Toward an Understanding of the
Value of a Dialogic Inquiry into and about Values

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ABSTRACT: This article attempts to illustrate the teaching and learning practice of values dialogue. First, various conceptions of values and of dialogue are explored. Then, these perspectives are consolidated into unified definitions. After uniting definitions, the author fuses them together in a practice that consists of dialogic inquiry into and about values and valuation. Finally, some of the potential consequences of values dialogue are perused. In sum, this article contains analyses of conceptions of values and dialogue as well as the assembly of a practice of dialogic inquiry.

Keywords: dialogic inquiry, values, dialogue, theory, praxis

RESUMÉ: à l'appui d''illustrations sur les exercices de pédagogie et de formation concernant les valeurs du dialogue, l'auteur analyse tout d'abord diverses conceptions des valeurs et du dialogue. Ensuite, il les renforce dans des définitions harmonisées puis, après les avoir fusionnées, il les intègre dans un exercice qui consiste en une recherche de dialogue vers, et au sujet des valeurs. En somme, on trouve dans cet article des analyses sur la conception des valeurs et du dialogue aussi bien que sur l'association de la mise en pratique de la recherche du dialogue.

Mots-clés : recherche de dialogue, valeurs, dialogue, théorie, mise en pratique.

Introduction

Many philosophers (Nietzsche, 1973; Kant, 1900; Plato ca. 427-347 B.C.) and psychologists (Oyserman, 2015; Taylor, 2012) have argued that values can influence our thoughts and actions. Furthermore, some psychologists, including Oyserman (2015), maintain that the analysis of values can help observers predict individuals' thoughts and behaviour. If we can identify these values, then their presence and/or absence may assist observers and agents in determining why and how people act in the ways that they do as well as why and how they acted in the past.

Particularly, values dialogue may create the context for participants to better comprehend their and their fellow agents' shared values and the potential reasons why they value differently than other participants. Thus, this article will explore values and dialogue and elucidate a practice of values dialogue.

Toward a Unified Definition of Values

Defining values

In order to illustrate a dialogic inquiry into and about values, we first need to review its composite parts, values and dialogue. Values, the foci of the dialogue, will be defined first.

The values discussed in these inquiries are of those that Kant alluded to including those of *a priori* biopsychological and of *a posteriori* epistemological origins (Kant, trans. 1900). A value has a biopsychological origin when it exists before and after experience and reason. For example, these innate values include human instincts such as survival.

Meanwhile, a value is epistemological in origin when it is subject to *episteme* (i.e., to knowledge). As subject to knowledge, epistemological values depend on the experiences and reason that influence the development of knowledge. While biopsychological values are innate and change little, epistemological values derive from experience and reflection and can change more often (ibid.). These experience- and reflection-based epistemic values often consist of entities of the highest importance in individuals' lives such as indicators of happiness, features associated with a high quality of life, and other markers of self-actualization.

Conceptions of values

> *Generalized ideas of ends and values undoubtedly exist. They exist not only as expressions of habit and uncritical and probably invalid ideas but also in the same ways as valid general ideas arise in any subject. Similar situations recur; desires and interests are carried over from one situation to another and progressively consolidated.*
>
> (J. Dewey, 1939: 44)

Scholars understand and conceptualize values in varying ways. This article consolidates and synthesizes some notable and philosophically significant conceptions of value and of valuation including those of Plato, Socrates, Ernest Joós, Tasos Kazepides, Friedrich Nietzsche, and John Dewey.

Plato (trans. 1955) conceived of epistemological values as *Forms*. According to him, the absolute values of his world were unchanging objects that can be defined with certainty through

reason. Moreover, Plato described values as knowable and therefore as a form of knowledge. He believed that knowledge was absolute and certain. He distinguished knowledge from opinion where knowledge is eternal and unchanging, while opinion is temporary and subjective. He measured all of the Forms relative to the Good, which he described as the "Form of Forms," establishing the Good as the highest value by which one can evaluate all other values.

Unlike Plato, Socrates's approach to value and to valuation was recapitulated through only other authors' writings. Moreover, scarce evidence remains of the works of Socrates's contemporaries from which to consolidate his conception of epistemological values. However, what does remain demonstrates his dedication to collaborative valuation and to the critiquing of values. After all, the Socratic dialogues (Plato, trans. 1955; Plato, ca. 427-347 B.C.) often centered on dialogues about epistemic values. Most often Socrates, Plato, and the other participants in their discourses began with, or returned to, attempts to identify and to define values. They performed collaborative inquiries about issues and entities of mutual concern such as conceptions of justice and of the Good (Plato, trans. 1955).

At most, the surviving dialogues convey a sense of Socrates's skepticism toward existing values, especially toward the patron Gods of Athens (ibid.). According to some of the surviving writings of his contemporaries, it seems that Socrates discussed epistemological values frequently. Notably, he was indicted for discussing entities of the highest value to himself and to participants in his dialogues as well as for challenging people's conceptions of these entities of divine value in Athenian society. In the Socratic dialogue *Euthyphro,* Socrates, when questioned how it was he had corrupted the young, recalled how Meletus "says that I am *a maker of gods* [emphasis added], and on the ground that I create new gods while not believing in the old gods, he has indicted me for their sake" (Plato, ca. 427-347 B.C., p. 3). Socrates faced trial and was ultimately executed, upon the basis that he had influenced the creation of new gods: of new entities of the highest value. Most essential, Socrates influenced the creation of these new values through dialogue, specifically through collaboratively critically analyzing these entities.

Echoing Plato and Socrates, Joós (1991), when commentating about Heidegger's conception of values, defined whatever we find valuable as Good by concluding that "value and the good are synonymous" (p. 19). But unlike Plato and Socrates, Joós also argued that we "know that the Good, like any other absolute, has

no definition, hence the same can be said for values also" (ibid.). Joós highlighted the potential enigmatic character of entities of ultimate value but concluded that it is important to aspire to define them regardless.

Joós questioned the fundamental character of values. Throughout his writings, he asked Why are there values? What forces drive valuation? Joós suggested that the origins of biopsychological and epistemological values are linked to the finite nature of reality. He argued that "necessity has *meaning* for us only in a finite World" (p. 158). Therefore, Joós implied that we judge the worth of entities or acts relative to their scarcity. He demonstrated that values may remain undefinable but that they have origins that can be described and understood.

Like Joós, Kazepides also attempted to identify and to dissect values. Kazepides (2010) emphasized the significance of "riverbed principles" and of moral principles more broadly as the epistemologically prior criteria, principles, rules, and norms that support our perspectives. For him, riverbed principles are acquired or inherited without any reflection; he argued that "we are born into them" (p. 83). As innate *a priori* contingencies, these propositions serve as criteria for the rationality of moral principles. Kazepides provided an acknowledgement of grounding principles that must be brought into focus if we are to understand and to critique the rationality of our moralities and of their underlying values.

Along with Kazepides, Nietzsche also challenged and critiqued the values of the highest importance in his society, specifically those of Christian *dogmata*. In *Beyond Good and Evil,* Nietzsche (1973) attempted to establish the subjection of moralities to individuals by challenging the subjection of Christians to their moralities. He glorified the movement "beyond good and evil and [to] no longer [be], like Buddha and Schopenhauer, under the spell and illusion of morality" (p. 82). Although he attributed some values to racial origins, he acknowledged that the epistemic values that influence our well-being and suffering, such as "the concepts of 'God' and 'sin,' will one day seem to us of no more importance than a child's toy and child's troubles seem to an old man" (ibid.). He often denigrated Christian moralities; at one point, he described them as nothing more than the "sign-language of the emotions" (p. 110). In concluding his attempts to discredit traditional Christian values, he alluded to the development of new morals by suggesting that, just as people valuate Christianity, people will continue to valuate *ad infinitum*. Moreover, he calls upon those

> spirits strong and original enough to make a start on antithetical evaluations and to revalue and reverse "eternal values"; towards heralds and forerunners, towards men of the future who in the present knot together the constraint which compels the will of millennia on to new paths. (1973, p. 126)

Ultimately, near the end of his life, Nietzsche (2002) called for the "transvaluation of all values" (p. 101). Nietzsche stressed that new philosophers need to "traverse the whole range of human values and value-feelings" in order to "*create values*" (1973, p. 142). In some ways, the practice of values dialogue demonstrates an attempt to evaluate existing and potential values through a process that can contribute to the realization of Nietzsche's transvaluation. This process consists of collaborative reflection and an evaluation of values in which participants refine and potentially create new values. In addition to attributing some of its legacy to Socrates, my definition of values dialogue also presents a potential practical methodology by which to operationalize and to actualize Nietzsche's revaluation.

Following Nietzsche, Dewey also explored values but was among the first to analyze them systematically. Dewey's (1939) *Theory of Valuation* attempted to provide a comprehensive explanation of how values influence interests, desires, and actions. He argued that a person's valuation and his/her practical realization of interests and desires can be measured by only observable behaviour. He maintained that "valuations exist in fact and […] that propositions about them are empirically verifiable" (p. 58). As observable patterns of behaviour, Dewey claimed that they can be studied empirically. Furthermore, values are verifiable but only to the degree that they can be determined upon reflection of past valuation and of past actions influenced by interests and desires. He demonstrated how values can influence and be influenced by action. Through his exploration, Dewey established how desires, interests, and the values that shape actions are influenced by external "environing conditions" (p. 63). Therefore, critically analyzing external environing conditions and, more broadly, all other possible stimuli that can influence value and valuation can contribute to a revaluation. In the process of valuation through a dialogue about values, participants can reflect on previous interests, desires, and actions and collaboratively explore how their values influenced these affects. From Dewey, a values dialogue will consider external environing conditions and how they shape epistemological values as well as how epistemic together with innate values influence interests, desires, and ultimately, actions.

Unified definition of values

Considering the contributions of Plato, Socrates, Joós, Kazepides, Nietzsche, and Dewey to the meanings of value and of valuation, I will now attempt to synthesize their conceptions and distill them into one unified definition. From Plato, one observes the notions of the highest Good and that the highest values can be determined through reason. From Socrates, one identifies some of the potential processes by which people can deliberate about entities of the highest importance and by which they can aspire through these processes to identify and to understand innate and epistemic values. From Joós, one is encouraged to approach conceptualizations of value and of valuation with a healthy degree of skepticism and with a generous degree of suspended judgment. Joós demonstrated that one can unify values as a category of entities by recognizing the scarcity of the objects and of the subjects that affect and are affected by values. From Kazepides, one could identify values as those entities that one takes for granted which undergird everything else one knows and believes: one's "riverbed principles." From Nietzsche, one witnesses the challenging of these principles and of traditional forms of valuation. He attempted to incite a spirited discourse of values by glorifying those who participate in it and by calling for a transvaluation of values, a critical revaluation both of values and of the processes by which people valuate. Finally, from Dewey one begins to acknowledge the linkages among values, desires, interests, and actions. These linkages are central to a dialogue designed to foster understanding of the origins of values and to facilitate valuation. They also serve as the foci of a dialogue about values, a discourse concerned with the valuing and valuation of entities of the highest and of the deepest meaning.

Therefore, the values and valuation depicted here refer to the existence and to the development of the deepest meanings maintained by each individual. The previous conceptions of value and of valuation demonstrate that every person exercises values and valuations throughout his/her life. Based on these valuations, the entities of the highest importance consolidate in and culminate as values that can influence every interest, desire, decision, and action.

Toward a Unified Definition of Dialogue

Defining dialogue

> *The dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course, a property of any discourse. It is the natural orientation of any living discourse.*

<div align="right">(M. Bahktin, 1981: 279)</div>

As with values, one often struggles with defining dialogue. Some participants within the discourse suggest that an effective dialogue is entered into with suspended judgment and so scholars of dialogue often approach defining their field in like manner (Wilson, 2012). Many who attempt to define it suggest that there is no one definition of dialogue. For example, Rockwell (2003) skeptically and hesitantly concluded that "*a dialogue is a unity of diverse voices*" (p. 24). Before settling with his overtly vague definition, Rockwell questioned why anyone would bother to define dialogue at all, as definitions tend to limit discourse. He admired another connotation of the word "define" which is "to bring something into focus" (ibid.). This section will attempt to do just that: It will explore some conceptions of dialogue in order to bring a unified definition into focus. I will generate a unified definition of dialogue by reviewing and synthesizing some of the ideas of Michel Foucault, Mikhail Bakhtin, Paulo Freire, and of Gordon Wells.

Conceptions of dialogue

 Before conceiving of dialogue, it is important to begin by developing a theoretical conception of discourse in its broadest sense. I adopt Foucault's (1969) Theory of Discourse for this purpose. When exploring the discourse of history in its many manifestations in *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* Foucault stressed the absence of attention to ruptures and to discontinuities as well as the pattern of inconsistency in the object of historical discourse, the past. He identified that "the use of concepts of discontinuity, rupture, threshold, limit, series, and transformation present all historical analysis not only with questions of procedure, but with theoretical problems" (p. 21). He emphasized that the totality of the discourse of history is incomplete without at least acknowledging the discontinuities. Foucault analyzed statements and their formations as well as their actual and potential relationships in discourse. Most importantly, in his conception of dialogue, Foucault argued that subjects exercise *enunciative modalities* in which each subject inhabits various statuses, sites,

and positions when participating in a dialogue. Here, Foucault established not only the transitory nature of discourse but also the transitory states of its participants; their circumstances are in flux. For Foucault, the macro level of discourse contained dialogues involving joint meaning-making through language. Although dialogue itself exists in a state of transition, it does not share the degree of discontinuity and of rupture of discourse.

Before Foucault, Bakhtin was among the first to describe dialogic relationships especially when he explored and glorified the Socratic dialogues. He characterized these dialogues as being among the first examples of the novelistic genre: examples of "dialogized story." Through his analysis of the Socratic dialogues, Bakhtin identified the significance of the rhetoric and of the diverse characterizations of the dialogues' participants, especially their varying roles from heroes to those wearing "the mask of a bewildered fool" (1981, p. 24). By examining Bakhtin's characterizations of participants in dialogue, one can increasingly appreciate the various actual and potential roles that participants enact, abandon, and transform throughout a dialogue.

Bakhtin's conception of dialogue was arguably a byproduct of his exploration of the development of the novel. In his four essays that compose the *Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin (1981) did not set out to establish a comprehensive theory of dialogue; rather, he explored and attempted to discern the relationships between works of literature and how the novelistic genre emerged from their discursion. His conception of dialogue was derived from his descriptions of the call-and-response between literary works. He emphasized that "the novelistic word arose and developed not as the result of a narrowly literary struggle among tendencies, styles, abstract world views – but rather in a complex and centuries-long struggle of cultures and languages" (p. 83). Bakhtin described the novelistic form as a dialogue in and of itself. Accordingly, a novel consisted of a "diversity of social speech types" as well as a "diversity of individual voices" (p. 262). He consolidated these diversities into what he described as a "multiplicity of social voices" (p. 263) that consisted of dialogized links and interrelationships among meaning-makers. From Bakhtin's analysis of literary discursive relationships, my definition of dialogue acquires the criteria of linguistic, cultural, and social interactions.

In addition to outlining a structure of discourse, Bakhtin also identified some of the power relationships within dialogues through an examination of the consolidation of dialects and of European languages. He argued that

the victory of one reigning language (dialect) over the others, the supplanting of languages, their enslavement, the process of illuminating them with the True Word, the incorporation of barbarians and lower social strata into a unitary language of culture and truth, the canonization of ideological systems, philology with its methods of studying and teaching dead languages, languages that were by that very fact "unities," Indo-European linguistics with its focus of attention, directed away from language plurality to a single proto-language — all this determined the content and power of the category of "unitary language" in linguistic and stylistic thought, and determined its creative, style-shaping role in the majority of the poetic genres that coalesced in the channel formed by those same centripetal forces of verbal-ideological life. (ibid., p. 271)

Here Bakhtin explored the process of the canonization of languages and of the development of dialectic hegemonies. He described the development of a single language amid the utterances, of a single national language amid social languages, and, finally, of a unifying culture that shares the same "socio-ideological cultural horizons" (p. 299). From his critique of the subduction of languages, my conception of dialogue includes an acknowledgement of the sociocultural and linguistic power dynamics existent in dialogue.

Bakhtin also highlighted the significance of rhetoric and artistic license in dialogue, as, within discourse, there are opportunities for individualistic artistic expression (p. 277). Ironically, Bakhtin's commentary on the rhetorical and on the distinctly human components of dialogue was almost lost to the discourse until these components were re-emphasized by scholars like Freire (2000) and Foucault (1969). Bakhtin contributed to the ongoing dialogue about discourse by highlighting the reality that these discourses are enacted by human beings with varying personalities, interpretive lenses, and capacities of expression.

Furthermore, Bakhtin (1981) attempted to establish the primacy of the word in dialogue. He argued that its internal meaning, or what he refers to as the "internal dialogism of the word," penetrates the entire structure of dialogue (p. 282). He argued that these individual words cannot be isolated as independent acts separate from a word's ability to form a concept of its object. This internal dialogism finds expression through semantics, syntax, and style. Bringing the discourse back to the word, Bakhtin identified it as the symbolic foundation of dialogue and as vital to the fabrication of joint meaning.

An important consideration for my approach to dialogue, Bakhtin highlighted the significance of a dialogue's language's

"proximity […] to popular spoken language" (p. 25). As a form a communication, a language's capacity to communicate meaning depends, in part, on the receptive capacity of those attempting to communicate. Therefore, as Bakhtin acknowledged, it is important that the language expressed in dialogue is reflective of the popularized spoken language of the dialogue's participants so that everyone can participate fully.

Similar to Bakhtin, Freire (2000) also concentrated on the importance of the word in dialogue. However, Freire divided the word into two dimensions: reflection and action. He argued that without action, dialogue becomes mere "verbalism," and without reflection, it becomes mere "activity" or activism. According to Freire, through dialogue, "the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized" (p. 88). Thus, in order for dialogue to create and facilitate a horizontal relationship of mutual trust among participants, Freire argued that dialogues require a foundation of love, humility, and of faith in humanity. He concluded that if people conduct dialogue as he depicted, then the participants will develop trust. From Freire, my definition eschews the supposed neutrality of verbalism and of pure activity in favour of a conception of dialogic inquiry conducive to transformation and to humanization through the dialogic critical analysis of values and of valuation.

Freire (2000) also suggested that only dialogue may generate critical thinking. Therefore, in order to conduct a critical analysis of valuation and of values, the investigation should be conducted dialogically. Here, Freire provided a justification for the dialogic approach to analyzing epistemic and innate values as well as the processes of valuation.

In sum, dialogue consists of symbol-mediated meaning-making, what some Vygotskians refer to as semiotic mediation. To help bring a unified definition of dialogue into focus, I employ Gordon Wells's interpretation of dialogue. My unified definition of semiotic mediation through language will be grounded in Wells's (1999) theory of language-based learning espoused in *Dialogic Inquiry*. Wells offered a theory of dialogic learning based on a fusion of the perspectives of Lev Vygotsky and of M. A. K. Halliday. Wells argued that a comprehensive language-based theory of learning should explain how a language is learned and how a language facilitates the learning and teaching of cultural knowledge. In addition, this kind of theory should acknowledge that the understanding of language and of cultural artefacts arises from collaborative practical and intellectual activities. Wells

concluded that a language-based theory of learning "should explain how change occurs through the individual's linguistically mediated internalization and subsequent externalizations of the goals and processes of action and interaction in the course of these activities" (p. 48). Wells's theory of dialogic inquiry incorporated many of the contributions of other scholars in the discourse of dialogue and so it provided a substantial representation of their perspectives. Likewise, he emphasized the space for *reflective thinking* in dialogue. As Wells argued, "Language provides a means not only for acting in the world but also for reflecting on that action in an attempt to understand it" (2009, p. 72). He demonstrated the reflective potential of dialogue. Dialogue provides a space for what Wells described as "inner speech" in which students "come to be able to frame questions and interrogate their own experience in the search for an answer" (ibid.). Through this process, "Language becomes a tool for thinking" (ibid.). Therefore, dialogue serves as a vehicle for both reflection and meta-cognition. In conclusion, Wells's conception of dialogic inquiry will serve as the bedrock for my unified definition of dialogue and for its dependent practice values dialogue.

Unified definition of dialogue

Dialogue is ever in the process of becoming. Any definition of dialogue is understandably tentative and contingent. For the purposes of consolidating a unified definition of dialogue, the fundamental unit of a dialogue is the symbolized meaning, most often the word. This unit draws its existence from its relationship with other symbols. Through micro-fusions of meaning, participants in dialogue create and recreate macro enunciations. These enunciations are expressed by participants in diverse ways along diverse channels. Based on Freire's (2000) reflections, I hypothesize that participants can foster their humanity through dialogue. If my proposed conception is accurate, then through the active collaborative deconstruction of intersectionalities, people can more clearly witness themselves and their worlds.

Toward Values Dialogue

A Fused definition of values dialogue

Taken together, a "values dialogue" is a dialogue into and about values and valuation. It is an investigation into the entities of the highest importance and of how they became important through dialogic inquiry. Moreover, this dialogic inquiry involves the potential discovery, identification, classification, development

of understanding, critique, and potential revision of the participants' deepest and ultimate meanings.

From definition to practice

The practice of a dialogue about values consists of a process of collaborative meaning-making in which participants develop understandings of values and of valuation. This kind of discourse consists of three processes of recognition and of development of understandings. Throughout the dialogue, participants attempt to identify the greatest meanings. They also try to recognize how these meanings develop. Finally, during the discourse, participants attempt to identify the justifications that give the identified values their meaning.

Therefore, the practice of a discourse about values consists of a dialogue about *dispositions* and *experiences*. Specifically, a values dialogue concerns how dispositions and experiences influence what each participant in the dialogue personally values and/or how they influence what other people value. Dispositions consist of *a priori* influences on values such as genetics, instincts, and intuition. Meanwhile, experiences include *a posteriori* influences such as sensation, sociocultural interaction, and environment.

At its essence, a values dialogue is a dialogue about stories. The dialogue involves the consideration of how dispositions and experiences affect and/or affected people's actions in situations of significance, especially in those situations and events that contributed to their values.

These three broad processes of recognition and of development of understanding can be initiated with guiding questions. These questions should evoke participants' discussions about choices and decisions as well as about how and why participants and/or people outside the dialogue chose to do whatever it was that they did. At a minimum, values dialogue will involve a form of one of the following questions:

1)   What is important?
2)   How is it important?
3)   Why is it important?

Discussions including such questions will inevitably have strong feelings associated with them and opportunities to discuss those feelings. However, developing an understanding of values is at the core of a values dialogue. If values influence dispositions and actions, and if roles and thought processes are also influenced by values, then values dialogue can contribute to understandings of

associations among emotions, dispositions, actions, roles, and cognition.

Potential Significance of Values Dialogue

It is the duty of these scholars to take everything that has hitherto happened and been valued, and make it clear, distinct, intelligible and manageable, to abbreviate everything long, even 'time' itself, and to subdue the entire past: a tremendous and wonderful task in the service of which every subtle pride, every tenacious will can certainly find satisfaction.

(F. Nietzsche, 1973: 142)

The body of philosophic literature that grounds my conceptualization of dialogic inquiries of values and of valuation supports a collaborative method of investigating values. Logically, if everyone values, and if these values are established through similar processes, and if their existence and relationships with one another and with action can be established empirically, then their presence can be investigated collaboratively through values dialogue. According to Hill (2014), the establishment of the existence of values through the dialogic investigation of their relationships to dispositions, experiences, and to actions may foster empathic and humanistic capacities. If so, then values dialogue may have educational utility as a means of fostering the empathy and the fuller humanity of its participants.

Ultimately, this article investigated conceptions of values and of dialogue in order to develop and to elucidate a theory and practice of values dialogue. The consequences of the practice of this kind of dialogic inquiry remain mostly unknown. To understand the value of a dialogic inquiry into and about values and valuation, this practice must be empirically tested in order to determine its true utility as an educational approach. I appreciate any attempt by another to illustrate the potential and actual utility of values dialogue.

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