

EDITORIAL

DEEP-DIALOGUE/CRITICAL-THINKING/ COMPETITIVE-COOPERATION: THE MOST AUTHENTIC HUMAN WAY TO BE AND ACT

I. "All Knowledge Is Interpreted Knowledge"

To begin, we humans as a group have in the last two centuries increasingly learned that “nobody knows everything about anything!” We now know that all knowledge is interpreted knowledge. There is no “truth” out there. There is “reality” out there, but “truth” resides in our knowing capacities: senses, sensitivities, intellect. Normally, we use the words “truth” and “true” to refer to our *statements* about something. We would say that my statement “The door is closed” is true if we checked and found that the statement accurately described reality—in this case, that the door in fact is closed. At the same time, we can of course say many other “true” thing about the door; for example, it is so tall, so wide, is a particular color, made of such material, and so on indefinitely. Our potential knowledge of that door is endless, except that it is limited by our “receptors.” If I know little or nothing, for example, about chemistry, my knowing about the chemical make-up of the door is thereby limited.

If this is true about a simple physical object, how much more is it true about more complicated, abstract matters, such as are claimed in understandings of literature, political affairs, history, and, especially, that most comprehensive of all “disciplines,” religion/ideology (“An explanation of the *ultimate* meaning of life, and how to live accordingly”—if based on some notion/experience of the transcendent, however understood, then called “religion,” if not, then called, perhaps, “ideology”)? The all-encompassing meaning of claims in the Bible, Qur’ān, Vedas, etc., will necessarily be limited by my knowing capacities. If I am a believing Muslim, for example, the Qur’ān will be completely without effect in my life until it has gotten into my knowing capacities, my senses, sensitivities, and intellect. But, like liquid Jello being poured into its container, it—in this case, the meanings of the Qur’ān—takes the shape of the container. The “truth” of the Qur’ān will take the shape of my senses, sensitivities, and intellect. Analogously, this is the case with all religious believers (or for whatever passes in a person’s life as religion or ideology). So, if I am the kind of Catholic who says, “Whatever the pope says is true,” then *I* have decided that “truth” will take the shape of “whatever the pope says,” or analogously, if *I* as a Muslim say “Whatever the sheikh says the Qur’ān says, I accept,” or, alternatively, I say that *I* will decide for myself what is the ultimate meaning of life. There is no escape from the fact that *I* am intimately involved in *all* knowledge, that “All knowledge is interpreted knowledge.”

Am I then trapped in a destructive solipsism (Latin: *solus*, alone; *ipsus*, myself), a “Leonard Swidler” bubble? No, for we humans can communicate with other “knowers,” who also necessarily perceive the world from their own van-

tage points, as I do from mine. That gives us the possibility of learning about other facets of reality—seen from, for example, Mary Murphy’s perspective, or from Mutombo Nkulu’s perspective—so that I can compare, analyze their knowledge, and aim at gaining an ever fuller, but never complete and never totally “objective” grasp of reality. In a word, the only way we can endlessly escape our “myself alone” bubble is by *dialogue*. I need to come to know about reality as perceived and understood by, for example, a Chinese Buddhist woman, who clearly will perceive and understand facets of reality that I as an American Catholic man cannot perceive and understand from my experience of reality, and *vice versa*. In short, we both need to be in dialogue with each other, and everyone else—endlessly! This is a far deeper, life-transforming understanding of dialogue than the often now rather superficial common understanding. Hence, I increasingly use the expanded term “Deep-Dialogue” to get at this more profound, substantial, life-shaping meaning.

II. Dialogue Is the Very Foundation of the Cosmos

Dialogue—understood at its broadest as the mutually beneficial interaction of differing components—is at the very heart of the Universe, of which we humans are the highest expression: from the basic interaction of matter and energy (in Einstein’s unforgettable formula, $E=MC^2$, energy equals mass times the square of the speed of light), to the creative interaction of protons and electrons in every atom, to the vital symbiosis of body and spirit in every human, through the creative dialogue between woman and man, to the dynamic relationship between individual and society. Thus, the very essence of our humanity is dialogical, and a fulfilled human life is the highest expression of the “Cosmic Dance of Dialogue.”

In the early millennia of the history of humanity, as we spread outward from our starting point in central Africa, the forces of *divergence* were dominant. However, because we live on a globe, in our frenetic divergence we eventually began to encounter each other more and more frequently. Now, the forces of stunning *convergence* are becoming increasingly dominant.

In the past, during the Age of Divergence, we could live in isolation from each other; we could ignore each other. Now, in the Age of Convergence, we are forced to live in one world. We increasingly live in a global village. We cannot ignore the other, the different. Too often in the past we have tried to make over the other into a likeness of ourselves, often by violence, but this is the very opposite of dialogue. This egocentric arrogance is in fundamental opposition to the Cosmic Dance of Dialogue. It is not creative but destructive. Hence, we humans today have a stark choice: dialogue or death.¹

¹See Leonard Swidler, with John Cobb, Monika Hellwig, and Paul Knitter, *Death or Dialogue: From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990).

*III. Dialogues of the Head, Hands, Heart
in Holistic Harmony of the Holy Human*

For us humans there are three main dimensions to dialogue, corresponding to the structure of our humanness: Dialogue of the Head, Hands, Heart, in Holistic Harmony of the Holy Human.

A. The Cognitive or Intellectual: Seeking the True

In the Dialogue of the Head we reach out to those who think differently from us to understand how they see the world and why they act as they do. The world is too complicated for anyone to grasp alone; increasingly, we can understand reality only with the help of the other, in dialogue. This is important, because how we understand the world determines how we act in the world.

B. The Illative or Ethical: Seeking the Good

In the Dialogue of the Hands we join together with others to work to make the world a better place in which we all must live together. Since we can no longer live separately in this “one world,” we must work jointly to make it not just a house but a home for all of us to live in. In other words, we join hands with the other to heal the world—*Tikun olam*, in the Jewish tradition. The world within us and all around us is always in need of healing, and our deepest wounds can be healed only together with the other, only in dialogue.

C. The Affective or Aesthetic: Seeking the Beautiful, the Spiritual

In the Dialogue of the Heart we open ourselves to receive the beauty of the other. Because we humans are body and spirit—or, rather, body-spirit—we give bodily-spiritual expression in all the arts to our multifarious responses to life: joy, sorrow, gratitude, anger, and, most of all, love. We try to express our inner feelings, which grasp reality in far deeper and higher ways than we are able to put into rational concepts and words; hence, we create poetry, music, dance, painting, architecture—the expressions of the heart. (Here, too, is where the depth, spiritual, mystical dimension of the human spirit is given full rein.) All the world delights in beauty, and so it is here that we find the easiest encounter with the other, the simplest door to dialogue.

D. Holiness: Seeking the One

We humans cannot live a divided life. If we are even to survive, let alone flourish, we must “get it all together.” We must not only dance the dialogues of the Head, Hands, and Heart but also bring our various parts together in Harmony (a fourth “H”) to live a Holistic (a fifth “H”), life, which is what religions mean when they say that we should be Holy (a sixth “H”). Hence, we are authentically Human (a seventh “H”) only when our manifold elements are in dialogue within each other, and we are in dialogue with the others around us. We must dance

together the Cosmic Dance of Dialogue of the Head, Hands, and Heart, Holistically,² in Harmony within the Holy Human.

IV. Deep-Dialogue Entails Critical-Thinking

A. Meaning of Terms

If we reflect at all about the term *dialogue*, it will be apparent that *thinking* is what it is all about.³ The Greek prefix “*dia*” has a variety of meanings, including: across, among, through, together. The Greek word “*logos*” is familiar to all speakers of Western languages in its many cognates, starting with logic—the science of thinking clearly. Further, all the words ending in “logy,” like geology, psychology, anthropology, etc., mean the systematic thinking about the *geos* (earth), *psyche* (spirit), *anthropos* (human being). Thus, “*dia-logos*” means thinking-across or thinking-together, making it clear that at the heart of *dialogos*, dialogue, is thinking, and not just any thinking, but systematic thinking, logical thinking, that is, “Critical-Thinking.”

Hence, if dialogue is at the foundation of the whole cosmos, with the human as its conscious pinnacle, the lead dancer of the “Cosmic Dance of Dialogue,” it is also true that *logos*, thinking, is at the center of dialogue, at the center of the cosmos (Greek: *cosmos*=order; *chaos*=confusion; we humans are constantly learning more and more about the *logos*, the “order,” the *cosmos*—which persists even in the midst of, seemingly to us at times, *chaos*, confusion, which permeates all reality). If we are seriously to engage in Deep-Dialogue, we necessarily must also engage in *logos*, logic, *denken*, thinking: Critical-Thinking.

The first thing to recognize about the term “Critical-Thinking” is that it does not mean negatively “criticizing” someone or something. Rather, the term “critical” comes from the Greek *krinein*, “to make a judgment, a decision.” However, we can make a judgment or a decision thoughtfully (with systematic *denken*, *logos*, logic) only if we have the data in front of us so that we can first analyze it (Greek: *ana*, up; *lysis*, break)—that is, to break up the ideas and the information into their component parts to see how they fit together—and then move to synthesis (Greek: *syn*, together; *thesis*, to put), that is, after seeing how the component parts fit together, to explore the relations of the parts to other things or, at times, to put the parts together in new ways.

B. The Three “W” Questions: What? Whence? Whither?

If analysis and synthesis are the fundamental ways we humans think, in order to think critically, to make a judgment or a decision on the basis of gathered

²Those who know Western medieval philosophy will recognize that these are the “Metaphysicals,” the four aspects of Being Itself, perceived from different perspectives: the one, the true, the good, the beautiful.

³“Think” comes from the Germanic side of the English (Anglo-Saxon) language; *denken* is “to think,” “to cogitate” (Latin: *cogitare*, to think).

data and systematic, analytic-synthetic thought, we must first address three basic “W” questions: What? Whence? Whither?

“What?” means that we need to develop the habit of striving to understand as precisely as possible what it is we are talking about. This principle is so obvious that it tends, as so often in life, to be violated in proportion to its simplicity. Oftentimes, it helps to ask what the etymological roots of the term or idea in question are (as I have been doing here) to help us get a clear grasp of what we are talking about. For example, to believe means having faith in someone or something; “faith” comes from the Latin *fides*, having trust. Hence, believing something, having faith in something, means affirming that something is true—not because we have proof of it but because we trust the source of that information.

We also need to make sure that I and my interlocutors have precisely the same understanding of the idea or term being discussed; otherwise, we will simply be talking past each other. It is also especially vital that we keep precisely the same meaning of the term when we move from one statement to another. If we do not, we will end up with a four-term syllogism. A typical syllogism runs like this: A is E; E is C; therefore, A is C. We need to be certain that the meaning of the connecting term, “E,” has precisely the same meaning in the second premise as in the first. If, deliberately or inadvertently, we change the meaning, however slightly, of the connecting term—E to É—while keeping the same sound and spelling, we will have a four-term syllogism: A is E; É is C; therefore...? therefore, nothing (!) simply because we have four terms: A, E, É, and C. Hence, it is vital to know precisely what we are talking about.

In thinking, whether alone or with others, out loud or in writing, we start with an idea or term—and, as just noted, in answering the first question of “What?” we need to be clear about its precise meaning. Second, we need then to ask ourselves, “Whence?” From where does the basis for affirming this idea come? Are we beginning by simply defining something to be the case? Is this idea an unexamined presupposition? Do we have factual evidence for it? Is it a valid, logical deduction from solidly proved data? Is it based on a trustworthy source? etc. Any truthful results of thinking, alone or with others, will depend on the validity of the answer to this question: Whence comes the evidence for what we are talking about?

If we have been careful in understanding precisely What we are talking about and have carefully tested the bases—the Whence—Whither?—this idea leads to. What are its implications, for, if the idea is true, then we want to base our subsequent actions on it. In other words, ideas have consequences. For example, if the “Golden Rule” is judged to be a valid ethical principle, then I need to respect others, tell the truth to others, help others, because I would want them to treat me the same way.

Second, it is important to follow out these implications to learn whether or not they lead to a *reductio ad absurdum* (reduction to absurdity). If that turns out to be the case, then we will need to reinvestigate our data bases and whole line of reasoning from the beginning in order to find the flaw of fact or logic. For example, some Christian theologians (such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin) argued

that nothing can happen except that God makes it happen, including making humans commit sins that will condemn them to hell for all eternity—the doctrine of “Predestination.” But, for followers of Jesus, who depicted God as his loving Father who reaches out to all humans to lead them to Godself, this is a clear contradiction, a *reductio ad absurdum*—a loving God deliberately creating humans to lead them not to God but to hell! This line of critical-thinking led many Augustinians, Lutherans, and Calvinists to reject Predestination.

C. Unconscious Presuppositions

A further fundamental move that we must strive to make in order to engage in Critical-Thinking concerns our *unconscious presuppositions*. To be conscious of something is, of course, to be aware of it. Obviously, *unconscious* means *not* to be aware of something. Also clearly, “*pre*” (Latin) means beforehand, and “*supposition*” (Latin: *sub positio*=under position) means something underlying. Hence, a presupposition is an idea that ahead of time underlies another idea or set of ideas. An *unconscious presupposition*, then, is one that we are *unaware* of; it is *unconscious*. For example, previously—and, unfortunately, still today—many men and women thought that women were incapable of clear, rational thought. This was a presupposition, a prior underlying assumption, which prevented women from attending a university. For the most part, it was unconscious, that is, most did not think about it; they just assumed it without being aware that they were doing so.

As long as a presupposition remains uninvestigated, we cannot know whether we are acting on the basis of reality or mirage. We cannot truthfully tell ourselves that we are acting thus in a rational manner. The situation is even vastly more devastating when the presupposition is unconscious. Then, we are controlled totally by an idea that might be partially, or even totally, unwarranted—and we can do absolutely nothing about it, for we are powerless to analyze an idea and change the consequent action, if we do not even know of the existence of the idea, which is the “motor” that secretly drives our minds and behavior.

We all have endless numbers of unconscious presuppositions that we need to seek out, bring to the conscious level, proceed to analyze, and judge (*krinein*) whether they are valid or not. This is an endless task, for all the information we gather is accepted into *our* cognitive faculties, that is, they are necessarily poured into our mental containers, our presuppositions, or, in a term frequently used today, into our “paradigms.” A typical example of a paradigm is: Earlier all astronomical data were poured into the paradigm (presupposition) that the Earth was the center of the planetary system, rather than the later paradigm that the Sun was the center. But, how do we find our unconscious presuppositions so that we may analyze and judge them? There is no sure way except endless reflection and self-examination. However, one major help is to enter into ongoing dialogues, for, when sufficient mutual trust is built, our dialogue partners then will be able to point out some of our unconscious presuppositions, which they can see but we cannot; our trusted dialogue partners become for us mirrors in which we can see how at least a part of the outside world perceives us.

V. Closing the Loop: Competitive-Cooperation

If our actions are to be compatible with Deep-Dialogue and Critical-Thinking, they must strive toward being “Competitive-Cooperative.” Let me explain this last seemingly contradictory double term.

If the way we understand the world determines the way we act in the world, then action completes the circle of perception-thought-decision-action. We first perceive, then try to understand, in light of which we make a decision, and finally act, putting our perceptions, understanding, and decisions into concrete behavioral form. If we have begun to engage the world in a deeply dialogical manner and critically analyzed/synthesized our perceptions and thoughts, we will want to make decisions on their bases, and carry out our actions in the world in an analogously dialogic/critical manner. I am suggesting that the most appropriate way to describe such action is “Competitive-Cooperation.”

The outcome of our Deep-Dialogue and Critical-Thinking must be our free/responsible action because the core of being human is freedom and its corresponding responsibility. This freedom/responsibility core has always been the case since the emergence of *homo sapiens sapiens*, perhaps 70,000 years ago in central Africa, even though this core did not begin to be *de facto* widespread and recognized until around 200 years ago with the Enlightenment. Our core human freedom/responsibility flows from our humanly developed rational intellect, which allows us to “abstract” (Latin: *ab*, “from”; *tractus*, “pulled,” as in “tractor”) from our myriad sense perceptions various concepts and possibilities, on the bases of which we can choose and can decide to act one way or another. This is another way to say we “love,” that is, we reach out to become one with what we perceive to be the “good”—for example, becoming one with the “good” ice cream, the “good” Mozart music, the “good” friend, each in its appropriate way.

Humans have long recognized that we are something unique in the cosmos (there may be other free beings we have not yet discovered—or perhaps ever will) because of our radical freedom (despite its limitations, of which we are increasingly becoming aware) based on our rationality.

I have written extensively—and am very deliberately restressing here!—about how humanity has in the last two centuries increasingly come to realize that because all knowledge is necessarily limited and is interpreted by the knower, “Nobody knows Everything about Anything!”⁴ Hence, we have no other intelligent choice but to reach out in dialogue, Deep-Dialogue, to those who think differently from us to learn increasingly/endlessly more about reality. I have also increasingly stressed the other side of our “coin of humanity,” Critical-Thinking, wherein we constantly pose the critical three “W” questions: *What* precisely are we talking about? *Whence* comes the basis for affirming it? *Whither* do its implications lead—*reductio ad absurdum*, or not? Steven Pinker has most recently brilliantly shown that it is the increasing human rationality, in the sense of the increasing development of reasonable habits of mind, abstract thinking, and thence actions, that is leading to an increasingly peaceful human world (counter-

⁴See, e.g., Leonard Swidler, “Nobody Knows Everything about Anything! The Cosmic Dance of Dialogue,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 45 (Spring, 2010): 175–177; and Reflections at the Scottish Parliament at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nu4ssQHRLP0.

intuitive though that may at first blush seem!).⁵ Even before him, in a more philosophical than social-scientific manner, Bernard Lonergan also argued that increasing intelligence was a necessity for increasingly ethical behavior.⁶

Since we humans are also bodies, our perceptions, reflections, and decisions need to result in actions in the world. Through fostering our Critical-Thinking and reaching out to expand increasingly our necessarily myopic view of reality through Deep-Dialogue, we will want to act in a manner that is a reflection of our “both-and” Deep-Dialogue/Critical-Thinking, namely, through Competitive-Cooperation. The “Cooperation” half is relatively easy to understand. As long as the “Other” is not acting in a destructive manner, then we would want to act, at a minimum, not negatively toward the Other, but as much as possible in tandem, so as to create a win-win situation.

But “Competitive”? That would seem necessarily to aim at a win-lose, a zero-sum approach. To a certain extent that is accurate. However, I am thinking first of all of this “Competition” as being with oneself, striving to be as effective, efficient, and creative as possible—to borrow from Islam the initial meaning of *Jihad*, the Great *Jihad* (Arabic: struggle), the Competition, with oneself to live out our inner principles (placed there by God, according to Islam—and Judaism and Christianity as well). This Creative Competition may at times mean that one individual, one group, will get the contract, will be chosen to provide the requested product or service—win-lose, zero-sum in that sense. But, the Creative Competition individual and group should thereby be led to create, to develop new alternatives—as, for example, renewable energy sources as alternatives to fossil fuels, or President Obama’s inviting Hillary Clinton into his cabinet. In the business field, an ever-more-human organization that increasingly searches for the most creative, expansive, all-inclusive way of operating—a “both-and,” a “win-win” for both the producers and users—reflects the creative balance of Deep-Dialogue, “pro-and-con” Critical-Thinking, in a balance of Creative Competition and Cooperation.

A striking example of such thinking—and action—in the global corporate world was given by Ryuzaburo Kaku, Chair of the Board of the Japanese multinational, Canon, Inc. His vision in leading his company convinced me that what I in English terms describe as Competitive-Cooperation was in fact doable. He expressed his vision as the *Kyosei* principles: “Living and working together for the common good.” He argued that this concept of *Kyosei* should be a creed that all corporations and nations follow. He outlined the progress of ethical companies through four stages, describing the fourth stage as follows:

The fourth type is the “corporation assuming global social responsibilities,” a “truly global corporation.” This type of company cares for all its direct stake-

⁵Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking Books, 2011), chap. 9. Amazingly, it is a massively proved fact that the popular IQ level has steadily gone up over the past century in the area of abstract reasoning—the so-called “Flynn Effect.”

⁶See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 253; discussed further in Leonard Swidler, *After the Absolute* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 15 ff.

holders, including its local community—but it goes beyond: it strives to fulfill its corporate obligations on a global scale. Its social responsibilities transcend national boundaries.

Mr. Kaku was not a naive “do-gooder” but a creative business entrepreneur, insisting that constant innovation was the key to creating ever more wealth for humanity—and for his company: “By creating new products and processes . . . the company will not only succeed financially, but will also have made the world a better place to live. That is what it means to be an ethical business leader!” He also wrote: “Competition is vital for efficiency, but it must be ‘fair’ competition, based on innovation, quality and efficiency,” combining thereby “competition” with “cooperation”: “Innovative corporations with specialties in different areas can also work together in the spirit of *Kyosei* to produce outstanding products. In this way a synergy is created and products can be produced that neither company alone could develop.” Impressive as this vision is, Kaku later projected a stunningly challenging fifth stage:

I have recently come to believe that a fifth category is needed in my analysis of companies as they evolve into ethical social institutions. This fifth type I see as a company that seeks to change the world for the better. Companies in the fifth stage also try to increase the number of like-minded partners that assume global social responsibilities and that are actively concerned with global problems. . . . Companies in the fifth stage realize it is not right for the enormous number of corporations existing in the world to remain apathetic about the various perplexing problems emerging on our planet. They know it is not enough for a corporation to transform itself only into a fourth type of corporation and simply strive to correct imbalances—it knows it must go further.

Kaku would have *Kyosei* serve as a key principle in the new world order emerging after the end of the Cold War. He insisted that democracy, human rights, and peace are indeed indispensable values, but alone they are not adequate. In other words, they are necessary but not sufficient causes of the common weal; *Kyosei* needs to augment them. In English terms for *Kyosei*, I offer “Competitive-Cooperation.”

Therefore, I propose that our most authentic human way to be and act is: Deep-Dialogue/Critical-Thinking/Competitive-Cooperation.

Leonard Swidler