

The Power of Dialogue in a Time of Global Crisis
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Abstracts



Healing the Wounds of Separation through Dialogue *by Virginia Benson*

In the context of recent dialogical efforts at the Ikeda Center on “John Dewey, Daisaku Ikeda, and the Quest for a New Humanism,” this paper explores resonance in the philosophical insights of this American Pragmatist and Buddhist humanist concerning dialogue, diversity, democratic community, and the nature of religious experience. Initial findings of the Ikeda Center and collaborating Dewey scholars are offered in a spirit of open-ended inquiry.

Both philosophers attribute a crucial role to dialogue and social interaction in developing the self’s greatest potential. Both place great importance on inner transformation and envision a holistic self, variously described as a “greater” or “wider” self. This greater self can break through the constraints of the ego-driven self and thus create social value and growth. Open-minded, compassionate dialogue with others, especially “different” others, plays a crucial role in developing this larger self.

Dewey and Ikeda see in the United States a potential proving ground for ideal patterns of respecting diversity within community. Both hold out hope that Americans will awaken to a naturalistic conception of “the religious” realized through daily life experience. Within this social environment, enthusiasm for mutually transformative dialogue would challenge discriminatory attitudes and generate greater unity. In Dewey’s view, out of such unity could emerge an inter-generationally cultivated heritage of values—“a common faith that has always been implicitly the common faith of mankind.”

In seeking to answer the practical question of how a common faith might be realized on a global scale, the paper’s conclusion revisits its opening quote from Ikeda. Ikeda’s idea is that dialogue has the power to create an open space—an ocean—for nourishing and sustaining greater selves. From personal experience in the SGI community, which seeks to put Ikeda’s idea of open dialogue into practice globally, I identify five “currents” or qualities of social interaction that have emerged through dialogue. Currents of friendship, of appreciation, of lifelong learning, of inspiration, and of encouragement are described in practice.

Climate Change and the Dialogue of Cultures *by Joseph Camilleri*

Climate change has rightly come to occupy centre stage in national and international life. Though some continue to question the emerging scientific consensus, there can be little doubt that human intervention is contributing in significant ways to our ecological predicament. Understandably, much attention is currently directed to what societies and the international community should do to reduce, if not reverse, the harmful effects of greenhouse gas emissions.

In the ensuing debate, not to say scramble for economic and political advantage, diverse stakeholders have focused on the technical and economic solutions to the problem. Culture has been strangely absent in these discussions. Yet, culture is central to any viable response.

Culture refers to mindsets, lifestyles, societal fears, anxieties and aspirations. It refers therefore to the diversity of cultural contexts and traditions. Precisely because climate change is a global phenomenon, it requires negotiation as much between cultures, religions and civilisations as it does between economies and politics.

This paper addresses two closely interlinked questions:

- Is culture destined to be part of the problem or part of the solution?
- How well prepared are we to bring the ‘dialogue of cultures and civilisations’ to bear on the Great Debate of the 21st Century?

Enlarging Boundaries of Compassion in a Time of Global Crisis *by Kevin Clements*

This paper will map out why the enlargement of boundaries of compassion (at personal, national and global levels) is a pre-requisite for generating conditions conducive to generative dialogue and for building institutions capable of realizing sustainable development, just peace and collaborative problem solving in the 21st century. The global challenges facing the world in 2030—population pressure, climate change, food and water shortages, urbanization and militarism—will be accompanied by inequality, marginalization, suffering and misfortune, which will stretch the compassionate disposition of the affluent North. If there is no political commitment to compassionate responses at the levels of the individual, nation, region and global system the prospects for peace are bleak. If there is a commitment to compassion the prospects are more positive.

Dialogue between Religions for Peace and Solidarity in the World *by M'hamed Fantar*

The globalization of the financial crisis has sparked and also revealed an economic crisis on a global scale: many industrial companies and banks had to declare bankruptcy and, due to this fact, are no longer able to keep their employees, their skills, or their management staff, whom they had relied upon to provide physical and intellectual strength. This had repercussions for those other small and medium-sized companies which, in turn, found themselves unable to survive since they had been dependent on these large businesses. This world-wide phenomenon resulted in a huge rise in unemployment rates and dire effects on poverty levels which, well before the catastrophe of September 11th, 2001, were at record highs. Famine is ravaging Africa – a sick continent which, after slavery, triangular commerce, and colonization, continues to experience war, misery, instability, and genocides. Furthermore, this planetary crisis presents several facets. In addition to the economic and financial aspects, there is the nuclear issue, as well as problems related to dissuasive armament, control of energy-related resources, migration flows, etc.

If we are convinced of the universal nature of this crisis and of the danger that it has brought about, what must we do to save the world? Faced with numerous problems, which in any case must be identified, we must find adequate solutions. Since this crisis is global in nature, and the danger, a collective one that threatens the entire human race, no single person can live alone. This means that one could not possibly build a life-saving boat exclusively for oneself. The salvation of humanity and of the universe can only be an action undertaken by all and for the sake of the entire human race.

Since this is the case, let us together find a beneficial solution through dialogue, a dialogue founded upon good faith and respect toward the interlocutor, whoever he or she may be and wherever he or she may be. Our duty is to ponder deeply on this planetary crisis. The problems seem to demand an ethical and moral resolution which, along with its religious dimension, also includes political, economic, social, and cultural considerations

Dialogue's Transformative Power to Create Understanding for Resolving Conflicts *by Ved P. Nanda*

This paper initially studies dialogue's transformative power through shared exploration to bring greater understanding for resolving disputes. It will study the role of dialogue in several specific contexts. These include the search for peace in Sierra Leone, as key figures gathered in Freetown to discuss the prospects for justice and reconciliation and also explored the potential impact of the Lome Agreement's proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission; various attempts at bringing together Palestinians and Israelis; civil society leaders coming together during the Northern Ireland troubles. The paper also discusses the contribution of several dialogues initiated by individuals, including those by President Ikeda, with his consistent focus on nuclear abolition and global peace.

Peace through Listening: Conversations across Time and Place *by Sarah Wider*

We never speak alone. We are always in conversation, part of a dialogue in which every voice seeks understanding. Words can be lifelines connecting a person with a future they could not imagine. All too often, they are deathlines taking life through the violence they foster. What kinds of words now dominate our lives? How are those words voiced? Is it a cacophony of conflicting cries, people pleading to be heard, no one listening?

As my students recently said to me, the power of listening, though often overlooked, is not to be underestimated. In an age when so many seem to be talking, we need to explore listening. What it is and what it does. How it shapes the words we speak. How do we create a community of listeners, a community in true conversation so that healthful action may arise from living words?

How will we use our words for the future? At a time when violence seems to have become the universal language, many of us call for a renewal of conversation and a new ethic of dialogue. I have heard this call from the students I teach at Colgate, from the students I have spoken with at

Soka University of Japan, Soka Women's College, and Soka University of America, from the older community members I have spoken with in the places I call home. This paper itself is an extended conversation, sharing my students' thoughts with you the reader as we consider together both the impediments to and the encouragements of conversation. Vowing that the conversation will not end here, will not be only more words on a page, we seek ways of connecting listeners and speakers across time and place so that the many cries and crises of our day do not end in the noise of violent despair.

Daisaku Ikeda's Philosophy of Dialogue *by Olivier Urbain*

Daisaku Ikeda, the founder of the Toda Institute and president of the Soka Gakkai International lay Buddhist organization, has held more than 7,000 dialogues with various people including artists, academics, and political and opinion leaders, and he has published more than 50 volumes of dialogues in book form.

The author believes that for Ikeda, the main goal of dialogue is to bring out the best in oneself and others in order to let our common humanity shine. It is this type of exchange which is most needed at the personal, local, and global levels to find effective solutions to the planetary crises facing humanity today. Participation of all people in a process of dialogue concerning our most pressing issues in the spirit of deliberative democracy is the crucial factor for humanity's future.

This presentation will explore the similarities between Ikeda's emphasis on the worth of each person through the dialogical process and Jurgen Habermas's concept of "communicative rationality." Links with Socrates, Montaigne and Buber will also be mentioned.

Some of the dialogical methods and strategies used by Ikeda will be described, with illustrative examples. Finally the whirlwind of dialogues characterizing Ikeda's activities for peace for more than six decades will be explored.

Deadly Theories and the Limits of Cultural Rationality *by Nur Yalman*

Our thought processes operate on the basis of categories. We have cultural concepts of what is right and wrong, of what exists, of the past and the future. These are cultural categories which may differ for different linguistic groups. In the Middle Ages in Europe people had concepts of the universe that had to be altered as a result of the developments in science.

Systematic developments in knowledge in the field of science, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, medicine eventually created a "modern" world where the ancient social understandings, especially those developed around the religions of mankind, found themselves in need of new perspectives. Social and political sciences pretending to be just like the physical sciences have attempted to fill in the gap left after the ebb of religious knowledge at the ancient Universities of the West. As a consequence, political scientists took over the role of Cassandra to foretell the future. The late Samuel Huntington was one of those Cassandras whose predictions have been

avidly embraced by a sympathetic public ready to believe his prophesies. He foretold the "Clash of Civilizations" especially between the Western Christian World and Islam.

Now after the human disasters in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Pakistan and terrible tensions in the rest of the world, these outlandish claims need to be reexamined in the sober light of world events. Was Huntington right? Or has the US made some major blunders in its conception of the "enemy" because of Huntington's theories? What is going on in Afghanistan and Pakistan? Is it "Islamic terrorism" or is it something quite different? How does "Islamophobia" in Europe contribute to the confusion? It is quite obvious that serious "dialogue" on these vital issues is badly needed.