do is to replace it. Hence, organ transplant is originated in Western medicine, not in Oriental. However, in Chinese (Oriental) medicine, the body is regarded as a balanced harmony. Pressure exerted on one part of the body is assumed to have an opposite effect in another part of the body. Hence, acupuncture is originated in Oriental medicine, not Western.

The basic insight of the dialogical model is that “I learn not by being merely passively open or receptive to, but also by being in dialogue with.” It is a way of seeing and reflecting on “reality.” I do not only “hear” or receive reality; I also – and, I think, first of all – “speak” to reality. I ask it questions, and I stimulate it to speak back to me, to answer my questions.

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7 S.H. Clarke, *Paul Ricoeur*, London: Routledge, 1990.

8 Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, New York: Doubleday, 1983, 30.

9 Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes, *The Study of Religion in the Age of Global Dialogue*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000, 52.

In the process, I give reality the specific categories and language with which to respond to me. The “answers” that I receive from reality will always be in the language, the thought categories, of the questions I put to it. It can “speak” or can really communicate with my mind, only in a language and in categories that I understand. Such a dialogical way does not mean that anything goes. As David Tracy (1939- ) insists,

Conversation is a game with some hard rules: say only what you mean; say it as accurate as you can; listen to and respect what the other says, however different or other; be willing to correct or defend your opinions if challenged by the conversation partner; be willing to argue if necessary, to confront if demanded, to endure necessary conflict, to change your mind if the evidence suggests it.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the text quoted, I need to learn to speak a more appropriate “language” when I put questions to reality. I cannot ask questions about living things in mechanical categories; if I do it, I would receive confusing answers. Further, I will receive unsatisfying answers to questions about the inner life (subconscious levels) of people, if I use categories that are solely psychological-experimental. In this case, an uninformed religious person is difficult to understand the idea of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) who insists that religion is a sign of psychological weakness and immaturity (childhood neurosis) wherein a person created an illusion that forces outside the natural order – usually named “gods” or “God” – controlled one’s fate.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Deep-Dialogue and Critical-Thinking

The primary purpose of ‘Deep-Dialogue’ is to learn from the other so that he or she can learn and grow. When we speak of “dialogue” here, we do not mean just another discussion, as valuable as that might be. We mean it as an experience of meeting with people, ideas, inventions in such a way that each one’s assumptions come to light, and that all can move ahead in reciprocal learning. Of course, both partners will also want to share their understanding with their partners. ‘Truth’ in this scheme of things is understood not as something ‘out there’ but as a reality that emerges in true conversation between authentic men and women when they “allow questioning to take over”.<sup>12</sup> In the past, we usually faced those who differed with us in a confrontation – sometimes openly po-

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10 David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*, New York: Harper and Row, 1987, 19.

11 Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, translated by W.D. Robson-Scott, edited by James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1978, 29.

12 David Tracy, *op. cit.*, 18.

lemically, sometimes more subtly so, but usually with the ultimate goal of overcoming the other because we were convinced that we alone had the truth.

Our contemporary thinking understands truth in terms of relation, conversation, and dialogue. It means to stand on our position, and at the same time seek self-transformation through opening ourselves to those who think differently. Such an intense dialogue lays bare all the underlying issues – religious, philosophical, psychological, etc. – which, when resolved, when integrated, will together serve as a locomotive pulling forward all other issues submitted to dialogue. Together with its counterpart, ‘Critical-Thinking,’ ‘Deep-Dialogue’ is a whole new way of thinking.<sup>13</sup>

Destructive Dialogue	→	Disinterested Dialogue	→	Dialogical Dialogue	→	Deep-Dialogue'
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Elements are polarized against each other		Elements are tolerant of each other		Elements learn from each other		Elements are mutually transformed

All reality is dialogical, operating on a continuum.<sup>14</sup>

To open ourselves to ‘Deep-Dialogue,’ we must at the same time also develop the skills of thinking carefully and clearly, of ‘Critical-Thinking’ (*critical*, from the Greek *krinein*: to choose, to judge). However, because ‘Deep-Dialogue’ and ‘Critical-Thinking’ are in fact necessarily two sides of one reality, whenever we speak of ‘Deep-Dialogue,’ we automatically mean to include ‘Critical-Thinking.’ Accordingly, we learn to understand all statement in *their* context, that is, a context can be correctly understood in *its con*-text. Only then we will be able to translate the original core of the statements / text into *our* context. This process of ‘Critical-Thinking’ obviously entails a mental dialogue within our mind. Thus, at its root ‘Critical-Thinking’ is dialogic; ‘Deep-Dialogue’ at its root entails clear, critical thought.

#### 4. Seven Stages of ‘Deep-Dialogue’

‘Deep-Dialogue’ and ‘Critical-Thinking’ is the heart of our rational capacity to negotiate reality, to be in touch with the ever-changing worlds around us. It has become clear that at the core of “life world” there is a fundamental dialogical dynamic between the self (=subject) and the realities

<sup>13</sup> Swidler and Mojzes, op. cit., 151.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.



surround us. It designates an inter-relational structure of self and other. There are seven stages for establishing 'Deep-Dialogue'.<sup>15</sup>

1. Stage one: radical encountering of differences (self faces others).
2. Stage two: crossing over – letting go and entering the world of the other (self transformed through empathy).
3. Stage three: inhabiting and experiencing the world of the other (self transformed into the other).
4. Stage four: crossing back with an expanded vision (self returns home with new knowledge).
5. Stage five: the dialogical awakening – a radical paradigm shift (self inwardly transformed).
6. Stage six: the global awakening – the paradigm shift matures (self related to self, others, the world).
7. Stage seven: personal and global transforming of life and behavior.

However, the procedure is much more like producing a work of art than following a rigid set of directions.<sup>16</sup> One needs to place emphasis on religious values at one point, while at another point one needs to emphasize cultural identity. At one point scientific views might need to be cultivated. To use our horticultural example, the dialogical model sees the need and value of cross-pollination so that new and sturdier plants might be developed to be better suited to a particular environment.

## 5. Conclusion

'Deep-Dialogue' is a powerful transformative process that eventually must become a habit of mind and spirit. It is a method of entering other worlds or perspectives and returning mutually transformed, having gained a deepened sense of one's own worldview and an awakened awareness of the worldviews of others. Through this awakening power of 'Deep-Dialogue,' individuals and communities are able to experience common ground between worlds and across differences, and thus achieve deeper personal integrity and community-building. It is not a once-and-for-all project, but it is something that must be on going.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-166.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, New York: Orbis Books, 2009, 92.

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