



Before and beyond dialogicality: Transformative trialectics of human dialogues



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A B S T R A C T

Keywords:

Relational psychology
Dialogical ontology
Transformative epistemology
Pluralistic metaphysics
Dialogue
Transformational trialectics

I first revisit Bakhtin's discourse-driven account of *dialogue* to situate the concept in its broad sociohistorical, political, and philosophical (i.e., epistemology-ontology-ethics-aesthetics-praxis) meaning context. Not only is the concept of *dialogicality* highly relevant for the psychology of difference but it also poses many strong meta/theoretical challenges. Second, therefore, I rapidly evaluate psychology's disciplinary developmental status and transformative potentials of Bakhtinian dialogicalism in/for psychological discourses. I pay particular attention to the (im)possibilities of a potential *dialogue* between *psycho-logic/-logy* and *dia-logic/-logue* in reference to our biosociocultural (real-symbolic-imaginary) human *be(com)ings*. Thus, while triangulating, reframing and refracting with/in my seemingly more radically pluralist and dynamic perspective, using some core notions from its conceptual matrix for (potentially) *self-reflective transformative-transformations*, such as *triopus* and *transformational trialectics*, it is hoped that the fascination with pragmatics of *dialogicality* would not overshadow the concept's hermeneutically transformative utility which asks for serious dialogical confrontations, insights, bold philosophical commitments and consistent knowledge-practices in/towards all areas of our human(e) worlds.

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1. In the beginning/towards an “end”?

Rhetorics of *dialogic* are no longer original nor interesting nowadays as they are everywhere. Pressed by the globally spread open/loud or disguised/silent acts of violence/conflict of all sorts and in all degrees, frequent calls are made for *dialogue* in many areas of knowledge-practice from philosophy to international politics. These assertions for broad *dialogicality* at almost all levels continually emphasize its ethical/moral implications and libratory significance in praxis.

However, let me openly state a general claim, or rather an authentically distanced (insider–outsider) reflection, right at the outset, that serves as the point of departure for this paper: Despite the increasing fascination with Bakhtin

and his conception of *dialogue*, acknowledgement of *dialogicality* being *sine qua non* of the human condition, and the growing critique of *monological* traditions, most critical reactions to the conventional (non/scientific) habits fall short of capturing the essentials/indispensable aspects of the concept to prevent the word from becoming an “empty signifier” (in-and-out of psychology).

Dialogicality revitalizes, for instance, the earlier Nietzschean idea that the human mind ontologically is based on the struggle and negotiation of a multiplicity of subjects, and hence, is not (cannot be?) a singularity. As in Bakhtin's words, a single consciousness is a “contradiction in terms”. One is conscious of one's self and become one's self “only revealing it for another, through another, and with the help of another.”

This by itself, however, has strong suggestions particularly for modern psychology's self/subject constructions with social/developmental/cultural aspirations and ambitions in

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our current historical time-global meaning space that dichotomizes and totalizes difference as the self and other/Other. Therefore, dealing with the (un)deliberated moral, political, philosophical, (meta)theoretical, methodological and discursive challenges which the appropriation of basic premises of *dialogicality* in psychology pose on human experience, thinking, language, inquiry and praxis all at once would gain priority. That would require intentionally dialogical and collaborative efforts, substantial revisions and commitments to its fundamental principles in practice. Taking seriously interdisciplinary location, historicity, and global dissemination of both modern psychology and the concept of *dialogicality* as its recent object of *jouissance* (e.g., Gülerce, 2006, 2012a, 2012b), therefore, I invite to (re)think conjointly on the issue, and to walk *dialogically* beyond the local *dialogicality* talks. I hermeneutically engage in this “dialogue” on/in the making of dialogical psychology/making psychology dialogical inevitably from within a post-/trans-(sub)disciplinary (e.g., Gülerce, 2009a) and post-metaphysical/secular perspectival stance (e.g., Gülerce, 2010) in the background. While I foreground few of its potentially transformative notions towards *dialogical* walks and talks about our *dialogical* human transformations, I also emphasize some requirements, if you will, as their minimum contingent conditions of (im)possibility for enabling *transformative dialogues* in that direction.

For this purpose, and in conjunction with the extremely brusque contextualization of Bakhtinian *dialogicalism*, which I provided in the introduction to this issue, let us first focus our attention to the heavily embodied and embedded terms in the composite title separately. I suggest to follow a reverse order to think together why, who, what, how and when *dialogue* is/is not in relation to psychology’s object-subject-self constructions in discourse about their constitutions in reality.

2. Dialogue(s)?

2.1. Tracing Bakhtin and dialogue

Some Bakhtin specialists, “have long since struggled to appropriate him for their own agendas”, says Eagleton (2007, p. 13): “Is he a Marxist, neo-Kantian, religious humanist, discourse theorist, literary critic, cultural sociologist, ethical thinker, philosophical anthropologist, or all these things together?” Viewed from within Bakhtin’s own hermeneutic perspective of *dialogicality*, this says also, perhaps more, about the reader’s own *forestructures* (Gadamer), *interdiscourse* (Péchéux), *overdetermination* (Freud) and simply monological and reductionistic reading style (Marleu-Ponty), than the author. But, could a reader who tries to “deduce” the author’s “subject position” and “hunts” for his “traces” merely on his texts to “stick” a “familiar label” be his/Bakhtin’s *preferred reader* (Wright)?

Bakhtin (as a kind of Russian Wittgenstein) is not always to be “found” or “placed” literally on his (*polysemic*) texts, although, his poetic meaning is deeply embodied and point at the context, pretext, subtext, and even its suggested reading style. His (poetic) meaning paradoxically is present (as absence) in entirety of his expressions. Thus, in a sense, “his place is placeless, his trace is traceless” just as in the

renowned ode from Rumi. *Dialogue* is experienced contingent on the simultaneous coming together of all *signifiers* and *signifieds* of/by dialogical partners in historical time-virtual space.

2.2. Psychology’s compatibility/commensurability with dialogicality

Modern psychology has deep seated metaphysical commitments to its predetermined, knowable, and static Universe, and to the principles of foundationalism, essentialism, representationalism, rationalism, cognitivism, positivism, reductionism, atomism, empiricism, objectivism, and so on, which describes abeardlylocal/partial worldview. The infant(ile) discipline is traditionally individualistic(Judeo-Christian) and culturally pragmatist(Americanized) despite its philosophical upbringings and earlier parental (European) aspirations. At the present time, and overall, the disciplinary subject/discourse (affective/cognitive/social/moral/aesthetic) developmentally still is “anxious of strangers”, “split”, “Ego/cogito/self-centric”, etc. and rather recently is fascinated with mechanistically moving “objects” around which are “representations” of “static” “structures” of (language/discourse/society) “outside” that are mysteriously/mechanistically transported to the “inside”.

Therefore, from a micro-meso-macro and critical perspective, the concept of *dialogism* is fundamentally an oxymoron to psychology. While the concept has been thriving rapidly in multiple ways and directions, however, its resilience is questionable. *Dialogism* seemingly is trying hard to survive the *monological* disciplinary resistance, or to contaminate psychology’s epistemic mind and institutional body with strong immunity to accurate/profound/authentic/foreign knowledge goods. Ironically, most accounts that refer to Bakhtin have been no exception. Overall, *dialogue* frequently is appropriated at best in terms of inner speech/thought, immediacy, I-positions, arena of identity positions, internal positioning, position exchange, dyadic conversation, semiotic/text analysis, turn-taking, subjectivity, mediation, reciprocity, conflict resolution, and so on, at an interpersonal level of face-to-face exchange, or intrapersonal decision-making in various accounts. Although, a view of self as a multiplicity of *I-positions* and its implicit conceptualizations of dialogic movement as exchange between positions understandably might seem a “challenge” to mainstream psychology (of the singular, integrated, stable, and continuous *I*) from a “normalized” and “naturalized” psychological stance.

Even in the so-called dialogical psychological approaches to *dialogue*, however, the self and the other still are problematic on various grounds. First of all, they are deeply soaked in the described monological, deterministic and universalistic worldview, and are embedded in its Cartesian rationality and split cognitive (-affective?) discourse in spite of the post/modern rhetorics to “individuate”/“emancipate”/“exit” from both. Just as the mainstream tradition, they have been reproducing/perpetuating the artificially drawn binaries that they “criticize”, “hybridize” or “bridge”. Equally superficial attempts that are made to compromise or blur the boundaries only (un/wittingly) reproduce new discourses of *power/knowledge*

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