In Theory

Cultivating Dialogue: From Fragmentation to Relationality in Conflict Interaction

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This article builds on the tendency in recent decades in the field of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) to analyze conflict and its transformation from a relational perspective. It surveys developments in twentieth-century philosophy that support the ongoing quest to explore the self in ADR from a relational perspective. It then shows how the concept of dialogue provides a framework for understanding conflict transformation from a relational perspective, by exploring the relational foundations of dialogue. It also draws a connection between the growing use of mindfulness practices in conflict settings and the practice of dialogue, suggesting that Buddhist philosophy and practices can help cultivate relational awareness and dialogue. The article therefore suggests that incorporating dialogue and exploring its relational characteristics can assist ADR scholars and practitioners to develop further practices that can promote collaboration by shifting disputants from adversarial and fragmented orientations to more relational mindsets.

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Introduction

The term "dialogue" is uncommon in alternative dispute resolution (ADR) discourse, and, when mentioned, it is usually referred to without identifying the unique characteristics that distinguish it from other modes of interaction. Thus, the potential for developing proficiencies that would help ADR participants cultivate dialogic interaction (when relevant) has largely been overlooked.

Dialogue is a mode of interaction that is qualitatively different from what the majority of ADR scholarship has emphasized. It indicates, as I will clarify in this article, a relational mindset that typically does not underlie other forms of interaction. In the dialogic interaction, participants are aware of their radical interdependence, such that their joint action mutually constructs their realities, and their senses of self emerge through and within their unique situation.

Dialogue is different from other modes of interaction that posit the parties as individuals who interact by engaging in an exchange of ideas. This view underlies our common understanding of conversation or negotiation, which I categorize in this article, following Charles Taylor (1991), as "monologic" rather than "dialogic." David Bohm (2000[1996]: 18) described what dialogue is not and the need to distinguish it from negotiation, claiming that

> A great deal of what nowadays is typically considered to be dialogue tends to focus on negotiation; but (. . .) that is a preliminary stage. People are generally not ready to go into the deeper issues when they first have what they consider to be a dialogue. They negotiate, and that's about as far as they get. Negotiation is trading off, adjusting to each other and saying "Okay, I see your point. I see that that is important to you. Let's find a way that would satisfy both of us. I will give in a little in this, and you give in a little on that. And then we will work something out."

In many negotiation and conflict settings, trying to achieve dialogue is unnecessary, but it can be a fruitful process in certain situations. The conflict specialist's clear understanding of the characteristics of dialogue can help her identify which situations lend themselves to dialogue. To cultivate dialogue effectively, the practitioner must first clearly understand its underlying premises. Furthermore, when it is used, she must use it intentionally and have the skills to establish this unique kind of engagement, without confusing it with other modes of interaction such as negotiation, conversation, or discussion. Conflict specialists can gain much by

helping parties engage in dialogue in its full sense and by introducing the skills to help parties cultivate it. To do so, however, and to be genuinely committed to cultivating dialogue, it is important that theoreticians and practitioners first explore at some depth what "dialogue" means and consider the characteristics that distinguish dialogue as a meaningful interaction worth distinguishing from other forms of engagement.

One reason why dialogue is uncommon in ADR scholarship[1] may be that the foundational premises that underlie its practice differ from the foundational assumptions that have governed Western thought for more than 24 centuries. In this article, however, I will describe some of the theoretical shifts that have occurred in recent decades that are gradually challenging these foundations in ways that encourage the cultivation of dialogic mindsets. To help individuals make such transitions, it is necessary to first understand the underlying transitions in the *zeitgeist* and how these philosophical transformations establish the conditions for incorporating relational theory and practices into ADR scholarship. Building these new theoretical foundations can also help conflict scholars draw the new "philosophical map" of cooperation that Leonard Riskin (1982: 43) has suggested should replace what he calls the "standard philosophical map" of adversarialism.

In this article, I describe the clear theoretical foundations for dialogue as a practice that can usefully supplement the conflict specialist's existing repertoire of practices. I seek to clarify the *relational* underpinnings that differentiate dialogue from other means of interaction, to examine how a dialogic/relational mindset can be cultivated, and to explore the potential applications for dialogue as an ADR practice. I suggest that it is important to clarify and make explicit a shift toward a relational philosophy as a means for cultivating dialogue in human interaction and mindset. This shift can already be found in twentieth-century thought at large, as I show in the first section of this article, but must occur in and among parties in certain interactions if their dialogic mindset is to be cultivated. The first section therefore describes the philosophical underpinnings of a shift toward dialogue, including current efforts to develop new understandings of the "self."

In the second section, I discuss prominent scholarship on dialogue and its views of the "self," focusing on the writings of Martin Buber, David Bohm, and Charles Taylor. A detailed description of these thinkers' ideas, consistent with the relational underpinnings described in the first section, seeks to clarify the characteristics of the transformation from non-dialogic to dialogic states of mind and to identify the necessary conditions for cultivating a common dialogic space for conflict resolution.

In the third section, I explore some of the relational underpinnings of Buddhist philosophy and practices, which have also grown considerably more popular in recent decades and which could help to further clarify the relational foundations of dialogue and to suggest practices that a conflict specialist could use to help cultivate dialogue.

Finally, in the article's conclusion, I describe a research agenda for investigating how methodologies for cultivating dialogue and relationality could be further integrated into the practice of conflict resolution.

Foundational Transitions in Twentieth-Century Thought

Emphasizing the relational characteristics of the self creates the potential for cultivating dialogue in conflict intervention. These characteristics can be easily missed; perhaps they are not compatible with the individualistic philosophies and view of humanity that is central to modern Western thought. According to the individualistic view, the self is a single, sole consciousness that is the ultimate source of meaning and reference. In this view, internal consciousness is positioned as separate from the external world it faces and is fundamentally isolated from all that is situated "outside" of one's consciousness.

Kenneth Gergen (2009: xxi) wrote, "From the early writings of Descartes, Locke, and Kant to contemporary discussions of mind and brain, philosophers have lent strong support to the reality of bounded being. In many respects, the hallmark of Western philosophy was its presumption of dualism: mind and world, subject and object, self and other."[2] These traditions posit the "other" as an outer-bounded self with whom one interacts in a dialectical rather than dialogic manner, that is, by situating oneself in separation and at times in opposition to the other.[3] This monosubjective perspective focuses on separately situated individuals who interact by exchanging ideas. This view is the basis of our common understanding of conversation and negotiation, which are described in this article as monologic rather than dialogic.

A shift has occurred in recent decades, however, that is gradually undermining that monosubjectivity in favor of an alternative, more relational view of the self. Various schools of thought that gained prominence in the twentieth century, described below, represent a paradigm shift that has challenged some foundational premises that have governed Western thought.

The thinkers behind this shift hold in common a fundamental criticism of Cartesian philosophy, that is, philosopher René Descartes' method of overcoming doubt and finding certainty in the mind of the autonomous self, which validates its own existence through inner reflection. Describing this philosophy and the manner in which we perceive the world and ourselves in light of it, Charles Taylor (1989: 122) wrote

> . . . we naturally come to think that we have selves the way we
> have heads or arms, and inner depths the way we have hearts or
> livers, as a matter of hard, interpretation-free fact. Distinctions of
> locale, like inside and outside, seem to be discovered like facts
> about ourselves, and not to be relative to the particular way,

among other possible ways, we construe ourselves. For a given age and civilization, a particular reading seems to impose itself; it seems to common sense the only conceivable one. Who among us can understand our thought being anywhere else but inside, "in the mind?" Something in the nature of our experience of ourselves seems to make the current localization almost irresistible, beyond challenge.

This "localization" is being challenged, by scholars such as Taylor (1991) and Gergen (2009), who have articulated alternative philosophies.

Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy, which had tremendous influence on twentieth-century thought, incorporated at its foundations a radical and intense criticism of the notion of the "self" and the metaphysics of substance, the Aristotelian notion that the true nature of an object is its internal core or substance. By assuming a subject with a clear and stable bounded core, Nietzsche claimed, humans impose a substantive view of the world in which each object has an inner core that defines its essence. Human beings, he argued, lay down their particular grid of logical and perceptual forms of understanding over the world to serve their need to organize and master it. This attempt to organize the world in forms and objects — their sense of self included — distorts human perception of what the world is truly like, he argued (Nietzsche 1999[1872]). Holding firmly to characteristics that allegedly define oneself and one's essence is thus a form of self-preservation, according to Nietzsche, but this diminishes one's freedom because the "subject" is only a fiction.

Phenomenology, an influential school of twentieth-century thought, casts doubt on the everyday human belief that externalizes the notion of a "reality" independent of how it is experienced. For Edmund Husserl, who is considered the father of phenomenology, describing "the world" as a separately existing object is inaccurate. The thing in the world and the subject who experiences it can no longer be analyzed with the common-sense distinction of subject/object according to phenomenological investigation that seeks to capture the concreteness of the phenomena in the flashpoint of the living present. "Things" are regarded as phenomena, which are understood as immanently and immediately knowable (Husserl 1982[1913]). Martin Heidegger used the German term "Dasein" — which literally means "there-being" and is often translated also as "being-with" — to describe a mode of being that is situated in a particular place. Being, he asserted, cannot be understood apart from the manner in which it is situated. He wrote (Heidegger 2005[1927]: 152): "A bare subject without a world never 'is' proximally, nor is it ever given. And so in the end an isolated 'I' without others is just as far from being proximately given." Like Nietzsche, Heidegger saw the objectifying of both oneself and the world as a weakness, an escape from its true existence or "authenticity."

Hermeneutics is a central twentieth-century theory of understanding and interpretation that arose from the phenomenological school of thought and that investigated the ontological status of people and objects that take part in or are discussed in the communicating process. Building on the idea that interpretation and assigning meaning are foundational aspects of human existence, Hans-Georg Gadamer argued that what characterizes human understanding and meaning making is that they are based on a fusion of the subject's thinking categories and the objects he encounters (works of art, texts, other humans etc.). "There is no longer a question of self and other" (Gadamer 1999[1960]: 300), he wrote. Gadamer critiqued what he called monologic scientific inquiry into the nature of objects, which according to him alienated the object from its contemporary situation.

Poststructuralism and what is commonly known as "postmodernism" emerged in the 1960s and gained some prominence in both philosophical thought, as well as in the humanities and social sciences. Poststructuralists hold that the concept of "self" as a singular and coherent entity is a fictional construct. Michel Foucault (2002[1966]) argued that the self is formed within cultural or sociopolitical relations; he described his philosophy as an endeavor to uncover those social practices and discourses through which we see ourselves as coherent and stable subjects. "Man is only a recent invention," he wrote, "a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge and [. . .] he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form" (Foucault 2002[1966]: iv). "The historical ontology of ourselves has to answer an open series of questions . . . How are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions" (Foucault 1984[1978]: 48)?

This subject, Foucault and other poststructuralists have argued, is formed within discursive practices. According to Jacques Derrida (1997[1967]), everything is a text and subjectivity arises from linguistic relations. Reality is nothing more than fluid and uncontrollable relations between linguistic "signs," and the idea of a stable and coherent self — and of a coherent relationship between consciousness and objects in the world — is an illusion. The self (subject) and the world (object) are relationally constituted in language and should be deconstructed, as these linguistic constituencies do not signify any firm singular coherent entities. Meaning is always temporal and has only fluid, indeterminate existence. The drive and desire for well-defined, definite concepts show, according to Derrida, that we are motivated by a desire for a fixed origin or center and to retain the classical distinction between substances and their attributes and between essential and nonessential attributes.

These thinkers and schools of thought sought to develop alternative philosophical foundations of the self in twentieth-century thought. The "making [of] the self into a 'noun'," as Taylor (1989: 122) called it, has been

increasingly challenged, and some of the deepest rooted underpinnings of modernity, and even of twenty-five centuries of Aristotelian tradition, have been questioned. This has had an effect on developments in many fields in the last decades, from the hard sciences to the social sciences.[4] These concepts also have direct implications for ADR theory and practice.

The Relational Foundations of Dialogue

The ideas of Martin Buber, David Bohm, and Charles Taylor form the philosophic foundations of dialogue and follow the tendencies in twentieth-century thought as presented in the previous section. Understanding the theoretical foundations of these thinkers will help develop the groundwork of ADR practice rooted in dialogic perspectives.

The Dialogic Philosophy of Martin Buber

Martin Buber's philosophy has often been referred to as "philosophy of dialogue" because his main argument is that dialogue is a basic form of existence. Buber drew a distinction between two different modes of human interaction: "I–Thou" and "I–It." Each word ("I" or "It" or "Thou") cannot be understood in solitude, according to Buber, but are granted meaning only in their relationship to one another.

The I–It relationship is characterized by a person's cold indifference to the other, who is treated as an object, a thing among things. It is a passive relationship, as the I and the It do not meaningfully connect with each other but rather use each other to serve their interests. The I–Thou relationship is a primary relationship, acknowledging that "Through the 'Thou' a man becomes 'I'" (Buber 1987[1923]: 28), meaning that only in the presence of the I–Thou primary relation can oneself be wholly realized.

The two worlds that are constructed through these two modes are utterly different. The one who observes others as "Its" sees them lying side by side in space: "Every 'it' is bounded by others; it exists only through being bounded by others" (Buber 1987[1923]: 4). This is the world of objects, of "things," the world of the positive sciences, claimed Buber: the world of knowledge gained by classifying the objects that lie side by side and by distinguishing among them.

In contrast, ". . . the realm of the 'Thou' has a different nature. When 'Thou' is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object . . . he has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation" (Buber 1987[1923]: 4). What is essential for Buber was not what goes on within the minds of the partners in a relationship but what happens *between* them (Friedman 2005a: 29). He was unalterably opposed to a psychological approach that focuses on the *separate* psyches of the participants (Friedman 2005b: 222). His focus was not on participants' internal states but rather on what arises in and through their interaction. The unit for analysis is not the individual but the common space in and from which participants emerge.

The I–Thou meeting, he explained, occurs only when the boundaries of the other — seen as in opposition to the self — are questioned, and both the "I" and the "thou" are realized to arise from their own unique concrete situation and from their relatedness to one another. When the knowledge of oneself and of the other — both grasped as objects — is transformed to what Buber called "becoming aware" (aware of both "I and Thou" and of the relationship between the two), dialogue becomes possible.

Buber made a radical suggestion that questions common ontological foundations in Western philosophy: that the "I–Thou" relationship precedes the world of knowledge and of distinction between objects, and that a primary and foundational experience is echoed in it, an experience of mutuality from which the experience of self is derived — one in which the nature of humans and of the world can be understood. He wrote: "In the beginning is relation — as category of being" (Buber 1987[1923]: 27).[5] Buber's view offered an alternative to the perspective that individuals are separate, independent entities that engage each other. He suggested that there is a fundamental interdependency between individuals in dialogue.

The sense that the "I" is a separate "thing" that seeks to be independent of relationality is an illusion. According to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, which heavily influenced modern Western thought, a thing can be known in itself only when separated from its relations. Buberian metaphysics argues the opposite, having at its starting point the idea that only the relationship grants the things their independent existence. "Through the 'Thou' a man becomes 'I'," writes Buber (1987[1923]: 29). Buber thus asserted — and this is the dialogic characteristic central to his entire philosophy — that the "I" consciousness is made possible only in the present moment of the relationship, in dialogue. A dialogue cannot take place when parties perceive their identities in a non-relational manner; rather, a dialogue, according to Buber, is only possible when mutual relations exist, in which people understand that only within the scope of that relationship does the "I" become a person in the fullest sense, fulfilling her humanity.

Humans, claimed Buber, live in the present, while objects live in the past. "The human being" is whomever is present in dialogue, in the present moment instead of referring back to images of self borrowed from past experiences or thoughts; the "I" acquires meaning within her unique and exclusive situational ties, in relation to the specific Thou she faces.

Describing Buber's philosophy, Ephraim Meir (2006: 126) wrote

> Buber's thinking in *I and Thou* belongs to the growing move-
> ment of relational thinking, which considers the separate "self" as
> an abstract mental construct. [. . . .] This non-violent thought
> about the connected I, contains possibilities that are insufficiently
> taken into account in negotiations between conflicting sides and
> in conflict resolution.

When in dispute, parties at times seek refuge in often separate private spaces. Thus, adversaries disrupt the dialogue and the "I–Thou" relationship.[6] The parties ought to develop relational awareness and transform the entrenchment in fixed and separated spaces or images of self, which result in monologic acts. A conflict specialist should help parties transform their monosubjective senses of self through cultivating relational awareness and dialogue. This emphasis differs from what ADR scholarship typically emphasizes, which is instead a focus on satisfying individuals' needs and on delving into their internal beliefs rather than attending to the manner in which they jointly construct their reality in the present moment.

Buber (2002[1932]) criticizes dialectical thinking, a form of critical thinking that is deeply rooted in our times and in which a person's answer incorporates an opposing stance to the speaker, which he argued prevented people from achieving dialogue. His concept of dialogue challenges conflict specialists to help parties approach each other dialogically and to refrain from an "I–It" mindset, gradually cultivating awareness of the common dialogic space in which parties co-arise.

David Bohm and the Suspension of Self in Dialogue

In his book *On Dialogue*, David Bohm explained that the word *dia* in Greek means "through," and the word *logos* translates as "the meaning of the word." Thus, wrote Bohm (2000[1996]: 6), "The picture or image that this derivation suggests is of a *stream of meaning* flowing among and through us and between us [emphasis in the original]."

William Isaacs, founder and director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Dialogue Project and a student of Bohm, defined dialogue in a similar way.

> . . . a dialogue is a *flow of meaning*. But it is more than this too. In the most ancient meaning of the word, *logos* means "to gather together," and suggested an intimate awareness of the relationships among things in the natural world. In that sense, *logos* may be best rendered in English as "relationship." The book of John in the New Testament begins: "In the beginning was the Word (logos)." We could now hear this as "In the beginning was the Relationship" (1999: 19).

According to Bohm, dialogue requires a reexamination of the assumptions and perceptions with which the participants begin; this reexamination may undermine foundational assumptions not only regarding the content of their discussion but also about the perception of "two different systems" of perception. "[Dialogue] proposes a quality of interaction," wrote Isaacs (2002: 206), "that goes beyond interpersonal subject-object exchange. It invites ontological inquiry as much as a problem-solving activity, and it challenges the traditional premise that communication is the 'exchange' of

anything — such as meaning or messages." Isaacs described the shift that dialogue enables as one that moves away from a state of separating "systems," or "private spaces," thus forming a totally new basis from which the parties may think and act.

Dialogue facilitates new perceptions and awareness of the polarization that defines a person's selfhood or "party-ness" in negotiations. This polarization reflects "the notion that all these fragments are separately existent" (Bohm 1980: 2), which, according to Bohm, is an illusion that "cannot do other than lead to endless conflict and confusion."

Bohm (1980) claims that the process of reexamining our foundational assumptions is also a reexamination of our thought processes. "Since our thought is pervaded with differences and distinctions, it follows that such a habit leads us to look on these as real divisions, so that the world is then seen and experienced as actually broken up into fragments" (p. 4).[7] He revisits the idea that thought process is a private process taking place within the self.

In dialogue, going beyond the positional self is characterized by revealing the thought process as a "stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us" (Bohm 2000[1996]: 26). "An example of people thinking together," writes Bohm, "would be that somebody would get an idea, somebody else would take it up; somebody else would add to it. The thought would flow, rather than there being a lot of different people, each trying to persuade or convince the others" (Bohm 2000[1996]: 26).

When a person fails to recognize the ongoing nature of his own thought construction, he is more likely to adhere to ideas and opinions formed in earlier, separate thought processes; he is unaware of the continual process of co-construction. Moreover, those reflexive thoughts support his belief in his thinking "self," assumed to exist behind its appearance: "Thought is producing an image of an observer and an image of the observed, and it is attributing itself to a thinker who is producing the thought and doing the observing. It's also attributing its being to the observed at the same time . . ." (Bohm 2000[1996]: 70). By doing so, claims Bohm, one misses the whole thinking process, which is dialogic by nature. This culminates in an attempt to present opinions and facts independent from the dialogic thought process that created them.

Dialogue, Bohm wrote, aims to arrive at what he calls "shared meaning." Ludwig Wittgenstein (1973[1945]) expressed a somewhat similar view in his later work, according to which words are granted meaning within the "language game" — that is, the web of connections and relations — in which they function. Words have meaning only in use, and word usage is always contextual. Wittgenstein argued that the attempt to imbue a word with non-contextual meaning — a meaning that supposedly exists separately from and prior to contextual usage — creates misunderstandings. Misunderstandings and problems arise when we make a non-legitimate shift from one context to another — that is, when we intentionally or

unintentionally bring into one language game charged meanings of concepts and words from other contexts, or "language games," without being aware of the changed context.

To cultivate dialogue, the disputant must recognize that his views are bounded by his own private and separate language, shifting from a separately held view of self to participate in an ongoing joint process of meaning making. This shift is different from the shift from a focus on positions to a focus on interests, which is at the heart of the interest-based approach to negotiation. A transition from advocating one's positions to working to achieve one's interests is still an activity built on a view of the self as a separate entity who at the end of the day thinks, acts, and makes meaning individually. This concept challenges our ideas about interdependence, suggesting that the construction of one's reality is a product of the interaction and the context in which one takes part.[8]

Bohm described a process of thinking together that requires a new awareness of the thinking process itself and of the manner in which meaning is made. This requires the ability to *suspend* opinions. However, explained Bohm, this process of suspension is unique because it is in fact a suspension of the "self." This does not require that one avoid or suppress one's positions, but rather notice and attend to how they are jointly created (Bohm 2000[1996]).

In dialogue, participants co-construct meaning, which enriches the context in which they take part — both in terms of the information and in terms of their capability to participate in a dialogic process — not as a "side" but as a partner to the context. Dialogue, as social-constructionist scholars stress, is not a process in which parties separately hold a number of diverse opinions, but one in which they participate in a common dialogic space.[9] When suspension of the "self" is taking place, according to Bohm, the partaking in the process of meaning making in the common dialogic space is made possible.

Dialogue, explained Bohm, is thus a joint process of opening and reexamining opinions and foundational assumptions, a process of suspending our most foundational assumptions. This is a challenging process because we tend to identify with the opinions with which we arrive as well as with the self that is seemingly situated behind them that these thoughts represent. A conflict specialist who sees the value in paying these high "costs" and in helping disputants achieve dialogue must first comprehend fully the nature of the relational interaction in the common dialogic space, to be able to help the disputants cultivate it.

Charles Taylor's Dialogic View of the Self

At the outset of this article, I quoted from Charles Taylor's monumental work on the sources of the self in modern thought. In a later article, on what he referred to as the dialogic nature of the self, Taylor returned to the

main theme of his earlier work when he wrote: "In a sense, 'the self' is a modern phenomenon. Only in modern Western culture have we begun to speak of the human person as 'the self' and of people as having and being selves" (Taylor 1991: 304). We have developed in modern Western culture a new notion of "reflexivity," he claimed, based on the post-Cartesian ideal of clear, self-responsible thinking, "in which the subject disengages himself or herself from embodied and social thinking, from prejudices and authority, and is able to think for himself or herself in a disengaged fashion" (Taylor 1991: 304). The Cartesian subject, explained Taylor, is by nature a mono-logical subject. He is in contact with an object in the "outside" world, through representations he has "within."

While presenting his dialogic view of human understanding and thinking, Taylor drew a distinction between "monologic acts" (single-agent acts) and "dialogic acts." (The latter did not emerge, he explained, from the common epistemological tradition). Taylor (1991: 312) argued that "[the] 'I' has no content of its own. It is a sort of principle of originality and self-assertion, which can lead at times to impulsive conduct, or to resistance to the demands of society, but does not have an articulated nature that I can grasp prior to action. Within a 'monologic act,' one fails to capture that . . . the self neither preexists all conversation, as in the old monological view; nor does it arise from an introjection of the interlocutor; but it arises within conversation, because this kind of dialogical action by its very nature marks a place for the new locator who is being inducted into it." It seems that Taylor (1991) articulates what can be seen as a relational vision for transforming adversity into dialogue: a vision of shifting from an introjected "I," who has to find his own voice, to gradual awareness of the process of how it arises within conversation, "gradually finding one's own voice as an interlocutor" (p. 313). The process that Taylor describes, by definition, cannot be an inquiry made by individuals — it is a process of cultivating through practice awareness of what I call in this article the common dialogic space.

The relational process advocated by Taylor, as well as by Buber and Bohm, challenges the underlying belief that at the end of the day "the inner space itself, is definable independently of body or other. It is a center of monological consciousness" (Taylor 1991: 304).

These thinkers offer an ontological framework that differs from some of the most fundamental strains in Western thought, and a different means for understanding dialogic interaction. The relational premises are offered as foundational to the dialogic mindset and acts. ADR scholarship that promotes dialogic processes can be built on this newer ontological framework and of the conditions that need to be set to help parties cultivate dialogue, and the development of conflict resolution practices to help parties cultivate dialogue should be consistent with these foundations.

Buddhist Worldview as a Dialogic Worldview

In this section of the article, I describe how Buddhist philosophy can help further illuminate relational views of the self and map a transformative path from fragmentation to dialogue. Recently, ADR scholars have argued that Buddhist mindfulness practices can be applied fruitfully to ADR practice. If used consistently based on knowledge of their theoretical underpinnings, I believe that these and other related practices can help the ADR practitioner cultivate a dialogic orientation in parties.

The Buddhist worldview offers an additional alternative view of the self. It also offers a rich variety of practices that, when built on a solid philosophical foundation, can help ADR practitioners cultivate dialogue and support a growing interest in the applicability of Buddhist-oriented mindfulness practices to conflict resolution.

The Buddhist worldview presents a philosophical framework that offers a radical alternative to the "inside-subject/outside-object" view of human interaction. This alternative is dialogic by nature and can further illuminate the theoretical underpinnings of the relational nature of the self and of dialogic processes presented thus far. Moreover, it suggests practical methods to help transform a mindset based on the metaphysics of substance into a more relational orientation and thus help cultivate the common dialogic space.

Buddhism, as the Japanese philosopher Toshihiko Izutsu (1977: 23) wrote, "is ontologically a system based upon the category of *relation*, in contrast to, say, the Platonic-Aristotelian system which is based on the category of *substantia*." While traditional Western thought perceives the self as substantial and separate, independent from the web of relations in which she takes part, the Buddhist worldview sees this perception of the self as an illusion that creates human suffering (*duhkha*). Moreover, this illusion — according to the Buddhist worldview — relates not only to the perception of human beings as having a substantial and independent "self" but also to the perception of *any* object as a separate, self-substantive entity. Such a mindset represents, according to Buddhism, a partial and insufficient understanding of reality, described as *ignorance* (*avidya*), that is, a blindness to the real nature of things. Buddhist practice strives to enable the practitioner to transform *avidya* into a realization of one's true nature, which, I argue, is a dialogic nature.

A key concept in the Buddhist worldview is "dependent co-arising" (*pratitiyasamutpada*). This concept is so central that the Buddha claimed that whoever understands it understands his entire teaching (or *dharma*) and that whoever does not understand dependent co-arising would not be able to understand the dharma. According to this concept, any given situation is a set of connections and relations in which separate entities arise, entities that through a process of abstraction we grasp as having the

characteristics of continuous separate substances because we observe the situation from outside, abstracting from the process of dependent co-arising as it occurs. Thus, we form ideas about entities that we later perceive to be separate from the process in which they arose. We perceive that they have a substantial and permanent inner nature with which "they" then enter a process of interaction with another — similarly substantial and permanent entity (e.g., "Mr. X," a separately defined subject, who interacts with "Mr. Y.")

Every "thing," every apparent object we seem to grasp as standing on its own, separate from other objects, is not so, according to the Buddhist view. The idea that objects have an internal essence, defined substantial unique characteristics that will never change, is perceived by the Buddhist philosophy as an abstraction derived from the human need to arrange the world and to create what Buddhism sees as an illusion.

According to Aristotelian metaphysics, understanding an object means understanding its essence, its core — the unchanging characteristics that define it and that will remain identical in an hour or in a year. According to the Buddhist perspective, this is a superficial view of reality; the idea of a "thing," an entity or object with internal unchanging characteristics or conditions, is an illusion according to the Buddhist worldview. According to Buddhism, no unconditional entities exist; all "things" are causally dependent (or dependently co-arise). In addition, every "thing" is in never-ending, ceaseless motion, and nothing is permanent or fixed. According to this world view, comprehending the true nature of things requires comprehending relationality because all things are dependent on other things and can be understood only in how they are related to other things in that particular moment.

Descartes, in his 1641 book *Meditations on First Philosophy*, which is considered to be one of the foundational essays of modernity and of the Enlightenment era, claims that knowledge is obtained when an entity is perceived in all its distinctness: "Everything that we clearly and distinctly understand is true in a way which corresponds exactly to our understanding of it" (Descartes 1997[1641]: 9). According to Descartes, clear knowledge goes together with the distinctiveness of the entity known. Buddhist philosophy replaces that aspiration with mindfulness to the relational process of dependent co-arising. Mindfulness should be understood as a central quality, not only as a skill in which one is mindful of the other person, listens carefully, and reacts accordingly, but also as a realization of the way people affect each other. Mindfulness means taking part in, and being mindful of, the process of dependent co-arising, being in the relation and in the situation as it co-arises, without any attachment to the "self" as a seemingly separate entity.

To understand the Buddhist departure from traditional conceptions of the self, it is important to understand the notion of emptiness (*sunyata*). The allegation that "nothing exists as an independent substantial entity" may

suggest that things are empty of inner nature, of essence, that they exist, but with no firm form as finite, as separate entities. But such a conclusion is incomplete because it still contains the idea that things exist. "Things" are ungraspable in themselves, not as existent nor as nonexistent, but in a different "middle" way — which does not attempt to identify their "real nature" — as dependently co-arising.

Masao Abe (1985: 24) wrote

> . . . what is meant thereby in Zen Buddhism is a dynamic field of power in its entirety and wholeness, an entire field which is neither exclusively subjective nor exclusively objective, but comprehending both the subject and the object in a peculiar state prior to its being bifurcated into these two terms.

Dialogue takes place within this dynamic field. The cultivation of mindfulness and the overcoming of ignorance and suffering as understood within the framework of the Buddhist worldview can therefore be understood in terms of cultivating a dialogic mindset. The ADR practitioner who wishes to cultivate dialogue can therefore benefit from Buddhist theory and practices to help cultivate the relational dialogic space.

Conclusion

In the last two decades, scholars in the ADR field have begun, following the twentieth century tendency described in this article, to offfer a critique of common understandings of the self with the goal of developing alternative relational perspectives and practices. The transformative approach to mediation, which draws, among other theories, from feminist theory (Bush and Folger 1994), for example, is built on the philosophical foundation that a transformation is needed from an individualistic to a relational view of the self. Its creators, Robert Baruch Bush and Joseph Folger (1994: 242), wrote that within the transformative worldview "individuals are seen as both separate and connected, both individuated and similar. They are being to some degree autonomous, self-aware, and self interested but also to some degree connected, sensitive, and responsive to others."

The framework of the narrative approach to mediation, as developed by John Winslade and Gerald Monk, also challenges the common modern Western conceptions of the self. Winslade and Monk, following postmodern philosophy, criticize the idea of the self as having an independent, stable, unitary, self-motivating, and self-regulating core. "Through the postmodern lens," they wrote (Winslade and Monk 2000: 44–45), "a problem is seen not as a personal deficit of the person but as constructed within a pattern of relationships. . . . From this perspective, identity is not fixed, nor is it carried around by the individual largely unchanged from one context to another."

Both the transformative and the narrative approaches have advanced thinking in the field of ADR and have encouraged serious consideration of alternative, more relational approaches to conflict resolution. They offer theories of conflict escalation and practices for its transformation consistent with the philosophical premises that underlie their frameworks.

In this article, I have sought to expand the discussion of relationality from a standpoint that views the self somewhat differently from the feminist-based and postmodern frameworks that underlie the transformative and narrative approaches to offer foundations that can help the ADR practitioner make new usages of mindfulness practices to cultivate a dialogic mindset and quality of interaction. Further research would develop conflict theory and practice consistent with the philosophical underpinnings described in this article — in ways similar to the efforts made to develop the transformative and narrative mediation approaches. Additional work to take these general principles and to develop tools that a conflict specialist could use to cultivate a common dialogic space in conflict settings is also necessary.

In the last decade, conflict scholars have shown a growing interest in integrating Buddhist mindfulness practice into conflict resolution methodologies. Riskin (2004) has argued that negotiation and mediation trainings fail to provide what he calls foundational training, training that would allow the practitioner to cultivate the skills needed to implement collaborative practices, and that mindfulness-based trainings can help cultivate these capacities. Riskin and other ADR scholars have advocated that practitioners develop such mindfulness-based capacities as maintaining equanimity, being nonjudgmental, developing awareness of the present moment, improving concentration and improving analytical capabilities, attending to one's own emotions as well as of others, increased attentiveness and listening capabilities, increased awareness of one's own habits and reactions, increased ability to see beyond one's own needs, and developing ethical conduct.[10] Much of this work has involved borrowing tools from Buddhist meditation.

The potential also exists, however, for a Buddhist-oriented framework for a dialogic approach to conflict that synthesizes the philosophical foundations of both the Buddhist worldview and the twentieth-century relational philosophies. The philosophical foundations of the Buddhist practices hold the potential to further develop relational frameworks and practices that the conflict specialist can use in contrast to the governing individualistic foundations to assist with the cultivation of a dialogic mindset, along the lines suggested in this article. Further introduction of Buddhist-oriented practices under these relational premises could help develop an approach for cultivating dialogue and for offering parties the option to cultivate relational awareness.

In this article, I have presented a theory of dialogue that resonates with the emerging relational understanding of the self-articulated in current Western zeitgeist, as well as in the ADR field. I have also suggested that the

Buddhist worldview offers a particularly salient relational understanding of the self that may serve as the foundation for a framework of dialogue relevant to ADR scholarship. Delving into these philosophical underpinnings will help practitioners reflect on their own philosophical stances and the beliefs that they bring, sometimes unconsciously, into their conflict resolution practice.

In his book *Beyond Neutrality*, Bernard Mayer (2004: 115) wrote

> Probably the biggest obstacle we face in confronting the challenges to our field lies in our own belief systems. We can contend with the challenges of use, resistance, rejection, and suspicion only if we overcome the limits we impose on ourselves by the constraints of our own thinking. Surrounding some of the guiding insights and principles of conflict resolution are many operational norms, constructs, and assumptions that we need to examine, broaden, and in some cases let go of . . . These are beliefs that we need to examine and challenge if we are to grow beyond the existing limits on our work.

To remain relevant and effective as conflict specialists, it is essential for us to expose and challenge the hidden norms, constructs, and assumptions that govern our belief systems and at times limit our vision as well as the services we offer our clients. Delving into the underlying premises can help the conflict specialist broaden her repertoire and offer dialogue as a distinct and important mode of communication that she can help cultivate.

Offering a perspective from beyond ADR scholarship, Isaacs (2002: 207) wrote

> Dialogue's ubiquitous use and apparent need today hides considerable confusion about its efficacy, meaning, and in particular our ability to produce it reliably. Leaders and practitioners may express a wish for dialogue, yet what they call dialogue, both in public discourse and in organizational settings, is often a much weaker form of exchange . . . People generally do not explore jointly their unwitting or unconscious intentions and ontological stances. This later territory in particular is typically taken for granted and not addressed.[11]

We may misunderstand dialogue because we are bound to philosophical foundations that encourage monologic thinking and separateness. A shift toward a relational philosophy can serve as a foundation for cultivating dialogue in ADR practices.

NOTES

1. An exception is a colloquy titled: "Can we talk? Developments in Dialogue Theory and Practice," in the 2004 *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 21(3). Among other excursions of dialogue in ADR context are Rotman (1996), Ropers (2004), and Graf, Kramer, and Nicolescou (2006). The

concept of dialogue gained more popularity in the ADR field when discussing facilitated multiparty processes on the societal level; see, for example, Saunders (1999), Pruitt and Thomas (2006), Herzig and Chasin (2006), and Dessel and Roggs (2008).

2. Gergen argues that the longstanding and much cherished tradition of the individual self has enormous costs, as this tradition invites fundamental separation and loneliness, encourages narcissism, generates unending threats to one's person, and transforms the self into a marketable commodity (see Gergen 2009, in particular chapter 1).

3. For more on the distinction between *dialogue* and *dialectic of thought*, see Baxter and Montgomery (1996) and Friedman (2005c).

4. For further elaboration on the effect of the growing popularity of relational theory on other disciplines, see, for relational theory in psychotherapy, Mitchell (1993, 2000) and Mitchell and Aaron (1999); for relational theory in political science, see Sandel (1984, 1996), MacIntyre (1984), and Avineri and De-Shalit (1992); for relational theory in biology, see Capra (1996); for the rethinking of the subject–object divide on quantum physics and its effect on conflict management theory, see Kuttner (2011); for cultural feminism that bases its theory on an alternative, relational notion of the self, see Gilligan (1982) and McClain (1992).

5. The term "relation" in Hebrew is "zika," which comes from the word "zik" — a spark. The spark can exist only by action of two objects, which in themselves are not sparks. Buber continues: "The thing, like the I, is produced late, arising after the original experiences have been split asunder and the connected partners separated" (Buber 1987[1923]: 27).

6. Per Lindell (1998: 279) argued that while dialogism points to the contextuality of cognition and communication, monologism is a decontextualizing activity. He wrote: "Monologistic perspectives have a much larger place in our society, as the basis for many kinds of abstracting and decontextualizing practices. What we do in these (relatively) monologistic activities is that we create a space, or an enclosure (. . .) for fixating a frame, that is, defining a context or situation, in which some specific premises are (assumed to be) valid. Within such frames, when perspectives have been fixated, they are often taken as given, stable and, quite simply, self-evident."

7. The illusiveness of the fragmented manner in which we perceive the world is a central theme in Bohm's writing. See also Bohm and Edwards (1991) and Bohm (1992).

8. In their article "Empathetic and Dialogic Listening," John Stewart, Karen Zediker, and Saskia Witteborn draw a distinction between empathetic listening, in which one pays attention to the "other," and dialogic listening, which "helps the two of you — or all the people in the conversation — build meaning together. So when dialogic listening works well, everybody understands each other, *and* the people involved co-create new understandings that go beyond the individuals" (Stewart, Zediker, and Witteborn 2009: 226).

9. Co-constructing is a term coined by social-constructionist thinking, a growing school of thought in the late twentieth century, which stems from postmodern thinking and aims to account for the ways in which phenomena are socially constructed, rather than consisting of internal characteristics separated from the social-construction process. See Gergen (1999), in particular chapter 6. For further reading on dialogue from a social-constructionist standpoint, see Gergen, McNamee, and Barrett (2002); Gergen, Gergen, and Barrett (2004); and Shoter and McNamee (2004).

10. See, for example, Riskin (2002, 2004, 2006, 2009, 2010), Codiga (2002), Freshman, Hayes, and Feldman (2002), Peppet (2002, 2004), Bowling (2003), Rock (2005), Noble (2005), Freshman (2006), and Kuttner (2010).

11. For similar claims, see Nikulin (2006) and Roberts (2002).

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