

# **Editorial Introduction**

Paul Weller  
*Academic Editor*

In providing a platform for intellectually rigorous engagement with dialogue, undertaken from starting points in a wide range of academic disciplines and in relation to a wide variety of contexts, the *Journal of Dialogue Studies* presents editions that seek to focus on particular aspects of dialogue and its conduct. Bearing in mind a phrase from the journal's overall working proposition that at the heart of dialogue is a 'meaningful interaction and exchange between people', because of its involvement with people, dialogue almost inevitably entails ethical dimensions. Therefore this edition of the journal seeks to open up and critically explore some of the ethical dimensions of dialogue, from various disciplinary perspectives and with reference to various contexts. In addressing this, contributions are made by writers with backgrounds in various national contexts including Israel, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

In particular, this edition contains articles by Scherto Gill and Dvora Lederman Daniely which explore the edition's theme in ways strongly informed by thinking (albeit with practical consequences) of two key philosophers (Hans Georg Gadamer and Martin Buber); those by Pietro de Perini's and Elli Nagai-Rothe which start from more concrete and specific contexts for dialogue, respectively, in terms of the European Union's relations with the wider Mediterranean region, and the inheritance of racialised relations in the United States of America; and finally, that by Charles Wright, which focuses on the mediation between dialogical ideals and group practice by way of engagement with biological and social-psychological perspectives.

Dr. Scherto Gill is Visiting Fellow and Associate Tutor at the University of Sussex's Department of Education and Research Fellow and Executive Secretary of the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace, based in Brighton, UK. Her article on 'Holding oneself open in a conversation' takes into its title a key quotation from Gadamer. It explores Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in drawing out implications for the ethics of dialogue. In this she highlights openness to the other and otherness as key ideals for dialogical encounter and understanding, looking especially at the ethics of alterity in relation to the place of otherness in dialogue; the ethics of self-cultivation in terms of a fusion of horizons; the ethics of mutuality, with reference to equality and active reciprocity in dialogue; and ethics of solidarity, as connected with language and understanding.

Dvora Lederman Daniely, who is a researcher and lecturer at David Yellin and Givat Washington Colleges in Israel, also contributes an article that is strongly informed by philosophical perspectives. In ‘The Buberian Dialogical Man as a Struggler in the Field of Existential Choice’, she explores the ethical dimensions of dialogue through the work of another important philosopher – Martin Buber - whose work has, for many, become archetypically connected with dialogue. The article does so by reference to models of dialogue found particularly in teaching and learning, and argues that such models are limited when they focus only on the cognitive aspects of teaching and learning; while interpersonal approaches that focus on containment and empathy may also not facilitate what Buber’s philosophy advocates as the critically important sphere of the “between”. Lederman Daniely therefore argues that dialogical relations of a kind that are more fully informed by Buberian philosophy are processes that involve a powerful and continuous existential struggle between the ‘I-Thou’ and the ‘I-it’ modes of relation.

Complementing the articles that are more strongly informed by explicit philosophical discussions are articles in this edition which explore ethical aspects of dialogue when rooted in very concrete fields of action and reflection. This includes Pietro de Perini’s piece on ‘The Origin of Intercultural Dialogue Practice in European Union External Action’. Pietro de Perini a junior research fellow at the Human Rights Centre of the University of Padua, Italy, and a doctoral Candidate at City University, London, UK. His paper analyses European Union policy documents to explore the origins of the concept and practice of the specific form of ‘intercultural dialogue’ that developed with the original intention of being a tool for use within the European Union’s engagements with the wider Mediterranean region. In doing so, he discusses how and why a tool that, when it was first launched in the mid-1990s was thought by many to be quite innovative and to have considerable potential was, in practice, for many years relatively neglected in its actual use.

Moving from the European to North American context, but also discussing some of the limitations of dialogical initiatives, Elli Nagai-Rothe, who holds a Master’s degree in International Peace and Conflict Resolution, facilitates intergroup dialogues and manages Restorative Justice programmes at SEEDS Community Resolution Center in Berkeley, California, USA, offers an article on ‘Dialogue as a Tool for Racial Reconciliation: Examining Racialised Frameworks’. This draws on her experiences as a facilitator of a seven-week intergroup dialogue on race to explore the possibilities and limitations of dialogue as a tool for racial reconciliation, especially in the context of the United States of America, and with particular attention to the relationship between what dialogue can and cannot achieve relative to the question of structural and power imbalances.

Mediating between moral philosophy and the practice of groups, Charles W. Wright's 'Tribal Morality and the Ethical Other' explores, as its subtitle puts it, 'The Tension between Modern Moral Aspirations and Evolved Moral Dispositions'. Wright teaches in the Department of Philosophy at the College of St. Benedict and St. John's University in Central Minnesota, USA and connects discussion of the ideals of perspective taking and mutual understanding with social psychological and biological accounts of social co-operation in human behaviour. He does this in ways that highlight the gap that can exist between these the evolution of both these ideals, and of the moral sensibilities found among human groups, within which there are tendencies to favour group insiders. He suggests that social psychological intergroup contact theory can help to identify the conditions under which propensities to group favouritism might be overcome.

Following on from the experimental introduction in the last edition of the journal of more reflective pieces, also included in this issue is a piece on 'What does Ethical Dialogue look like? A Reflection', written by Julian Bond, who was formerly Director of the Christian-Muslim Forum in the UK. This takes as its starting point the concerns felt by some about the possibility of becoming compromised during the development of dialogue that connects both with practical engagement and with doctrinal beliefs. This is the second example of the journal's new section intended for pieces that provide a platform for more preliminary reflection on dialogical practice that we hope might complement the more formal peer reviewed academic papers that remain at the core of the journal's project. We will continue to keep this new feature under review and would welcome feedback from readers about the inclusion of this section. In addition, as with the first of these pieces published in the last edition, we would particularly invite dialogical responses from readers.

Finally, as always, this edition of the journal ends with book reviews. On this occasion, Nicholas J. Wood reviews a collection of papers on the work of mainly North American scholars and pioneers of dialogue edited and presented by Catherine Cornille into the *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogues*; while Michael Barnes reviews the single authored work of Professor of Interreligious Studies at the University of Oslo, Oddbjørn Leirvik, on *Interreligious Studies: A Relational Approach to Religious Activism and the Study of Religion*, published by Bloomsbury, and written under the shadow cast upon Norwegian civil society's attempts to wrestle with the implications of contemporary religious plurality, by the ideology and actions of Anders Behring Breivik.