
ON DIALOGUE

by David Bohm

On Dialogue

by David Bohm

Perhaps we could begin by talking about what I mean by dialogue. We will begin with that rather than with trying actually to *have* a dialogue, since if you try to begin that way, everybody will wonder what is a dialogue and whether we are having one actually. Therefore we will be going off the point. So we will discuss dialogue for a while - what is its nature?

I give a meaning to the word 'dialogue' that is somewhat different from what is commonly used. The derivations of words often help to suggest a deeper meaning. 'Dialogue' comes from the Greek word *dialogos*. Logos means 'the word' or in our case we would think of the 'meaning of the word'. And *dia* means 'through' - it doesn't mean two. A dialogue can be among any number of people, not just two. Even one person can have a sense of dialogue within himself, if the spirit of the dialogue is present. The picture of image that this derivation suggests is of a *stream of meaning* flowing among and through us and between us. This will make possible a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which will emerge some new understanding. It's something new, which may not have been in the starting point at all. It's something creative. And this *shared meaning* is the 'glue' or 'cement' that holds people and societies together.

Contrast this with the word 'discussion', which has the same root as 'percussion' or 'concussion'. It really means to break things up. It emphasises the idea of analysis, where there may be many points of view. Discussion is almost like a Ping-Pong game, where people are batting the ideas back and forth and the object of the game is to win or to get points for yourself. Possibly you will take up somebody else's ideas to back up your own - you may agree with some and disagree with others - but the basic point is to win the game. That's very frequently the case in a discussion.

In a dialogue, however, nobody is trying to win. Everybody wins if anybody wins. There is a different sort of spirit to it. In a dialogue, there is no attempt to gain points, or to make your particular view prevail. Rather, whenever any mistake is discovered on the part of anybody, everybody gains. It's a situation called win-win, in which we are not playing a game against each other but *with* each other. In a dialogue, everybody wins.

Clearly, a lot of what is called 'dialogue' is not dialogue in the way that I am using the word. For example, people at the United Nations have been having what are often considered to be dialogues, but these are very limited. They are more like discussions - or perhaps trade-offs or negotiations - than dialogues. The people who take part are not really open to questioning their fundamental assumptions. They are trading off minor points, like negotiating whether we have more or less nuclear weapons. But the whole question of two different systems is not being seriously discussed. It's taken for granted that you can't talk about *that* - that nothing will ever change that. Consequently their discussions are not serious, not deeply serious. A great deal of what we call 'discussion' is not deeply serious, in the sense that there are all sorts of things which are held to be non-negotiable and not touchable, and people don't even want to talk about them. That is part of our trouble.

Now, why do we need dialogue? People have difficulty communicating even in small groups. But in a group like this of thirty or forty, many may find it very hard to communicate unless there is a set purpose, or unless somebody is leading it. Why is that? For one thing, everybody has different assumptions and opinions. They are *basic assumptions*, not merely superficial assumptions - such as assumptions about the meaning of life; about your own self-interest, your country's interest, or your religious interest; about what you really think is important.

And these assumptions are defended when they are challenged. People frequently can't resist defending them, and they tend to defend them with an emotional charge. We'll discuss that in more detail later, but I'll give you an example now. We organised a dialogue in Israel a number of years ago. At one stage the people were discussing politics, and somebody said, just in passing, "Zionism is creating a great difficulty in good relations between Jews and Arabs. It is the principal barrier that's in the way." He said it very quietly. Then suddenly somebody else couldn't contain himself and jumped up. He was full of emotion. His blood pressure was high and his eyes were popping out. He said, "Without Zionism the country would fall to pieces."

That fellow had one basic assumption, and the other person had another one. And those two assumptions were really in conflict. Then the question is, 'What can you do?' You see, those are the kind of assumptions that are causing all the trouble politically all over the world. And the case I just described is relatively easier than some of the assumptions

that we have to handle in politics. The point is that we have all sorts of assumptions, not only about politics or economics or religion, but also about what we think an individual should do, or what life is all about, and so forth.

We could also call these assumptions 'opinions'. An opinion is an assumption. The word 'opinion' is used in several senses. When a doctor has an opinion, that's the best assumption that he can make based on the evidence. He may then say, "Okay, I'm not quite sure, so let's get a second opinion." In that case, if he is a good doctor he does not react to defend his assumption. If the second opinion turns out to be different from his, he doesn't jump up with an emotional charge, such as the fellow did on the question of Zionism, and say, "How can you say such things?" That doctor's opinion would be an example of a rational sort of opinion. But most are not of that nature - mostly they are defended with a strong reaction. In other words, a person identifies himself with them. They are tied up with his investment in self-interest, and all that.

It is important to see that the different opinions that you have are the result of past thought: all your experiences, what other people have said, and whatnot. That is all programmed into your memory. You may then identify with those opinions and react to defend them. But it doesn't make sense to do this. If the opinion is right, it doesn't need such a reaction. And if it is wrong, why should you defend it? It is as if you yourself are under attack when your opinion is challenged.

Opinions thus tend to be experienced as 'truths', even though they may only be your own assumptions and your own background. You got them from your teacher, your family, or by reading, or in yet some other way. Ten for one reason or another you are *identified* with them, and you defend them.

Different people coming from different backgrounds typically have different basic assumptions and opinions. In this group here you will probably find a great many different assumptions and opinions of which we are not aware at the moment. That is generally so in any group. It is a matter of culture. In the overall culture there are vast numbers of opinions and assumptions which help make up that culture. And there are also sub-cultures that are somewhat different from one another according to ethnic group or to economic situation, or to race, religion, or thousands of other things. People will come to a gathering like this from somewhat different cultures or sub-cultures, with different assumptions and opinions. And they may not realise it, but they have some tendency to defend their assumptions and opinions reactively against evidence that they are not right, or simply a similar tendency to defend them against somebody who has another opinion.

If we defend opinions in this way, we are not going to be able to have a dialogue. And we are often *unconsciously* defending our opinions. We don't usually do it on purpose. At times we may be conscious that we are defending them, but mostly we are not. We just feel that something is so true that we can't avoid trying to convince this stupid person how wrong he is to disagree with us.

Now, that seems the most natural thing in the World. It seems that that's inevitable. Yet if you think of it, we can't really organise a good society if we go on that basis. I mean, that's the way democracy is supposed to work, but it hasn't. If everybody has a different opinion, it will be merely a struggle of opinions. And the one who is the strongest will win. It may not necessarily be the right one; it may be that none of them are right. Therefore, we won't be doing the right thing when we try to get together.

This problem arises whether we meet here, or legislators try to get together, or businessmen try to get together, or whatever. If we all had to do a job together, we would likely find that each one of us would have different opinions and assumptions, and thus we would find it hard to do the job. The temperature could go way up. In fact, there are people facing this problem in large corporations. The top executives may all have different opinions, hence they can't get together. So the company doesn't work efficiently, it starts to lose money and goes under.

There are some people who are trying to form groups where top business executives can talk together. If politicians would do that, it would be very good. Religious people would be the hardest to get together. The assumptions of the different religions are so firmly embedded that I don't know of any case of two religions, or even sub-groups of any given religion, where they ever got together once they had split. The Christian church, for instance, has been talking about trying to get together for ages and it stays about the same all the time. They talk and they appear to get a little bit closer, and then it never happens. They talk about unity and oneness and love, and all that, but the other assumptions are more powerful; they are programmed into us. Some religious people are trying to get together; they are really sincere - they are as serious as they can be - but it seems that they cannot do it.

Scientists also get into the same situation. Each one may hold to a different view of the truth, so they can't get together. Or they may have different self-interests. A scientist who is working for a company that produces pollution may have a certain self-interest in proving that the pollution is not dangerous, and somebody else might have self-interest in proving that it is dangerous. And perhaps then somewhere there is an unbiased scientist who tries to judge it all.

Science is supposed to be dedicated to truth and fact, and religion is supposed to be dedicated to another kind of truth and to love. But people's self-interest and assumptions take over. Now, we're not trying to judge these people. Something is happening, which is that assumptions or opinions are like computer programs in people's minds. And those programs take over against the best of intentions. They produce their own intentions.

Besides that, you will find other problems in trying to have a dialogue in a group of this or any size. Some people want to assert themselves; that's their way of going about things. They talk easily and they become dominant. They may have an image of themselves as dominant, and they get a certain amount of security out of it, a lift out of it. Other people, however, do not have such great self-esteem in this area; they tend to hold back, especially when they see somebody who is dominant. They are afraid that they'll make fools of themselves, or something of the kind.

There are various roles that people adopt. Some people adopt the dominant role, some adopt the role of the weak powerless person who can be dominated. They sort of work together, with each other. Those 'roles', which are really based on assumptions and opinions, will also interfere with the operation of dialogue. So a person has built some assumptions about himself, whether it's one way or the other. Also, since his childhood people have told him that that's what he is, that he is this way or that way. He has had bad experiences or good experiences, and it all built up. These are some of the problems which will arise when we try to have a dialogue.

We can say that a group of about twenty to forty people is almost a microcosm of the whole society, and has a lot of different opinions and assumptions. It is possible, though, to have a dialogue with one person or with two, three, or four, or you can have the attitude of the dialogue by yourself, as you weigh all the opinion without deciding.

But a group that is too small doesn't work very well. If five or six people get together, they can usually 'adjust' to each other so that they don't say the things that upset each other - they get a 'cozy adjustment'. People can easily be very polite to each other and avoid the issues that may cause trouble. And if there is a confrontation between two or more people in such a small group, it seems very hard to stop it; it gets stuck. In a larger group like this, we may well start out politely. After a while, though, people can seldom continue to avoid all the issues that would be troublesome. The politeness falls away pretty soon. In a group of less than about twenty it may not, because people get to know each other and know the rough edges that they have to avoid. They can take it all into account; it's not too much. But in a group this size, it is too much.

So when you raise the number to about twenty, something different begins to happen. And forty people is about as many as you can conveniently arrange in a circle - or you might put two circles concentrically. In that size group, you begin to get what may be called a 'microculture'. You have enough people coming in from different subcultures so that they are a sort of microcosm of the whole culture. And then the question of culture - the collectively shared meaning - begins to come in. That is crucial, because the collectively shared meaning is very powerful.

The collective thought is more powerful than the individual thought. In fact, the individual thought is mostly the result of collective thought and of interaction with other people. The language is entirely collective, and most of the thoughts in it are. Everybody does his own thing to those thoughts - he makes a contribution. But very few change them very much.

The power of the group goes up much faster than the number of people. I've said elsewhere that it could be compared to a laser. Ordinary light is called 'incoherent', which means that it is going in all sorts of directions, and the light waves are not in phase with each other so they don't build up. But a laser produces a very intense beam which is coherent. The light waves build up strength because they are all going in the same direction. This beam can do all sorts of things that ordinary light cannot.

Now, you could say that our ordinary thought in society is incoherent - it is going in all sorts of directions, with thoughts conflicting and cancelling each other out. But if people were to think together in a coherent way, it would have tremendous power. That's the suggestion. If we have a dialogue situation - a group which has sustained dialogue for quite a while in which people get to know each other, and so on - then we might have such a coherent movement of thought, a

coherent movement of communication. It would be coherent not only at the level we recognise, but at the *tacit level*, at the level for which we have only a vague feeling. That would be more important.

'Tacit' means that which is unspoken, which cannot be described - like the tacit knowledge required to ride a bicycle. It is the actual knowledge, and it may be coherent or not. I am proposing that thought - to think - is actually a subtle tacit process. The concrete process of thinking is very tacit. The meaning is basically tacit. And what we can say *explicitly* is only a very small part of it. I think we all realise that we do almost everything by this sort of tacit knowledge. Thought is emerging from the tacit ground, and any fundamental change in thought will come from the tacit ground. So if we are communicating at the tacit level, then maybe thought is changing.

The tacit process is common. It is shared. The sharing is not merely the explicit communication and the body language and all that, which are part of it, but there is also a deeper tacit process which is common. I think the whole human race knew this for a million years; and then in five thousand years of civilisation we have lost it, because our societies got too big to carry it out. But now we have to get started again, because it has become urgent that we communicate. We have to share our consciousness and to be able to think together, on order to do intelligently whatever is necessary.

If we begin to confront what's going on in a group like this, we sort of have the nucleus of what's going on in all society. When you are by yourself you miss quite a bit of that. Or even one-on-one you don't really get it.

You could say that generally our culture goes in for large groups of people for two reasons. One is for entertainment and fun. The other is to get a useful job done. Now, I'm going to propose that in a dialogue we are not going to have any agenda, we are not going to try to accomplish any useful thing. As soon as we try to accomplish a useful purpose or goal, we will have an assumption behind it as to what is useful, and that assumption is going to limit us. Different people will think different things are useful. And that's going to cause trouble. We may say, "Do we want to save the world?" or "Do we want to run a school?" or "Do we want to make money?" Whatever it may be.

That's also going to be one of the problems in corporate dialogues. Will they ever give up the notion that they are there primarily to make a profit? If they could, this would be a real transformation of mankind. I think that many business executives in certain companies are feeling unhappy and really want to do something - not merely to save the company. It's not that all of them are money-rubbing or exclusively profit-oriented.

What I am suggesting is that in dialogue we do not have an agenda and we are not trying to accomplish anything useful. Nor are we going to have a leader. Now, that's a harder problem. People will tend to say, "Okay, we have no agenda. We're not solving a problem. At least somebody will tell us what to do." The whole society has been organised that way - to believe that we can't function without these leaders. But maybe we can.

The idea behind dialogue has been developed by a number of people. It is becoming quite a common thing, or at least more common than it was. This idea seems to be growing in society. We could say that the time is ripe for it, and people are beginning to take it up.

Now, the way we start a dialogue group is usually by talking *about* dialogue - talking it over, discussing why we're doing it, what it means, and so forth. I don't think it is wise to start a group before people have gone into all that, at least somewhat. You can, but then you'll have to trust that the group will continue, and that these questions will come out later. So if you are thinking of meeting in a group, one way which I suggest is to have a discussion or a seminar about dialogue for awhile, and those who are interested can then go on to have the dialogue. And you mustn't worry too much whether you are or are not having dialogue - that's one of the blocks. It may be mixed.

A basic notion for a dialogue would be for people to sit in a circle. Such a geometric arrangement doesn't favour anybody; it allows for direct communication. In principle, the dialogue should work without any leader and without any agenda. Of course, we are used to leaders and agendas, so if we were to start a meeting here without a leader - start talking and have no agenda, no purpose - I think we would find a great deal of anxiety in not knowing what to do. Thus one of the things would be to work through that anxiety, to face it. In fact, we know by experience that if people do this for an hour or two they do get through it and start to talk more freely.

It may be useful to have a facilitator to get the group going, who keeps a watch on it for a while and sort of explains what's happening from time to time, and that kind of thing. But his function is to work himself out of a job. Now, that may take time. It may be that people must meet regularly and sustain the dialogue. That form might be to meet week after week, or bi-weekly or whatever, and sustain it a long time - a year of two or more. In that period, all those

things we mentioned would come out. And people would begin to learn really to depend less and less on the facilitator - at least that's the idea behind it. that's the suggestion. Of course, it's an experiment. We can't guarantee that it is going to happen. But that is what takes place in any new venture: you consider all the evidence, you consider what's the best idea, what to say about it, what your theories about it are, and then you go ahead and try it.

Some time ago there was an anthropologist who lived for a long while with a North American tribe. It was a small group of about this size. The hunter-gatherers have typically lived in groups of twenty to forty. Agricultural group units are much larger. Now, from time to time that tribe met like this in a circle. They just talked and talked and talked, apparently to no purpose. They made no decisions. There was no leader. And everybody could participate. There may have been wise men or wise women who were listened to a bit more - the older ones - but everybody could talk. The meeting went on, until it finally seemed to stop for no reason at all and the group dispersed. Yet after that, everybody seemed to know what to do, because they understood each other so well. Then they could get together in smaller groups and do something or decide things.

In this large group we are not going to decide what to do about anything. This is crucial. Otherwise we are not free. We must have an empty space where we are not obliged to do anything, nor to come to any conclusions, nor to say anything or not say anything. It's open and free. It's an empty space. 'Occupied' is the opposite of leisure; it's full. So we have here a kind of empty space where anything may come in - and after we finish, we just empty it. We are not trying to accumulate anything. That's one of the points about a dialogue. As a friend of mine used to say, "The cup has to be empty to hold something."

When a group is new, in general people talk around the point for a while. In all human relations nowadays, people generally have a way of not directly facing anything. They talk around things, avoiding the difficulties. This practice will probably continue within any group such as this. If you keep the group going for a while though, that tendency begins to break down. At a dialogue one evening a fellow spoke up, saying, "Okay, we're all talking about philosophy. Can I read this nice bit of philosophy I brought?" And some people said, "No." So he didn't read it. It seemed a bit of a shock, but it worked out.

It all has to be worked out. People will come to a group with different interests and assumptions. In the beginning they may have negotiation, which is a very preliminary stage of dialogue. In other words, if people have different approaches, they have to negotiate somehow. However, that is not the end of dialogue; it is the beginning. Negotiation involves finding a common way of proceeding. Now, if you only negotiate, you don't get very far - although some questions do have to be negotiated.

A great deal of what nowadays is typically considered to be dialogue tends to focus on negotiation; but as we said, that is a preliminary stage. People are generally not ready to go into the deeper issues when they first have what they consider to be a dialogue. They negotiate, and that's about as far as they get. When Bush and Gorbachev meet, or example, negotiation should really be only a beginning to what they ought to be doing.

Negotiation is trading off, adjusting to each other and saying, "Okay, I see your point. I see that that is important to you. Let's find a way that would satisfy both of us. I will give in a little on this, and you give in a little on that. And then we will work something out." Now, that's not really a close relationship, but it begins to make it possible to get going.

We have been saying that people in any group will bring to it their assumptions, and as the group continues meeting, those assumptions will come up. Then what is called for is to *suspend* those assumptions, so that you neither carry them out nor suppress them. You don't believe them, nor do you disbelieve them; you don't judge them as good or bad. You simply see what they mean - not only your own, but the other people's as well. We are not trying to change anybody's opinion. When this meeting is over, somebody may or may not change his opinion.

This is part of what I consider dialogue - for people to realise what is on each other's minds without coming to any conclusions or judgements. In a dialogue we have to sort of weigh the question a little, ponder it a little, feel it out.

I'm going to suggest the way it ought to work. Assumptions will come up. And if you hear somebody else who has an assumption that seems outrageous to you, the natural response might be to get angry, or get excited, or to react in some other way. But suppose you suspend that activity. That means that it is sort of there in front of you. You are not suppressing it, not carrying it out, not believing it or disbelieving it, you are simply seeing the meaning of your assumption along with the other person's. You may not even have known that you had an assumption. It was only

On Dialogue

because he came up with the opposite one that you find out that you have one. You may uncover other assumptions, but we are all suspending them and looking at them all, seeing what they mean. The first thing is to take in all the opinions. You have to notice your own reactions of hostility, or whatever, and you can see by the way people are behaving what their reactions are. You may find, as with anger, that it could go so far that the meeting could blow up, although I think that this group may have become so integrated that it would be difficult for that to happen. This group is probably much more coherent in some ways than some of the groups we've seen, because it has been together at least once a year for several years. It isn't important whether everybody in the group has; if some people - a fraction - have shared this together, that affects the whole group. And if temperatures do rise, those who are not completely caught up in their particular opinions should come in to defuse the situation a bit so that people could look at it. It mustn't go so far that the opinions come out, but where you can look at them. Provokes your own. That's all part of the observation. You become more familiar with how thought works.

That is part of collective thought - people thinking together. At some stage we would share our opinions without hostility, and we would then be able to *think together*; whereas, when we defend an opinion we can't. An example of people thinking together would be that somebody would get an idea, somebody else would take it up, somebody else would add to it. They thought would flow - rather than there being a lot of different people, each trying to persuade or convince the others.

In the beginning, people won't trust each other. But I think that if they see the importance of the dialogue, they will work with it. And as they start to know each other, they begin to trust each other. It may take time. At first you will just come into the group bringing all the problems of culture and the society. Any group like this is a microcosm of society - it has all sorts of opinions, people not trusting each other, and such. So you begin to work from there. People talk at first in a perhaps rather trivial way, and then later less trivially. Initially they talk about superficial issues, because they're afraid of doing more, and then gradually they learn to trust each other.

The object of a dialogue is not to analyse things, or to win an argument, or to exchange opinions. Rather, it is to suspend your opinions and to look at the opinions - to listen to everybody's opinions, to suspend them, and to see what all that means. If we can see what all of our opinions mean, then we are *sharing a common content*, even if we don't agree entirely. It may turn out that the opinions are not really very important - they are all assumptions. And if we can see them all, we may then move more creatively in a different direction. We can just simply share the appreciation of the meanings; and out of this whole thing, truth emerges unannounced - not that we have chosen it.

If each of us in this room is suspending, then we are all doing the same thing. We are all looking at everything together. The content of our consciousness is essentially the same. Accordingly, a different kind of consciousness is possible among us, a *participatory consciousness* - as indeed consciousness always is, but one that is frankly acknowledged to be participatory and can go that way freely. Everything can move between us. Each person is participating, is partaking of the whole meaning of the group and also taking part in it. We can call that a true dialogue.

Something more important will happen if we can do this, if we can manage it. Everybody will be sharing all the assumptions in the group. If everybody sees the meaning together of all the assumptions, then the content of consciousness is essentially the same. Whereas, if we all have different assumptions and defend them, each person is then going to have a different content, because we won't really take in the other person's assumptions. We'll be fighting them, or pushing them away - trying to convince or persuade the other person.

Conviction and persuasion are not called for in a dialogue. The word 'convince' means to win, and the word 'persuade' is similar. It's based on the same root as are 'suave' and 'sweet'. People sometimes try to persuade by sweet talk or to convince by strong talk. Both come to the same thing, though, and neither of them is relevant. There's not really coherent or rational. If something is right, you don't need to be persuaded. If somebody has to persuade you, then there is probably some doubt about it.

If we could all share a common meaning, we would be participating together. We would be partaking of the common meaning - just as people partake of food together. We will be taking part and communicating and creating a common meaning. That would be participation, which means both 'to partake of' and 'to take part in'. It would mean that in this participation a common mind would arise, which nonetheless would not exclude the individual. The individual might hold a separate opinion, but that opinion would then be absorbed into the group, too. He might or might not keep his opinion, but his meaning would be seen. However, insofar as people have opinions that they defend, or assumptions

On Dialogue

that they defend, there is something that interferes with creativity. If you are defending an assumption, you are pushing out whatever is new.

Thus everybody is quite free. It's not like a mob where the collective mind takes over - not at all. It is something *between* the individual and the collective. It can move between them. It's a harmony of the individual and the collective, in which the *whole* constantly moves toward coherence. So there is both a collective mind and an individual mind, and like a stream, the flow moves between them. The opinions, therefore, don't matter so much. Eventually we may be somewhere between all these opinions, and we start to move beyond them in another direction - a tangential direction - into something new and *creative*.

Now, that would be the ideal situation. I've painted the ideal picture. But as we start, you'll find, of course, that it doesn't happen. That's often the case in dialogue - the thing that seems to make sense, which looks coherent and right, doesn't work when we try it. The thing that doesn't make sense is what does seem to work.

You can notice the similarity of the difficulties within a group to what we've talked about in the past relative to the conflicts and incoherent thoughts within an individual. The individual would have to suspend his assumptions, and so does the group. There is another factor in a group, though, because collective cultural assumptions come in to a much greater extent. And in a large group like this, many sub-cultures also come in.

A society is a link of relationships that are set by people in order to work and live together: rules, laws, institutions, and various things. It is done by thinking and agreeing that we are going to have them, and then we do it. And behind that is a culture, which is shared meaning. Even to say that we want to set up a government, people must agree to a common meaning of what kind of government they want, what's good government, what's right, and so on. Different cultures will produce different functions of government. And if some people don't agree, then we have political struggle. When it goes further, it breaks down into civil war.

I am saying society is based on *shared meanings*, which constitute the culture. If we don't share coherent meaning, we do not make much of a society. And at present, the society at large has a very incoherent set of meanings. In fact, this set of 'shared meanings' is so incoherent that it is hard to say that they have any real meaning at all. There is a certain amount of significance, but it is very limited. The culture in general is incoherent. And we will thus bring with us into the group - or microcosm or microculture - a corresponding incoherence.

If all the meanings can come in together, however, we may be able to work toward coherence. As a result of this process, we may naturally and easily drop a lot of our meanings. But we don't have to begin by accepting or rejecting them. The important thing is that we will never come to truth unless the overall meaning is coherent. All the meanings of the past and the present are together. We first have to apprehend them, and just let them be; and this will bring about a certain order.

If we can work this through, we will then have a coherent meaning in the group, and hence the beginning of a new kind of culture - a culture of a kind which, as far as I can tell, has never really existed. If it ever did, it must have been very long ago - maybe in some groups in the primitive Stone Age conditions. I am saying that a genuine culture could arise in which opinions and assumptions are not defended incoherently. And that kind of culture is necessary for the society to work, and ultimately for the society to survive.

Such a group might be the germ of the microcosm of the larger culture, which would then spread in many ways - not only by creating new groups, but also by people communicating the notion of what it means.

Also, one can see that it is possible that this spirit of the dialogue can work even in smaller groups, or one-on-one, or within the individual. If the individual can hold all of the meanings together in his own mind, he has the attitude of the dialogue. He could carry that out and perhaps communicate it, both verbally and non-verbally, to other people.

In principle, this could spread. Many people are interested in dialogue now. We find it growing. The time seems to be ripe for this notion, and it could perhaps spread in many different areas.

I think that something like this is necessary for society to function properly and for society to survive. Otherwise it will all fall apart. This shared meaning is really the cement that holds society together, and you could say that the present society has some very poor quality cement. If you make a building with very low quality cement, it cracks and falls apart. We really need right cement, the right glue. And that is shared meaning.

So we have talked about the positive side of dialogue. However, this attempt at dialogue can be very frustrating. I say this not only theoretically, but also from experience. We've mentioned some of the difficulties: it's frustrating to

On Dialogue

have all these opinions; it's frustrating to have some people more dominant, or others who find it hard to talk; people may fall into role-playing; there may be anxiety.

Now, how are you going to deal with the frustrations within the group? As we said before, things may make you angry or frustrated or may frighten you. Your assumptions may be revealed and challenged, and you may find the opinions of others to be outrageous. Also, people may be frightened and anxious if there is no leader and to topic and nothing 'to do'. So you have to get through all of that.

These are the problems that are going to arise - that have arisen in all the groups that I've seen. And you can expect that they are almost inevitable, and may ask, 'Then what is the point in going on with all of this?' So we must explore that.

I am saying that there is a *reason* for dialogue. We really so need to have it. This reason should be strong enough to get us through all the frustration we talked about. People generally seem ready to accept frustration with anything that they regard as important. Doing your job or making money, for example, is often frustrating; it produces anxiety. Yet people will say, "That is important! We have to stick with it." They feel that way about all sorts of things. I'm saying that if we regard dialogue as important, as necessary, we will say about it as well, 'We will stick to it.' But if we don't think it is necessary, we might say, "Okay, what's the point? This is too much trouble. Let's give it up. It's not producing anything." You see, you have to explore anything new for a while. In science, or anywhere, you usually have to go through a period where you are not getting anywhere while you are exploring. It can, nevertheless, be very discouraging.

If we can all suspend carrying out our impulses, suspend our assumptions, and look at them all, then we are all in the same state of consciousness - the content is the same. And therefore we have established the thing that many people say they want - a common consciousness. It may not be very pleasant, but we have got it. People tend to think of common consciousness as 'shared bliss'. That may come; but if it does, I'm saying that the road to it is through this. We have to share the consciousness that we actually have. We can't just impose another one. But if people can share the frustration and share their different contradictory assumptions and share their mutual anger and stay with it - if everybody is angry together, and looking at it together - then you have a common consciousness.

Even hate is a very powerful bond. I remember that many years ago I visited some people in Ireland when I gave a talk there. They had come from Germany, where they had been anti-Nazi fighters. They fought the Nazis for a while, but left while they still could. They said that they actually missed the Nazis. They missed that hate, because it gave them energy and meaning to life. There was sort of an anticlimax. The point is that this hate itself is a very powerful bond. And if people can stay with it together, then they are really sharing - then that can change into something else. If people could stay with power, violence, hate, or whatever it is, all the way to the end, then it would sort of collapse - because ultimately they would see that we are all the same. And consequently they would have participation and fellowship. People who have gone through that can become good friends. The whole thing goes differently. They become more open and trusting to each other. They have already gone through the thing that they are afraid of, so the intelligence can then work.

There's another story I would like to relate. I knew a man in London who had been a child psychologist. He told me that somebody once brought to him a girl about seven years old who was very disturbed. She refused to talk to anybody. They brought her hoping that he would help to get her talking. So he tried for about an hour and got nowhere. Finally, getting exasperated, he said, "Why don't you talk to me?" She answered, "Because I hate you." He thought that he had to bring *time* into this somewhere to defuse it. So he said, "How long will you hate me?" She said, "I'll hate you forever." He was then a bit worried, so he brought time in again. He asked, "How long will you hate me forever?" Then she burst out laughing and the whole thing was broken. The energy which had been there was now available. The absurdity of the thing was shown to her - that the thing was incoherent. She was saying that she was going to hate him forever, and she could see that that wouldn't really be so; and if that's not so, then the idea that she has got to go on with the hatred is not necessary either. Just as hatred is a very powerful emotion, so panic is another one. And some dialogue groups could go into panic. I don't think this one will, although I've heard of people saying that it can happen - at least, a moment of panic, even though it's not sustained. But then you may get such panic from many things. If you are trying to climb a mountain, you could get a moment of panic. Or you might be panicky about your money, about your job, about anything. Nevertheless, people do stick with such things because they think it is important to get through

them. If you could stick with what I have been saying about dialogue, you might begin to see something about this hate and panic, which would then change us in a fundamental way.

When you have anger, it has a reason, or a cause. You say that you are angry because of this, this, or that. It builds up to rage and hate, at which point it no longer has a particular reason anymore - it just sustains itself. That energy of hate is sort of locked up, and then it's looking for an occasion to discharge. The same holds with panic. You are usually aware of a reason for your fear, but by the time you get to panic it goes on by itself. However, the sort of energy that goes around at that level may also in a vague way be the kind of energy we are talking about for *creativity* - namely, *an energy without a reason*.

The fact of sharing a common content of consciousness shows in what people say, in the way they think, in the stance of their bodies. What is going on outwardly is very similar from one person to the next. Everybody is similar in that everybody is doing basically the same thing - which is to have different opinions that are in conflict with another person's opinions, frequently leading to anger, rage, hate, fear, panic, of the kind that has just been described.

In this situation of a dialogue, however, some people may not be all that strongly attached to certain opinions; and, as we said, those people can come in and defuse a particular issue so that it doesn't get too confrontational or polarised or otherwise too highly charged emotionally. If people can stay with all this and look at it, then a change can take place. A common perception can take place, which is stronger because many people are involved, and because it is being reinforced collectively, socially and individually. The common perception builds up.

The collective, though, is also often troublesome. The group may act like a conscience, for example, inducing powerful guilt feelings in its members, because we are all so built that we tend to regard what everybody agrees on as true. Or it may act like something else that people are also afraid to oppose.

There is a great deal of violence in the opinions that we are defending. They are not merely opinions, they are not merely assumptions; they are assumptions with which we are identified - which we are therefore defending, because it is as if we are defending ourselves. The natural self-defence impulse, which we got in the jungle, has been transferred from the jungle animals to these opinions. In other words, we say that there are some dangerous opinions out there - just as there might be dangerous tigers. And there are some very precious animals inside us that have to be defended. So an impulse that made sense physically in the jungle has been transferred to our opinions in our modern life. And in a dialogue, we get to be aware of that in a collective way.

Facing this sort of thing can be done both collectively and individually. And actually we ought to do both. But something new - the whole cultural conditioning - comes in when you face it collectively. Individually it is very hard to be aware of it. You normally surround yourself with people who have a very similar culture. You share assumptions and don't know that you have them. However, in a group of about twenty to forty you are bound to have people with different assumptions and things that they do not share. The point is that we are facing the fact that we don't share our background - not entirely. We share a great deal, but disagreeing on one point can be enough to blow it all up. And the more we share, the quicker it will blow up when there is one point that doesn't agree.

I'm going to say what might happen in a dialogue, if we sustain it and go through the unpleasant phases of the process together. In such a dialogue, this whole structure of defensiveness and opinions and division may collapse; and suddenly the feeling may change to one of fellowship and friendship, participation and sharing - because the fact is that when we are sharing all these opinions, we are all participating in the same thing. We are then partaking of the common consciousness, and we are taking part in it. So you get the feeling that we are participating.

But as long as we have this defensive attitude - blocking and holding assumptions, sticking to them and saying, 'I've got to be right,' and that sort of thing - then intelligence is very limited, because intelligence requires that you don't defend an assumption. There is no reason to hold to an assumption if there is evidence that it is not right. The proper structure of an assumption or of an opinion is that it is open to evidence that it may not be right.

That does not mean that we are going to impose the opinions of the group. Everybody may or may not have a different opinion - it is not that important. It isn't necessary that everybody be convinced to have the same view. This *sharing* of mind, of consciousness, is more important than the content of these opinions are limited anyway. You may find that the answer is not in the opinions at all, but somewhere else. Truth does not emerge from opinions; it must emerge from something else - perhaps from a more free movement of this tacit mind. So we have to get meanings

On Dialogue

coherent if we are going to perceive truth, or to take part in truth. That is why I say the dialogue is so important. If our meanings are incoherent, how are we going to participate in truth?

There is no 'road' to truth. What we are trying to say is that in this dialogue we share all the roads and we finally see that none of them matters. We see the meaning of all the roads, and therefore we come to the 'no road'. Underneath, all the roads are the same because of the very fact that they are 'roads' - they are rigid.

I think this *new* thing will open the way to changing the whole situation ecologically and in other ways. For instance, the ecological movement, the 'green movement', is now in danger of fragmenting and splitting, because many of those groups have different opinions about how to deal with the problems. So they can wind up fighting each other as much as they fight for the ecology. Consequently, it seems particularly urgent that the green movement get into dialogue.

People concerned with the ecology are clearly aware of some of our planetary problems, but I think it is important to call attention to this explicitly in a clear way, so that it becomes clear what the basic problem is. These kinds of activities go together. Cleaning up the rivers and planting trees and saving the whales should go together with dialogue and with seeing the general problem of thought. They all belong together, because any one of those activities by itself is not enough. If we all just talk about thought and think about thought for a long while, the whole plant may be destroyed in the meantime. But I think that dialogue will work in this tacit level of mental process, where the most significant things take place.

There are situations where people have differing assumptions and opinions, where one faction is interested and the other isn't. Still, somehow, we have got to give a dialogue. Even if one faction won't participate, we who are willing can participate in a dialogue between our thought and their thought. We can at least dialogue among ourselves as far as we can, or you may by yourself. That is the attitude of dialogue. And the further this attitude could spread, the more I think it would help to bring order. If we really could do something creative, it might still affect the other person on a tacit level. It would really communicate at the tacit level, both with words and beyond words. But if we keep on repeating the same old story, then it won't.

Thought is all one, manifesting in all sorts of places and with all sorts of specific contents. So this spirit of a dialogue is important in facing this question, even though we realise that we are going in a direction which another very large part of the culture doesn't agree with at all.

The point is that this notion of dialogue and common consciousness suggests that there is some way out of our collective difficulties. And we have to begin here at the grass roots, as it were, not to begin at the top of the heap with the United Nations or with the President - although even the President and Gorbachev are now going to have a talk in which they have no agenda and are coming to no conclusions, so the idea must have percolated to that level, too; I don't think that they have thought it out for themselves. The idea of no agenda and no conclusion has probably been circulating among the lower echelon - which shows how these ideas do percolate and may even reach the highest levels.

That they are meeting is a very healthy development. It is a really good sign if they are going to do it. I know that there are people in the State Department who are familiar with this idea of dialogue - it could have reached them that way. This indicates that things can communicate very fast in this modern world - though that may look very insignificant at first. In three to five steps it might reach all sorts of levels. Just as the destructive things communicate, so this idea of dialogue could communicate, too.

As we ourselves stay with the frustrations of dialogue, the meaning of what we are doing may be much more than will appear at first sight. In fact, we could say that instead of being part of the problem, we become part of the solution. In other words, our very movement has the quality of the solution; it is part of it. However small it is, it has the quality of the solution and not the quality of the problem. However big the other one is, it has the quality of the problem, not of the solution. Accordingly, the major point is to start something which has the quality of the solution. As I have said, we don't know how fast or slowly it would spread. We don't know how fast a movement in the mind, in the thought process and beyond the thought process - this *sharing together* - will spread.

People sometimes say, "All we really need is love." Of course, that's true. If there were universal love, all would go well. But we don't appear to have it. It seems people can't just say, "Well, now there is going to be love between Bush and Gorbachev," or whomever. So we have to find a way that works. Even though there may be frustration and anger and rage and hate and fear - we talked about that occurring in a dialogue - we have to find something which can take all of that in.

To illustrate the point, here is a story about the two leading physicists of this century, Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr. Einstein remembered that when he first met Bohr, he felt close to him. He wrote of a feeling of love for him. They talked physics in a very animated way, and so on. But they finally came upon a point where they had two different assumptions, or opinions, about what was the way to truth. Bohr's judgements were based on his view of quantum theory, and Einstein's on his view of relativity. They talked it over again and again in a very patient way, with all goodwill. It went on for years, and neither of them yielded. Each one just repeated what he had been saying before. So finally they found that they weren't getting anywhere, and they gradually drifted apart. They didn't see each other for a long time after that.

Then one year, both of them were at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, but they still didn't meet each other. A mathematician name Herman Weyl said, "It would be nice if they got together. It's a pity that they don't." So he arranged a party to which Einstein and Bohr and their respective students were invited. Einstein and his associates stayed at one end of the room, and Bohr and his associates stayed at the other end. They couldn't get together because they had nothing to talk about. They couldn't share any meaning, because each one felt his meaning was true. How can you share if you are sure you have truth and the other fellow is sure he has truth, and the truths don't agree? How can you share?

Therefore, you have to watch for the notion of truth. Dialogue may not be concerned directly with truth - it may arrive at truth, but it is concerned with *meaning*. If meaning is *incoherent* you will never arrive at truth. You may think, 'My meaning is coherent and somebody else's isn't, 'But then we'll never have meaning shared. And if some of us come to the truth', so-called, while a lot of people are left out, it's not going to solve the problem. You will have the 'truth' for yourself or for your own group, what ever consolation that is. But we will continue to have conflict.

If it is necessary to share meaning and share truth, then we have to do something different. Bohr and Einstein probably should have had a dialogue. I'm not saying that they *could* have had one, but in a dialogue they might have listened properly to each other's opinion. And perhaps they both would have suspended their opinions, and moved out beyond relativity and beyond quantum theory into something new. They might have done that in principle, but I don't think that this notion of dialogue had occurred to scientists then.

Science is predicated on the concept that science is arriving at truth - at a *unique* truth. The idea of dialogue is thereby in some way foreign to the current structure of science, as it is with religion. In a way, science has become the religion of the modern age. It plays the role which religion used to play of giving us truth; hence different scientists cannot come together any more than different religions can, once they have different notions of truth. As one scientist, Max Planck, said, "New ideas don't win really. What happens is that the old scientists die and new ones come along with new ideas." But clearly that's not the right way to do it.

This is not to say that science couldn't work another way. If scientists could engage in a dialogue, that would be a radical revolution in science - in the very nature of science. Actually, scientists are in principle committed to the concepts involved in dialogue. They say, "We must listen. We shouldn't exclude anything."

However, they find that they can't do that. This is not only because scientists share what everybody else shares - assumptions and opinions - but also because the very notion which has been defining science today is that we are going to *get* truth. Few scientists question the assumption that thought is capable of coming to know 'everything'. But that may not be a valid assumption, because thought is abstraction, which inherently implies limitation. The *whole* is too much. There is no way by which thought can get hold of the whole, because thought only abstracts; it limits and defines. And the past from which thought draws contains only a certain limited amount. The present is not contained in thought; thus, an analysis cannot actually cover the moment of analysis.

There are also the relativists, who say that we are never going to get at an absolute truth. But they are caught in a paradox of their own. They are assuming that relativism is the absolute truth. So it is clear that people who believe that they are arriving at any kind of absolute truth can't make a dialogue, not even among themselves. Even different relativists don't agree.

We've said that in a dialogue there will be frustrations, but you might become better friends if you can get through all that. Not that we demand affection. We don't demand friendship; we don't demand anything. Friendship may come. If you see other people's thought, it becomes your own thought and you treat it as your own thought. And when an emotional charge comes up, you share all the emotional charges, too, if they affect you; you hold them together with all

On Dialogue

the thoughts. Often, when there is an emotional charge somebody can come in to defuse the issue a bit so that it doesn't run away - as the child-psychiatrist defused it with his asking, 'How long will you hate me forever?' Or some other sort of humour may defuse the issue, or something else - some appropriate remark which you can't foresee.

Sometimes people feel a sense of dialogue within their families. But a family is generally a hierarchy, organised on the principle of authority which is contrary to dialogue. The family is a very authoritative structure, based on obligation, and that sort of thing. It has its value, but it is a structure within which it might be difficult to get dialogue going. It would be good if you could - perhaps it does in some families. In general it is difficult, though, because there is no place in the dialogue for the principle of authority and hierarchy. We want to be free of hierarchy and authority as we move. You must have some authority to 'run' things; that's why we say that if you have a 'purpose', then you are bound to bring in some authority somewhere. But in dialogue, insofar as we have no purpose and no agenda and we don't have to *do* anything, we don't really need to have an authority or a hierarchy. Rather, we need a place where there is no authority, no hierarchy, where there is no special purpose - sort of an empty place, where we can let anything be talked about.

In the dialogue we create an empty space where we don't have an object, we don't have an agenda or a program. We just talk with each other, and we are not committed to accomplishing anything. Nobody has to agree to anything. We simply listen to all the opinions. And if nothing seems to get done we don't care, because the process of dialogue is going to affect us at a much deeper level if we can create an empty space. Listening to all the opinions will bring us together.

The defence of opinions separates people. Each of us defends his own opinion, and then we don't meet. We don't really listen to one another; we try to win. But if we are listening to all the opinions, and we understand them all, then we are all meeting. We don't have to make any decisions. It will often happen that we will see that all the opinions are limited and that we may therefore have to go beyond them. There are, for instance, all sorts of opinions on what to do about the ecological crisis. Maybe if we looked at them all, we would say that they are all too limited and that we have to find something more creative. Also, if someone wants the group to accomplish his idea of purpose, it would probably start a conflict. The dialogue is aimed for those people who can commonly agree that this is the way to go about it. If people don't agree that this is the way to go about it then there is no reason to be in it. Frequently you find that as the dialogue goes on and the group continues, some people leave and others come in. There are those who feel, "Well, this is not for me."

We see that it is not an arbitrary imposition to state that we have no fixed purpose - no absolute purpose, anyway. We may set up relative purposes for investigation, but we are not wedded to a particular purpose, and are not saying that the whole group must conform to that purpose indefinitely. All of us might want the human race to survive, but even that is not our purpose. Our purpose is really to communicate coherently in truth, if you want to call that a purpose.

While we don't have 'rules' for the dialogue, we may learn certain principles as we go along which help us - such as that we must give space to each person to talk. We don't put that as a rule; rather we say that we can see the sense of it, and we are learning to do it. We see the necessity or value of certain procedures that help. We give space. People will gradually learn to give space to the others to talk. Very often when you don't give space in a group, everybody jumps in right away with whatever he has in his mind. But at the same time, you shouldn't be mulling it over in your mind - picking on one point and turning it over - while the conversation goes on to something else. If you stop to think about one point, by the time you have thought about it the group has moved on, and what you were going to say is now irrelevant. As you were thinking: "What does all that mean and what shall I say about it?" it became too late, because the topic has changed. So there is sort of a subtle situation in between, where you are not jumping in too fast, nor holding back too much. There may be silent periods, and so on.

Sometimes you may find that you are about to raise a question, but someone else brings it up. In such a case, that thought is probably latent in the group as a whole, implicit. And one person may say it, or somebody else may say it. Then another person may pick it up and carry it along. If the group is really working, that would be thinking together - common participation in thinking - as if it were all one process. That one thought is being formed together.

Now, this has not been common in human society, although that is really what is necessary if the society is to cohere. If people would do that in government or in business or internationally, our society would all work differently. But then, that requires *sensitivity* - a certain way of knowing how to come in and how not to come in, of watching all the

subtle cues and the senses and your response to them, and what's happening inside of you, what's happening in the group. People may show what is happening to them in the stance of their body - by their 'body language' - as well as by what they say. They are not trying to do this purposefully, but you will find that it develops. That's part of the communication. It will be non-verbal as well as verbal. You're not *trying* to do it at all; you may not even be aware that it is happening.

Sensitivity is to be able to sense that something is happening, to sense the subtle differences and similarities. To sense all this is the foundation of perception. The senses provide you with information, but you have to be sensitive to it or you won't see it. If you know a person very well, you may pass him on the street and say, "I saw him." If you are asked what the person was wearing, however, you may not know, because you didn't really look. You were not sensitive to all that, because you saw that person through *the screen of thought*. And that was not sensitivity.

So sensitivity involves the senses, and also something beyond. The senses are sensitive to certain things to which they respond, but that's not enough. The senses will tell you what is happening, and then the consciousness must build a form, or create some sense of what it *means*, which holds it together. Therefore, meaning is part of it. You are sensitive to the meaning, or to the lack of meaning. It's perception of meaning, if you want to put it that way. In other words, it is a more subtle perception. The meaning is what holds it together. As I said, it is the 'cement'.

Meaning is not static; it is flowing. And if we have the meaning being shared, then it is flowing among us; it holds the group together. Then everybody is sensitive to all the nuances going around, and not merely to what is happening in his own mind. From that forms a meaning which is shared. And that way we can talk together coherently and think together. Whereas generally people hold to their assumptions, so they are not thinking together. Each one is on his own. What blocks sensitivity is the defence of your assumptions and opinions.

Regardless of the size of the group, the thing that mostly gets in the way of a dialogue is holding to assumptions or opinions, and defending them. If you are identified personally with an opinion, that would get in the way. And if you are identified collectively with an opinion, that also gets in the way. The main difficulty is that we cannot listen properly to somebody else's opinion because we are resisting it - we don't really hear it.

But if you are defending your opinions, you don't judge yourself and say: "I shouldn't be defending." Rather, the fact is that you *are* defending, and you then need to be sensitive to that that condemns and judges, and so forth. We can all realise that that would get in the way. So this group is not going to judge or condemn. It is simply going to look at all the opinions and assumptions and let them surface. And I think that there could then be a change.

I have said that in a large group you are beginning to touch the cultural assumptions more than you can in small groups or as an individual. The cultural assumptions are very powerful and we are not usually aware of them, just as you are not normally aware of an accent in the way you talk. Other people can tell you that you've got one, or if you listen carefully you might find it. But the accent is part of your culture. Now, a great deal of your assumptions are part of your culture, too, and this comes out in relationship.

A friend with whom I used to discuss these issues, said that 'to be' is to be related. But relationship can be very painful. You have to think/feel out all your mental processes and work them through, and then that may open the way to something else. And I think that is what can happen in the dialogue group. Certain painful things can happen for some people; you have to work it all out.

We once had a dialogue in Sweden, in which the group seemed to divide itself into two factions. There were a lot of 'New Age' people, and from the beginning they began to talk about the virtues of love and the fact that the place was full of love all around, that it was all love everywhere. Part of the group remained silent for a while, but in the next hour they started to talk. They intimated that the love talk was all sentimental nonsense and didn't mean anything. Then one fellow got so excited that he couldn't stand it, and he walked out. He eventually came back, and they finally got together again. Polarisation had taken place, which is a typical difficulty that can arise. Someone noticed the polarisation happening and said with a bit of good humour, "There are two groups here - the love group and the hate group." That broke the tension a little, and the two sides could then begin to talk. They didn't necessarily convince each other, but each was able to see the meaning of the other side's position, and the two polarised groups were able to talk to each other.

Now, *that* was a more important point than whether they convinced each other. They might find that they both have to give up their positions so that something else can come about. It was not important whether one favoured love or one favoured hate or another favoured being suspicious and careful and somewhat cynical, or whatever. Really, underneath they were similar, because they both had rigid positions. Loosening that position, then, was the key change.

On Dialogue

I think that a group like this offers opportunity for a certain kind of relationship which involves the whole culture, that individuals or smaller groups don't generally have. With individuals and within families you will have a different kind of problems in relationships, and that also has to be met. But a group of this size had a particular possibility that is not available in smaller groups. And if you make it much bigger than this, the circle gets too big. It gets too unwieldy and you can't communicate.

At the beginning of a dialogue we would not expect that personal problems or questions would enter into it. If people sustained the dialogue week after week, or month after month, then maybe they could. Everything can enter, but the people have to get to know each other and trust each other and establish that relationship of sharing. It would be too much to expect to start with that. And in fact, a personal problem may not be all that important anyway; although if someone has one, the group could consider it. There is no reason why they couldn't, however I don't think we would begin with that, at least not often. The group is not mainly for the sake of personal problems; it's mainly a cultural question. But the personal could come into the group, because personal problems and culture get mixed up.

It is important to understand that a dialogue group is not a therapy group of some kind. We are not trying to cure anybody here, though it may happen as a by-product. But that's not our purpose. A friend of mine who has gone into this calls it: 'Socio-therapy'. Not individual therapy. The group is a microcosm of society. So if the group - or anyone - is 'cured', it is the beginning of the larger cure. You can look at it that way if you like. That's limited, but still it's a way to look at it.

Nor is this a so-called 'encounter-group', which is aimed at a particular type of therapy where people's emotions, and so forth, can come up. We are not particularly aiming for that, but we are not saying that emotions should *never* come up, because in certain cases, if people confront each emotionally it will bring out their assumptions.

An essential feature of the dialogue group is that it is able to *reveal assumptions*. These assumptions are actually making us ill. And in that sense, it is therapy to reveal them. The content here, then, is more in that direction and eventually moving toward being free of those assumptions, and exploring something new beyond the assumptions.

So the suggestion is that people could start dialogue groups in various places. The point would not be to identify with the group, but rather, what is important is this *whole process*. You might say, "This is a wonderful group," but it's actually the process that counts.

I think that when we are able to sustain a dialogue of this sort, you would find that there will be a change in the people who were taking part. They themselves would then behave differently, even outside the dialogue. Eventually they would spread it. It's like the Biblical analogy of the seed - some are dropped in stony ground and some of them fall in the right place and they produce tremendous fruit. The thing is that you cannot tell where or how it can start. The idea here, the communication here, the kind of thought we're having here, is a kind of seed which may help this to come about. But we mustn't be surprised if many of these groups are abortive and don't get going. That doesn't mean it can't happen.

The point is not to establish a fixed dialogue group forever, but rather one that lasts long enough to make a change. If you keep holding it for too long, it may become caught up in habits again. But you have to keep it up for a while, or else it won't work. It may be valuable to keep the dialogue going for a year or two, as we said, and it is important to sustain it regularly. If you sustain it, all these problems will arise; it cannot avoid bringing out the deep assumptions of the people who are participating. The frustration will arise, the sense of chaos, the sense that it's not worth it. The emotional charge will come. The fellow with the assumptions about Zionism probably wanted to be very polite. But suddenly somebody said something that outraged him, and he couldn't control himself. Its going to happen that the deep assumptions will come to the surface, if we stick with it, then something new will come.

Now, dialogue is not going to be always entertaining, nor is it doing anything visibly useful. So you may tend to drop it as soon as it gets difficult. But I suggest that it is very important to go on with it - to stay with it through the frustration. When you think something is important you will do that. For example, nobody would climb Mount Everest unless for some reason he thought it was important, as that could also be very frustrating and not always entertaining. And the same is true if you have to make money, or do all sorts of things. If you feel that they are *necessary*, you do them.

I'm saying that it is necessary to share meaning. A society is a link of relationships among people and institutions, so that we can live together. But it only works if we have a *culture* - which implies that we share meaning; i.e., significance, purpose and value. Otherwise it falls apart. Our society is incoherent, and doesn't do that very well; it hasn't

On Dialogue

for a long time, if it ever did. The different assumptions that people have are tacitly affecting the whole meaning of what we are doing.

On the whole, you could say that if you are defending your opinions, you are not serious. Likewise, if you are trying to avoid something unpleasant inside of yourself, that is also not being serious. A great deal of our whole life is not serious. And society teaches you that. It teaches you *not* to be very serious - that there are all sorts of incoherent things, and there is nothing that can be done about it, and that you will only stir yourself up uselessly by being serious.

But in dialogue you have to be serious. It is not a dialogue if you are not - not in the way I'm using the word. There is a story about Freud when he had cancer of the mouth. Somebody came up to Freud and wanted to talk to him about a point in psychology. The person said, "Perhaps I'd better not talk to you, because you've got this cancer which is very serious. You may not want to talk about this." Freud's answer was, "This cancer may be fatal, but it's not serious." And actually, of course, it was just a lot of cells growing.

I think a great deal of what goes on in society could be described that way - that it may well be fatal, but it's not serious. As we said, you can also have a dialogue in a more limited way - perhaps with a purpose or a goal in mind. It would be best to accept the principle of letting it be open, because when you limit it, you are accepting assumptions on the basis of which you limit it - assumptions that may actually be getting in the way of free communication. So you are not looking at those assumptions.

However, if people are not ready to be completely open in their communication, they should do whatever they can. I know some university professors who are interested in applying the principles of dialogue to corporate problems. One of them recently had a meeting with the executive officers of a corporation that makes office furniture. They wanted to have this sort of meeting, because they knew that they were not functioning efficiently and that they couldn't agree. The higher officers had all sorts of assumptions that blocked everything. So they asked him to come in. He started a dialogue which they found very interesting, and now they want to have a whole series of them.

Naturally, that sort of dialogue will be limited - the people involved do have a definite purpose, which is limiting - but even so, it has considerable value. The principle is at least to get people to come to know each other's assumptions, so they can listen to their assumptions and know what they are. Very often people get into problems where they don't really know what the other person's assumption is, and they react according to what they think it is. That person then gets very puzzled and wonders: what is he doing? He reacts, and all gets very muddled. So it is valuable if they can at least get to realise each other's assumptions.

The professor told me about two interesting cases. One involved a company which had trouble with people in the higher executive branches who were not very happy and were not getting on with each other. The company's usual way of solving it was to offer them a higher salary, sort of a sweetener, and a lot of mediocre people were given the very highest possible positions. It went on and on, and pretty soon there were so many people with high salaries that the company couldn't afford it; they were failing. They said, "What can we do? Well, we've got to have somebody who's tough, who will tell these people, 'You have to accept another position.'" The negotiator that they used explained the new policies by saying: "The company just can't afford it." But he was avoiding the issue. He was not straightforwardly saying, "This whole approach is wrong." Now, if the company is to work efficiently, there must be a mutual agreement that they are not going to give a person a higher position just to alleviate a psychological problem between people. That's not a right way to proceed. Everybody should understand that that is not the right way of working, otherwise the company won't succeed. Therefore, a dialogue was needed so that they could really begin talking with each other in order to come to see clearly the salient points: that's the way we are thinking, that's where the problems are coming from, and that's the way we have to go. So within the framework of assuming that the company has to survive, there was a limited kind of dialogue - not the kind we ultimately want to have here, but still it was good in some way.

Now, I am suggesting that the human race has got to do that. We could say that the human race is failing for the same sort of reason that the company was failing

The second case involved the negotiating group itself, the university people whose speciality it is to go into companies and help solve these problems. They were organising a meeting among themselves with the same purpose - just so they could talk. They had a series of meetings where it happened that two of their people could never quite meet on any issue. One of them constantly had the assumption that the right thing to do was to bring out the trouble - to confront somebody with it. And the other person had the opposite assumption, which was that you shouldn't do that. He

On Dialogue

wanted other people to draw him out. He felt that he couldn't say something unless other people created the space for him to talk, and drew him out. The first fellow wouldn't do that, he did the opposite. So they couldn't meet. The whole thing went on for a long time in confusion, with the one person waiting to be drawn out, and the other person not understanding that this was the case. Finally they got to talking, and each one actually brought up childhood experiences which were behind these assumptions. And then it opened up.

The fellow who was working as facilitator during this time did very little. In fact, several of the people appealed to the facilitator and said, "Why don't you talk." The facilitator may come in from time to time and comment on what is going on or what it all means. In a more general group he should eventually be able to be just a participant. Probably in the company group this wouldn't work, though; he couldn't become *just* a participant - such a group has too limited an objective.

This second example might be an illustration of when the personal may have to come into the general, because in certain cases there are blocks due to particular assumptions that the person got hold of in childhood, or in some other way. And in this example, they were finally able to uncover those assumptions. They weren't trying to heal each other, or to do therapy; nevertheless, it had a therapeutic effect. But that's a secondary thing.

Some people feel that that type of corporate dialogue is only furthering a corrupt system. However, there is a germ of something different. I think that if you go into society, you will find that almost everything is involved in this corrupt game. So it doesn't accomplish anything to dismiss it all. The executives have got to make the company work; and in fact, if all these companies would work more efficiently we would all be a lot better off. It's partly because they are in such a mess that we are in trouble, that society is inefficient, that the whole thing is falling apart. If the government and the companies could all work efficiently, we wouldn't be so wasteful, even though that by itself wouldn't solve all the problems.

For the society to be working right, all those things have got to work efficiently and coherently. If we look at what is going on in the world today, in this or in any country, we can say that it is not working coherently. Most companies are not really working coherently. And slowly the thing is sinking. I think that if you can get this notion across in whatever situation - the germ of the notion dialogue - if you can get people to look at it, it's a step. You can say that Bush and Gorbachev are not likely to have the kind of dialogue that we are talking about. But if they will have any kind at all, if they'll begin to accept this principle, it's a step. It may make a change; for instance, the kind of waste of energy which is going on in armaments could be cut down. If we could stop the tremendous amount being spent on armament that's being produced - let's say a trillion dollars a year - that could be used for ecological regeneration and all sorts of constructive things. And possibly some of that might happen. Those political figures who are more aware of the ecological problem might make Bush more aware of it, if they would really talk. Not that we can expect the politicians to solve the problems we face. But I'm saying that if there's a slight movement toward something more open, the rate of destruction will slow down. If we go on at this rate, we may have very little time to do anything. We can't do anything at the level of Bush or Gorbachev. They have their own opinions. But the various ideas filter, as we've said. Somehow the notion of something a little bit like dialogue has filtered to that level, and it may have an effect; that's all I'm saying. I think that in the government there are some people who are more this way, and some people who are more the other way. We don't know how it is going to come out, but there is a certain movement toward something more open. I don't say that it is going to solve the whole thing; I am saying that if it slows down the destruction, that's important, because unless the destruction is slowed down to give time for something new to emerge, it will be too late.

There may be no pat political 'answer' to the world's problems. However, the important point is not the *answer* - just as in a dialogue, the important point is not the particular opinions - but rather the softening up, the opening up, of the mind, and looking at all the opinions. If there is some sort of spread of that attitude, I think it can slow down the destruction.

So we've said that it is crucial to be able to share our judgement, to share our assumptions and listen to each other's assumptions. In the case of Einstein and Bohr it didn't lead to violence that they did not; but in general, if somebody doesn't listen to your basic assumptions you feel it as an act of violence, and then you are inclined to be violent yourself. Therefore, this is crucial both individually and collectively; and dialogue is the *collective* way of opening up judgements and assumptions.

On Dialogue

We should keep in mind, nonetheless, that the dialogue - and in fact, all that we've been talking about - is not *only* directed at solving the ills of society, although we do have to solve those ills; we would be much better off if we didn't have them. If we survive and we want to have a worthwhile life, we have to deal with those problems. But ultimately that's not the entire story. That's only the beginning. I'm suggesting that there is the possibility for a transformation of the nature of consciousness, both individually and collectively, and that whether this can be solved culturally and socially depends on dialogue. That's what we're exploring.

And it's very important that it happen together, because if one individual changes it will have very little general effect. But if it happens collectively, it means a lot more. If some of us come to the 'truth', so-called, while a lot of people are left out, it's not going to solve the problem. We would have another conflict - just as there is conflict between different parts of the Christian faith or the Mohammedan faith or various others, even though they all believe in the same God, the same prophet or the same Saviour. Thus this whole question of communication and the ability to dialogue, the ability to participate in communication, is crucial.

The *collective* dimension of the human being, where we have a considerable number of people, has a *qualitatively* new feature: it has great power - potentially, or even actually. And in dialogue we discuss how to bring that to some sort of coherence and order. The question is really: do you see the *necessity* of this process? That's the key question. If you see that it is absolutely necessary, then you have to do something.

The point is that love will go away if we can't communicate and share meaning. The love between Einstein and Bohr gradually evaporated because they could not communicate.

However, if we can really communicate, then we will have fellowship, participation, friendship, love, growing and growing. That would be the way.

And perhaps in dialogue, when we have this very high energy of coherence, it might bring us beyond just being a group that could solve social problems. Possibly it could make a new change in the individual and a change in the relation to the cosmic. Such an energy has been called 'communication'. It is a kind of participation. The early Christians had a Greek word *koinonia*, the root of which means 'to participate' - the idea of partaking of the whole and taking part in it; not merely the whole group, but the *whole*.

This, then, is more or less an outline of what I mean by 'dialogue'.

AFTERWORD

Professor David Bohm was born in Pennsylvania in 1917, and earned his PhD at Berkeley under Robert Oppenheimer. He is currently Emeritus Professor at Theoretical Physics at the University of London, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society. His published works include: *Quantum Theory, Causality and Chance in Modern Physics*, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, and co-authorship of *Science, Order and Creativity*.

While Dr. Bohm is best known in academic circles as a theoretical physicist, he has long had interest in subjects considered outside the purview of traditional 'science'. The nature of thought and consciousness and how they affect both the individual and the society is one such topic, and he says it is critical that we reach a better understanding of that question if we are to survive and lead meaningful lives.

Dr. Bohm has looked at the nature of thought in our daily lives - our reactions, hopes, pleasures, fears; and also at the social and environmental results of thought - nationalism, religious factions, economic fragmentation, and so on. Through this investigation he has come to consider how people communicate. He points out that 'shared meaning' is the basis of culture and society, and that we absorb a great deal of that meaning - much has been experimenting with the notion of the process of dialogue as a way to coherent meaning. As he says in the text which follows: "I'm suggesting that there is the possibility for a transformation of the nature of consciousness, both individually and collectively, and that whether this can be solved culturally and socially depends on dialogue. That 's what we're exploring."

David Bohm's interest in the question of communication is not new. He recalls, for example, conversations with Albert Einstein in the 1905's and later with J. Krishnamurti, with both of whom he felt 'intense energy' of listening and 'freedom from selfprotective reservations and barriers'. Currently he has been trying to bring that sort of attitude to a group situation. In May, 1984, what was intended to be a weekend seminar consisting of three lectures and discussions developed into what Dr. Bohm called 'the awakening of the process of dialogue itself as a free flow of meaning among all the participants'. That weekend is documented in the book *Unfolding Meaning*. Dr. Bohm has talked on dialogue and participated in groups in England, Europe, Israel, and the United States.

--oOo--

Niets uit deze uitgave mag worden vermenigvuldigd en/of openbaar gemaakt door middel van druk, fotokopie, microfilm of op welke andere wijze dan ook, zonder voorafgaande schriftelijke toestemming van de uitgever.