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A Conversation with Calvin O. Schrag

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

RER/DJM: Professor Schrag, we are immensely grateful for the opportunity to reflect here on the richness of the work that marks your distinguished career. We hope that, in some small way, we can offer something here that acknowledges the time, encouragement, and support you so selflessly and graciously give those who are working in philosophy and communication.

It is our intention to conduct this conversation in such a way that it will prove to be useful both to those who are familiar with your work and to those as yet unfamiliar with it. We hope to offer those already familiar with the work, not only further contextualization, but a new perspective on the work as well. We have always believed that the radical implications of your work, implications that have become obvious to us in our many conversations with you, have too often been overlooked, and we hope that in this conversation we can bring some of these implications to the fore. For those unfamiliar with your work, we hope to offer a consolidated, if not a comprehensive, introduction to your thought.

In discussing your work, it will become evident that we have a particular interest in your reflections on the phenomenon of “communicative praxis.” We are scholars trained in both the disciplines of philosophy and communication and have been dedicated from the first to an elaboration of the philosophy of communication. It is our hope that in the course of

the conversation we can create openings for new generations of scholars concerned with posing philosophical questions about the practice of communication, a practice your work has come to make a central concern.

COS: Thank You. I appreciate your kind words.

ON DOING PHILOSOPHY

RER/DJM: Although you have been labeled a “continental” philosopher, your willingness to move beyond the various demarcations—the boundaries and barriers—that have structured the discipline of philosophy belies the simplicity of this characterization. Before we take this label as a given, we would like to give you the opportunity to situate yourself as a philosopher.

COS: I would situate myself between the either/or that has demarcated the continental and analytic philosophical traditions, as well as within the American tradition of philosophy that this either/or has too often obscured. I would quickly add, though, that this situatedness is neither some species of eclecticism, nor some manner of synthesis. Rather, it is a matter of remaining situated in such a way that forays into, as well as beyond each of these traditions that always remains possible.

With respect to the American legacy, to take the latter first, I have, for example, always been particularly taken by the way Emerson links discourse, thought, and action.¹ In a sense, it complements my own project of communicative praxis. You might be surprised to learn that were I to give an address such as the oration “The American Scholar,” which Emerson delivered in 1837 to the Phi Beta Kappa Society in Cambridge, it would deal with many of the same themes he dealt with more than 150 years ago. In that address Emerson spoke of the scholar as one who is educated by nature, books, and action.

Now, admittedly, much of the program at the annual meetings of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP), which I cofounded with John Wild, James Edie, and George Schrader in 1965, is devoted to discussions of the contributions of philosophers from continental Europe. But one should not forget that there is an indigenous American existentialism and phenomenology, as Bruce Wilshire has so admirably illustrated in his book, *William James and Phenomenology*.² My guess would be that an investigation of the nooks and crannies of American intellectual life would also yield resonances of the themes that have come to identify postmodernism, such as multiplicity, heterogeneity, difference, incredulity toward metanarratives, and so on.

It should also be made clear that the purpose of founding SPEP was not as much to confront the dominant Anglo-American analytic tradition as it was to supplement it. We wanted to provide the philosophical community with a more pluralistic agendum. The call for pluralism is a manifestly American request. It is part of our ethos. An ethos that received decisive expression in William James's pioneering work, "A Pluralistic Universe."³

Further, I have some deep concerns about the label "continental" philosophy. I am of the mind that the labels "continental" and "analytic" as applied to philosophical discourse have outworn their usefulness. I have yet to meet a responsible "continental" philosopher who is opposed to analysis and I have encountered numerous "analytic" philosophers who are concerned with many of the same issues that elicit my interest. That there are differences of style, attitude, and approach across the spectrum of philosophical movements cannot be denied. But many times these same differences can be found within the movements themselves.

I have always found it amusing that scholars enamored with Edmund Husserl's quest for a universal logical grammar have more in common with the early analytic philosophers than they do with philosophers who have turned from transcendental to existential phenomenology. Or, to use another example, that the representatives of the Ordinary Language School, the second phase of analytic philosophy, have more in common with philosophers involved with hermeneutics than they do with members of the earlier phase of analytic philosophy.

The lesson to be learned from all this is that philosophy of whatever stripe never speaks with a single voice and that if the conversation is to continue it should behoove us to strive to communicate in spite of differences. A multiplicity of voices is needed in the philosophical task, a multiplicity of voices that, in a sense, always remains too narrow.

RER/DJM: In your own work, it is evident you have made an effort to "communicate in spite of differences," engaging the work of many philosophers, philosophers associated with movements such as phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, deconstruction, postmodernism, and so on. Clearly we would be remiss in leaving out pragmatism and other homegrown movements. Yet in these engagements, you have consistently refused to align yourself with any of these philosophical movements. This refusal appears to be indicative of your work.

COS: The philosophical movements that you name are all relevant to an account of my philosophical development. Other philosophical movements or tendencies, of course, would need to be referenced in charting my critical conversations.

However, all along, my response to these movements has been one of critical appropriation. It would be quite misleading to say that I moved from a phenomenological period to an existential period to a hermeneutic period and so on. I have carried on a critical conversation with the representatives of each of these movements as well as others, but never found myself comfortably situated within any one of them.

When I speak of critical appropriations vis-à-vis the individual movements that you have enunciated, I mean that I have taken over the responsibility of addressing the issues, the problems that their thought poses without necessarily taking on their distinctive approaches to the issues. It is important to draw a distinction between a position or a school of thought and the issues that are addressed.

I am reminded here of the response that we received from Martin Heidegger after setting up the Heidegger circle some thirty or thirty-five years ago. We had planned to discuss Heidegger's approach to technology. So we wrote to him, told him about the existence of the circle, and informed him that we were going to be discussing his approach to technology. We received this very interesting letter from him, telling us that he was touched by the fact that we had an annual meeting devoted to a discussion of his philosophical accomplishments. But he urged us not to talk about his approach, but rather talk about the issue of technology.

So that is what I have done in my own work: distinguished position-taking from issues. And my conversation with the different philosophers that I treat in my work has been that of appropriating the issues while remaining critical with respect to their positions. I am hopeful, in this way, what Friedrich Nietzsche always feared can be avoided, namely becoming a disciple or coming to have disciples.⁴

RER/DJM: The suggestion has been made that in appropriating issues rather than position-taking, as you put it, there is a certain refusal of polemics, that time-honored philosophical genre and prominent academic pastime. In other words, a suggestion that you eschew polemics.

COS: It is important that this issue be raised because it gives me an opportunity to address a misunderstanding that appears to be afloat in the neighborhood. I have never taken a stand against polemics or argumentation—which itself would be polemical—nor have I avoided or eschewed polemics.

There are two points at issue here. The first has to do with the placement of strategies and techniques of argumentation within the designs of philosophical discourse. My position here has always been that argumentation clearly has a place in philosophy, but it must remain subordi-

nate to the achievement of understanding and enlightenment. It should not become an end in itself, that is, argumentation for the sake of argumentation, designed simply to chalk up points by obliterating an opponent. The goal of argumentation is not coercion, but rather mutual understanding.

The second point is that although polemic, insofar as it is not abused, comprises a quite legitimate function in the philosophical enterprise, the use of language in its polemical modality is only one function of language. Linguistic usage cannot be restricted to argumentative competence and performance. Language plays within a wider theater of performance and disclosure, exhibiting nonargumentative usages in speaking and writing. Doing philosophy is not bound to the employment of only one language game.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's later work, *Philosophical Investigations*, is a classic illustration of this point.⁵ Not a single argument can be found in its 229 pages. What one finds there is the use of language to show that what appears to be the case—to elucidate how something consists in, or counts as something—only within a specified context of circumstances. This is language in its function of showing, of setting forth, of disclosing, rather than language toolled to deliver deductive conclusions or inferential claims. The citadel of philosophy is expansive enough for both of these functions of language as well as others to thrive.

RER/DJM: Taking this into consideration and given that you have characterized your work as a critical appropriation of issues—with an emphasis on the term “critical” here—where do you stand with respect to what has been called the hermeneutics of suspicion?

COS: The triumvirate of Karl Marx, Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud—the three masters of suspicion, as Paul Ricoeur dubbed them—came to play a role somewhat later in my professional development. I had studied bits and pieces of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud all along, but what piqued my desire to have another look at them was mainly Ricoeur’s pioneering work that teased out a hermeneutics of suspicion from each of these giants.⁶ Certainly, there is a hermeneutics at work in the thought of each, and it does not require much investigation of their works to find that they are indeed suspicious about much. Marx works out a strategy of suspicion in his investigation of the ideological underpinnings of false consciousness. Nietzsche directs his attention to the self-deception that feeds the good and bad conscience. Freud uncovers the libidinal energy that motivates behavior from the depths of the unconscious and which the super-ego is want to cover up.

Now you ask, "How do these strategies of a hermeneutics of suspicion link up with my project of communicative praxis?" Clearly, there is a linkage here. But it is not one of wholesale appropriation. The hermeneutics of suspicion provides us with a necessary deconstructive strategy whereby one dismantles the intrusive ideologies and duplicities of self-deception that obstruct an understanding of self, other, and world. But this is only one half of the loaf—and although one half may be better than nothing, it is desirable to have the other half as well. The other half has to do with a strategy for re-creating a vision of self, of other, and of world that opens up in the wake of the deconstructive dismantling. We must never forget that deconstruction and re-creation always go together.

The hermeneutics of suspicion by itself is too one-sided, too limited, too restricted. It remains largely reactive. It reacts against the techniques by means of which false consciousness, the herd morality of the good and bad conscience, and the repressive facades of the superego cover-up the operations of power. This, of course, is all to the good. But one needs to graft on to this reactive hermeneutics a proactive hermeneutics, that is, an interpretive stance that sorts out the requirements for a more positive and more edifying dynamics of discourse and action. This is precisely the goal of my project of communicative praxis.

PORTRAITS OF THE SELF

RER/DJM: The title of your most recent book *The Self after Postmodernity* hints at what appears to be a life-long project.⁷ It is a project already evident in your first book *Existence and Freedom*.⁸ From that work onward there seems to be an abiding interest in the notion of the self. Before turning specifically to the project of communicative praxis, we would like to ask about this ongoing interest in the self, assuming, of course, that this is an accurate assessment.

COS: It would be correct to say that the questions of self-understanding and self-constitution are at issue throughout all of my work, from the very earliest to the latest. There are two preliminary points that can be made here that perhaps will help to clarify this interest.

The first point has to do with the accident of one's professional development. Here it was my early interest in Alfred Whitehead, who raised the question about the self in a rather provocative manner. In asking about the self, his position was the self must always be understood as a self in process.⁹ Now if the self is always in process, then as Whitehead once put it—and he probably overmade the point, but he did put it

this way—Aristotle’s doctrine of substance is a complete mistake. I say “probably over-made the point,” because Aristotle may have had a more fluid understanding of substance than did René Descartes, for example. But the point, which Whitehead clearly made for emphasis, is that there is no permanent substrate to the self. So, on the one hand, the problem of understanding the self on the basis of an application of the categories of substance and attribute, categories in which the self had traditionally been understood, became a problem for me based on my initial philosophical studies.

The second is the existential and, probably, the more basic point. Namely, to ask any kind of basic philosophical question presupposes some kind of understanding—pretheoretical, to be sure—of what it means to ask a question. The questioner is inescapable here and so the question about the questioner becomes inescapable as well. This amounts to the existential side of the Cartesian problematic: Who is it that doubts before the doubting begins? So, there is, on the other hand, the existential feature of philosophy itself that informs my interest in the self.

Now the pursuit of the question, as you might expect, led me more and more to the disciplines of the social sciences, and probably more specifically to communication. And this was inevitable. As soon as the self is somehow socially or communally contextualized, then there is the requirement to give attention to the social situatedness of the self and the communicative interaction that structures that situatedness.

My most recent book, *The Self after Postmodernity*, provides a kind of consolidation of my life-long interest in the question of the self. Here I attempt to steer a course between the Scylla of selfhood anchored in a stable and self-identical substance, immune to the ravages of time, and the Charybdis of a self dispersed in a random becoming, without any unity or direction. The self, between these unacceptable alternatives, is a self refigured as the “who” of discourse, action, community, and transcendence.

RER/DJM: The interest in the self, as you put it in your second point, is and presumably remains an interest in the existential self. But in speaking of the existential, it is difficult to escape the reverberations of existentialism, which, as you know, has gotten more than its share of bad press. Can we appeal to the existential in spite of these reverberations, and if so, what are we now to understand by the term?

COS: There is the inescapability of self-consciousness, of self-understanding, of self-knowledge in any philosophical inquiry. This mandates, if you will, a return time and again perhaps not to the question “*What* is the self?” but as I suggested in my last book, “*Who* is the self?” or “*Who*

is speaking?" or "Who is acting?" or "Who is in community?" etc. Now this concern with the self is a concern in another guise of the question: "What does it mean to be a human being?" I am reminded here of the statement attributed to Feuerbach: "I do not wish to be a philosopher at the expense of being a human being."

In a sense, this is a kind of recovery of that initial existential question, but now it has matured, gone through a baptism in communicative approaches to selfhood, moved beyond the tendency toward the kind of perfervid individualism in the early existentialists. So, it is not simply a return understood in terms of recovering what somehow was already fixed and finished. Rather, there is a repetition. And here I am thinking of Gilles Deleuze: a repetition with difference.¹⁰

The inescapable concreteness of the self is, I think, one of the continuing lessons of the existentialist revolt. To be sure, existentialism began by revolting against the abstract philosophy of Georg Hegel, which entailed its own sort of depersonalization. But we find this depersonalization not only in abstract philosophy, we also find it illustrated in the excessive technologization of our current societies. Today, we are required to do battle with dehumanizing strategies of communication and practice, the technologization of communication and practice in which this concreteness is lost.

This is something that has been attended to in much of the postexistentialist literature, in which there is specific attention paid to the relations of power at work enframing self-development and societal development.¹¹ So that indeed, becoming a self—and it is always a matter of *becoming* a self—is a struggle in achieving selfness, in confronting constraining power relationships in society, and specifically in institutions broadly understood.

RER/DJM: This leads to an interesting aside, the problem of speaking about "the" self in the wake of what you have termed postexistentialist thought. It seems as though no article would be quite right.

COS: This, of course, has to do with the difficulties of speaking about the self in the literature. There is always a problem with articles and connectives in titles—when Martin Heidegger talks about being and time, for example, one slides into the other. It is difficult to know how to handle them.

I had a fight with my publisher about this. *The Self after Postmodernity* was first presented as a series of lectures at Trent University honoring the philosophical contributions of Gilbert Ryle. I entitled the lectures "Portrait of the Self after Postmodernity." Yale University Press agreed to

publish the manuscript, but their marketing department, for a number of reasons—none of which I thought were very good—argued that the title *Portrait of the Self* would be a bad title, because the book would be cataloged in libraries under photography rather than philosophy.

Although “Portrait of the Self” doesn’t wholly address the concern, it does shift the perspective from a suggestion that what we have here is a kind of complete description of the self—an entity of some sort, to a way of looking at the self, a perspective on the self.

Whatever characterization we ultimately come upon, the issue of the existential remains. Any philosophy that seeks effectuality in our quotidian existence ultimately betrays an existential residue: Someone must act—and, despite appearances, this includes philosophies like deconstruction and postmodernism, which without such effectual effort would be nothing but empty formalism. So, the existential question—the question about the self and its inescapable concreteness—returns not only in experience, but in literature as well.

RER/DJM: Obviously, there are issues concerning the self that you have not yet been able to address in your work. Given this, what do you see as the most pressing concern in articulating an adequate conception of the self today?

COS: I would underscore the requirement for intensive and sustained analyses and interpretations of the role of technology and ecology upon the project of attempting to define who we are within a postmodern ethos. The acceleration of technological innovations during the last half of the century has supplied numerous challenges along the way. Issues having to do with artificial intelligence, which, of course, have been with us for some time, will now become intensified. Developments in biotechnology will have a direct bearing on future definitions of selfhood.

And then directly connected with the development of technology are the ecological issues, which will require our increasing attention. With the unprecedented and almost frightening growth in the world population, and the limitation of both natural and societal resources, we will need to revise some of our jaundiced convictions of what it means to inherit the Earth.

In all this, the need for further study and research in communication becomes quite readily apparent. The world has become a global society as never before. With this comes the requirement to devise means for communication across geographical, ethnological, cultural, and religious divisions. And with this, travels the tough question: What is the *meaning* of communication?

The perfecting of technological devices to send scripted, voice, and visual messages across the land does not provide a sufficient answer to the question of what it means to communicate something to someone else. Wider issues of the meaning of community and communal organization, involving the body politic, also come into play here, and we then quickly see how issues of the self slide into issues of community, politics, and ethics.

RER/DJM: In responding to our questions concerning the self, you have touched, in a number of different ways, on something we take to be central to your interest in the self as well as to your project of communicative praxis. What we find is a concern with alienation or estrangement and the necessity of working to overcome it. It is a theme that first appears in *Freedom and Existence* where, citing Marx, Søren Kierkegaard, and by implication Ludwig Feuerbach, you write of our estrangement or alienation from others, from ourselves, and from nature.¹²

COS: I first studied Marx along with my studies on Kierkegaard and Feuerbach. The three comprised for me the philosophically fresh air of anti-Hegelianism—Marx contesting Hegel's philosophy of identity from the perspective of our socioeconomic existence; Kierkegaard, from the perspective of our ethicoreligious existence; and Feuerbach, from the perspective of our concrete sensory-biological existence.

Hegel's grand hypothesis was that the polarities of essence and existence achieve a synthesis, unity, or coincidence within the dynamics of Absolute Spirit. Marx, Kierkegaard, and Feuerbach were quick to point out that this synthesis appears to occur only in Hegel's head, since all around us we see that the forces of estrangement or alienation are still very much a part of our social, religious, and biological existence. All three were involved, in some manner or another, with what came to be called the “existential revolt” against the Absolute Idealism of the later Hegel.

One of the things I wanted to do in *Existence and Freedom* was to point out the distinction between alienation and estrangement, on the one hand, and finitude on the other, in order to avoid a collapse of the two. It is important to distinguish limitations that arise out of our finitude from alienation and estrangement within that finitude. Alienation or estrangement is, in a sense, finitude gone wrong, which is why we can do something about it—it's not inscribed on our being-in-the-world.

To be finite is not tantamount to being estranged or alienated—a distinction that has, at times, been blurred. Estrangement and alienation amount to a displacement of possibility that is not properly bound to the

finitude attached to our being-in-the-world. Although finitude places limits on possibility, the limitations on possibility resulting from estrangement and alienation are not a consequence of this finitude, even though they make use of it and the ambiguous freedom that attends such finitude. Estrangement and alienation are in large measure a result of the misuse of our finite freedom.

It is important, however, in speaking of these matters, to recognize that alienation and estrangement, as distortions of our existence, are not something that can be rectified by linguistic maneuvering. They are material determinants at work in our distorted existence and must be addressed as such.

With respect to my project of communicative praxis, if there were no alienation or estrangement in our communicative activities, I guess there would be no reason to talk about those activities. There is a sense in which my interest in communication is certainly in part, if not to a great extent, motivated by the problems of the distortions of communication. Just as hermeneutics is, in a sense, a project that responds to misunderstanding. So clearly, Kierkegaard, Feuerbach, and Marx—particularly Marx's early work on alienation—are a motivating factor in my project of communicative praxis.

THE TURN TO COMMUNICATION

RER/DJM: As you know, there was an effort to understand philosophy and rhetoric as complementary practices in the work of both Plato and Aristotle. One thinks, for example, of the “philosophical rhetoric” Plato describes in the *Phaedrus*, or again, of rhetoric characterized as the *anti-stropos* or, as it is usually put, the “counterpart” of dialectic in the opening lines of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. However, in time, this complementarity, presupposed in one manner or another by Plato and Aristotle, quickly deteriorated into an antagonism in which one was required to make a choice between the two discourses. Subsequently, the task of undertaking something like a philosophy of communication has at least been burdened, if not at times blocked, by this relationship.

COS: That Plato and Aristotle, and the Greeks more generally were interested in the connection between philosophy and rhetoric, and that in later philosophical developments interest in this connection faded, is certainly right on target. Plato wrote two works on rhetoric and Aristotle wrote one of the classic treatises. Moreover, in the medieval trivium, logic, grammar, and rhetoric flourished as overlapping disciplines. But this all

changed with the advent of modern philosophy. The rhetorical arts were marginalized at best, disparaged and disdained at worst. Even a philosopher of the stature of Immanuel Kant, who surely should have known better, defined rhetoric as “the art of deluding by means of a fair semblance.”¹³

Why did rhetoric receive such ill treatment in modernity? Much, of course, had to do with the “epistemological turn” that began with Descartes’ invention of “mind” as a *solum ipse* and the preoccupation with a technical reason that looked to the natural sciences for some sort of unimpeachable criteria for knowledge. The crux of the matter clearly has to do with this imprisonment of the mind as the isolated, zero-point origin of knowledge. The mind in modern epistemology has the responsibility to achieve knowledge. And after it has knowledge, then it may, if it has sufficient time on its hands, decide to communicate what it knows to others.

But does the mind first know and then communicate? Or is communication constitutive of knowledge? Is knowledge a private affair, founded on criteria that are somehow known in advance? Or is knowledge the progeny of what I have called communicative praxis, a quite public affair in which criteria are *post festum* rather than front-loaded, criteria devised and revised in the struggle for an understanding that is the reward and, at times, the disappointment of rhetorical transactions?

One of the important contributions of postmodernism has been to reinstate rhetoric and communication as native voices in philosophical discourse. Nietzsche has played a significant role in this project of restoration. Of particular importance is his explication of truth as “a moveable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms.”¹⁴ And then there is Jacques Derrida, who, in his splendid essay “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” has shown, and almost effortlessly, how the grammar of philosophical discourse throughout the history of Western philosophy continued to receive its direction from rhetorical invention.¹⁵

In spite of this, it is clear that what you call the burden on or blockage to a philosophy of communication attending this historical antagonism remains in force today. And there are two interrelated points I would make with respect to moving beyond this antagonism, one directed to philosophy, the other to communication studies.

On the one hand, there is a responsibility on the part of philosophers to recognize that communication is constitutive of knowledge. This involves a more thorough-going distantiation from the Cartesian legacy in which knowledge is achieved first and then communicated—insofar as it is communicated—as an afterthought. On the other hand, there is a

responsibility on the part of communication theorists to recognize that there is a genuine threat of sophistry—of empty formalism—in our communicative engagements. This threat has been pointed out in the tradition going as far back as Plato.

RER/DJM: In the twentieth century, a good deal of philosophical attention has been directed, in one manner or another, toward issues concerning communication. However, it seems that, despite this attention, the phenomenon of communication as such—communication *qua* communication—has, for the most part, gone unphilosophized. What we often find in its place is an appropriation of the phenomenon as a means of solving other philosophical problems. This can be seen, for example, in Husserl's attempt to use communication as a means of resolving the problem of intersubjectivity, or again, in Jürgen Habermas' effort to use communication as a means of establishing a normative ethics.

COS: This is where I differ, not only from Husserl but also from Habermas, each of whom have a kind of instrumental understanding of communication, namely, something that can be used to solve other problems. This is, of course, one possible way to use communication.

Husserl continues the marginalization or subordination of communication in the Cartesian legacy using communication to solve or somehow supplement an epistemological problem. It is a subordination that follows in the wake of the prejudice that knowledge somehow is borne by an isolated act of consciousness. The presupposition is that knowledge is an interior event, an event of a solitary ego-cogito that is somehow able to apprehend its object, either in its givenness as an existential reality or as an object that is meant. After this, communication enters the picture as an instrument used to convey this knowledge to other people.

Now, in Habermas, it's a little more circuitous, and it's not as blandly Cartesian. Communication stands in the service, not of conveying epistemological formulations in terms of assertoric claims, but of opening up a space for ethics. Although I find this to be quite suggestive and to have its own rewards, it seems to me that what Habermas fails to recognize is that in each of the domains of knowledge he maps out—the cognitive, the evaluative, and the aesthetic—communication is always already at work.

Habermas does go beyond the Cartesian legacy in the sense that communication is somehow constitutive of knowledge within each of the cultural domains. But it is constitutive of a rather narrow notion of knowledge. It is knowledge bent upon the discovery of validity claims—that's the whole point of it. Now, to be sure, the validity claims operative in the different culture spheres are operative in different senses, but they are still

operative as claims. So, communication is constitutive of each of these domains only insofar as it establishes the claims specific to the domains. These claims, in turn, provide the normative basis for argumentation.

Communication is, for the most part, reduced to the use of language; more specifically language delimited in such a way that it stands in the service of argumentation, which is, in a sense, the long and short of philosophy for Habermas. Communication now provides the resources for argumentation. It substantiates claims—cognitive claims, ethical claims, aesthetic claims, and so forth—in service of the force of the stronger argument.

Reduced to argumentation proceeding from what are taken to be the normative validity claims of each of the cultural domains, communication becomes instrumental, the validity claims themselves standing in service of being correct—a disguised form of epistemology. It is profoundly ironic that Habermas' use of communication is instrumental in spite of itself. Although he has a good sense of the limitations of instrumental reason, moving with great acumen out of the early Frankfurt school and the critique of instrumental rationality, he does so only to turn around and unwittingly make communication itself instrumental.

There is, I think, a significant difference in my understanding of communication. I take communication to be constitutive of philosophical problems rather than something to be used to solve philosophical problems. Communication, by its very performance, poses or sets forth philosophical problems.

And I agree there is a great deal that is left undone in philosophizing communication. You could say Heidegger opened the door—opened the door, but didn't really get much past the threshold. Communication must always be understood as being constitutive of our being-in-the-world. But then I think you have to make a semantic move from communication to community—a move already implicated in the term “communication.” Communication clearly has something to do with community. The point is that, in understanding ourselves as being-in-the-world, we are always already communally situated, so that, to move beyond Heidegger, communication/community becomes a structural determinate of our being-in-the-world.

One of the things then that is left undone is fleshing out the significations of communication and community as they play themselves out in the court of sociopolitical concerns. Communication—the meaning of communication—has something to do with the contextualization of the communicator within the polis. Here, communication immediately assumes a kind of responsibility for both a descriptive and prescriptive understanding of politics. And with respect to this, Heidegger clearly came up a little short.

RER/DJM: Communication does not, at least *prima fascia*, always lead to community. Communication can also injure and harm. It can produce separations that destroy community.

COS: Communication and community may be too closely tied together here. In *Experience and Being*, I tried to address this issue by distinguishing community from sociality.¹⁶ Sociality is a rather straightforward and neutral designation of being-with-others that undergoes both positive and negative modifications. There I took community to be a positive modification of sociality, a creative way of being-with-others. And I took what I called conformism to be a negative modification of sociality, a destructive way of being-with-others. Within this set of logical distinctions, there is no deficient form of community because community is, by definition, positive. Strictly speaking, there are only deficient modalities of sociality that entail estrangement, alienation, and the misuse of freedom. Here a kind of communication is at work that articulates stereotypes, that stigmatizes, that refuses difference.

RER/DJM: Would you view this type of communication as somehow being deficient in the same way that Heidegger sometimes talks about deficient forms of care?

COS: I'm a bit reluctant to put Heidegger in this context because of the problem that he has with the unauthentic and the authentic in his ontology of *Dasein*. I think this is principally a consequence of the way he set up the format of *Being and Time*. If you begin with an unauthentic being-in-the-world in which communication is reduced to unauthentic talk—*Gerede*: idle chatter—then you have the problem of distilling out of this unauthentic being-with-others the content and measure of an authentic being-with-others. It is an important distinction, but one that Heidegger made problematic by trying to derive the one from the other. If we are to use the terms, I think we need to take a different approach here. We need to begin with a notion of communication as a kind of neutral space that, like sociality, has different modifications: the authentic and the unauthentic.

At any rate, what I think is significant and helpful in Heidegger's attending to what one might call unauthentic communication, is that there is a kind of ever-present threat to community that is part of the continuing struggle for communication. Interpersonally, the unauthentic would be a failure to respect the other as other, a lack of openness, of receptivity, of responsiveness, a failure to listen and, more importantly, to hear.

This is a threat that is intensified with the advent of technology. Here also, Heidegger pointed the direction, though some of the technological advances that threaten communication didn't really come to the fore until very recently. The threats to authentic communication that travel with advanced technology are threats that require our attention.

There is, for example, an assumption that when we send messages—either scripted, verbal, or visual—across geographical landscapes to disembodied others, then we have communicated. But the virtual recipient is still just a virtual recipient. To be sure, certain dimensions of knowledge can be conveyed in this way, but these are all disembodied dimensions of knowledge. It is important to recognize—and we recognize this less and less—that there is a difference between conveying information and communicating.

As I see it, the threat here is twofold. On the one hand, there is a failure to recognize the abstraction or decontextualization from the communicative context at work here, a failure to recognize that even though something may be gained, something is lost. On the other hand, there is a tendency toward absolutizing certain technological modalities of communication, taking them to be normative of communication itself. This is reductionism in its most violent form.

It is technological enframing as Heidegger spoke of it. And we must see that there is more to communication. More than conveying information in which the decontextualization of communication disguises itself as such. And more than the technological modalities of communication which taken normatively require us to communicate in certain ways at the expense of all others.

Beyond the interpersonal, the unauthentic would also testify to distortions in our sociopolitical existence. For example, in some forms of Marxism, the unauthentic has much to do with the notion of false consciousness or ideology—however you care to put it—that can be generally described as involving unauthentic self-understanding and unauthentic communication. It's interesting how it comes to the fore here. Workers in a state of subjugation are able to communicate. They can talk with each other about all kinds of different things and interests. They can talk about their excitement about a possible raise in their weekly pay. But they are unaware of the underlying conditions of their subjugation. There is communication going on, but communication that belies an authentic understanding of the wider situation.

RER/DJM: In your earlier response, you used the phrase “the struggle to communicate.” This seems to us to be a particularly important qualification.

COS: It is Karl Jaspers who uses this rather revealing phrase: communication as *liebender Kampf*—a loving struggle. And it becomes a loving struggle particularly when you are dealing with communicating what he called the truths of *Existenz*—existential truths.

Jaspers lived this philosophy, as I discovered when I had the opportunity to meet with him at the University of Basel. This was in 1955, during the time I was studying at Heidelberg as a Fulbright Fellow. Not only did Jaspers set everything aside to meet with me, but he patiently listened to my hesitant German, rephrasing my questions, answering them, asking if I had understood, rephrasing questions and answers if I hadn't. I still marvel at this great philosopher devoting his entire attention to a young American graduate student—it is one of the most memorable experiences I have had.

It is unfortunate that Jaspers has been so sorely neglected in the recent literature. We forget, for example, that the second volume of the three-volume English translation of his *Philosophie* deals with issues having to do with communication, and that the third lecture in *Reason and Existenz* is on truth as communicability.¹⁷

When you're dealing with existential truths, the truths of *Existenz*, there is a constant struggle. It is a struggle because there will be inevitable differences both interpersonal and sociopolitical differences, religious differences, cultural differences, and so on. But you have to strive to communicate in spite of these differences. You have to work to keep communication from breaking down, from becoming restricted and distorted. It's a loving struggle because you always have to be willing to recognize that there will be barriers to the communication, and you have to accept the other in spite of an inability to make your point.

AN ILLOCUTIONARY ACT: COMMUNICATIVE PRAXIS

RER/DJM: We would like to turn now to discuss your project of communicative praxis. As a preliminary to this, could you tell us when communication first became an issue for you?

COS: I guess I encountered the issue of communication in my undergraduate studies, but I didn't realize I had encountered it until I was confronted with the need to understand and explain societal structures in my work.¹⁸ The structures of authentic and unauthentic communication are implicated in the very name social science. But it wasn't until I wrote my third book, *Radical Reflection and the Origin of the Human Sciences*, that

I specifically addressed issues in social science.¹⁹ My work *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* followed this.²⁰

RER/DJM: In reconsidering the phenomenon—or phenomena—of communication, why did you find it necessary to construct the new locution “communicative praxis”?

COS: A number of factors came into play in my decision to couple communication and praxis. In dealing with the continental tradition, I wanted to avoid what I observed to be the hegemonic and, in a sense, anaptopic—or totalizing—tendencies in the philosophical turn to language, discourse, textuality, and so forth. I also wanted to avoid the tendency in that turn to isolate communication from action. By zeroing in on language, or discourse, or textuality, or whatever, communication was being considered without attending to the actional component of our engagements with others.

In dealing with the analytic tradition, I wanted to avoid the division of communication and action attending the disciplinary separation of the philosophy of language from the philosophy of action. At the same time, I wanted to avoid what I took to be a resurgence of the threat of elementalism within certain quarters of each of these areas of analytic philosophy.²¹ In this, an effort was being made to reduce language, on the one hand, and action, on the other, to its fundamental elemental units—its isolated, atomistic, so-called constitutive elements. This, of course, goes back to the beginnings of the British empiricist tradition. The problem here is that in reducing language to its syntactic units or action to units of movement, for example, there is a decontextualization in which meaning is lost.

So, for example, in the philosophy of action, you might be very much preoccupied with the raising of the arm as an instance of action quite independent of the context. Raising an arm is an act independent of the rest of the body—apparently, you can raise your arm without a shoulder, in isolation from one’s holistic embodiment. This kind of philosophy doesn’t get you anywhere because the actions are isolated, cut off from the social significations in which action occurs.

So I chose the phrase “communicative praxis” in which communication qualifies praxis—is even an intrinsic qualification of praxis, in that it provides the context for the very understanding of the meaning of what goes on in human action. When you link communication and praxis you now have a social form that provides the context for specific acts.

RER/DJM: You make use of the term “praxis” with all of its historical resonances rather than the term “practice” which is more in vogue today. Would you explain your use of the term in relation to its history?

COS: Praxis clearly has been in the vocabulary since the time of Aristotle. And there is a sense in which my effort is, in part, to reclaim the Aristotelian sense of praxis before the separation of theory and practice in the tradition.

Now one might argue that Aristotle was partly responsible for this separation in his division of *theoria*, *poiesis*, and *praxis* with *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis* as their attendant forms of knowledge. But with the advent of modernity, the bifurcation of theory and practice widened. When theoreticians tried to be generous about practice and the practical, they said, at best, “Well sure there’s practice, but it’s always practice as an application of theory, always in the service of theory.”

The problem here is twofold. On the one hand, practice, as an application of theory, has to wait upon the determinations of theory for its meaning or intelligibility. On the other hand, while practice without theory is blind, theory without practice is empty.

So, I tried to do a kind of semantic clarification in which praxis—if not on the thither side of this divide—was perhaps somehow between the theoretical and the practical as they are generally understood, and particularly as they are understood in modern philosophy. Praxis as the manner in which we are engaged in the world and with others has its own insight or understanding prior to any explicit formulation of that understanding. Here, of course, I am very much indebted to Heidegger and to Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Praxis was also used a good deal in the early phase of Critical Theory by members of the Frankfurt School: Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, and then much later, of course, by Habermas. But there the notion of praxis moves out from a neo-Marxist notion in which praxis is, at least at times, subordinated to *techne*.

Marxism clearly understood the danger of subordinating praxis to *theoria*: “The point is to change the world.” But it failed to see the danger of subordinating praxis to *techne*—to forms of socioeconomic organization. The point is to change the world. But how does change take place? Through *techne*: alter the mode of production and everything will follow from that.

So, my effort was, on the one hand, to liberate praxis from its subordination to *theoria* in the modern theory/practice distinction, and on the other to broaden the notion of praxis found in early and later Critical Theory, liberating praxis from its subordination to *techne*. Of course, it must be understood that praxis, as I understand it, is always entwined with communication.

RER/DJM: In a previous response, you described communicative praxis in a way that indicated, if only obliquely, the manner in which we are to

understand the relation of these two terms. Communication, you said, is an intrinsic qualification of praxis. By this, we take it that you do not intend the term communicative to designate a particular kind of praxis among others, but rather that all praxis is communicative or, put inversely, that all communication is praxial. Earlier, however, you evinced uneasiness regarding the claims that everything is language, or discourse, or textuality with their hegemonic and totalizing tendencies. Insofar as everything now appears to be communicative praxis, how do you avoid the same dilemma?

COS: As you point out, there has been a recurring problem, a logical problem of sorts, with landing upon one feature, one aspect, one profile, of human existence or being-in-the-world as a means of explication. And then, having settled upon something in this way, having to answer the question: “Well, if everything is discourse or everything is language or everything is interpretation, then isn’t it the case that nothing is language, discourse, or interpretation?” But, I think this can be sorted out in such a way that the latter does not necessarily follow from the former.

William James tells a story about an Indian master who explained that the world rests on the back of a huge elephant. Now the master’s student wanted to know on what the elephant’s legs rested. The master responded that the elephant’s legs rested on the back of a huge turtle. The student, James says, still not satisfied wanted to know on what the turtle’s legs rested. To which the master answered: turtles all the way down. The answer, of course, is paradoxical because there is no “all the way down,” no bottom at which you arrive, no bedrock foundation.

Now I think, in a similar fashion, it can be said that interpretation goes all the way down. Language goes all the way down. Discourse goes all the way down. Action goes all the way down. But that doesn’t mean that any one of those items is all there is.

Here the task of philosophy becomes a continuing matter of sorting out, explicating, and clarifying the various expressions entwined in the upsurge of human life in the world: the linguistic expression and the action expression, the interpretive, the descriptive, the evaluative, and all the rest. So I think that’s how you surmount the so-called logical problem of appearing to assert that this is all there is.

COMMUNICATIVE PRAXIS: TRANSVERSALITY

RER/DJM: In your project of communicative praxis, there are two notions that have come to play a predominate role: transversality and the