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To cite this article: Mari Lee Mifsud & Scott D. Johnson (2000) Dialogic, dialectic, and rhetoric: Exploring human dialogue across the discipline, Southern Communication Journal, 65:2-3, 91-104, DOI: 10.1080/10417940009373160

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10417940009373160

Published online: 01 Apr 2009.

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DIALOGIC, DIALECTIC, AND RHETORIC: Exploring Human Dialogue Across the Discipline

Mari Lee Mifsud and Scott D. Johnson

In the communication discipline, human dialogue is studied by both social scientists and humanists. Social scientists situate dialogue in dialectic; humanists situate dialogue in rhetoric. Generally, their work proceeds without acknowledgment of the other, perpetuating what we identify as central concerns for the discipline: (a) The isolation of dialectic and rhetoric as distinct subjects of analysis; (b) the theoretical antagonism of dialectic and rhetoric; (c) the political antagonism of the humanistic and social scientific sides of the discipline; and (d) the stabilization of both the theory of human dialogue and the methods used to study it. This essay problematizes the study of human dialogue in the communication discipline and suggests that future directions in dialogic theory and research show ways of engaging dialectic and rhetoric in an authentic rather than antagonistic dialogue.

The communication discipline is uniquely positioned within the academy, where interdisciplinary studies are becoming the preferred means of knowledge-making. This unique position arises, in part, from the way humanistic rhetorical studies and social scientific communication studies are drawn together in the discipline. This diversity has allowed communication scholarship to proceed along many fronts, pursuing answers to questions about human interaction through the application of varied perspectives, methods, and goals. However, this diversity can also lead to decreasing dialogue, misunderstanding, and closed conversations. "Are rhetoric and science incompatible?" was a question considered by Craig (1990). His answer suggests that the diversity of approaches in our discipline has been, indeed, both a blessing and a curse: "Rhetoric versus science polarized the speech discipline from the twenties through the sixties. . . But the speech tradition, however much refracted, will continue through our discourse, and may shed important light on questions that will arise concerning disciplinary identity, the relevance of communication inquiry to practice, and the interrelations among diverse scholarly methods" (Craig, 1990, p. 313). Some might conclude that Craig’s assertion is overly optimistic, though recent attempts to reduce dependence on traditional humanistic/social scientific divisions in curricula and research seem to suggest progress in similarly positive directions (e.g., Clair & Kunkel, 1998; Condit, 1990; Smith & Turner, 1995).

Somewhat ironically, though, communication continues to suffer from relatively poor cross-disciplinary communication. In most cases, scholars focus their graduate studies, teaching, and thinking in one area of the discipline, avoiding (sometimes even feeling a certain aversion toward) scholarship in other areas. Whether due to a lack of awareness of the shared interests of rhetoricians and communication scientists, a lack of understanding or respect for the methods used by the other in the study of the human condition, or the territorial nature of the academic environment, scholars

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SOUTHERN COMMUNICATION JOURNAL, Volume 65, Numbers 2 & 3, Winter-Spring 2000

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within this discipline who cross the boundaries of their particular sub-field into the areas of others remain the exceptions. The resultant failure to communicate across sub-fields likely prevents rather than fosters creation of the kind of interdisciplinary knowledge communication scholars are so well positioned to generate.

Recent work in communication on the study of human dialogue gives evidence of the barriers to cross-disciplinary conversation. Typically, communication studies scholars have situated dialogue within the tradition of dialectic, while rhetorical studies scholars have situated dialogue within the tradition of rhetoric. These disparate histories of dialogue have resulted in scholarly efforts divorced from one another within the discipline. This separation limits the work of each unnecessarily and constrains our discipline's theorizing of dialogue. However, because dialogue is intriguing and useful to scholars across the discipline, it encourages the transcendence of boundaries and traditions, providing a means of unifying scholars within communication despite differences in training or preferred methodology.

In this essay, we represent the two sides of our discipline—the humanistic and social scientific—presenting our own dialogue on dialogue. In general, this dialogue is intended to encourage further dialogue, to support the multivocal nature of our discipline, and to facilitate cross-disciplinary interaction. In particular, we hope to suggest the urgency and significance of further discussion of the conceptual and methodological opportunities that exist in viewing human dialogue as involving both rhetorical and dialectical processes.

THE VIEW OF HUMAN DIALOGUE AS DIALECTIC

Communication social scientists have recently begun to utilize a dialogic view in the study of human interaction. Although a few scholars of communication social science have grounded their study of dialogue in the philosophy of Martin Buber (e.g., Arnett, 1986, 1992; Cissna & Anderson, 1998; Stewart, 1999), more commonly, this approach has derived from a history of dialogue as situated within the notion of dialectic—what we will shortly term a "dialectical dialogue." Baxter and Montgomery (1996) present a concise discussion of the application of "dialectic" to the study of interpersonal relationships. Their book (certainly the best presentation to date of a communication studies approach to dialogics) describes, as they see it, the history of dialectic, viewing modern conceptualizations as shaped by the works of Lao Tzu and Heraclitus, Plato and Aristotle, and more recent philosophers and scholars including Hegel (1812/1929), Marx (1867/1906), and Bakhtin (1981). Although their discussion suggests that the earliest considerations of dialectic (those of Lao Tzu and Heraclitus) were ontological in nature, the conceptualizations of dialectic that are most familiar to communication scholars are those which view dialectic as epistemic—as a method of reasoning. Platonic and Aristotelian views, while certainly distinct, both presuppose dialectic to be a way of knowing. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) point out that Plato considers dialectic a search for Truth through philosophical argument, and for this reason reveals an epistemological dialectic. Furthermore, they point out from the work of Billig (1997) that because the sophist Protagoras asserts that every issue has two opposing lines of argument, he, too, can be understood as revealing an epistemological dialectic. Using the writings of Williams (1989) and Kahn (1979), Baxter and Montgomery (1996) differentiate such views from what they call an ontological dialectic present in the extant fragments of Heraclitus, including the following: "One cannot step twice into the same river, nor can one grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again gathers; it forms and dissolves, and approaches and departs. . . . As they step into the same river, others and still other waters flow upon them" (p. 21). They summarize that for Heraclitus, "the deepest reality was change that comes from opposing forces; reality was like the simultaneously destructive and creative power of fire" (p. 21). In this manner, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) distinguish the perceived rhetorical view of
dialectic-as-epistemic (as a tool for reasoned discourse) from the social scientific view which situates dialectic as ontological (with contradiction and tension as the natural state of human interaction and the source of communicative behavior).

Scholarly applications in the social scientific realm which have firmly established dialectic as a means of understanding human interaction and behavior (ontological) rather than as a means of knowing (epistemological) have occurred relatively recently, primarily through the works of Hegel and Marx. Hegel's (1812/1929, 1807/1931) theories are rooted in contradictions and "negation." His thinking focuses on a unity of oppositions (present in virtually every category) such as Freedom/Necessity, Finite/Infinite, Identity/Difference. Hegelian dialectic might be viewed as being in some ways transitional between an epistemic dialectic (Hegel suggests that dialectic is a method of thought useful for examining contradictions and resolving them through higher processes of reasoning) and an ontological dialectic (his emphasis on negation and conceptualizations of contradiction in virtually every area of human existence suggests that dialectic is not only a way of reasoning—it is also inherent to the human condition). Although Hegelian dialectical theory critiques the conscious world, with little if any specific connection to the social world, Marx (1867/1906) drew Hegel's thinking into the realm of social interaction, further establishing ontological uses of dialectic through his theory of dialectical materialism. Marx critiques human interaction as founded in class-defined relationships—not in consciousness alone, but in a material world. Physical needs drive human motivations, leading to means of production to meet those needs and resulting in the division of labor, class separations, and oppression. Because humans have conscious awareness, they are able to consider class divisions and oppression, working within the contradictions of production and consumption to reshape the constraints of the economic and social world.

In the social scientific discussion, the final shift from these views of dialectic to dialogue was made by Russian literary critic and intellectual Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1986). Bakhtin's dialogism views the social realm as constituted within centripetal and centrifugal forces, creating a cacophony of voices that "pull" continually. "Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The process of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272). Such interconnected oppositions form the substance of a dialogical view of social interaction, and Baxter and Montgomery (1996) depend heavily on Bakhtin's dialogue in their own conceptualization of dialectic (a "dialectical dialogue") as useful for the illumination of social reality and interpersonal communication.

In this manner, the social scientific view in the communication discipline has grounded dialogue in the tradition of dialectic. In recent years (from roughly the mid-1980s), communication scholarship has been energized by applications of "dialectical dialogue" to contextualized communication. Adelman and Frey (1997) framed their work in a non-profit residence for people with AIDS in this dialectic, Johnson and Long (forthcoming) extended applications of dialectic to the small group context, and Benson (1977) incorporated dialectic into considerations of organizations. Bopp and Weeks (1984) and Bochner and Eisenberg (1987) (among others) have drawn dialectic into studies of the family. More thoroughly, interpersonal communication scholars have worked to apply dialectical concepts to the study of dyadic relations (e.g., Altman, Vinsel, & Brown, 1981; Conville, 1991; Goldsmith, 1990; Montgomery, 1992, 1993; Rawlins, 1983a, 1983b, 1989, 1992).

Leslie Baxter, in particular, has been instrumental in these scholarly shifts, and her work effectively illustrates the move from dialectical-dualism to dialectical-dialogue in interpersonal communication scholarship. Baxter has been among the leaders in applying dialectic to dyadic relationships (e.g., 1988; 1990; 1993; Baxter & Goldsmith, 1990; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). Her work is often cited by text authors to illustrate the application of "dialectical theory" to interpersonal scholar-
ship (e.g., Adler, Rosenfeld, Towne, & Proctor, 1998; Griffin, 1997). Baxter’s work with dialectic in interpersonal relationships moved from a relatively dualistic approach (see Baxter, 1988; 1990) toward a more dialogic view as she began to incorporate the thinking of Bakhtin into her research (Baxter, 1994). In her recent summary of this dialectical-dialogue view in interpersonal communication scholarship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), Baxter voices this shift herself in a dialogue with her co-author:

Leslie [Baxter]: “You and I were both doing dialectical work before we encountered Bakhtin. I think what initially attracted each of us to Bakhtin is that he makes communication the centerpiece of dialectics. And, of course, once we got into Bakhtin, we realized that what attracted us to his work initially is but the tip of the iceberg. Bakhtin is dialectical, but not in the way we were conceiving of dialectics in our ‘pre-Bakhtin’ work. So when people have asked what is the book about, we’ve both said, ‘Dialectics,’ but we’ve qualified that by emphasizing that it’s a dialectical approach through a Bakhtinian eye.”

Barbara [Montgomery]: “The book is about contradiction in communication, but multivocal contradiction instead of binary contradiction. It’s about the ongoing interplay of stability and change, but without the transcendence of synthesis” (p. 233).

Although Baxter and Montgomery retain the original notion of contradiction from ancient Western definitions of dialectic-as-epistemic, their conceptualization of dialectical dialogue views contradictions as inherent to social interaction. Dialectic isn’t simply a tool for examining philosophical questions—it is now seen as an inherent element of the daily exigencies of every relationship which can be managed on an ongoing basis by relational partners.

This contextualizing of dialectic, and the ensuing attempts to manage omnipresent dialectical oppositions, suggest the ongoing, moment-by-moment nature of the social scientific conceptualization of dialectical dialogue. Through dialogue, dialectic has become, to social scientists, a means of examining and managing the mundane interaction of relational partners as they create and maintain their relationships. Further, as this work has broadened, definitions of dialectic and dialogue have become nearly indistinguishable, and distinctions have been considered only recently in any detail (see Baxter, 1994; Rawlins, 1998). Baxter and Montgomery discuss directly their perceptions of the relationship of dialectic to dialogue in communication scholarship:

Dialectics is a family of perspectives, united in the commitment to the foundational concepts of contradiction, change, praxis, and totality, but separated in the unique emphases that characterize each perspective. Dialogism is one variant within the dialectics family, and our relational-dialectics perspective is closely tied to Bakhtin’s work. The link between relational dialectics and dialogism is so close in our minds that in subsequent chapters we use the terms virtually interchangeably. To commit to a relational-dialectics view is to accept that individuals are socially constructed in the ongoing interplay of unity and difference. Communication events, relationships, and life itself are ongoing and unfinalizable, always ‘becoming,’ never ‘being.’ There are no ideal goals, no ultimate endings, no elegant end states of balance. There is only an indeterminate flow, full of unforeseeable potential that is realized in interaction. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 47)

In this dialectical-dialogue view, there is no “synthesis,” no ideal resolution of overarching tensions. There is, more importantly, realization of and response to oppositions that are inherently present in social interaction. The focus becomes the awareness and management of these oppositions in every communication event, moment by moment, in the relationship.
SELECTIVITY IN THE VIEW OF DIALECTICAL DIALOGUE

Whether to view dialogue as dialectic depends, at least in part, upon one’s perception of how the history of ideas should be written. When social scientists in communication (like the one’s discussed earlier) write their histories, Protagoras’s now famous dissoi logoi (the idea that every logos—or argument, in this case—has an equal and likely counter-logos) is understood as an early manifestation of what would later become an epistemological dialectic, or a method of reasoning by which one searches for understanding through the clash of opposing arguments (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). When those who study rhetoric write histories, (e.g. Kennedy, 1994; Poulakos, 1995; Smith, 1998), Protagoras’s dissoi logoi is an expression of rhetorical potentiality in human communication (not necessarily nor uniquely dialectical).

The possibility to write history either way shows the subjectivity of historiography. Such subjectivity presupposes selectivity. The necessity of such selectivity arises perhaps from, in Protagorean terms, the complexity of the subject matter or perhaps the shortness of human life, but certainly from the inability of human beings to avoid measuring their realities with subjective rules. That historiography is a subjective/selective process resulting in the shaping of a particular perspective on reality—one which the selectors wish to be considered reasonable by a larger audience—seems to be by now a truism of critical historical methodology in many academic disciplines. Historiography becomes, in this light, a rhetorical argument, thereby, open to counter-argument. What we wish to present next could be considered just such a counter-argument to the idea of dialectical dialogue. This counter-argument presupposes that other legitimate ways of contextualizing (historicizing) human dialogue exist.

THE VIEW OF HUMAN DIALOGUE AS RHETORIC

The study of dialogue in human communication has not been limited to social scientists; those interested in rhetoric have also engaged in this study. These theorists are housed within communication (Anderson & Cissna, 1996; Johannesen, 1971; Poulakos, 1974) as well as in psychology (Billig, 1997, 1998), philosophy (Walton & Krabbe, 1995), and English (Bialostosky, 1995; Glenn, 1997). This interdisciplinary interest in the rhetoricity of dialogue reveals, in at least one way, the multivocal nature of dialogue. The multi-vocality of dialogue refers most obviously to the plurality of voices in any dialogue, but it can also refer to the plurality of voices in the conversation on what dialogue means and does, some voices calling dialogue dialectic and others rhetoric. Of course, the multi-vocality of dialogue increases when we realize as well that the meanings of both “dialectic” and “rhetoric” shift depending upon which discourse community uses the words. All three terms—dialogue, dialectic, and rhetoric—thwart the stability of single referents.

Although our understanding of dialogue in communicative experience can be fostered in part by an understanding of dialectic, the multivocal theoretical possibilities of dialogue invite us to consider the ways in which our understanding can be fostered also by a critique of its rhetoricity. In what follows, we explore some possibilities for considering dialogue as rhetoric. At minimum, dialogue and rhetoric are involved with one another to the extent that they are motivated by opposition, shapers of judgment and action, and attendants to situation and particularity, all for the purpose of creating change in the public, private, and personal spheres of human experience.

In the most basic way, dialogue and rhetoric are involved with one another because of their situation in the inherently oppositional nature of human communication. Although characterizing the nature of human communication as inherently oppositional might seem contradictory because communication is the process of establishing “communion” between people, the contradiction resolves once we recognize that com-
munion presupposes division, and division is a prerequisite for opposition. This opposition can be said to operate on a variety of levels, including normative, behavioral, perceptual, and linguistic. Briefly, normative opposition arises from the manifestation of contradictory beliefs and values; behavioral opposition arises from manifestations of contradictory actions; perceptual opposition arises from the inability to share completely the perceptions of others; and linguistic opposition arises from selectivity in language, something the Burkean (1966) triad of reflection/selection/deflection has made apparent about language function.

One might reject the idea of dialogue and rhetoric as sharing in opposition if one were to believe that the goal of rhetoric is to resolve opposition by bringing one opposed force into conformity with another. This traditional view of rhetoric, though, is unnecessarily limited. In pleas for the revival of sophistry, historians of rhetoric have drawn attention to a sophistic idea of the inevitable incompleteness of the resolution of opposition in rhetorical situations (Crowley, 1989; Poulakos, 1995). Within this interpretive context, Protagoras's dissoi logoi is frequently appropriated to show rhetoric's ongoing negotiation of opposition: for every logos, there is an equal and likely counter-logos.

The rhetor and the participant in dialogue share more than their situation in opposition. They are related also through their directed and purposive use of language. Traditionally, we might say that rhetoric has been directed toward the shaping of judgments and courses of action whether through political or judicial deliberations, or through epideictic demonstrations. One needs no great stretch of the imagination to see that human dialogue, whether public, private, or personal, arises, at least in part, from the need to determine the expediency or inexpediency of future courses of action, to judge guilt, innocence, and responsibility, and to express (and in so doing to shape) cultural and personal values and identities. Quite simply, to the extent that humans engage in dialogue for the purpose of any of these three ends, we can say that their dialogue moves in rhetorical ways.

Opposition to a characterization of dialogue as being directed and purposive like rhetoric is likely to come from the perspective that direction and purpose presuppose prior planning and an intended, specific outcome. When viewed as strategic planners of persuasive communication who objectify audiences prior to entering communicative situations, rhetors have always been subject to criticism. If we were to understand rhetors as functioning exclusively in such predetermined ways, to see any relationship between rhetors and participants in dialogue would be difficult. Such pre-determinacy of communication undermines one of dialogue's most essential characteristics: its immediacy (Cissna & Anderson, 1994). The immediacy of dialogue is a condition for "presence"; presence presupposes the absence of vested interest in orchestrating specific outcomes and requires that participants act in the here and now, unscripted and unrehearsed (Cissna & Anderson, 1994).

Such opposition seems to arise, and we believe rightly so, from a concern with the ethics of communication. Using theory appropriated from philosopher Martin Buber (1947, 1965), theorists of dialogue have considered it as authentic communicative action, where communication takes place in an environment of genuine concern for the "Between" that is always being formed (always becoming, never being) through the sharing of "Self" and "Other" (Anderson & Cissna, 1996; Anderson, Cissna, & Arnett, 1994; Cissna & Anderson, 1994; Johannesen, 1971; Poulakos, 1974; Stewart, 1978). In Buberian terms, the Between becomes the space that intermingles the boundaries of Self and Other, which are themselves not clearly demarcated. For analytic purposes only do we talk about a "Self" and an "Other." The distinction of Self/Other, like all academic distinctions, is useful for the way it can change our ability to create critical insights, but it becomes detrimental when it invites critics to act as if such resulting analytic units can be studied in isolation from one another, and from that from which they are being distinguished. Neither the Self nor the Other can enjoy the expected simplic-
ity, predictability, familiarity, independence, and security of being that isolation seems to offer. Rather, Self and Other must (and do) always share space, both physical and psychological. This space is complex, unpredictable, collaborative, strange, interdependent, and vulnerable (Cissna & Anderson, 1994). To negotiate their occupation of this shared space, Self and Other use dialogue. To the extent that this dialogue is directed toward the negotiation of this shared space, and likely takes as its purpose something akin to the idealized effect of living well together, we can say that dialogue, like rhetoric, proceeds in directed and purposive ways.

Our aforementioned concern for ethics in communication gives rise, at this point, to critiques against the pre-determinacy that might be associated with directed and purposive communication. When the analytic distinction of Self and Other degenerates into considerations of the Self as a pure entity and center of power, the Other becomes objectified and trivialized. With an objectified Other as audience, whether in a dialogic situation or not, the narcissistic Self sees an opportunity to operate on the Other, to persuade its conformity to the ways of being that are familiar, acceptable, and useful to the Self. The devising of schemes has a temporally prior feeling to it, whether this feeling arises from imagining the narcissistic Self determining beforehand the specific ways it will treat the Other, or from knowing that regardless of the specifics of the Self’s treatment of the Other, the predetermined condition of their relationship is the objectification of the Other and the privileging of the Self that results in this hierarchical relationship. Such communicative behavior is dehumanizing, and dehumanization is a prominent theme in much of Buber’s work on dialogue (e.g., 1952).

Contemporary theorists of rhetoric, whether specifically interested in dialogue or not, have recognized the way rhetoric in such a context of Self-affirmation and Other-objectification affronts humanity, and they have made a critical turn away from the production of rhetor-centered theory (like that in the long-standing neo-Aristotelian tradition) to the production of intersubjective theory (e.g., Brummett, 1976; Scott, 1973). Rhetorical theory that could be called “intersubjective” rejects the idea of rhetoric as a one-way communication, or a matter of a speaker influencing an audience, and pursues the idea of rhetoric involving mutual influence and interdefinitions. Benson (1989) emphasizes the ethical importance of such a collaborative view of rhetorical events, for only within such a view can both the rhetor and the audience be acknowledged as human agents whose being is constituted in their interaction. Johnstone (1965) theorizes intersubjectivity as bilaterality. Bilaterality presupposes that both rhetor and audience are mutually open to personal and intellectual risk, the possibility of self-change, and the openness to scrutiny by others. Bilateral rhetoric is characterized by habits of resoluteness, openness, gentleness, and compassion. Furthermore, Anderson and Cissna (1996) suggest that the rejection of the idea of rhetoric as “exclusively intentional, unidirectional, formulaic, and agonistic” in its influence has lead to the pursuit of the idea of rhetoric as a force to “synthesize, not analyze; to facilitate or catalyze, not win; to understand, not oversee” (p. 89). This pursuit has contributed to an expansion of rhetorical theory to account for the co-experiential, collaborative, open, and expansive forces of rhetoric. These theories are broad enough to critique more than traditional ideas of rhetorical texts, such as orations and literary creations. As Anderson and Cissna (1996) note, they are broad enough to be useful for critiquing “instances of conversational dialogue—instances that can be considered intentional texts co-authored in response to human needs and the symbolic means by which persons address those needs” (p. 89).

Hence, to say that dialogue acts like rhetoric when it proceeds in directed and purposive ways toward the shaping of judgment and action does not presuppose predetermined communication. Yet the question of pre-determinacy will not go away this easily. Although rhetorical theorists such as Fish (1989) and Schuster (1985) affirm that both rhetoric and dialogic presuppose an inevitably infinite nature of conversation, others, such as James Berlin, remind us that all rhetoric is always “fixed from the start” (quoted
Although Berlin is not referring to the kind of pre-determinacy we were examining earlier, he is referring to the way our subjectivity always biases our communication: "Rhetoric is always situated in an ideological stance, providing a platform from which possibilities can be viewed and selected. Being in one place and not another, that is, one ideological position and not another, a rhetor is always already biased, always already committed to a limited range of possibilities. This is inevitable and unexceptional" (quoted in Enos 1990, p. 9). To the extent that neither rhetor nor participant in dialogue can ever in actuality enter a communicative situation tabula rasa, we must conclude that both experience a tension between pre-determinacy and infinite possibility in their directed and purposive use of language.

The relationship between dialogue and rhetoric is also manifest in their nature as situated communicative events focused on particularity. Rhetoric is what Goodnight (1993) calls "anthro-relativistic," meaning that its versions of reasonableness are located within standards prevailing in a certain community for acceptable arguments. If we believe that the standards for reasonableness, effectiveness, or appropriateness of communication during a dialogue are determined by the constraints of the dialogic situation, rather than by the formal, universal criteria for logical validity, then we can believe that dialogue shares in the rhetorical. Moreover, to the extent that relational partners engage in dialogue for the purpose of discussing the particulars of a given human experience, we can say that their dialogue shares in rhetorical ways. Particularity is a touchstone of the rhetorical world (see also Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 26). Rhetoric does not deal with questions about the nature of "The Good," but rather with questions about whether a particular person, situated in time and space, is good. Rhetoric's primary concern in this regard is pragmatic, not philosophical. Dialogic communication, too, is not focused necessarily on that which is universal (a focus more characteristic of dialectic than rhetoric), but on that which is particular to the participants in dialogue. To the extent that dialogue is situated and directed toward particularities, whether in regard to standards of communicative appropriateness or subjects of communicative action, we can say that it proceeds rhetorically.

We have mentioned several times thus far that public, private, and personal dialogue can be viewed as rhetorical. Public dialogue refers to civic or community communication, whether in the political, judicial, or epideictic spheres. Private dialogue refers to interpersonal communication. Personal dialogue refers to intrapersonal communication. But what is personal dialogue? Can the Self engage in dialogue with itself? We can see signs of this communicative phenomenon as early as the Homeric epics where heroes are often portrayed as having an internal debate about a particular course of action (Mifsud, 1998). In Plato, the Eleatic Stranger in the Sophist (263e) defines thought and speech as the same, only the former is the internal conversation of the soul. And Socrates, in the Phaedrus (261b), defines rhetoric as the art of moving the soul, whether in public assemblies or in private. While traditionally "private" is meant to refer to interpersonal exchanges between Socrates and his interlocutors, the term seems ambiguous. Isocrates, in his Antidosis, writes that the arguments by which we persuade others when we speak to them are the same as those we use when we deliberate in our own thoughts.

Such a perspective on personal dialogue is not ancient history. Contemporary theorists, too, critique in an affirmative way the existence of this communicative phenomenon (e.g., Blake & Haroldsen, 1975; Roberts, Edwards, & Barker, 1987; Rogers, 1984; Vocate, 1994). In particular, some theorists define this communicative phenomenon as uniquely rhetorical. Burks (1970) writes of self-talk as self-persuasion and notes that "self-persuasion is not essentially different rhetorically from persuasion of others" (p. 116). Burke (1969) suggests that internally addressed rhetoric which has an "I" addressing its "Me" (see Mead, 1934) takes the form of a "parliamentary wrangle" (p. 38), while Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) reject the philosophical tradition of defining
internal dialogue as logic, and they argue that to consider internal dialogue as a particular kind of rhetorical argumentation is highly desirable. Billig (1998) applies this rhetorical view of thinking to Rodin’s solitary thinker:

Such an internal conversation, given The Thinker’s outward signs of preoccupation, will probably have an argumentative character. He is unlikely to have divided his mind into two speakers, only to find them in happy agreement—as if his desire says, “I want to get off this rock and go for an ice cream,” and his voice of conscience replies, “what a lovely idea.” Were this the case, he would not be sitting on the rock, head on hand. Instead, we can imagine a fierce debate inside his head, turning over the pros and cons of a course of action. Perhaps the voices of desire and conscience are vigorously debating a course of action or the ethics of another’s personality. Maybe, seated on his seaside rock, he is debating whether, despite doctor’s advice, to go for that ice cream. Whatever the content of the internal debate, one might say that Rodin’s thinker-as-debater has not been abstracted totally from social life. Instead, his internal processes would be derived from publicly observable debate, as he uses, silently and internally, a public language” (Billig, 1998, p. 202)

In addition, Johnstone (1970, 1978, 1990) suggests this phenomenon as worthy of further study. Johnstone takes as his starting point what he sees to be the function of rhetoric: the evocation of consciousness. To the extent rhetoric functions to evoke consciousness, we can say that rhetoric evokes it not only in other people but in oneself. Public rhetoric attempts to evoke consciousness by driving a wedge between an audience and some fact or thesis of which it has hitherto been unconscious; private rhetoric drives it between a subject, no longer unconscious of the choices and judgments he or she must make, and him- or herself. For Johnstone, rhetoric, both public and private, functions to evoke consciousness. But as Johnstone and Mifsud (1999) have recently noted, rhetoric also functions as a bridge to build common awareness, to establish lines of identification, and to evoke shared consciousness. Again, as a bridge, rhetoric can function publicly or privately. In the public realm, the rhetorical bridge functions to create public order by negotiating diversity of attitudes and opinions and establishing common values that can identify diverse peoples and ideas. In the private realm of internal dialogue, the rhetorical bridge prevents the sundered self from collapsing into something akin to schizophrenia. The end of intrapersonal rhetorical dialogue is not only to evoke consciousness about the necessity to make choices and form judgments, but to bridge the poles of the divided mind, thus recreating a unity of mind manifest in a personal decision.

Opposition to the idea of personal dialogue might arise if one were to see the focus on the “intrapersonal” as yet another academic privileging of the Self. In Buberian terms, having such a critical focal point might make more difficult attempts to understand the Self as it is created and maintained in the space between Self and Other. However, if intrapersonal dialogic theory were to proceed with the knowledge that the purity of the Self as center of power is a romanticized notion brought on by years of intellectual immersion in individualism and methodological immersion in making analytic distinctions, it can take into account the way that even when the Self is in intrapersonal dialogue, the plurality of inner voices arises from exposure to the Other. In fact, some theorists have already begun to do this (e.g., Barker & Edwards, 1980; Hikins, 1989).

To exemplify this, let’s return to Rodin’s thinker-as-debater. We can remember that Billig does not describe him in isolation from the Other. He says, “Rodin’s thinker-as-debater has not been abstracted totally from social life. Instead, his internal processes would be derived from publicly observable debate, as he uses, silently and internally, a public language” (Billig, 1998, p. 202). The inability of the thinker to be purely per-
sonal in his thoughts is made evident further by the voice of the doctor in the thinker’s head, along with his own voice of desire to eat ice cream despite the doctor’s advice. And still again, we can imagine the inability of pure Self talk if we can imagine that on his way to his rock, the thinker encountered another eating ice cream. Imagining this possibility, can we say that the voice of his desire is purely his own, having originated from some personal, primal, psychological/physiological urging deep within? Such a purity of desire is hard to imagine because desire is always directed, always of something. That “something” is, by definition, Other. Because the Other remains a part of the reflexive Self, in at least these three ways, we can describe this phenomenon of reflexivity as a kind of dialogue, where the Self, while indeed being reflexive, is still in dialogue with the Other. Intrapersonal theory must account for this, or risk the aggrandizement of the Self and the affronts to humanity that are likely to result.

Hence, dialogue and rhetoric are related to the extent that they are motivated by opposition, directed toward shaping judgment and action, and sensitive to situation and particularity of communication, all for the purpose of effectively negotiating the shared space of Self and Other, whether this space is externalized (public and interpersonal) or internalized (intrapersonal).

PROBLEMS WITH ISOLATION, ANTAGONISM, AND STABILIZATION

Having now considered both dialectical and rhetorical views of dialogue, we can see that the isolation of dialogue as either dialectic or rhetoric is problematic. The most obvious problem arises from the way such isolation prevents us from seeing the overlapping claims being made. For example, both dialectical and rhetorical views of dialogue claim to focus on oppositions and tensions in relationships. Both also claim an interest in change, ethics, the relationship between finite and infinite communicative possibilities, and the ways in which identity and knowledge are formed in communicative processes. The failure to critique these (and other possible) overlapping claims signals a more central problem at hand, namely the way our analytic distinctions bifurcate communicative phenomena into either dialectic or rhetoric. To formulate dialectical dialogue and study it in isolation from rhetorical dialogue, or vice versa, is to commit the same methodological error of analysis that we referred to earlier in our discussion of Self and Other. Although this limitation of analysis (the inability to sustain a critique of ideas in their most analytically distinct and isolated forms) is frustrating, it is necessary to redirect our attention to the whole—not only the whole from which all division initially emerges and for which all division is meant to explain (at least in part), but also the whole which is created anew through the shared space of the analytic units in dialogue (the whole which we could call the Between).

To isolate dialectical dialogue and rhetorical dialogue, and to examine them in the absence of the other, is to risk suggesting either that the two processes—dialectic and rhetoric—are exclusive, incompatible, and necessarily antagonistic, or that they are unrelated enough to be discussed in the absence of the other. This suggestion is not new to the Western tradition, dating back at least as far as the classic debates between the rhetor sophists and the dialectician Plato, proceeding through the intellectual clashes of the Medieval scholastics and Renaissance humanists, and achieving its most powerful voice through Peter Ramus who theorized that dialectic and rhetoric are wholly distinct enterprises, the former governing thought (logic), the latter expression (elocution). For centuries in this tradition, dialectic and rhetoric have been positioned in antagonistic ways. The antagonism arises from two polarized views of reality. One view reveals reality as constructed through language; the other reveals reality as communicated through language. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this antagonism stands today at the very heart of the dialogue on the human condition and its relation to the symbolic and natural worlds. The former view has been regarded as rhe-
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In the former, language is used not to discover but to manipulate reality. In this way, “Reality is what is accepted as reality” (Lanham, 1976, p. 4). The latter view is generally regarded as dialectical, where certain truths about reality, or universals, exist prior to discourse. When discovered by the powers of the dialectical processes, these truths are then communicated through language. Rhetoric in this world becomes the handmaiden to dialectic. To appropriate Fish’s (1989) critique, that which dialectical man fears, namely the invasion of the fortress of essence by the contingent, the protean, and the unpredictable, rhetorical man celebrates and incarnates.

While many of the social scientists “doing dialectical theory” have moved away from the traditional view of dialectic, their moves have brought them closer to the rhetorical world than they have admitted thus far. In a recent example, Kellett (1999) critiques how dialectic works within collaborative dialogue sessions to structure and constitute organizational change. Kellett, appropriating Baxter and Montgomery’s dialectical theory for the study of interpersonal dialogue, critiques how organizational change involves dialectical oppositions that “provide the impetus for initiating change, frame the context and meaning of change goals and outcomes, and structure the communicative dynamics of change processes” (Kellett, 1999, p. 211). Kellett’s critique of the relationship between dialectic and organizational dialogue seems to be crossing into rhetorical territory. Most obviously, his critique emphasizes oppositional tensions, directed and purposive shaping of organizational judgments and actions, and the importance of situation and community in the process of making choices about future action and creating change within an organizational setting, which as we have already discussed are all characteristic of rhetorical ways, not uniquely dialectical ways. To a reader sensitive to the relationship between dialectic and rhetoric, work that critiques dialogic change as dialectical without recognizing its rhetorical elements seems to silence the centuries old dialogue between dialectic and rhetoric. Similarly, work that critiques dialogic change as rhetorical without recognizing its dialectical elements does the same. That such silencing, whether intentional or accidental, undermines what most would agree are some of the core values of dialogue (e.g., collaboration, mutual- ity, and recognition of “otherness”) seems to us a most interesting irony.

Our purpose here is not to choose between the rhetorical and dialectical views of dialogue, thereby privileging one or the other. Rather, our point is that the antagonism between rhetoric and dialectic pervades the history of ideas as well as the contemporary study of human dialogue in the discipline of communication. This antagonism not only perpetuates what might be nothing more than an academic dispute which began when Plato formalized the disciplines of rhetoric and philosophy (dialectic), but it is now perpetuating the separateness of the two dominant methods of study in the discipline of communication: humanistic and social scientific. Such theoretical and political antagonism undermines rather than fosters the study of human dialogue. Moreover, the dialectic/rhetoric antagonism, when emergent in the study of dialogue, forces the stabilization of the referent for “dialogue.” Such stabilization confines human dialogue to one or the other particular kind of intellectual/communicative process—to either dialectic or rhetoric. Worse than confinement is the delusion of being able to stabilize a phenomenon as all-encompassing as dialogue. Human dialogue is pervasive and inescapable in human experience. To attempt to stabilize dialogue seems to us an exercise in futility; to attempt to stabilize methods used to study dialogue seems an exercise in frustration.

From considering the rhetorical and dialectical views of human dialogue, we have come to recognize not only the necessity but the urgency of engaging these views in an alternative dialogue—one that might be described as “authentic” as opposed to “antagonistic.” But what would an authentic dialogue between two such multi-faceted, protean powers sound like? Answering this question lies beyond the present scope of this essay, but for now we can offer some ideas.
Both rhetoric and dialectic are forms of logic. Rhetorical and dialectical communicative events both employ speech in a reasoned way to engage an other with manifest, or at least potential, doubts. Their difference lies in their locus of reason. In dialectic, the locus is exteriorized and trans-situational, while in rhetoric, the locus is implicit, audience-specific, and shifting (Goodnight, 1993). Although this analytical distinction of dialectic and rhetoric clarifies the difference between these communicative processes, it does not suggest a complete distinction between dialectic and rhetoric. Such a distinction can only demeane both enterprises. As Goodnight suggests, if we were convinced that dialectic is the dominant communicative force, then rhetorical communication would appear at its best as defective discussion and at its worst as the use of psychological and social force in the service of conformity. If we were convinced that rhetoric is the dominant communicative force, then dialectical communication would seem to be "so much hair splitting and carping apologetics" (Goodnight, 1993, p. 332).

For authentic dialogue, rhetoric could be understood then (at least in part) as the counterpart, not handmaiden, to dialectic. The semantic nuance of "counterpart" might be understood by calling attention to the Greek word for "counterpart," "antistrophos." Interestingly enough, antistrophos is a term generally related to ancient Greek drama, in particular, the turning movement of the chorus in a dramatic dialogue. To understand rhetoric as "antistrophos" to dialectic then could be to understand it as a participant in dialogue with dialectic. The idea of dialectic and rhetoric, respectively, as strophe (turning movement) and antistrophe (opposite turning movement), as Aristotle suggested, might give us the insight we need to begin re-thinking the relationship between these two forces and their mutual opportunities as methods for studying human dialogue. The insight of rhetoric as the antistrophos to dialectic shows us that both methods can mutually reinforce one another to invite meaningful communication.

Recent support for such "methodological eclecticism" in dialogic scholarship has been growing among some scholars (e.g., Montgomery & Baxter, 1998), but such a movement is unlikely to take hold if done in the name of either dialectic or rhetoric. We believe dialogue can serve a unique role in our discipline, providing an impetus for us to leave traditional analytic distinctions behind in our research and theorizing so that our attention is drawn to the Between. In its own way, dialogue can be a bridge across what have been rarely-traversed waters, encouraging our discipline to see connection where separation has stood, and to allow the idea of "crossing over" to move our scholarship—and our relationships—in ever-expanding ways.

REFERENCES


