

## Interview with Hubert Hermans about Dialogical Self Theory

**Nima Ghorbani**

1. *Thanks Hubert for accepting to be interviewed by me. How did your personal inspiration move toward a creative integration of James' American Pragmatism and Bakhtin's Russian Dialogism, as you have lived locally between them in Netherlands? What sort of training and theories moved you toward such integration?*

Actually, I devoted a large part of my professional career to the construction of the so-called Self-Confrontation Method (SCM), which I further developed over several decades in the last part of the previous century together with my first wife and colleague Els Hermans-Jansen. We applied the method in her psychotherapeutic practice so that I had the opportunity to have direct contact with a diversity of clients who did a self-investigation in a crucial period of their lives. The method invites them not only to become involved in a thorough self-investigation but also to change relevant or even central aspects of their personal meaning system. In our conversations with the clients, we discovered that the self-investigation process was optimal when clients were not only involved in a dialogue with the psychotherapist, but also, even at the same time, engaged in a dialogue *with themselves*. This productive

simultaneity of external and internal dialogue greatly stimulated my interest in the notion of dialogue, with special attention to internal dialogue. This interest was confirmed when I discovered some clear advantage of the spatial positions of client and therapist when involved in communication. In the 70's of the previous century I experimented with the difference between sitting in front of the client and sitting side by side at a table. I found out that some people preferred to sit side by side while reading together the open questions of the Self-Confrontation Method and then inviting the client to tell his or her story. Apparently, in this position they felt a relation of cooperation that liberated them from any form of objectification by the eye of the other. It is like having a good conversation while sitting side by side during a travel in a car. There is a space in front of you where you can project the inner movements of your mind and then respond to them. From that time onward, I became interested in the relationship between dialogue and spatial positions. In fact, the central term of Dialogical Self Theory (DST) is the '*I*-position' which is a spatial notion. Space and dialogue are intimately interconnected, as a voice is always coming from a spatial position, from the outside world or from the inner space of the mind. Along these lines, I proposed to transform the Jamesian *I* into an *I*-position (e.g., I as an adventurer, I as a music lover, I as the son of my parents, I as politically engaged) and introduced the notion of dialogue by inviting the voiced *I*-positions to exchange their stories from their own specific point of view. Indeed, as you say, working in the Netherlands, I was somewhere located between the place of birth of American pragmatism and the cradle of the Russian dialogical school and,

therefore, in an ideal position for the construction of a theoretical bridge between these traditions.

1.1. *Thank you! You said about sitting side by side during dialogue: “Apparently, in this position they felt a relation of cooperation that liberated them from any form of objectification by the eye of the other. It is like having a good conversation while sitting side by side during a travel in a car. There is a space in front of you where you can project the inner movements of your mind and then respond to them.” Don’t you think it is a form of bypassing or ignoring negative projection of the client in which s(he) is seeing the front person as opposing. The front person, however, is not always an opposing person, and its extreme example is your front person when you are making love. Plus, seeing the therapist in front of oneself facilitate a full contact and dialogue which confront the client with its both positive and negative projection which might distort current reality of the dialogue, and s(he) needs to be aware of. Your method is called self-confrontation method and I assume it implies a confrontation with oneself, either it is negative or positive. Does sitting next to the client imply a non- confronted method from your point of view?*

Yes, I understand. You bring in some very relevant considerations and, among others, you emphasize the possibility of negative projection. Negative projection is a phenomenon that stems from psychoanalytic considerations. At this point it is important to note that the SCM is not rooted in this tradition (although there are

similarities, see your next question)and intended to create the opportunity for clients to investigate themselves in direct contact with the psychotherapist. However, on this point there is an interesting similarity with the original Freudian psychoanalysis: the fact that the client in a psychoanalytic session is not confronting the psychotherapist and is not having direct face-to-face contact (lying on a couch). In order to create space for the process of free association, patients are stimulated to freely move in a virtual space where they may go into very different sides as a travelin their mind. In this respect, the spatial locations in psychoanalysis is not different from the client in a self-confrontation, who is invited to start a process of association before giving an answer to the questions posed to him or her.

A difference with psychoanalysis is that, sitting side by side, clients are invited to give their own interpretations of the results of the self-investigation and they are even invited to do so *during* the process of self-investigation. This creates a situation of interchange between client and psychotherapist, each from their own specific expertise and experience, which I seeas the basis of a productive dialogue in which clients confront themselves*with themselves*.

- 1.2. *I see. I need to know if this is formally what you do in the process of SCM or it can be done in both direction, side by side sitting of therapist and client or face to face sitting of therapist and clients?*

Personally, I have always advised to sit side-by-side. However, there

different views about this issue and certainly not all SCM practitioners are conforming to this guideline. There are quite some colleagues who advocate sitting in a corner of 90 degrees, which combines the advantages of sitting side by side and facing each other directly.

2. *In what sort of psychotherapy schools do you have been formally trained before you developed the Self-Confrontation Method? And how did they affect you to develop this method? Is Self-Confrontation Method closer to Psychoanalysis or Behavior therapy?*

Around the time I made my first travel to USA (1968), I felt strongly attracted to the humanistic approach of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, the main advocates of this movement at that time. I visited Rogers' *Institute for the Study of the Person* in Lajolla, California. I was quite excited! I felt attracted to the client-centered therapy because of its principle of 'unconditional positive regard' that expressed a true respect for the person. Later, Els Hermans-Jansen decided to go through an in-depth training as a Rogerian therapist and started to apply the Self-Confrontation Method in combination with client-centered therapy in her independent practice. At that time, the therapeutic ideal of the 'fully functioning person' was an important source of inspiration for us. During my professional career as a professor of personality psychology, I was interested in the difference between 'personality', as an *object* of study and the 'person' as a meaning-creating *subject*.

Your question about the relation of the Self-Confrontation

Method with psychoanalysis and behavior therapy is particularly interesting! When I look back at the development of the method over the years, I conclude that it is somewhere in the middle between psychoanalysis and behavior therapy. The affinity with psychoanalysis is expressed in chapters on dreams and myths and on the role of defense mechanisms, included in our book *Self-Narratives* (1995). The similarity with behavior therapy is in the so-called ‘validation process’, that is, the phase in the self-confrontation procedure where clients start to make new plans in order to change their behavior on the basis of the insights and discoveries in the preceding phase of the self-investigation. In summary, in the Self-Confrontation Method you can find traces from three traditions: Rogerian psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, and behavior therapy. I see it as a ‘productive mix’ of elements brought together in a comprehensive dialogical framework.

*2.1. Clear, thank you!*

3. *You are fascinated by the idea that the self of the individual person functions as a “society,” composed of a multiplicity of “members” who are able to address each other as the individuals in the society at large. From the other side, you, like Gadamer, consider mind as innately imperfect. Could you please first elaborate what you exactly mean by innate imperfection of mind, because I could not find a detailed explanation for such statement in your books? I assume by innate imperfection of mind you mean mind constantly needs itself to keep on with dialogue. The dynamism of dialogue is the nature of*

*mind and mind would be non-existent if it stops dialogue with itself. Plus, any form of dialogue cannot be fully present, I mean something needs to be appeared first and then be comprehended. Thus, any understanding cannot be fully in the present and it refers to something from the past, either just the past moment or long time ago. The constant need for dialogue and impossibility of being fully present explains, in my opinion, why mind is innately imperfect. Could you correct my understanding of imperfection of the mind in DST, and then explain if you think there is any relationship between imperfection of the mind and its function as a society?*

Well, this is a deeper question. The imperfection of the mind becomes apparent when we realize that the mind is not immediately clear to itself and needs itself to get clarity about any matter that is really important in life. I tried to capture this process with the terms ‘proposal’ and ‘disposal’. I ask myself a question (e.g., ‘Shall I do this or not?’ ‘Does this fit to me or not?’ ‘Is this the ideal job for me?’). At the moment I ask myself such a question (proposal), I need myself, that is, another part of myself, to give an answer (disposal). Proposal and disposal do not coincide and there may be some time lapse between the two. Typically, particular *I*-positions are involved in this process. I might say: “As an ambitious person, I would like to accept this job, as it enables me to build up a promising career” Then, there follows a response from another position: “As a husband and father, I’m afraid that this job brings me in a situation of stress so that I will not be able to give sufficient time to my family”. You ask yourself a question that is answered by one position -- the most accessible or

most dominant position at some moment in time -- but there is another position at the background that may give a different or even conflicting answer. The one position is doing a proposal but the disposal of the other position is different. The two positions create a field of tension that is a fertile ground for an internal dialogue. The one position does a proposal, which is not agreeable or acceptable for another position that emerges as a disposal. The mind is imperfect because you do not coincide with any position. There are always other positions which you need to consult before you come to a final decision. There is no 'God's eye view' that has an overview of all relevant positions at one moment in time. In order to arrive at a decision, you have to 'travel' through a diversity of positions and this travel is a temporal movement in a field of uncertainty. This process is not very different from the interaction between people in society. When you want to reach a particular purpose, you talk with another person or with different persons and do them a proposal which they, dependent on their positions, accept, reject, modify, or develop. Also here we notice a temporal process between positioned participants with hence and forth movements in order to find a way via a process of proposals and disposals.

*3.1. Very good! You said "Proposal and disposal do not coincide and there may be some time lapse between the two". Is there any neuroscientific evidence for the lapse of time between the two?*

Well, there is some evidence when one assumes that the process of proposal and disposal requires some thinking or deliberation with

oneself before one is able to give an answer. LeDoux (2002), for example, has argued, that there are two paths in the brain for responding to stimuli, a lower and a higher one. The lower circuit, the amygdala, a part of the limbic system, is involved in the processing of emotions. The higher circuit, considerably slower than the low road, becomes involved when an emotional signal is carried from the lower parts of the brain to the neocortex. This difference in speed between higher and lower parts of the brain suggests that thinking and dialogue needs more time than instinctive or impulsive reactions.

*3.2. The conception of the mind as imperfect might be used as an explanation or justification for religious faith. Mind is always a dynamic process. It can never be static and fully stable and as I said it can never be fully present and aware of everything. Hence, the imperfection and dynamism of the human mind needs to be in connection with an infinite, perfect, and stable mind. Such perfect entity is a source of forming and flourishing of the human mind, not restricting and manipulating. That explains how religious faith to a perfect and comprehensive and stable consciousness can be a source of freedom, instead of blind obedience. Blind obedience might be a result of an image or conception of God which is clear but finite and imperfect. The recognition of imperfection and finite of human mind might be a source for the necessity or need to be in connected with a perfect and infinite mind. Do you have any idea in this regard, of course, if you would like to take any position in religious issue?*

Well, this is a point of view that goes beyond any scientific theory. I take the freedom to answer the question briefly from my point of view as a theoretician. We could pose the question of what is the place of God as related to the self of the individual person. In order to answer this question, I start with the assumption that the other person is part of the extended self in the sense of William James. This implies that parts of the environment and the universe belong, as far as they are experienced, to that extended domain. The extended self as I have further developed it together with my colleagues, is dialogical, in the sense that the other person is seen as the ‘other-in-the-self with whom one a meaningful relation of exchange is possible. So, the other person functions, in Mikhail Bakhtin’s terms, as ‘another I.’

Elaborating on this view, I conceptualize God as the ‘ultimate promoter position’ in the self. This brings us to the point of the imperfection of the self. As an ultimate promoter in the self, God is experienced as a Being that, in its quality of ultimate meaning giver, compensates for the inherent imperfection of the ordinary person. As such, God is experienced as, or believed to be, the absolute center in the (extended) lives of moral beings who are persistently and incessantly trying to overcome their inborn insufficiency and existential limitation.

*3.3. I see, thank you.*

4. *How do you think about the relationship of dialogue and attachment? According to diverse research evidences, attachment is an innate psychological need, in which attention, I assume, is its basic*

*ingredient. Any character, either within or between persons, is innately in search for contact due to its attention for attaching. Do you think DST is in fact a practical theory about how the innate need for attachment is functioning among diverse characters, either within or between individuals?*

This touches an important aspect of Dialogical Self Theory: the relationship between the social and the biological. Considering this issue, psychotherapist Paul Lysaker and philosopher John Lysaker have proposed that there are particular positions, organismic positions, which emerge from biological needs or from the physical state of the body. Such positions may emerge when the person feels tired or experiences a sexual urge, or a need for safety. The need for safety can be observed when the young child crawls away from the mother in order to explore the environment. However, at a particular point the child makes a turn and crawls back to the source of safety. In this example, we see that the child first increases the spatial distance from the parent (exploration need) and then reduces it (safety need). Actually, a similar process takes place in the self. Usually, people like to stay within their safety zone and cherish the stable conceptions they have about themselves. They tend to avoid any confrontation with their ‘shadow positions,’ that is, they eschew contact with those parts of themselves which they see as ‘inferior,’ or ‘unacceptable,’ or ‘strange,’ such as hidden aggression, racist tendencies, implicit discrimination or sexual longing for the wife of a friend. As soon as we notice such tendencies in ourselves or other people around us draw our attention to this, we feel a tendency to return to the safety zone in our selves. Yet, for a more dialogical self and for a

more dialogical world it is important to confront ourselves with our shadow positions. The great psychoanalyst Carl Jung has drawn our attention to the process of ‘individuation,’ becoming a whole person requires a ‘coincidence of opposites, that is, not only a ‘going together’ of the conscious and unconscious, the animus and anima, and the child and old person in our selves, but also of the persona (presented positions in our terms) and the shadows. Maturity requires to leave one’s comfort zone, but able to return when unsafety arrives at a point of emergency.

*4.1. Very good! My impression is your response is confirming that human being innately would search for relatedness and attachment and SDT is about the rules for such communication. What I expressed in this question was that exploring and searching for new and unsafe objects are in fact exploring and searching for new attachments and dialogues. We have tendency for new attachments and dialogues, but while we cross the red line of our safety zone, according to our adaptive capacity, we tend to stick to our familiar attachments and dialogues. And the distinguishing the necessity of moving forward toward new and unknown dialogues and attachments or moving backward to our familiar and known dialogues and attachments are a challenge for the human mind.*

Very important insight!

*4.2. If you accept my just above explanation, tell us any guidance or criteria you might advise for distinguishing the necessity of moving forward or moving backward?*

You rightly say: "...distinguishing the necessity of moving forward toward new and unknown dialogues and attachments or moving backward to our familiar and known dialogues and attachments are a challenge for the human mind." The question is: how can we move from our safety zone, or comfort zone as we may call it, to the unfamiliar and unknown areas in the self? This question touches the notion of boundaries between the two zones. When there would be no boundaries at all, one would not be able to defend oneself. As attachment theorists have demonstrated, we have a fundamental need to feel safe as we can see clearly in the behavior of young children who want to retreat to their attachment figures in situations of uncertainty or threat. However, when the boundaries around the familiar and the unfamiliar areas would be entirely closed, like a city in which citizens lock themselves up when they are afraid for the enemy, then the self, constrained to its safety zone, would 'dry up,' not being able to receive any innovative impulse from the outside. This brings us to the issue of dialogue, In order to realize a generative dialogue, that is, a form of dialogue that produces new meaning, then flexible boundaries are required between safety zone and the zone of the unknown. Flexibility in this case means that the self feels safe enough to become engaged in a dialogue that requires the self to be open to the new and the unknown, and to tolerate the possible discomfort of being confronted with unfamiliar insights. When we depict dialogue in this way, then the person should be able to go into a field of uncertainty, yet feeling able to return to the safety area if necessary. Only when safety is accessible, dialogue can proceed.

When you ask for any guidance that may be helpful to distinguish between moving forward and backward, then I would like to refer to the insight into what I consider the biggest stumbling block for dialogue: *exclusive truth pretensions*. When I have the pretension that I know the truth and the other person might have another truth or would simply disagree with me, then it is not possible to be, at that particular issue, dialogical in the generative sense of the term. The truth of the other party is excluded in advance. Certainly, everybody has the right to believe in his or her own truth or to believe in the truth that is proclaimed by any doctrine, but it would then be necessary to make a distinction between ‘discussibles’ and ‘indiscussibles’. The more indiscussibles one includes in one’s repertoire, the less open this person can be for an exploration of unfamiliar or unknown areas of one’s own self and the self of the other.

*4.2.1. Very good comment, thanks! Just need to remember that too much discussibles threaten our identity and make us unstable and little discussibles make us rigid and threaten our growth.*

Very adequate formulation!

5. *“All we need is love”. This is a phrase I assume you find it very ideal and impractical. I would like to know your idea about the role of Love and Compassion in leading to a constructive dialogue? What is your idea about the ways to facilitate it? Do you consider Love as just an emotion or something more than an emotion?*

Interestingly enough, AgnieszkaKonopka and I published a chapter (2010) on the dynamic features of love, an empirical research project based on Agnieszka's dissertation. It was found that, in comparison with a series of positive feelings (e.g. joy, inner calm, strength, safety) and negative feelings (e.g., anxiety, loneliness, inferiority, cold), love was experienced as creating most positive changes in the self both in men and women. Moreover, the feeling of love evoked the most action tendencies both in men and women. This finding suggests that feelings of love have an enormous influence on the way the self is organized and reorganized from both an emotional and a behavioral point of view. Yet, you rightly pose the question whether love is an emotion or more than that. My answer is that it is more than that, at least, it can be more than that. For some people, love is so important in their live that it becomes, in terms of our theory, a 'promoter position.' This type of position, initially launched by developmental psychologist JaanValsiner, has a special place in a person's position repertoire. The background idea is this: when we would be distributed in an increasing number of different and divergent *I*-positions, so typical of our globalizing and border-crossing world, the self would be at risk to become overly distributed and fragmented, and, as you know, fragmentation is a central notion in post-modern views of the self. So, in the lives of most people there are particular positions, promoters, that have the capacity to give direction to a diversity of more specific positions. They move the nose of a manifold of other positions into the same direction. They have an integrating function and have the power to give a developmental impetus to a number of more specific positions and they are even able to generate new

positions. Different people have different promoters. They may receive very different names: 'I as a fighter,' or, 'I as spiritual,' or 'I as loving' or 'I as a dedicated and idealistic professional'. Also external positions in the self can have a promoting function: 'the person I love', 'my dedicated parents', or 'Mandela as my political model.' So, I as loving is then more than an emotion: as an internal promoter in my self it gives a meaningful direction in my life and the person I love enriches my life as an external promoter. So, love can function as a mutually promoting relationship.

*5.1. Interesting! You wrote from David Bohm (Hermans, 2012) in your lecture that all we need is love IS not a practical idea, and I now see you find Love as an important and practical idea. As you said, love starts like an emotion and it can develop to more than that. Plus, what you said for Love as a source of integration in the self is very close to what Iranian mysticism said about Love (Rumi). Could you explain how Love as a promoter position has the capacity to give direction to a diversity of more specific positions and integrate them? Is Love the only promoter or we might have other things as promoter? And could you describe pathological or unhealthy Love from the DST point of view?*

Love as promoter can indeed give direction to a diversity of other positions. Take the example of a person who has a great love for music, like a Chopin or a Schubert. He might, as a consequence of this love, to learn to play an instrument, to become a pianist, to become a composer, to contact people in the musical scene and to become

friends with them, to just mention a small amount of *I*-positions that might be generated by the love for music. I suppose it works the same with all other forms of strong love in which one is dedicated to art, science or to significant others.

Love could become unhealthy if it would reduce the openness of the self to the world and would lose its generativity. Take the example of a person who in his or her love is overly dependent on one other person and loses or gives up, as a result, his or her autonomy. The so-called ‘dependency disorder’ is a clinical example of a person who might be so overly dependent on another one that this *I*-position (‘I as loving X’) entirely dominates all the other positions so that no space is left for their development as relatively autonomous parts of the self.

*5.2. I see. What you said could be a criteria for the differentiation between healthy love and addiction. Addiction is an unhealthy love. But such unhealthy love could be a result of both unsuitable object of love or unhealthy approach toward a healthy or un-unhealthy love object. The latter is also in fact due to an illusionary perception of that love object. Do you agree?*

I agree.

*6. There are three innate psychological needs according to Self*

*Determination Theory. After security, according to this theory, there are autonomy, competency, and relatedness as universal needs among*

*many cultures. There are also many evidences in this regard, and from psychoanalytic theories that attachment or relatedness is an innate need. Does DST accept the universal innate psychological needs according to such research evidence?*

Yes, DST acknowledges such innate psychological needs and they receive a place in the theory under the term ‘organismic positions’ as I have already explained.

*6.1. OK, so I assume you consider these three needs as biological programming of human being which is in dialogue and interaction with the social and cultural aspects, as you explain in your response to question 4.*

Yes, correct.

*7. How is the relationship of DST with transpersonal theories and Psychology? William James, in fact, is both an inspiration for DST and transpersonal psychology. As you surely know, Transpersonal psychology "is concerned with the study of humanity's highest potential, and with the recognition, understanding, and realization of unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness". Five key themes in transpersonal psychology are: states of consciousness, higher or ultimate potential, beyond the ego or personal self, transcendence, and spirituality (Lajoie and Shapiro). The perspective of holism and unity is central to the worldview of transpersonal psychology. I am wondering if the concept of collective unconscious,*

*or we might say collective psyche, might be a related concept to DST. Does this mean that there are collective selves that might be a characteristic of an individual or a culture? In other words, is there a similarity between transpersonal psychology and DST in that both accept the existence of collective characters and each individual might have a unique combination of those characters? Could you please explain your idea in this regard?*

In DST there is attention to so-called collective positions that may express themselves as collective voices. Such voices can be considered as a multiplicity of ‘generalized others’ in the sense of George H. Mead. A culture, including subcultures and counter-cultures, can be seen as a dynamic multiplicity of collective and individual voices engaged in dialogical relationships as open interchanges between the different groups and sub-groups. Or, cultural contacts may be engaged in monological, conflict- or power-relationships when some of the positions are suppressed or marginalized by other positions. Cultural or sub-cultural interactions become often problematic because collective voices of a particular group or sub-group are usually based on in-group vs. out-group relationships. In sociology, the notion of ‘othering’ is often used to describe this process: many groups divide the world into two categories, typically ‘we’ vs. ‘them,’ with the in-group as considered superior to the out-group. In its extreme forms, such forms of ‘othering’ can lead to dehumanize the others and reduce them to ‘objects,’ but even considering them as ‘abjects.’ In a situation where humans radically separate themselves from each other with violence

and war as a possible outcome, a conception of consciousness is needed that surpasses any in-group vs. out-group dichotomy. This touches the problem of identity. The tragedy of humankind is that identity is often formed with the knife of separation. We construct ourselves and our groups as belonging to our identity due to the fact that we are different and separate from them and standing even above them. Political groups in many countries are based on explicit or implicitly opposition, even animosity, to newcomers, possibly as a counter-reaction to a globalizing world that may, under certain conditions, alienate people from each other. At the moment of writing this document, our political situation in The Netherlands is a source of worry for many citizens. When there would be elections at this moment, then the expectation would be that a right-wing political party that openly preaches the reduction of immigrants, mainly muslims, from North-African countries, particularly from Morocco. Unfortunately, national identity in combination with resistance to Islam religion is one of the main factors that motivate inhabitants of our country to respond to immigration streams from the perspective of a closed national identity. Often, identity finds its fertile soil in separation, particularly in a globalizing world that becomes overly open to the unknown and unfamiliar. Therefore, it is so important that, as part of a developing position repertoire, people learn to include not only in-group identities but also identities that reflect a broader consciousness: I'm not only a representative of my political group, my country or my region, but I'm also a European, a world citizen, a human being like other human beings.

At this point I would like to make an additional step. I have

already detailed that promoter positions are an integrative answer to an otherwise overwhelming diversity of distributed *I*-positions. This is one possible answer to the problem of the increasing cacophony of the contemporary world. However, there is an additional and even more radical answer to this problem. It is given by Agnieszka Konopka in a chapter in the *Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory* (2012). She starts by observing that in DST much attention has been given to the dynamic multiplicity of *I*-positions in the landscape of the mind, a description, that allows the study of the self as a ‘society of mind’ embedded in the society at large. In this form, the dialogical self is based on the implicit or explicit assumption that the *I* as a reflexive and dialogical agency is always and even necessary bound to the flow and change of positions. This view would imply that the *I* is *always* positioned. In contrast to this assumption, Agnieszka argues that the *I* is not necessarily defined by a position, but has its own specific nature and qualities. There is a way out of the endless succession of *I*-positions because the *I* is able to *deposition* itself, that is, it has the possibility to disidentify from any specific position and enter a form of consciousness that is described in the literature as a witnessing, thought-free, transcendental awareness. In our book *Dialogical Self Theory* (2010), Agnieszka and I have outlined different forms of depositioning as bridges between the personal and the transpersonal and between science and spirituality.

*7.1. Very good response! According to my understanding you are expressing there are multiple and different I-positions. These positions have the ability to depositioning themselves, means de-*

*identify (I prefer de-identify instead of disidentify) itself from its own specific nature and quality, and develop itself into a meta-position in which it functions as an observing (witnessing), balanced objective or balanced biased (thought-free), and collectively developmental (transcendental) awareness. Such awareness has a capacity of developing love leading to potential integration among positions. Such awareness has a capacity of differentiating among positions and developing balanced dialogue among them leading to new integrations or differentiations. This can be an enriched and creative process of within and between individual dialogues for developing separation, identity, relatedness, integration, and new expanded identity. What do you think? Is my understanding correct?*

I would only add that transcendental awareness goes an important step beyond a meta-position. The essence of a meta-position is that one looks at a specific position or to a pattern of position from the outside, considering them from a distance as one does when taking an overview of the way one behaves in different situations. However, this is not necessarily non-judgmental. It may be that I look, from a meta-point of view, to some specific positions in a critical way or favoring one position more than the other. In the experience of transcendental awareness, on the contrary, one looks at a position or to a pattern of positions in a thought-free, non-judgmental way.

*7.1.1. I see. I assume you agreed with what I just said and you added something more.*

I agree with you on your description of de-positioning in the form of

(thought-free) transcendental awareness. However, I would like to add that a meta-position is not identical to self-awareness, as a meta-position can certainly be thought-full, for example, when one compares a broader variety of specific positions and their patterns and one feels quite critical or judgmental about it. Transcendental awareness, on the other hand, is to be conceived of as non-judgmental and non-critical.

*7.2. Is there any criteria in DST to differentiate between when an I-position is changing and developing and when an I-position is a creation of dialogue among several other I-positions. Such criteria are needed in order to practically and objectively avoid endless succession of I-positions, I assume?*

Generative (innovative) dialogue can indeed lead to new positions, as when one discovers that one has to change one's life-style or life-situation after a longer period of dissatisfaction (e.g. change of job or profession). However, dialogue can also lead to looking at existing I-positions in a new way, as happens, for example, when one may feel grateful for all the gifts one has received in one's life. One may also look at an existing position from the perspective of another existing position, which not necessarily adds to a succession of *different* positions. Moreover, it is essential for DST that it is not based on counting numbers of positions. Doing so would reflect a reification of positions as if they are 'things' that one may add to one's bag. Actually, we are involved continuously in a process of positioning, counter-positioning, and repositioning. Looking at positions in this

more dynamic way, prevents to consider them in terms of numbers only.

*7.2.1.. I see. So any I-position, as you already expressed in your theory, has a character and continuity.*

*8.I have seen in your book that you do not consider human being as lonely. What is your idea about the existential loneliness according to the existential theories? How do you interpret the idea of existential loneliness according to DST? You said "The extended I is a contextualized I that is not alone but always together with, and even extended to, something or somebody else: the hero of a book, a friend with whom you identify, one or more of your children in whom you recognize yourself, a character in a film that reveals a hidden part of yourself, or the person you met only briefly but felt as if you had known him or her for a long time. For a highly developed person, such as the Dalai Lama, Buddha or Christ, even an enemy can be experienced as an accepted and valued aspect of the extending I, although the distinction between self and other and between I and You is not removed (p 153)". What is your idea about existential loneliness? Does loneliness just express a pathological experience or express an existential human experience?*

Existential loneliness is certainly not a pathological condition, but a basic human experience. What is the relationship between loneliness and being alone? In my view there is a clear difference. You can be alone and feeling not lonely. As the French philosopher Sartre once

said: “When you feel lonely when you are alone, you are apparently in bad company.” With this statement he demonstrates that you can feel in good company with yourself, when being alone. Loneliness and being alone are not identical. We can even reverse the question: when you feel (existentially) lonely, are you then alone? Not necessarily. When you become aware that other people also feel lonely, even existentially lonely, then you are not alone in that experience. It can motivate you to share this experience with others, talk about it write about it, make a philosophy about it with the consequence that you are not alone in that (common) experience.

*8.1. Thank you!*

*9. What is the position of DST toward the concept of authenticity, real or true self? Existential psychologists expressed the idea of authenticity (plus psychoanalysts such as Winnicott and Horney), and it is also claimed in self-determination theory as a product of autonomy. I am wondering if the concept of authenticity has any place in DST? If yes, how?*

Yes, authenticity has a place in DST. Let's start with autonomy. There are different conceptions of autonomy. Some interpret it as a form of individualism; others, like some feminist authors, talk about 'relational autonomy,' emphasizing that you can only be autonomous within the context of relationships. We make a stance as autonomous persons *towards* others with whom we are intrinsically connected. We can even develop as autonomous persons *with* others. In my view,

autonomy has always a connection with relatedness. In the Self-Confrontation Method we have worked with the distinction between two motives: self-assertion vs. contact and union with somebody or something else. This distinction corresponds with David Bakan's (1966) concepts of 'agency' vs. 'communion' and with Andras Angyal's (1965) notions of 'autonomy' vs. 'homonomy'. What we found in hundreds of clients is that self-assertion is healthy if it has contact with the other at the background so that, at the right moment, a person is able to shift from assertion to contact and back again, dependent on the demands of the situation at hand. We also found that there are many experiences in which self-assertion and contact/union merge and are experienced in combination: when you are proud of doing something for somebody else or when you are involved in a competitive game which you both enjoy and which unites you both in a common activity. Let's now change the subject from autonomy to authenticity, because that was your question. In our book *Dialogical Self Theory* (2010), we described the phenomenon of 'dialogical authenticity', a form of authenticity in which the other as an external or extended position in the self is directly involved and contributes to the experience of authenticity. Here is a quote from our book:

Dialogical authenticity implies not only listening to the voice of one's own emotions, but also to the voice and messages of the emotion of the other. When these messages are part of a meaningful interchange, then the alterity of the other has a chance to become integrated into one's own emotions, without the risk that their voice is neglected, adapted to the other, or prematurely changed. Dialogical authenticity can be understood by considering it from the perspective of the Buddhist notion of compassion. This tradition has taught for centuries that one is not only

concerned with the “suffering” (including emotional reactions) of others but also with the suffering of oneself. This means that when one is emotionally involved in contact with others, dealing with the emotions of the other and incorporating them in one’s reaction to the other, implies not only compassion to the emotions and positions of the other but also to those of oneself (p. 277).

Like autonomy, that can be seen as relational autonomy, authenticity can be interpreted as dialogical authenticity.

*9.1. Clear, thankyou!*

*10. My own clinical experience, related to above question, told me that when some hidden characters which are laden with strong feelings appear, those could be called true and authentic selves appearing in a patient's explicit experience. The patients also feel more authentic and alive in such situation. This is what we call breakthrough to true feelings or unlocking the unconscious in Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy (ISTDP). In other words, there are some characters within the self that are dominating and repressing other characters within. Those dominated characters get, or in fact steal, their power (emotions) from other inside or outside characters, so that such dominated characters got a fake power, and weaken the power of those true characters by stealing their power (emotions). I am trying, in this way, to explain true and false selves according to DST in my clinical experience. True selves are those characters within the self, which have few or no conflicting forces, and when they are exposed, their power or emotions are intrinsic or suitable with*

*their role. False selves are those characters creating strong conflicts and get their power from the emotions of other characters by force. What is your idea about such usage of DST in explaining true and false selves?*

In fact, I don't use the terms 'true' or 'false' in DST. I prefer, instead, to talk about adaptive vs. maladaptive positions. In my experience, a position that is adaptive in one situation or in one particular period of life, can become maladaptive ('false' in your terminology) in another situation or period of life. Let me give an example from my semi-autobiographical work *Between Dreaming and Recognition Seeking* (2012) in which I applied DST to some significant events in my own life. As I described in that book, I was confronted by some deep experiences of inferiority in my early school career. I often was 'inside myself,' in a kind of dreaming world, while being in company with others. I was seen as 'strange' and, as a consequence, became an outsider. Both my peers and teachers positioned me as a 'dreamer' who was not really present and was perceived as deviant from the group norms. As a result, my teachers ridiculed me and my peers started to bully me. My school performances went down dramatically, which resulted in strong feelings of inferiority. As an answer to these degrading experiences, I developed over the years a strong ambitious position, as an attempt to 'fight myself back' into the group and, later into the broader society. Looking back at my life, I realize that this ambitious position brought me a lot of advantages and it was crucial for my further development. Although I was a very moderate pupil at primary school, I was more successful at high-school and university

and I performed a dissertation project in abreaking time record of 2,5 years. Was the ambitious position my ‘true self’? At that time, I would say yes, it was, as I studied hard and worked on my projects with passion. However, later in my life, I discovered that the ambitious position which made me quite productive in the earlier period, became gradually a burden and a stumbling block as it was losing its function that it had earlier, in the period of building up a career. I even experienced it as an *I*-prison which prevented me to get in deeper contact with people and it sometimes even distracted me from my authentic interest in the psychology of human life. In other words, the ambitious position gave me so much in the early period of my career (invitations, traveling over the world, becoming immersed in other cultures) and was certainly adaptive as a successful response to my initial inferiority. However, it became later a ‘maladaptive machinery.’ As I see it, the terms adaptive and maladaptive are more contingent on the nature of the situation than the terms true and false.

Apart from differences in terminology, you make a very important point when you address the phenomenon of breakthrough of suppressed or dominated parts of the self and you aptly observe that this breakthrough can lead to an increase of authenticity. There is a clear parallel in DST, when rejected or unacceptable positions (e.g., jealousy, anger, pain, inferiority) are accepted as belonging to the self. When such shadow positions become conscious and included as acceptable parts of the society of the self, people experience themselves as more authentic and feel themselves to be more a whole (remember Jung’s individuation process). Against this background, we may understand why ‘acceptance’, including ‘self-acceptance’ can

serve as promoter in the development of the self of many people when they go through a period of painful self-investigation and self-discovery. That is exactly what we often have observed when clients applied the Self-Confrontation Method on themselves: fighting with the dragons from the darker regions of the self, often purifies the self and makes it more complete. This fight requires more courage than the often celebrated intelligence.

*10.1. Clear! What do you mean by “Celebrated intelligence”? And could you explain what sort of fight would it be according to DST? Does it imply awareness, acceptance, and developing a constructive dialogue with dragons? Do you agree with a constructive dialogue with dragons or clear awareness and acceptance and intelligent fighting with dragons? I mean devils (both within and between) need to be understood and need to be helped to transform into goods, or they need to be intelligently understood and beaten?*

With ‘celebrated intelligence’ I ironically look at some intellectual circles where IQ is seen as something of utmost importance to ‘success in life.’ When I talk about courage in the context of dialogue and self-confrontation, I want to emphasize that the courage to enter the unknown and to leave one’s comfort zone is more helpful and effective in life than a high IQ that is often used to rationalize preferences or choices on a post-hoc basis.

I agree when you refer to constructive dialogue with dragons as implying a clear awareness and acceptance of them that creates the space for intelligent fighting with them. This is ‘real intelligence’ as

distinguished from purely intellectual and intellectualizing IQ.

*10.1.1. I see, thank you*

*11. I would like to know your idea about the concept of Superego or Conscience? Conscience is an almost universal concept and, in DST terms, can be considered, in my opinion, as a set of characters in cultures. The role of conscience is guiding and controlling behavior from the standpoint of morality within a given culture. Such characters, in a healthy form, guide other characters within a self with realistic praise, support, insight, autonomy, and compassion. In pathological form, conscience characters would be loaded with violence and aggression. Such conscience enforces its imperative through fear or rough seduction. It offers love (i.e. The illusion of secure attachment) to other insideself-characters through obedience to an authoritarian structure or through loyalty to a belief system. It maintains an inflexible, destructive, and unloving dialogue with other characters, which it scolds, and shames when disobeyed. It discourages self-knowledge and encourages repression, and by ignoring insight (as meta-positions in DST terms) prevents learning and constructive changes (Neborskey, Peluso, 2007). This is what we also see in societies with dictatorship or totalitarian regime. I would like to know your idea about the existence of conscience characters in dialogical self, as I described it in pathological and healthy form. How would you describe the position of conscience characters within self and their role in mental health in comparison to other*

*characters?*

The subject of morality is a crucial one, particularly in times of differences, contrasts and contradictions between individuals, between groups and between cultures. I'm very concerned about the problem that taking a position that one sees as 'good' in a moral sense, creates at the same time the conditions for the 'not-good' or 'evil'. The good on the one side automatically creates the 'bad' at the other side. What is seen as good in one religion or culture is seen as bad in another one. This is what Ken Gergen (2009) calls 'primary morality' which is based on explicit or implicit in-group vs. out-group dichotomy. When there is a form of moral positioning within rigid social boundaries, there is always a form of moral counter-positioning from another side, often with a total lack of dialogue between them. Fighting against the enemy is seen as 'good' in the service of one's highest values. However, when both parties are convinced that their own moral values are superior to those of the other with the values of the other hidden behind the screen of a dehumanized abject, the result is escalation and total destruction as we know very well from history. So, what we need, in order to break through these repetitive barriers is another form of morality, a 'secondary morality,' that is based on a relational and dialogical view that is able to surpass sharp or rigid social and moral boundaries. Given the fact that moral views like any other views, may be different between individuals, groups, nations or cultures, dialogical morality is in essence the willingness to present one's moral views to the other party and to give space to each other to share not only their moral views but also to share the historical,

cultural, and political contexts from which they have emerged. Therefore, I believe in dialogical morality that accepts differences in moral views, yet willing to listen to the point of view of the other party and starting an interchange that is facilitated by the courage to investigate one's own moral principles from the perspective of the moral perspective of the other. Such a morality does not remove differences or even oppositions but creates a common ground that was not there before. Such a common ground can be created by storytelling and generative dialogue (see, for example, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was set up as a form of restorative justice in South-Africa after the abolition of apartheid). Therefore, I strongly agree with your reference to the role of taking meta-positions, as those positions do not give overview and insights in one's own positions and their history but also overview and insight into the positions and meta-positions of the other. Sharing each others' meta-positions is essential for the emergence of empathy and understanding of positions in their broader contexts.

*11.1. I like your idea of dialogical morality. That is really a must in the time of globalizing world. I would also like, as I said, to know your idea about the role of morality, generally, in human mental pathology. Morality or conscience laden with rage and guilt is a major source of psychopathology. When rage and guilt are fused in conscience, then we have an inflexible and authoritarian conscience, which severely split good and bad, and demand blind obedience. Such conscience would lead to psychopathology, both within and between individuals? What is your idea?*

Yes, indeed, the combination of rage and guilt would form, in DST terms, a ‘maladaptive coalition’ that functions as an unhealthy and oppressive power that leaves no space for other positions in the self and for other people to develop themselves in their own way. This is in strong contrast with empathy and compassion that form together an ‘adaptive coalition,’ worth to develop in a globalizing world in which individuals and cultural groups are continuously confronted with the otherness of the other.

*12. What is the conceptualization of DST of projection, both as a defense and as a mental function? I assume in DST, the border between internal and external is considered as an illusion or a mind-made distinction. Self, in DST, is extended both in time and space. But in modern psychoanalysis (ISTDP) the projection as a defense would be deactivated with differentiating between internal and external processes and viewing the external reality with its differentiation from internal processes, differentiating between subjectivity and objectivity. How would you deal with projection as a defense in your psychotherapy according to Self-Confrontation Method?*

People have a basic tendency to make others equal to themselves and, generally, they feel more attracted to similar others than to different others. In the literature this phenomenon is called ‘homophily,’ referring to the principle that contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people. We favor contact with likeminded individuals or groups as expressed by marriage,

friendship, work, advice, support, information transfer, and other types of relationship. Race and ethnicity create the strongest divides in our personal environments, with age, religion, education, occupation, and gender following in roughly that order. In other words, homophily motivates people to stay within the comfort zone of their self-space. Although projection is not the same as homophily, it is equal in the sense that one's own positions are placed on the self of others, either as a defensive reaction or as an inability or unwillingness to see the otherness of the other. This otherness of the other, named 'alterity' in DST, is an essential characteristic of dialogical relationship. When one is sensitive to the alterity of another person, one is sensitive to the fact that his or her positions are similar to those of you in some respects but different in other respects. Moreover, they are acknowledged and respected as different from you. In a most succinct way, this was expressed by Aristotle when he said that the highest form of friendship is seeing your friend as 'alter ego'. He is both similar to you (ego) and different from you (alter). In DST the other is seen as an 'alter ego.' Projection takes place when the projecting person is biased to the ego aspect and blinded for the alter quality of the other's self.

*12.1. Good! I assume there was no contradictory between what I said as defensive projection and the way of handling it with what you explained in DST. Blindness to alter quality of others is interesting and important. I just think it need to be considered that the bias to the Ego aspect can be conscious and unconscious and might be originated both from conscious and unconscious mental processes,*

*and the objects of ego which might be illusionary projected into others can be an image, a thought, or a feeling. Let me know your idea in this regard?*

Actually, I see such unconscious or conscious projections of ego-positions as examples of monologue. In projection you see, in fact, parts of your own self that cover the alterity of the position repertoire of the other. It is a space-occupying and space-dominating process. You can become dialogical from the moment that you are able to ‘take back’ the projections and acknowledge them as emanating from your own self. From that moment on, space is created for the positions of the other in their alterity.

*13. I have not found any empirical evidences, like CBT and ISTDP, for the Self-Confrontation Method as a form of psychotherapy? I might be unable to find such research evidence, but could you tell me about any research about the effectiveness and efficiency of Self-Confrontation Method as a form of psychotherapy? Your perspective in evaluating of this form of psychotherapy might be different from the tradition of empirical evidence? How much do you consider Self-Confrontation Method as a close system to psychoanalysis?*

In the course of time almost 30 dissertations used the Self-Confrontation Method (SCM) as a central part of its research, but only a minority dealt with the effectiveness of the method. On this point, two dissertations, in particular, provided evidence for the effective power of the method. VanHuygevoort (2005) applied the SCM in a

group of visually handicapped people (ill-sighted and blind). She found that the SCM was more effective than the standard support the people received from social workers. After doing a self-investigation and counseling with the SCM, the participants showed more self-assertiveness, more positive feelings, and more acceptance of their handicap, in comparison with a control group. In another dissertation project, VanGeelen (2010) provided SCM assessment and counseling to a group of adolescents with chronic fatigue syndrome and showed that the fatigue level after the SCM trajectory was almost equal to a group of healthy adolescents who served as a control group. At the moment of this interview, there is a broader research project running that investigates the life satisfaction of clients who did an SCM investigation. The preliminary results show that the general satisfactions of clients after a SCM trajectory achieve an average of 8.3 on a 10-point scale.

*13.1. I see.*

14. *My previous interview was with Jon Fredrickson who is a famous psychoanalysis in the United States. I asked him about his idea of the post-modern approach in psychoanalysis and he said: "In the post-modern perspective there is no such thing as a person, but a collection of selves. Philosophically, they make the mistake of eliminating the subject while preserving the hypostases of the subject. Put in another way, if there are all these selves, who has them? For instance, Bromberg talks about "standing in the spaces." He believes that the end result of analysis is that the patient should be able to*

*stand between the different selves without being identified with any one of them. I would agree, but I would add a question: who stands in those spaces? My answer: the human person, the subject.” I would like to know how you response to this criticism toward post-modern theories as DST is clearly a post-modern one?*

First of all, DST was certainly influenced by post-modern theories but it is not a typical representative of this stream of thought. The *I*-position, which is the central notion of the theory, acknowledges not only a multiplicity of divergent *positions* but also emphasizes that there is, at the same time, a continuity principle in the form of an *I* that provides, in terms of William James, identity through time (*I*-positions). While the multiplicity of the positions refers to the post-modern self, the continuity of the *I* in *I*-position, refers to the modern self and designates continuity and sameness. Moreover, the theory includes the workings not only of decentralizing movements but also of centralizing movements in the self. The relevance of decentralizing movements, typical of post-modern conceptions, is aptly expressed by poet William B. Yeats's (1920) famous dictum: “Things fall apart, the center cannot hold”. On the other hand, the importance of centralizing (unifying) movements in the self are a typical product of modern views of the self as expressed in the icon of the ‘self-made man’ and in psychological concepts as ‘self-actualization’ (Abraham Maslow) and the fully functioning person (Carl Rogers). In DST decentralizing and centralizing movements are seen as mutually complementing and as alternating phases in the development of the self.

14.1. *I see.*

14.2. *Hubert, could you directly respond to the question*

*I mentioned above? I said Bromberg believes that the positive end result of psychoanalysis is that the patient should be able to stand between the different selves without being identified with any one of them. Hubert, who stands in those spaces, according to DST, between different selves without identifying with any of those selves? A Meta-position? My own answer according to your theory is that this is NOT the human person, the subject who stands in the space, because it implies there is always a united self or a united person, which is not a compatible idea with DST. My answer, according to DST, is that a meta-position or meta-positions are standing in the space between different selves without being identified with any one of them. Such position is the characteristics of meta-positions in DST. Am I right?*

I see your formulation as fully correct. In our 2010 publication, we have emphasized that a meta-position has three functions: *unifying*: drawing positions into relationship and seeing them as coherent, despite their differences, conflicts and contradictions; *liberating*: being able to leave *I*-positions and not being imprisoned in them; and *executive*: engaging in an action or decision on the basis of the insights resulting from self-reflection on the meta-level. In fact, you are referring to the liberating function of the meta-position which implies that one does not fully identify with one of the specific positions.

15. *What is the position of DST to individualism and collectivism? DST goes beyond the dichotomy of internal and external by bringing the external to the internal and, in reverse, to infuse the internal into the external. Would the concepts of individualism and collectivism, in such context, be disappeared? Individual is a society and society is an individual. Both contain diverse selves in dialogs. So what is the position of DST toward the concepts of individualism and collectivism, which have been applied for identifying societies, social classes, and manners of individuals?*

Actually, I'm quite critical about the way these concepts are used in psychology. Some time ago, I wrote, together with Harry Kempen, an article under the title 'Moving cultures: The perilous problems of cultural dichotomies in a globalizing society (1998). We criticized the tradition of cultural dichotomies, that psychologist continues to publish over the decades under varying names: individualistic vs. collectivistic, independent vs. inter-dependent and many others. We argued that, in a globalizing society, these dichotomies are becoming increasingly obsolete as there are at least three development that challenge these dichotomies (a) cultural connections leading to hybridizations and fusions of cultural elements stemming from different cultures: (b) the emergence of a heterogeneous global system in which cultures are no longer separate entities but parts of a super-ordinate global system; and (c) the increasing cultural complexity, resulting from ideas, modes of thoughts, cultural and technological products (e.g., forms of art, kinds of food, computers, internet) that are increasingly spread over the world and leading to communications

across the borders of existing cultures. An illustrative example of this cultural flow was given by Surgan and Abbey (2012) who presented an extensive case study of a woman who travelled hence and forth between her original culture (Puerto Rico) in which she was raised as an ‘interdependent self’ and North-America that required her to behave as an independent self. The authors showed how their subject, Eleonora, developed a third position, an ‘inter-dependent independence,’ as a hybrid combination that enabled her to live a satisfactory life in both cultures.

*15.1. I see. What you said about dichotomizing the cultures with the idea of individualism and collectivism makes sense to me. Let me put my questions in another word? Do you think there is an individual or a person? Our perception obviously in physical level, show us a person or an individual, but in the psychological level we mostly encounter different characters, different selves, different identities within one individual. I assume this is the basic tenet of DST. Multiplicity of voices within an individual or different characters in dialogue within a person evidences that there is not one character within an individual. So there is not one person in fact in a person or an individual. Self is like a society of multiple selves or characters. And the continuity of the characters within an individual belongs to the nature of I-positions, and also meta-positions that might guide several I-positions for a given period of time. So the individual has a collective entity like a society and there is no individual in a psychological level. We have characters and identities, not individual, both within and between a so called given individual or person.*

*Please correct my understanding from the DST point of view?*

Yes, interesting that, from a purely psychological view, the self is a multiplicity, but we tend to see him or her as an individual, in the original meaning of the Latin term ‘individuum, which, like the Greek word ‘atomos’, means ‘undivided’ or ‘indivisible.’ I’m always impressed by a statement from Montaigne (1603), who several centuries ago demonstrated a striking insight into human nature when he said, “We are all framed of flaps and patches, and of so shapeless and diverse a contexture, that every piece, and every moment plays his part. And there is as much difference found between us and our selves, as there is between our selves and others (pp. 196-197).” The first part of this sentence reflects an observation that, in our contemporary society, is more relevant than ever before in human history: the emergence of a *multiplicity* of the self at the edges of fragmentation or even beyond. The second part of Montaigne’s sentence indicates something equally relevant for our times: the increasing *difference* between the several parts or facets of the self. If we stay attached to the everyday implicit or explicit view that the self is united and coherent in “one” person, at the same time being different from the selves of other people but identical to itself, we are at risk of ignoring the fact that as *part* of a heterogeneous world society the self has become more and more *different from itself*. As a result of widening our horizons, we have an increased range of identifications and disidentifications available that enlarge actual or possible differences in self or identity.

*15.2. Hubert, please clarify your last sentence. Are you saying in your last sentence that if we accept that an individual is NOT undivided, and can be divided into multiple characters, then the number of identities within an individual increases. Am I right in my understanding?*

Your understanding is correct.

*15.3. My second concern in this question is the nature of meta-position. I assume Meta-position is always a position of meta-awareness and promotes self-knowledge. These are meta-positions, which can develop integration among different characters within an individual. This is what I am trying to explain in my above question and I need you tell me if such understanding is in harmony with the position of DST?*

Yes, it is in harmony with DST.

*16. Some scholars used the term post-postmodernism. Would you agree, according to DST, that dialogical notion is an epistemological foundation after post-modernism? An era in which faith, trust, dialogue, performance and sincerity can work to transcend postmodern irony? A form of notion in which power relation of post-modernism, agency of modernism, and moral responsibility of pre modern are considered all together in a constant dialogue and this can be a foundation for a post-postmodern zeitgeist. What is your idea?*

The notion of power is inevitable in a dialogical theory, certainly in a theory that considers the self as a society of mind. Human interactions in the society at large cannot be well understood without the pervasive impact of social power. So, power should also be an intrinsic feature of the self-society in which *I*-positions find themselves always in fields of tension with one position as more dominant or powerful than the other one. When positions are in conflict with each other, the one wants to be stronger than the other and often they are engaged in a win-lose relationship rather than win-win relationships. Dominance relationships are also typical of the process of dialogue itself. The one voice may talk longer than the other voice, may talk louder, may talk with more knowledge or information, may suddenly change the subject, or may deceive the other or manipulate him or her by the use of facade positions. Dialogue and dominance are intensely interconnected in every form of dialogue. The notion of social power comes even more sharply to the fore when the voices of marginalized or suppressed individuals or groups in the macro-society are silenced so that they have no opportunity to tell about their experiences from their own point of view (e.g., I as black, I as old, I as a woman, I as belonging to a lower cast). Macro-society deeply infiltrates the micro-society of the self and challenges, stimulates, or blocks the potential of internal and external dialogue.

*16.1. Thank you for your clarification, but I wanted to know or my question was about if you consider the morality of dialogue and describing the epistemological foundation of dialogue as a zeitgeist*

*after post-modernism? Please read my above question again.*

Yes, I strongly confirm your assumption: the dialogical self reflects a Zeitgeist beyond post-modernism. In my view, DST was in need of a post-modern conception of the self because this conception has emphasized the multiplicity of the self. However, post-modernism has not given, certainly not in its radical manifestations, a satisfying answer to the problem of fragmentation. DST acknowledges the multiplicity, but it replaces fragmentation by dialogue. Or, more precisely, DST develops a view of the self in which decentering movements (emphasized by post-modernism) are complemented by centering movements (as typical of modern conceptions). Centering and decentering movements as two complementing forces keep unity and multiplicity together.

*16.2. I see*

17. *You extended self in time as traditional, modern, and postmodern, which all are living in an individual simultaneously but with different power and dominance? The values of traditional self are expressed in myths and celebrated in rituals (p 54), as you explained. In temporal classification of philosophy in the west, there are the era of the Ancient, Medieval, Modern, and Contemporary. In such classification, Ancient might be considered mythical but Medieval be as traditional. According to Jungians as well, the myths, not the traditional aspects of each culture, express themselves in dreams, primitive tribes, and delusions and hallucinations of psychotic patients like essential*

*schizophrenia. Works of Joseph Campbell also may differentiate myths from traditions. What is your idea about differentiating between traditional and mythical self both as pre-modern selves?*

Yes, you are right. In our exposition of DST we made no explicit distinction between a mythical and a traditional period in history. You pose an intriguing question, which makes me think about the matter. I remember very well that I was fascinated reading Campbell's *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1968), particularly when he described the three phases in the life of the hero: (a) The hero starts in a mundane situation from which he receives some hint or information that acts as a call to move into the unknown (b) He has to undergo a series of trials, tasks, or ordeals that lead to a process of transformation and (c) After having found bliss and enlightenment in the other world, the hero wants to keep the wisdom gained on the quest and strives to integrate that wisdom into a human life. Although this travel is typically performed by mythical or religious figures like Buddha, Christ, or Moses, the basic structure of this quest can also be observed in a dialogical process: (a) being located in the comfort zone of everyday situation, the person receives an invitation to dialogue: (b) becoming engaged in the dialogue, the participants may receive important insights, knowledge, or information; (c) they want to integrate the new wisdom or knowledge in their existing life patterns. Maybe, here is a basic pattern of positions through which human beings are invited to travel through physical and psychological space in order to enrich and innovate their lives and communities.

*17.1. Good comments!*

18. *Takfiri, as you probably know in recent news, is a group of extremist Muslim who accuses another Muslim of apostasy. In principle, the only group authorized to declare a Muslim a kafir is the Ulema and this is only done once all the prescribed legal precautions have been taken. However, a growing number of splinter Salsify groups, labeled by some scholars as Salafi-Takfiris, have split from the orthodox method of establishing takfir through the processes of the law, and have reserved the right to declare apostasy themselves. Such a recent issue in the world news shows that extremism is an inevitable form of localization, appeared in all eras of history, and is widely spreading a culture of violence. Such extreme groups definitely reject any form of dialogue. How is it possible to open up dialogue with such groups, if you have any suggestion to Muslims to understand and establish a constructive relationship with such extremist?*

Extremists who reject any form of dialogue bring us evidently at the ultimate border of meaningful interchange, as dialogue is only possible when both participants create a sufficiently open space for considering, reconsidering, and developing their own experiences. Truth is not a starting point of dialogue but its (shared) result. There is, maybe, one strategy which may avoid any form of escalation and that may create possible uncertainties on the side of the dogmatic extremist guided as he may seem to be by indiscussible truth pretensions: posing good and challenging questions, repeating them, and waiting for the answer, with patience and sincere interest. In some

situations, one's tongue is the most powerful weapon.

*18.1. So there is nothing more than the creative use of mind to open up a dialogue. Could you say what you meant by this sentence in your response: "Truth is not a starting point of dialogue but its (shared) result"?*

I mean that when something is defined as 'the truth' before any dialogue takes place, it has the status of 'preliminary truth'. By going through the dialogical process, this starting truth may be changed, corrected, developed, or confirmed. In this way 'truth' becomes 'shared truth' and, as such, accepted by a wider community.

19. *You presented below a comment from Mohammad Khatami, former president of Iran (1997-2005), in his speech in 2000 at UN, in your last year lecture: "But dialogue becomes possible only at a particular time and place under certain psychological, philosophical, and ethical conditions, and therefore, not everybody, with any world view and belief in some political, moral, religious or philosophical system, can claim that he or she is an advocate of dialogue. For real dialogue to take place, we require a set of general, all-inclusive, a priori axioms, without which no dialogue is possible in the true sense of the word. It is up to such world organizations as UNESCO to conduct research into these axioms, to publicize them, and to make them acceptable and even desirable to the world community" (p. 30). What is your idea about the suggestion of the Iranian former president regarding the dialogue among civilizations?*

What I particularly like in Khatami's speech is that he emphasizes that dialogue is possible only in particular conditions. In other words, dialogue is not there at any time and at any place. Dialogue is more than becoming engaged in a chat. It is more than using language and it is more than just communication. It is certainly a special kind of communication. Taking the notion of 'special conditions' into account, we proposed some criteria for 'good dialogue', for example, dialogue can only take place when there is a sufficiently broad bandwidth of positions, that is, when the space for introducing relevant positions from both sides is not limited, dialogue can develop. Or, dialogue is only possible when participants have respect for the alterity of each other's positions; or dialogue can only develop if one acknowledges the possibility of misunderstandings and the existence of power differences; or, dialogue requires that one's own point of view is not presented as ultimate or exclusive truth but rather discussible in self-reflective ways so that further development of initial positions is possible. Becoming aware of such necessities and sharing them illustrates that dialogue is a highly sensitive, innovative and precious human activity that lifts us up above many other forms of communication.

*19.1. I see, thanks.*

20. *Iran is a country that has a high rate of immigrants in two directions. There are a lot of Iranians within past several decades that immigrate to the west and there are a lot of Afghan immigrants moved to*

*Iran. What is your advice for both Iranian immigrants that have been facing a lot of difficulties in adjusting themselves to the life style of west, plus their job and economical difficulties, and your idea about our encounter with Afghan people who have been immigrating to our country?*

People are identity-seekers. There is the great misunderstanding that people have one identity ('What is your identity?' 'Who am I?') as if only one answer can be given. We have the tendency to talk about identity in the singular. However, it leads to immense difficulties, when we think that way. Because, when this one identity is threatened, we start, often vehemently, to defend it, as no alternatives are available. In the globalizing and localizing world in which we are living, it is better to accept the idea that everybody has more than one identity, a multiplicity of identities or positions, so to say, and we may be glad that we have the possibility to think about ourselves in plural terms. For a livable world, it makes sense to place these identities on different levels, varying from more specific levels (e.g., I as a father, I as a professions) to more general levels (e.g., I as Iranian, I as a Japanese, I as a Afghan), and going up to an even higher level (e.g., I as a human being, I as living on this precious planet). Please, understand me well. This is not simply a matter of self-categorization or self-definition. It is a matter of a living process of self-positioning. What is the difference? Self-categorization and self-definition are *objectifying* acts, you just place yourself in categories in a way similar to dividing objects, persons, or animals into baskets that are, in one way or another, equal to or different from each other. In contrast to

categorization, positioning is a *relational* act: when you position yourself, you place yourself towards something or somebody. In doing so, you position at the same time the other. When I position myself towards you, you are positioned by me at the same time. And you can answer with a form of counter-positioning (confirming, rejecting or just answering to my way of positioning). When I say: ‘He is a Muslim,’ or ‘He is a Christian,’ this is more than a categorization. It implies that I position not only the other, but I also position myself towards this person, with implicit and explicit messages towards the other or myself. And this process of positioning and counter-positioning can be a very emotional and engaging process. So, the crucial question is not “*who* are you?” but “*where* are you standing towards the other (and towards yourself)?” From a dialogical point of view, the ‘who’ should be replaced by the ‘where,’ as the ‘where’ always implies a *relationship* with the ‘there’. When I become aware of my own standing towards the other, I have the possibility of becoming aware of what I’m *doing* towards the other and myself. And this doing has moral implications as it can contribute to the well-being of the other or damage them.

*20.1. Very clear and interesting! It reminds me of what you said about the difference between sameness from logical and dialogical point of view: The logical identity of the two same statements is not identical but an utterance and it is a confirmation from the dialogical perspective. Thank you!*

21. *What is your suggestion, at the end, for the Iranian colleagues in*

*order to move toward cultural dialogues in conceptual and empirical levels both within and between individuals and cultures?*

What I would suggest is something very practical but with theoretical and empirical implications. The best the Iranian scholars, like other scholars in the world, could do is to perform culturally relevant research and to work on practical problems on the interfaces of cultures, nations, and regions. It is at these places where the differences between individuals and groups become visible and where there are promising opportunities for mutual enrichment and innovation. Globalization has a double face: it can lead to economic exploitation, devastating conflicts, and ineffectual separations from each other. It can also give us a chance to learn from each other, to start new forms of cooperation, and to be co-creative. It largely depends on the way people position each other and themselves on these interfaces. Are they places of separation and alienation or fields of fertility and growth? I say this in the awareness that multiple identities are increasingly generated at the border zones of a globalizing world that finds, at the same time, localizations as their counter-force. So, let's meet each other in international educational projects, international conferences, intercultural meetings, on the Internet, and let's publish our experiences and views in each other's journals and newspapers.

*Thank you for spending time responding to my questions. They would be a valuable source for my Iranian colleagues!*

Thank you too, Nima, this was for me an in-depth exploration into a subject matter that has great significance for me. It was a great pleasure to communicate with you as a thoughtful and well-informed guide. I see our exchange as a true example of a “good dialogue” and I’m delighted that via you I can be in touch with the readers of your Persian journal!

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