

*Dialogue and stategic communication*

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In different ways, Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas developed a philosophy of the other. Buber proposed dialogue between 'I' and 'Thou' as a non-reifying, reciprocal, not necessarily linguistic form of communication. He distinguished I-Thou relations of intrinsic value that are free from strategic and instrumental intentions, in contrast with instrumental I-It relations. I-Thou relations are driven by emotions more than logic, which is seen as inevitably bringing in calculative self-interest. For Levinas the relation with the other is asymmetric, dominated by an absolute, unconditional awe for the 'visage' of the other'. Levinas rejected religion after his family was exterminated by the Nazis's. Nevertheless he sees in the other 'the face of God', prior to any sense of identity. Buber remains religious, seeing the approach to the other as an approximation of the connection to God, the ultimate 'Thou'. Dialogue lies 'in between' self and other and is divinely inspired. Buber witnessed the emergence of Nazism and of industry, the rationalisation and de-mystification of the world detected by Weber, the individualism of capitalism and the collectivism of communism, and he sought an intermediate form of contact in community, as attempted in the Israeli Kibbutz (Morgan and Guillherme 2010).

In contrast, Habermas (1948) argued for a discourse based on reason, but open and without any exercise of power ('Herrschaftsfreie Diskussion').

This article discusses how utopian or realistic these views are, the nature of the boundary between selves in the I-Thou relation, how and to what extent that relation lapses into the 'I-It' relation, and how to make communication as dialogical as possible

## Sources and extent of dialogue

A fundamental problem is that every speech or act has a subconscious, often tacit basis in 'boundary assumptions', ideologies, or 'metanarratives' that are taken for granted and gener-

ally remain hidden, fall outside discourse. It is very difficult to escape them, and they hinder dialogue. It may be etched in a professional code. It is inevitable. You cannot look in all directions at the same time, only God can do that, and even scientists have to take something for granted as a premiss, a point of departure. Mathematics has its axioms to depart from. On a flat plane parallel lines do not intersect, but on a curved space, such as the globe, they do, at the poles. Paradoxically, here lies an opportunity of a sudden insight, awareness of such prejudices, from inspiration by the other. One is literally inspired, breathed into by the other, and it makes you catch your breath. You fall outside your customary frame, bearing an emotional force.

Strategic conduct is pervasive. It anticipates actions and reactions of an intelligent other. It spawned game theory as a tool for investigating it. Strategic conduct is not necessarily self-centered and manipulative. One can, in good conscience, try to avoid self-interested, manipulative conduct, but it is rarely successful. Strategy seems inimical to the Buberian I-Thou relation. However, take the relation between a psychotherapist and a client. The therapist designs interventions in anticipation of response. However, the therapist should be open to the surprise of an unanticipated response. The relation is unequal but can and should be reciprocal. The anticipation is oriented at the well-being of the patient, not the interest of the therapist. Thus, although strategic communication is often manipulative, it apparently need not be so. In a debate between Buber and the therapist Rogers, in 1957, it was agreed that true dialogue is possible but is only momentary and transient (Cissna and Anderson 1998), in moments of I-Thou emerging in a primarily I-It relation, even in therapy. Following Buber, Rosa (2019:205-6) characterised such moments as something that ‘touches, grips and moves us’.

Likewise, in education the teacher-pupil relation should be aimed at the development and flourishing of the pupil. Teaching is not funneling information into the pupil but releasing the pupil’s potential. It remains fruitless if the pupil is not ready for it. Vygotsky (1934) coined the expression ‘Zoped: Zone of proximal development’, where the pupil is near independent flourishing but needs some support for this to come about. Jerome Bruner called this ‘scaffolding’, as in providing a carrying structure under a bridge until it supports itself.(Wood et al.976)

Searle (2003) was sceptical about scaffolding, because it can mean, and in practice often does, that with the scaffold the teacher imposes a structure to which the pupil should conform. It is what the teacher has in mind, not the pupil. ‘The child’s experience is taken from him and is molded according to the teacher’s view of what is relevant and interesting’ (Searle 2003:28) The teacher should facilitate the pupil to build its own structure.It is not opening the door to an existing house, but welcoming the other to participate in building the house.

Buber recognised that people are harnessed into themselves, out of fear that opening up

would open them up to destruction (Buber 2006: 153). Certainly, the human being has an instinct of protecting itself, ‘protecting its resources’ as Lindenberg (2003) claimed. One can understand this as drive inherited from evolution, from a drive to survive in the selection process. On the other hand, the human being also has an instinct for solidarity, be it mostly in the group one sees oneself to belong to. This also can be explained from an evolutionary perspective, where empathy and solidarity in the group were conducive to survival of the group. This has been called ‘parochial altruism’ (de Dreu et al. 2014). The limitation of solidarity to the group to which one belongs can be understood in evolutionary terms, as needed to protect the group against the invasion of opportunistic outsiders who may exploit indigenous solidarity, enhancing their survival and ultimately coming to dominate the group.

## Resonance

How far should mutual influence in relations go? Hartmut Rosa (2019) proposed the notion of *resonance*, recognising the work of Buber as a source. Resonance occurs when a tuning fork adopts the vibration of a source of sound. Like Buber’s I-Thou relations, resonance requires contact but should not engage in control. Rosa (2019: 17) identified four stages of control: making visible, making reachable, making manageable, and making useful. Excess control can mute resonance, but resonance does require the first two stages of control, of visibility and accessibility, to achieve affect and being affected. It goes too far in the stage of making manageable, which is one-sided, an ‘I-it’ relation, in Buber’s terms, making useful, giving instrumental value, and destroying intrinsic value of a relation in itself. Rosa (2019: 44) granted that resonance requires ‘semi controllability’

## Trust

Can there be dialogue, resonance, without trust? Rational trust can go a long way, in assessing the sources of reliability of an associate, such as legal obligation, hierarchical supervision, reputation and material incentives of rewards or punishments. Beyond such control, trust can be based on public morality, or personal bonding in families, clans, friendships or relations of love (Nooteboom 2002). However, one cannot be certain how people will act or respond, not even of oneself, under unknown future conditions. Even if the other has strong virtues, one cannot be sure. Then trust becomes a ‘leap of faith’ (Moellering 2009), assuming but not knowing trustworthiness.

Resonance and dialogue carry uncertainty: you cannot fully control the other person, and you cannot predict every action that may arise in his or her conduct, or indeed your own, and

one has to accept that. A relation can start with distrust, but by dialogue can evolve into trust, which, however, is never blind.

## Conclusion

Dialogue cannot be strategic, since that implies anticipation of actions and responses, which is impossible, and in dialogue one accepts that, indeed welcomes it, as a source of a possible shift of one's background assumptions.

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