INVITING A DIALOGUE ON 'DIALOGUE'...

HL Fouché & DJ Smit
University of the Western Cape

Abstract

The concept of 'dialogue' can have radically different meanings to different people (Cf Müller 1991; Doeser 1983; Handgraaf 1983; Vroom 1983; Tracy 1981, 1987, 1989). But it can also serve as an umbrella-description for major questions. In this article the ambiguity of 'dialogue' is traced with reference to four well-known positions on dialogue: Gadamer (Trusting dialogue in goodwill ...), Derrida (Suspicious dialogue in counter-position ...), Rorty (Dialogue as therapy that changes our vocabulary ...), and Habermas (Non-coercive dialogue according to rational procedures ...). Some tentative conclusions on different approaches to dialogue are drawn and reflections on the relevance for scholars and for South African (theological; religious; political; scholarly; ethical, etc) discourse are presented.

1. From *contextual hermeneutics* to *dialogue* ...

In recent years a shift in intellectual theological discourse in South Africa can be observed away from 'contextual hermeneutics' to 'dialogue'.

Why the topic, *dialogue*? Why move from *contextual hermeneutics* to *dialogue*?

To approach theology from the point of view of contectuality yielded, among others, an insight into the *ethics of interpretation,* an awareness of power-relations and their impact on the responsibility and accountability of the interpretative acts. The importance of reflection in this regard is evident, particularly in respect of the *teaching* of theology.

However, the emphasis was very much on *particularity*, on taking the specifics of each context seriously. But once the contextual and historical differences, the particularities, are recognized, the issue of continuity or rather *the integrity* of theological education becomes critical. What makes theological education, in all these contextual and particular forms, *theological*? Should, and could, the different contexts *relate* to one another? Is there some form of *commonality* possible, some form of *communication*, some form of relationship, of *dialogue*? So, the importance of *dialogue* between different contexts, traditions and communities presents itself as a major issue.

Many people have strong reservations about the usefulness of the metaphor of *dialogue*. To them, *dialogue* sounds like collaboration, like oppression, like betrayal of the very ideas of *contextuality* and *particularity*. However, it could perhaps be argued that, although the expression *dialogue* carries a variety of radically diverse meanings, it somehow can serve as an umbrella-description for major questions at present. For example:

▪ *Biblical scholars,* in dealing with texts, with historical studies, and with communities of interpretation, face questions of *dialogue* in a number of ways.

▪ *Systematic theologians,* in dealing with traditions, with doctrines, and with different communities of faith, face questions of *dialogue* in a number of ways.

▪ *Practical theologians,* in dealing with experience(s), with culture(s), and with fields-of-action, face questions of *dialogue* in a number of ways.

▪ *All of them together,* theologians working in different contexts, for different publics, and according to different disciplines, face questions of *dialogue* in a number of ways (with the specific context; with the church; with the academy; with society; with one another; etc).

It seems useful, therefore, to start obtaining some clarity on the different ways the expression *dialogue* is used. In order to do that, a discussion on *a dialogue on dialogue* is introduced, keeping the four well-known theoretical approaches to dialogue, namely those of Gadamer, Derrida, Rorty, and Habermas, in mind.

2. What does *dialogue* mean?
Gadamer, Derrida, Rorty, Habermas ...

2.1 Trusting dialogue in goodwill - Gadamer

In his book, *Wahrheit und Metode,* Gadamer describes the event of understanding as a *dialogue* (1975:324-360. Cf Vandenbulcke 1973:141-178 and 1969:211-231; cf also Gadamer 1972a:27-49 and 1968:40-51). But *dialogue* is not the only metaphor he uses to describe the event of understanding. In fact, he uses a string of linked and overlapping metaphors to highlight the multifaceted nature of the event of understanding. In using Gadamer's concept of dialogue in this article, it is necessary to keep in mind this network of metaphors within which Gadamer's concept of dialogue functions.

For Gadamer understanding is something that happens. When people understand, they are drawn into the event of understanding as a player is drawn into a *game* (Gadamer 1975:97-160).[1] They are overcome by the impact of what they are about to understand before they recognise it and are drawn into the process of understanding without noticing it. In a sense we are always already part of the process of understanding. When understanding occurs, it is not something which is applied afterwards; the subject matter *(die Sache)* understood is already worthy of meaning for the understander and thus applied. The process of

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1. Gadamer uses the concept of *game* as the primary metaphor for his description of the experience of art. The hermeneutic implications of his analysis of game are in direct opposition to romantic hermeneutics and any hermeneutics which gives the initiative in the proces of understanding to the person who understands. The metaphor of *game* demonstrates how understanding is more a happening where we are overcome and carried along, than a discursively act of the understander. Furthermore, what is understood in this being carried along, is truth. The understander is overwhelmed and changed in the process of understanding. Cf. Gadamer 1977b:234-240 and 1977c:3-72.

understanding is a *fusion of horizons*[2] in which the horizon of the person understanding and the horizon of the text to be understood come to the fore as a single horizon and thus changes the understander and his or her horizon (Gadamer 1975:284-323). This fusion of horizons is a *dialectical* event[3] in which the interpreter discovers that what is to be understood is different to what had initially been assumed. In this way existing opinions are thwarted (Gadamer 1975:329-344).

Gadamer uses the metaphor of a *dialogue* to describe the subversion of opinion and the realization of a new understanding of a subject matter (*eine Sache*). This analysis of a dialogue can serve as a *model for dialogue - a trusting dialogue in goodwill*.

For Gadamer authentic dialogue takes place between an *I* and a *you* (Gadamer 1975:340-344). As one is dealing here with a *you* who is not *I*, there are implicit *ethical implications*. This calls for an *attitude* with which to enter into the dialogue if the dialogue is to be an authentic dialogue and not smothered or distorted or forced with hidden motives into a particular direction.

Gadamer distinguishes *three kinds of attitudes* towards the *you* which correspond to *three kinds of dialogue*.[4]

- The first attitude towards the *you* is one in which a type of behaviour is derived from human actions and on the basis of that a fixed expectation of the other is built up. In such a dialogue the *I* attempts to predict and understand the *you*'s behaviour, views and beliefs in advance and deals with them on the basis of categories drawn up in advance. For Gadamer such a dialogue corresponds with the methods of the social sciences which simply imitate the methodology of the natural sciences - and are therefore also doomed in advance.[5]

- The second attitude towards the *you* is one which acknowledges the *you as a person*, but a *you* which has no claims on me. In such a dialogue the views of the other are taken as interesting information which are listened

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2. The metaphor of a fusion of horizons is Gadamer's attempt to overcome the problems of the interpreter's prejudices with which a text is read, the temporal distance between the interpreter and the written text or tradition, and Schleiermacher's restriction of hermeneutics to the *subtilitas intelligendi*, apart from the *subtilitas explicandi* and the *subtilitas applicandi*. In a certain sense one could describe Gadamer's whole hermeneutics from the perspective of the *fusion of horizons* as Thiselton (1980) did.

3. Gadamer uses Hegel's concept of experience to explain dialectical events. Experience occurs when something counters one's opinions, when one realizes that something is not as one had assumed it was. From this concept of experience Gadamer postulates the finite nature of human understanding, and not an absolute knowledge as Hegel did. He then uses the concept of dialogue to describe the dialectic experience in which the question has a logical priority over the answer. Cf further Gadamer 1971b:5-30 and 1971c:83-96).

4. Gadamer's analysis of the three types of experience of tradition is intended to clarify the distinctive nature of the event of understanding. It could be claimed therefore that these three types of experience correspond with three types of dialogue.

5. The whole intention of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is precisely to dismiss this kind of approach as untenable. 'Der Sinn meiner Untersuchungen ist ... das allen Verstehensweisen Gemeinsame aufzusuchen und zu zeigen, daß Verstehen niemals ein subjektives Verhalten zu einem gegebenen *Gegenstande* ist, sondern zur Wirkungsgeschichte, und das heißt: zum Sein dessen gehört, was verstanden wird' (Gadamer 1975: 269-275).

to, but which make no impact on the *I*'s *social ethos*. There is no mutual influence. For Gadamer such a dialogue corresponds to the historical consciousness which sees the tradition's historical uniqueness without being affected by it. This is also not authentic dialogue.[6]

■ The third attitude towards the *you* is one in which *the I is open to the you which has something to say to me*. In such a dialogue there is a mutual willingness to be addressed by the (other) *you*. It is a dialogue about something with a *you*. The *I* and the *you* both open themselves to be addressed by and to the impact of what they are talking about. Neither the *I* nor the *you* submit in any way to the other, but place themselves under the control and persuasive power of what is discussed. For Gadamer such a dialogue corresponds with an authentic hermeneutic experience. This is authentic dialogue (Gadamer 1968:13-80, especially 40-52).

In an authentic dialogue in which the discussion partners are open to one another, the *question* plays a prominent role. A question brings openness. Genuine questions are not like rhetorical or pedagogical questions in which the answer is known in advance. They rather challenge alleged truths or opinions. Questions keep the issue under discussion in a state of suspension, unresolved, vague: they balance the relevant issue as an overabundant network of possibilities which cannot be grasped comprehensively. The role of the question is to subvert fixed opinions in the open space of profusion of meaning, so that the partners in the discussion repeatedly know that they do not know.

Yet the question does not only force into *openness*, but it is also *directive* and thus sets boundaries. The question in fact creates a horizon of expectation within which the answer to the question is possible. Every question eliminates other questions as nonsense or inapplicable. The boundaries set by questions thus indicate the *limitations of every dialogue* and thus also the incomplete and ongoing *dialogue that we are*.[7]

To ask a question is not simply a matter of *technique;* it is an *art*. The discussion partners repeatedly discover that the question is forced onto them by the matter itself. The art of conducting a dialogue thus involves having a *questioning attitude*. The questioning attitude of the Socratic dialogue has maieutic productivity which allows room for the issue to come to the fore in language. The opinion or truth or consensus which the participants in the dialogue arrive at is then not the opinion of one of the two, but a new meaning to which the dialogue has led.

Wir suchen von dem Gaspräch aus, das wir sind, dem Dunkel der Sprache nahezukommen ... Zunächst halten wir fest, daß die Sprache, in der etwas zur Sprache kommt, kein verfügbarer Besitz des einen oder des anderen der

6. In the second part of his book Gadamer points out the pitfalls in the historical consciousness which recognizes the difference and the pastness of the past, but denies its legitimate claims on us (Gadamer 1975:162-249). The history of understanding of the classics reflects the shift from truth to information. In the past all literature was called classical which expressed the truth, had legitimate claims on us and was worthy of imitation. Under the tyranny of the historical consciousness, it simply became an indication of a period (Gadamer 1975:269-275)

7. 'Das Gespräch das wir sind' - a quotation from a poem by Hölderlin.

Gesprächspartner ist. Jedes Gespräch setzt eine gemeinsame Sprache voraus, oder besser: es bildet eine gemeinsame Sprache heraus ... Die Verständigung über die Sache, die im Gespräch zustande kommen soll, bedeutet daher notwendigerweise, daß im Gespräch eine gemeinsame Sprache erst erarbeitet wird. Das ist nicht ein äußerer Vorgang der Adjustierung von Werkzeugen, ja es ist nicht einmal richtig zu sagen, daß sich die Partner aneinander anpassen, vielmehr geraten sie beide im gelingenden Gespräch unter die Wahrheit der Sache, die sie zu einer neuen Gemeinsamkeit verbindet. Verständigung im Gespräch ist nicht ein bloßes Sichausspielen und Durchsetzen des eigenen Standpunktes, sondern eine Verwandlung ins Gemeinsame hin, in der man nicht bleibt, was man war (Gadamer 1975:360).

For Gadamer authentic dialogue is thus possible only between participants in a dialogue who are prepared to listen to one another, who are willing to be told something by the other one, who have *goodwill* towards one another, who are prepared to give in and allow themselves to be persuaded by the power and legitimate claims of the relevant issue (*die Sache*).

Dialogue, according to Gadamer, requires an *ethical attitude of goodwill*. This attitude of goodwill is however, not so much directed to the dialogue partner, as to the good and truth as the expected outcome or consensus of the dialogue. Therefore dialogue also requires *phronesis* - a concept Gadamer uses in line with Plato and Aristotle (Gadamer 1975:295-307, 1978:24-40, 93-103 and 1983b:73-76; Aristotle:1976:203-225/NE 1138b18-1145a11). *Phronesis* is *prudence* or *practical wisdom* and it is the ability to concretise the general good in a specific situation. It is something totally different from *theoretical knowledge* (*episteme*) because it is practical. It is also different from an *art* or *technical skill* (*techne*) because in the *application* of a general rule in a particular case the technicians themselves are not involved. In the case of *phronesis* the persons who concretise the general good in a specific situation are themselves totally involved.

Phronesis in the ongoing dialogue tends to create a *common solidarity* so that people behave in solidarity with each other, even in a global solidarity. By doing so, it tends to change peoples' individualistic attitude, that was characterised by *Heraclete*, the weeping philosopher, as: *Reason (logos) is common to all. But the people behave as if every one has his or her private reason* (Gadamer 1976b:77, cf especially from 68-77).

Gadamer's concept of dialogue is thus imbedded in the love for wisdom, in the seeking for truth and what is good for the participants in the dialogue. In so far it is a participating in the *dialogue that we are*, dialogue is for the good of society, and also for humankind as a whole.[8]

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8. The relevance of practical philosophy and its possibilities for our orientation in the world today is obvious. Cf for instance Riedel 1972 and 1974; Rossouw 1980:57-68; Simpson 1987:15-19; Sullivan 1987:21-44; Comay 1987:83-98; Bubner 1988:147-193; Schuchman 1979:41-50; Van Niekerk 1994b; Van der Walt 1984). Gadamer's concepts of *phronesis* and of *practical philosophy* are crucial for the understanding of his view on dialogue, for the main thrust of his philosophical hermeneutics and for the comprehension of his notion of the *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Cf Gadamer 1983b:67-76, 1983a, 1976a, 1976b:54-77, 1976c:78-109. Cf also Fouché's dissertation on Gadamer which is in preparation and due for 1995 (Fouché:1995).

2.2   Suspicious dialogue in counter-position - Derrida

Whereas dialogue for Gadamer occurs in a *living exchange*, for Derrida it occurs in *written text* (Derrida 1982b:109-136; cf also D P Michelfelder & R Palmer (edd) 1989:1; Hoy 1978:77-84). For him language is always already text. The written word is already a disrupted sign, infiltrated by absence. This is why Derrida always remains on the alert as to how otherness lurks within meaning and how it is constantly impossible to decide which possibility is the true and authentic one.

Gadamer is like a *rabbi* who conveys the truth of the ancient text respectfully and faithfully; Derrida is like a *poet* who sees the impossible possibilities in the text and caricatures it in a welter of associations.[9]

This is also why the historic meeting between Gadamer and Derrida was itself such a surprising dialogue. Not that there was much dialogue in any normal sense of the word. Gadamer assumed that you participate in a dialogue in order to be understood. *Goodwill* is the will to overcome your own narrow-mindedness and to understand the other. Gadamer himself is therefore the *epitome of goodwill* - he would bend over backwards to find common ground with Derrida.

Derrida withdraws from this eagerness to engage in dialogue. He does not answer Gadamer but talks about Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche. When Gadamer then shifts to the problem of Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche in order to find common ground for a discussion with Derrida, Derrida withdraws once again (D P Michelfelder & R Palmer 1989:21-71 and also Gadamer's reply on the debate 75-125). In John Simon's words: '... *even this move (of Gadamer) will fail, because Derrida's strategy is to be always only a counter position and never a position*' (Simon 1989:162-175 and D P Michelfelder & R Palmer 1989:11-12)[10]

In his *meeting* with Gadamer - it is hardly a *dialogue*! - Derrida engages in a strategy of irony in which he wishes to overwhelm his *discussion partner* through deliberate misunderstanding. He parodies and makes ironic. He cannot separate himself from his image as an ultra-ironic participant in discussion (G B Madison 1989:192-198; D P Michelfelder & R Palmer 1989:13).

In this process Derrida is the *epitome* of his conception of *différance*. *Différance* is the continuing *difference* and *deferring* of the network of

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9.   The *rabbi* and *poet* are two metaphorical characters for the hermeneutical and deconstructive interpreter - a distinction Derrida made in 'n piece on the Jewish author Edmond Jabes. The rabbi is the man of the book whose main task is to keep the people true to the book by calling them back to the stone tablets and the ark. The poet is the weed that grows between the crack in the broken tablets, irreligious, free and constantly in exile. The hermeneutical interpreter or rabbi is religiously subordinated to an original text and conceives him- or herself as a humble commentator that wants to be transparant, superfluous and dispensible. The deconstructive interpreter or poet is autonomous and impudent, nearly an outlaw. She does not bow her head to the sacred text, and when she interprets, it is in a wild and free fashion, lacking the piety and respect for the original (Caputo 1987:116-117).

10. Cf also S Ijsseling 1986:9-27 in which he characterises Derrida's oeuvre (in Derrida's own words) as *grafted onto existing and accessible texts*. Ijsseling further characterises it as *hors-d'oeuvre, par-ergon, pro-gramma, pré-texte*. Derrida thus has no distinctive personal thesis, but only provides marginal notes to existing texts.

relationships within which meaning emerges (Brogan 1988:31-40). Through parody and irony he is simply playing the game of meaning, which is necessary for dialogue.

It would be unfair to think that Derrida is *against dialogue* or that he *did not conduct a dialogue* with Gadamer or that he has *no contribution* to make to the *thinking about dialogue*. It would be more appropriate to see that he has a *tempering function* in the dialogue on dialogue which could lead to a fuller realization of what we are doing when we engage in a dialogue.

Where Gadamer wishes to make a *constructive* contribution towards the understanding and conducting of an authentic dialogue, Derrida wishes to make a *deconstructive* contribution to the dialogue on dialogue. His playful parody of the supposed consensus which participants in a discussion intend to reach in trust in a dialogue destroys goodwill so that consensus is regarded with greater sober-mindedness and suspicion.

Derrida's contribution to the dialogue on dialogue is to demonstrate that constructive contributions should not be taken too seriously but with a pinch of salt. His *subversive suspicion* directed at the scaffolding does not lead to the collapse of the construction, but rather - in a playful way - introduces what is joyful and mirth-provoking, and draws the marginalised being into the centre of the discussion.[11]

2.3   Dialogue as therapy that changes our vocabulary - Rorty

Rorty characterises the tendency of Western thought as a search for foundations, a striving for the ideals of objectivity, rationality and truth. His intention is to show that these ideals are unattainable by proposing a better system of thinking which could liberate these thinkers from enslavement to unattainable ideals. His *intention is therapeutic*: he proposes new metaphors for thought, characterises his opponents as excessively serious and 'plagued by unnecessary hang-ups and afflicted by the unfortunate tendency to *scratch where it doesn't itch*'.[12]

For him a better way of thinking is *total acceptance* of the *contingency* of existence in which it is meaningless to search for the truth. Truth and objectivity are simply what is *current opinion* within a particular society. When you say to people that they are telling the truth, then this is not an appreciation of their

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11. Gadamer's notion of *Sein das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache* bring to the fore that what we can understand of being, had arrived in language. There is however always the twilight and vague dimension on the boundaries or margins of being and language. Being, as an abundance of possibilities, lurks on the margin of language and forces to enter the light (Gadamer 1975:415-465 and Fouché 1995). Gadamer, aware of the abundance of possibilties on the margins, concentrates in a constructive way on what already arrived in language; while Derrida concentrates on the margins, on what is yet to arrive.

12. '... Rorty's various writings should be read as narratives which remap the intellectual scene, and as witty and slightly comic stories about the vaulting ambition of foundationalism designed at liberating us from it, and not at constructing systematic alternatives to it. His intent is therapeutic and hence, an important part of his anti-foundationalism consists in his rhetorical style - the new metaphors which he introduces, the frequently frivolous and ironic tone, his characterisation of his opponents as excessively serious, plagued by unnecessary hang-ups and afflicted by the unfortunate tendency to *scratch where it doesn't itch*, etc.' J G Allan 1992:53. Cf. also A Van Niekerk 1992:96-114.

statements, but of the people themselves - you are complimenting them, scratching their backs. In doing so you are simply telling them that you associate yourself with the current opinions of the society in which they function (Allan 1992:53).

For Rorty the philosopher is thus not somebody who thinks from an epistemological or metaphysical perspective, but rather one who thinks upon an *ethical basis* which leads to solidarity with the people of that society and their views.

For Rorty the best way of achieving solidarity with the society in which you find yourself is through *dialogue*. Dialogue is one tradition in the midst of many others. But it must be extended *as no one has yet come up with a better idea*. This is rather like Winston Churchill's typifying of democracy as *the worst form of government imaginable except for all the others which have been tried so far.*

In dialogue different views and current opinions are *interwoven* in an ongoing process. The nature of dialogue is thus not a search for truth as something external to the situation of the dialogue, but being in a state of solidarity with the people of the society in which you are living. Within the Western mentality founded on epistemology and metaphysics, dialogue amounts to a scientific investigation within the universe; in Rorty's conception dialogue is participation in discussion within society. It is dialogue between people *whose paths through life have fallen together, united by civility rather than by a common goal, much less by common ground* (Rorty 1980:318).

The conditions for dialogue are related to Michael Oakeshott's idea of the *conversation of humankind*:

> This is characterized by an absence of previously fixed goals, requirements for participation, lists of acceptable topics and conversational moves, hierarchies of membership, etc. In Oakeshott's words, 'Conversation is not an enterprise designed to yield an extrinsic profit, a contest where a winner gets a prize, nor is it an activity of exegesis; it is an unrehearsed intellectual adventure. It is with conversation as with gambling, its significance lies neither in winning nor in losing, but in wagering ... In it different universes of discourse meet, acknowledge each other and enjoy an oblique relationship which neither requires not forecasts their being assimilated to one another' (M Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, London, Methuen, 1967, quoted in J G Allan 1992:53).

Although Müller characterises Rorty's conception of dialogue as *dialogue for the sake of dialogue* (HP Müller 1991:98-115) as there is nothing outside the dialogue - there is only dialogue! - there is in fact a purpose for Rorty ... an *ethical purpose*. Dialogue is therapy to free people from foundational thinking for the sake of a new vocabulary, a new way of living, so that they may become new people.[13]

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13. 'Since *education* sounds bit too flat, and *Bildung* a bit too foreign, I shall use edification to stand for this project of finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking.' (Rorty 1980:360). He concludes his book by saying: 'The only point I would insist on is that philosophers' moral concern should be with continuing the conversation of the West, rather than

2.4   Non-coercive dialogue according to rational procedures - Habermas.

It is not really necessary to remind oneself of Jürgen Habermas' work on dialogue, on democracy, on discourse, on communicative action.

Habermas has always been interested in *dialogue* (for the importance of dialogue in his earlier work, cf Strasser 1972 and 1974; Smit 1976). He has been called *the last great rationalist*, referring to his very basic choice for and belief in rationality. In his *Legitimation Crisis* he himself called this *a partisanship on behalf of reason*. An anthology of some of his early essays had therefore been called *Toward a rational society* and the translated first volume of his major work was called *Reason and the rationalization of society*. For Habermas, ideology-criticism should take place through rationalization. Why? Because he believes that rationalization will lead to a better, more human, life in society. He trusts *the Enlightenment's promise of a life informed by reason*, the emancipatory, liberating, humanizing power of reason. In this way he remains faithful to the critical theory.

But how should ideology-criticism take place through rationalization? This is where dialogue and democratisation become important, *true* democratisation, where everyone affected is really and fully informed, empowered and in the position to take part in a rational discussion, and not a *false* democracy as it is found in political systems all over, where falsehood, mystification, propaganda, and hegemony are all part and parcel of the so-called democracy itself. He links true democracy with *non-coercive dialogue*, with his popular ideas on *an ideal speech-situation*, an open, free and informed discussion in which no partner has the power to force or influence the other into accepting ideas. In fact, his work on this *ideal speech situation* can be seen as a formal attempt to define ideology-criticism (Geuss 1984:64). The *ideal speech situation* is a situation of absolutely uncoerced and unlimited discussion between completely free and equal human agents. In such a discussion, principles like comprehensibility (or intelligibility), truth, appropriateness and authenticity of viewpoints and contributions become important criteria. Of course, such an ideal speech situation - or, in political terms: complete democratisation - will never be fully realised, but instead functions as *a regulative idea*, something to strive after, in order to achieve it as fully as possible under particular circumstances. One should, however, be careful not to overestimate the power of *reason* and *rationalization* in this regard. Habermas is very critical of what is commonly called *rationality*. His ideology-criticism is ultimately a criticism of ideological forms and claims of rationality itself. He criticises *Technik und Wissenschaft als 'Ideologie'* (technology and science as *ideology*). Why? Because so-called rationality in a modern capitalist, technocratic society is often a rhetorical, ideological slogan in the service of very particular collective interests. The basic human interest of emancipation, both intellectually and socio-historically, is not served by such rationality, but instead obstructed. Therefore the title of the translated second volume of his major work is *A critique of functionalist reason*.

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with insisting upon a place for the traditional problems of modern philosophy within that conversation' (Rorty 1980:388).

When he, therefore, analyses types of democracy, eg in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, a historical reconstruction with systematic purpose, (only recently translated into English and presently discussed in the USA), he works with this basic interest in mind: to argue for a dialogue without coercion to be implemented, in order to facilitate ideology-criticism through truly rational discussions between equal and free partners.

More recently, Habermas,[14] together with K-O Apel,[15] developed their so-called *discourse ethics*. Both in German[16] and in English[17] there has been a lively discussion of Habermas' recent thought and specifically of the discourse-ethics.[18] Several theologians have also joined the conversation.[19] Habermas is convinced that this hope of the Enlightenment to attain a rational society, that will also be free of ideological misunderstanding and domination, can only be achieved through *communicative action* or, more precisely, *action oriented to reach understanding (verständigungsorientiertes Handeln)*. He distinguishes this from *action oriented to success*, which can again be divided into *instrumental action*, and *strategic action*. He argues that in real democratic discourse, or *dialogue without constraint or domination*, the earlier *ideal speech situation*, a form of *communicative rationality* can be established in society. He arrives at his well-known four criteria by analysing the *validity-claims* at work in every speech-act. Without entering into detail, it is clear that his *discourse* or *communicative ethics* promises mutual understanding by means of a rational, informed, non-coercive public dialogue.

Summary:

- For *Gadamer* the emotional input in dialogue is *unruffled awaiting* and an *adventurous risk*. It is after all a dialogue on the truth that surpasses the conversationists, it is a conversation about something that exceeds the participants, something which persuades them and which crystallises in an

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14. For Habermas, see especially his two-volume work on *communicative competence*, translated into English by Thomas McCarthy and published as *The theory of communicative action* (Habermas 1984 and 1987). Since then, he has published much more on discourse ethics, eg J Habermas, *Erläuterungen zur Diskursethik*, as well as other essays, in *Erläuterungen zur Diskursethik* (Habermas 1991:119-226); *Diskursethik - Notizen zu einem Begründungsprogramm* (Habermas 1983), some relevant essays in *Texte und Kontexte* (Habermas 1992a - 2. Auflage), as well as a recent application on questions of law and justice, *Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechsstaats* (Habermas 1992b).

15. Cf eg Apel 1973:358-436; K-O Apel, D Böhler & W Kuhlmann (Hrsg.) 1984, the important K-O Apel 1988 and K-O Apel & M Kettner 1992.

16. The most authoritative German commentator from theological circles is Edmund Arens eg in E Arens (Hrsg.) 1989, and his essay in E Arens, O John & P Rottländer (Hrsg.) 1991:145-200, but also his *Christopraxis* 1992: (especially)18-44, and his earlier Arens 1982: (especially)173-324; and Arens 1989b.

17. For English introductions to Habermas, see eg S K White 1988 and D M Rasmussen 1990 (with a bibliography), and Thompson 1984.

18. From the many studies on discourse or communicative ethics, see eg Rasmussen 1990:56-74; S Benhabib & F Dallmayr (edd) 1991; W Rehg 1994; A K Ploeger 1989; A Honneth & H Joas (Hrsg.) 1986; Ingram 1982; Poster 1990; Rasmussen et al 1990; and A Honneth's important *Kritik der Macht* 1986. More popular, W Bender 1988:75-91 and even A Grözinger 1991:18-70, 197-209.

19. For practical applications, also in theology, J Assmann & D Harth (Hrsg.) 1990:11-48; H J Höhn 1989:179-198; and the very informative D S Browning & F S Fiorenza (edd) 1992.

event of understanding ... and during this eventful conversation they are changed so that no one is the same afterwards.

■ As opposed to this the emotional input in dialogue for *Rorty* is *energetic responsibility*. There is nothing outside of the dialogue which can support it or guide it or guarantee anything ... there are only the participants who attempt to convince each other that their own view is better than that of the other participants. For this they have to plunge in enthusiastically in order to make a difference to peoples' vocabulary. In Cilliers' words, interpreting Lyotard: *enter into the agonistics of the network!*[20]

■ For *Derrida* the emotional input is *humorous playfulness*. Nothing is taken too seriously. Every opinion must be taken with a pinch of salt and played off against other possibilities which have become realities in the text. And so he *paraderridises* dialogue.

■ For Habermas the emotional input in dialogue is *rational responsibility*. His *discourse* or *communicative ethics* promises mutual understanding by means of a *rational, informed, non-coercive public dialogue*.

Perhaps it would be best, in line with a typical post-modernist approach or simply in line with Paul Celan's words - *'wahr spricht wer Schatten spricht'*[21], not to choose between these alternatives, but to juggle them in the awareness of the abundance of possibilities! Different metaphors, including *dialogue*, function in different ways in different historical situations. What may be more suitable in one situation, may be problematic in another.

3. Towards *a hermeneutics of the other*

So: Is it possible to draw some conclusions for the present situation from these brief reminders of some of the well-known theoretical approaches to *dialogue*?

Many people, including theologians and social ethicists, and for many different reasons, do not like the idea of *dialogue*. Stanley Hauerwas once wrote that 'the two most basic metaphors determining how the Christian life is to be understood are those of *journey* and *dialogue*' - and he prefers the first (Hauerwas 1985:xxvii).

There are many reasons for such suspicion and criticism. The ambiguities in the expression *dialogue* are clear. It can be used specifically and technically, or generally and vaguely. It can be seen as a rational and liberating meeting of people, and it can be seen as oppressive and coercive, as domination over people

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20 Lyotard speaks of the *agonistic aspect of society* (Lyotard 1984:16) in showing how information functions in the ongoing discourse in society. There are continually moves that provoke countermoves as part of a strategy to hold the power balance intact. A new statement or unexpected move (not merely a reactional countermove) is a displacement in the power game and increases knowledge. In this power game every one, also *dissenting voices* have to 'enter into the *agonistics of the network* where their relevance is dynamically determined through competition and cooperation in terms of the history as well as the changing needs and goals of the system' (Cilliers 1993:195).

21. A prominent and crucial phrase in the poem *'Sprich auch du'* (Celan 1975:135).

without power. Even positions on the opposite extremes of the spectrum of human communication, from ignoring the other completely, thus refusing dialogue in the normal sense of the word, to making war with or committing violence against the other, can be interpreted as forms of dialogue.

Still, whatever one wants to call the process, ie. whether one prefers the expression *dialogue* or not, the present necessity for South Africans to learn the skills to live with one another seems obvious. Whether one refers to theological, to ecclesial, to religious, to political, to public, to scholarly, or to ethical discourse: people seem to agree that we need some kind of *living together*, some kind of *dialogue* with people we have not known before.

In many countries and societies people are presently facing similar challenges. Some see it as part of the *post-modern* condition (cf Mark Kline Taylor 1990: celebrating plurality, respecting narrativity, opposing oppression). Some see it as part of the *radical political changes* of the last decade, particularly in Eastern Europe. Some prefer to talk about the formation of *civil societies* (cf Van Soosten 1988; Bellah et al 1991; Cohen & Arato 1992) and then they ask questions about the role of the so-called *public church*, ie a church in inter-action, or dialogue, with public life (cf Marty 1981; Thiemann 1991; Smit 1994a and 1994b). Some prefer to talk about the necessity to learn to *live in multi-cultural societies* (cf Huber 1992 for an excellent discussion; also Schlesinger 1992). In South Africa, some prefer to talk about *nation-building*, or *national reconciliation*. Many people are interested in the need to find *a common moral language* (cf Stout 1988; Smit 1994c and 1994d), or *common values*. Often, people talk about the need to accept *the other* (the theme of the German Protestant Kirchentag in 1993, cf *Nehmet einander an* 1992; Sponheim 1993; Keifert 1992; Ricoeur 1992), to *live with the stranger* (Fuchs et al 1988; Koenig 1985; Ogletree 1985; Micksch 1992; Koyama 1993; *Rondom het Woord* 1993; Kristeva 1990; Hof 1993; Jagersma 1993), to *learn to love the enemy* (cf Huber 1982; Klassen 1984; Lapide 1984 and 1988). They talk about *solidarity* (Arens 1989). They talk about *dialogue.*

Perhaps a kind of *hermeneutics of the other* is needed, as Theo Sundermeier has recently called it (Sundermeier 1991, also Sundermeier 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992; also Geffré 1991 on *a hermeneutics of dialogue*; and De Lange 1993), provided that one takes *the other* in a broad sense, to include eg texts, history, etc. That would explain the need to move from *contextual hermeneutics* to a *hermeneutics of the other* (cf the argument of Balz 1991). The emphasis on contextuality, on particularity, however important, must be complemented by a move towards *the other*, respecting the otherness, the strangeness, the particularity, and the legitimate claims, of *the other*. And perhaps this is what *dialogue* proper should be.

In David Tracy's work, this has also been the shift in emphasis in his own way of using the notion of *dialogue. Dialogue* (or *conversation*, his earlier root-metaphor for interpretation) has always been an important notion in Tracy's work. It played a major role in his approach towards pluralism (Tracy 1978) and in his search for imaginative analogical relations between a plurality of traditions (Tracy 1981). The idea of theology as *public discourse* is obviously closely related (many of his articles through the years).

In *Plurality and ambiguity* (1987) he explains:

> Conversation is a rare phenomenon, even for Socrates. It is not a
> confrontation. It is not a debate. It is not an exam. It is questioning itself. It is
> a willingness to follow the question wherever it may go. It is dialogue (Tracy
> 1987:18).

However, according to his own admission in *Dialogue with the other* (1990), he
takes dialogue increasingly seriously:

> Theological reflection on dialogue itself ... suggests that only where the
> subject-matter and not the subject's consciousness is allowed to take over does
> true dialogue happen. Every subject inevitably enters that unnerving place, the
> dialogue, with certain expectations on what the relevant questions are and who
> the other may be. It cannot be overemphasized that, if genuine dialogue is to
> occur, we must be willing to put everything at risk. Otherwise, we do not
> allow attention to the logic of questioning elicited by this particular subject
> matter (however different or other - even, at times, terrifyingly other, as
> Levinas correctly insists) ... For some (myself included) one or another liberal
> version of Christian *inclusivism* and *finality* once seemed adequate to the
> pluralistic situation ... But the liberal inclusivist ways, too, I now realize, must
> also be put at risk ... (Tracy 1990:95-96).

Tracy's comment already shows one way of learning about *dialogue* and about
respect for the particularity of *the other*: the work of Emmanuel Levinas (cf
particularly Levinas 1963, 1978, 1981, 1983, 1987; and the excellent studies by
Burggraeve 1985; Casper 1984 and 1991; Henrix 1984; Pollefeyt 1994; also
Critchley 1992, for a *dialogue* between Derrida and Levinas; Gibbs 1992;
Hoffmann 1989; Klehr et al 1991). His influence is present in many of these
discussions.

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