

## Preface

In conversation and dialogue with others, we discuss things that often seem trifling and insignificant, as well as things that appear important and even sublime. *We are*, we exist dialogically as beings that communicate with one another at the very moment that we are talking with others. But when we arrive at a conclusion by accepting some arguments and rejecting others, we are using an implicit method or set of methods of reasoning traditionally called dialectic. One can be in dialogue about dialectic; one can be in dialogue without using dialectic; and one can use dialectic outside of dialogue. The main questions discussed in this book are: What are dialogue and dialectic? And how are they related to one another? This is not, however, a systematic dialectical argument about dialectic; nor is it a historical reconstruction of dialectic and its development, where each historical stage might constitute a necessary step in a logical sequence of stages. It is also not a dialogue on dialogue. Rather, what follows is a story: one that discusses a tradition of philosophizing through dialogue while practicing dialectic. It is a story about the *birth of dialectic out of the spirit of dialogue*. Once dialectic is dissociated from dialogue, it understands (and misunderstands) itself in many different ways: as an art of conversing about any given thing, a universal method of correct reasoning, and even the completion of philosophy. However, all of these characterizations still seem to point toward the origin of dialectic as that of an unassuming simple conversation and oral dialogical exchange.

The consideration of dialectic and dialogue in their mutual relation is complicated by the fact that it is not ultimately clear where each of them belongs in the traditional division of philosophy, the sciences, and art. Despite its codification in literature and philosophy, dialogue is primarily live conversation. As such, it is spontaneous, which means that in dialogue every interlocutor is free. Therefore the outcome of a conversation can never

be predicted in advance. Hence there is no science of dialogue. On the one hand, despite its being capable of self-description and self-reflection, dialogue is not a theory. Nor can there be a theory of dialogue, because dialogue can always be continued in a different way, that is, a person can express herself differently every time she is in dialogue. Yet despite dialogue's being both spontaneous and alive, it is always possible to discern traits of consistency within dialogue, but only *after* it has happened. On the other hand, dialogue also bears a resemblance to art. Indeed, dialogue requires conversational and communicative skills, and in this sense its consideration may belong to aesthetics. Moreover, dialogue embodies *aisthēsis* or the sense perception of a minimal corporeality, namely that of the voice. Thus dialogue can also be understood as the art of being—that is, the art of being together with other human beings or the art of being human. In the case of imitative, written dialogue, dialogue evolves into the dramatic literary art of presenting persons as characters, of asking the appropriate questions, and of making the proper dialogical move to and with another interlocutor. However, dialogue as oral conversation with the other *neither imitates nor produces anything*. Rather, dialogue allows interlocutors *to be* in communication with each other. Hence dialogue is not properly an art insofar as being only *is* and is not produced.

Dialectic comes about as the written record, fixation, and reflection of an initially unstructured and seemingly disorganized oral dialogical exchange. Yet dialectic emerges only after the act of a live oral dialogical event. As such, dialectic turns out to be the formalized and finalized product of the monoconscious disintegration of an original dialogue, which, despite its unsystematic nature and seeming lack of universality, is nevertheless a universal human phenomenon. Dialogue proceeds by means of mutual interruption, whereas dialectic moves by grappling with opposites, particularly at the moment of their alleged coincidence. Dialogue's purpose, which lies within itself, is to continue the activity of conversation and (well-)being with the other. Yet dialogue is not just *a* form of communication: dialogue constitutes the very *conditio humana*, because to be is to be in dialogue with one's dialogical partner(s). As such, dialogue is always meaningful and complete, even if it is not finalized at any moment.

The unpredictability of dialogue cannot but irritate the mind looking for a reliable method in search of regularities and propositional uni-

versal truths. Dialectic is suspicious of dialogue, in which dialectic sees too much chance and disorder. Although dialectic originates in dialogue, dialectic wants to liberate itself from its own origin, to forget it, obliterate the vestiges of the dialogical within itself, and thus become a strict science and method. Dialectic, then, intends to eradicate all accidentality from reasoning, or at least to channel dialogical conversation onto a course that would produce a proof or argument through joint deliberation. In this way, dialectic hopes to get rid of any dependence on the dialogical other, and thus it becomes monological. Dialectic builds itself up as a logical enterprise, as the art and method of constructing correct philosophical arguments in accordance with certain rules, and of choosing the right presuppositions as starting points.

In its various manifestations throughout history, dialectic takes many forms and assumes many faces, each unlike the other. A common ground for reasoning about dialectic in modernity—in Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher, and Gadamer, all of whom take dialectic to be a major constituent in their inquiries—appears to be the understanding of dialectic as it is epitomized in Plato and Aristotle. Plato takes dialectic to be necessary for the destruction of incorrect theses. It is possible that a correct thesis is not reachable by a discursive dialectical procedure, but the correct thesis cannot be accepted as known or rationally justified without dialectical justification and argumentation. Dialectic grows out of simple, yet not simplistic, discussions about what and how things are, about those things with which we are constantly engaged in (making) the world, such as politics, love, and so on. As a method of rational justification, dialectic is based on spelling out the contradictions that arise in dialogical investigations of our common opinions about things. As the practice of questioning “what” a thing is by reference to opposites that occur as “yes” and “no” responses in dialogical exchange, dialectic is perhaps a kind of art. When Plato writes his dialogues, which both imitate and reconstruct real conversations, he is very much aware of the origin of dialectic within live dialogical exchange, but wants to elevate dialectic to a logically ordered and ordering way of conceiving the true in an ascent from primary assumptions to their undemonstrable grounds and the ultimate good. When Aristotle places dialectic within a logical system of elaborate and subtle distinctions, syllogisms, and tropes, he takes the

project of dialectic to be an artificial systematization of his teacher's and predecessors' insights about correct thinking, which are already implicit within a seemingly casual and unsystematic dialogical conversation. Later philosophy, however, wants to eliminate altogether the haphazardness of conversational exchange by elaborating a sure art and method for coining universal, and not accidental, propositions.

Dialogue, too, assumes a variety of forms and appearances: among them, conversations in the streets and squares of Athens; guided school discussions; idle chat; symposia; Kant's after-dinner courteous table talk; salon *bon mot* conversation. There are an unlimited number of dialogic genres, and each can be renewed in an original way. In each of its forms, however, dialogue is always engaging and unpredictable yet non-contingent. The engagement is mutual because it occurs in conversation between interlocutors, and it is further reinforced by the untainted enjoyment of being with the other and the interlocutors' attending to each other, even though, at times, this may not be easy.

With its appearance in the works of Plato and his immediate predecessors, dialogue played a central role in both philosophy and literature, for at that time the two were not considered separate. Written dialogue became a favorite dramatic form for revealing not only universal ideas, but also unique human characters and irreversible events. Dialogical narrative can be understood as an alternative to dialectical restorations of prior events. This sort of narration is capable of weaving complex networks for understanding human relations by showing, sometimes indirectly through hints and associations, how things are or were, as it does in a detective novel, for instance. Literary artificial dialogue, then, combines features of dialectic with the art of narrative and uses methods of persuasion that are found in both.

In modern philosophy, however, dialogue is ousted by the advent of the Cartesian, self-centered, autonomous, and universal subject, who develops its dialectic of philosophical analysis as *the* method of correct reasoning. When this all-permeating author's ego ("subjectivity") attempts to suspend itself and thereby protect itself from itself and from its own intrusion into things, it mostly fails. Even if the author—who usurps the privileged position of reasoning and being able to see what is real as real—does not want to be *the* voice in an invented dialogue and constructed dialectical argument, he is still unable to commit literary suicide and get

rid of himself either through fragmentation or by using various writing techniques, such as “automatic writing.” For this reason, today (which is but the lengthy day of modernity) we seem to be experiencing a crisis of dialogue due to the solitariness of a single, self-isolating autonomous subject. Such solitude is often just loneliness among other lonely subjects, all of whom strive for, yet cannot achieve, a simple conversation with the other, for which they substitute an anonymous exchange of “no one’s” opinions.

The fixed form of written dialogue occurs as an attempt to both artfully preserve and skillfully imitate oral dialogue. However, because dialogue is elusive and ever changing, it is difficult to pin it down in writing. Therefore one must invent artificial means and techniques, including that of written dialectical dialogue, in order to reproduce oral dialogue, thereby substituting for oral dialogue what is not oral dialogue. It is not by chance, then, that certain criticisms of writing began to occur at the same time as and together with the appearance of dialectic and written dialogue. One such critique that can be traced back to the enlightened Sophists (particularly Alcidas) and Plato is that written speeches are similar to painted statues that mimic humans to an awe-inspiring degree, yet cannot talk back when asked a question, cannot defend themselves, and cannot be other than they are. Thus, even if the purpose of composing beautiful speeches where characters seem to talk to one another is to preserve their original discussions, imitative literary dialogue is still only an improper substitution for memory with a “reminder” that is incapable either of saving the things and conversations of the past, or of communicating them to the reader.

Perhaps one should not write, after all. Yet we do write, so perhaps it is just a (bad) habit. Writing is premeditated and fixed, and as such lacks both the flexibility of oral dialogue and the capacity to answer the question; neither can it grasp and hear all the subtleties and ramifications of the response. Although it is not possible for oral dialogue to follow all of the possible paths that are opened up with each new rejoinder in a discussion, oral dialogue is still capable of choosing *a* path. Even if it is not always the most appropriate choice, it is at least unique to the discussion. Written dialogue and its distillation into dialectic, on the contrary, have only one path that they have already realized and chosen to follow forever.