ISSA Proceedings 2010 – From Polemical Exchanges To Dialogue: Appreciations About An Ethics Of Communication

1. Introduction

Although agreement and consensus are widely considered respectful and play a fundamental role to solve conflicting situations, how can we deal with circumstances which agreement and consensus seem too far? Is consensus a necessary factor for a fair dialogue? To polemize is a way to manage disagreements and it is commonly presupposed that in order to attain better communication, good relationship and mutual understanding we must require agreement, consensus and common ground conceptions. Are disagreements necessarily unfair? Are agreement, consensus and common ground conceptions to be pursued in all situations? Can people not live in harmony even though they have different opinions or discrepant world-views? Would not it be more beneficial to a more harmonious coexistence to emphasize as Nicholas Rescher a concept of rationality which includes a legitimate diversity, a constrained dissonance, an acquiescence in the difference and a respect for the autonomy of others than taking the consensus as an imperative of reason or as a requirement for its limitations? (Rescher 1995, p. 3, 7, 14)

Disagreement and dissent are attitudes that oppose dogmatism and are important elements of being rationally critic. Karl Popper stated that "the growth of knowledge depends entirely on the existence of disagreement" and even though it may lead to "strife" or "violence" it "may also lead to discussion, to argument and to mutual criticism"(Popper 1996, p. 34). However, why do disagreements instead of rational debates turns so frequently into quarrels or offensive disputes? How do we handle with these extremes situations? Habermas in his theory of communicative rationality has pointed out that "reaching understanding is considered to be a process of reaching agreement among speaking and acting subjects" (Habermas 1984, p. 287). But even critical rationality seems to be insufficient to preclude insulting remarks and irrationals discussions grounded on

harsh feelings, desires and beliefs.

To manage controversies is not sufficient to appeal only to rationality. Ethical values should be reflected on, in order to deal with attitudes that are not attained exclusively at a cognitive level or that can not be settled on an informational base solely. When a reasonable debate turns into a quarrel, it is necessary for the disputants, even for a moment, to suspend the opinions or the judgments and keep simultaneously a dialogical attitude so as to renew the controversy later in a less exalted mood.

Ethical values deal with sentiments, desires, beliefs, accountability, reliance, truthfulness, and respect. Their concern is at the core of a dialogical attitude that may keep the disputants in touch while the judgments are suspended. Suspension of judgment is a state of our intellect that we do not assert nor negate any proposal or assertion whatsoever. It is called *épokhé* in the Pyrrhonean skeptical tradition (Popkin & Stroll 2002, p. 55). Suspension of judgment or *épokhé* follows soon after a situation in which disagreement – opposed views or attitudes – seems to prevent any decision in a dispute. It is in the state of *épokhé* the promising terrain that dialogue may grow. It is in the state of *épokhé* that the confrontational animosity is kept aside and follows on a state of moderate feelings and tranquility (called *ataraxia* by the Pyrrhoneans).

In this paper, Marcelo Dascal's theory of controversies is taken as a general framework, and in order to avoid any attraction towards angry and offensive disputes, a maneuver is proposed to help move from a contentious to a dialogical attitude by exploring an interplay between Pyrrhonean skepticism and Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue. A dialogical attitude is fundamental in order to regain a state of reasonableness and fairness and this state is a necessary condition for argumentation. As David Bohm says:
"The object of a dialogue is not to analyze 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." (Bohm 2007, p. 30)

2. The Irresistible Attraction towards Dispute: The Evil of Certainty
Our daily life, be it public or private, professional or not is entangled in debating, discussing or arguing. The content of strife may vary from trivial domestic

quarrels, to disputes over labor demands, to conflicts in organizations, to political dissensions, or to scientific controversy and so on.

In order to understand the phenomena of polemical exchanges, Marcelo Dascal (Dascal 1998) proposed, as a general hypothesis, a typology that consists of two sets of abstract "ideal types". The two sets represent two "macro" levels of organization which Dascal calls, respectively, "strategical" and "tactical". The first level comprises the polemical types; they refer to the structure of the polemical exchange; the second level comprises the *types of polemical move*; they refer to the process of the polemical exchange.

There are three polemical types: 1) discussion, 2) dispute and 3) controversy.
1) A discussion is a polemical exchange whose object is a well-circumscribed topic or problem that allows for solutions which result from the application of procedures that the contenders accept in a well-defined field. The root of a problem is a mistake relating to some important concept or procedure within this field. Discussion is basically concerned with the establishment of truth. It follows a "problem-solving" model. The Popperian schema of conjectures and refutation fits very well into this type of polemic.
2) A dispute is a polemical exchange whose object is also a well-defined problem. But instead of allowing for solutions, at best it can only dissolve or be dissolved, because the contenders at no point accept its definition as grounded in some mistake, and neither do they accept any procedure for deciding the dispute. The root of the problem is not a mistake, but differences of attitudes, feelings, or preferences that seems unsolvable. Disputes are basically concerned with winning, and winning involves a "contest" model.
3) A controversy is a polemical exchange that occupies an intermediate position between discussion and dispute. It has no steady specific problem and can spread quickly to other problems. The contenders reveal profound divergences about the extant methods of problem solving. The problems are not perceived as a matter of mistakes to be corrected, nor are there accepted procedures for deciding them. Controversies are an ongoing process that are neither solved as discussions, nor dissolved as disputes; they are, at best, resolved. Their resolution may consist at the "weighting" of the conflicting positions to see at which side reason favors, or at the modifying of the accepted positions of the contenders, or at the clarifying the nature of the differences at stake. Controversies are basically concerned with persuading. It follows a "deliberative" model.

The types of polemical moves are also three: a) proof, b) stratagem, and c) argument.

a) Proof is a move that aims to establish the truth of a proposition by employing some inferences that lead from various propositions to the one that needs to be proved. It is related to discussion.

b) A stratagem is a move that aims to cause a relevant audience to (re)act in a certain way, by inducing it to believe that a proposition is true. It may involve deception and dissimulation. The force of this move lies in rendering the contender "speechless", i.e., unable to react with a satisfactory counter-move. It is related to dispute.

c) An argument is a move that aims to persuade the addressee to believe that a proposition is true. Like stratagems, arguments are also concerned with beliefs also. But unlike stratagems, arguments seek to achieve their effect by providing recognizable reasons for inducing in the contender the desired belief. Unlike proofs, these reasons need not be based on a logically conclusive inference pattern or on truthful evidence, but on sufficiently sound reasoning and some factual agreements. It is related to controversy.

It ought to be emphasized that real cases of polemical exchanges do not appear as exactly circumscribed by these three ideal types. Instead, polemical exchanges turn out to be a mixture of all three types.

It is desirable that conflicting situations in all contexts should be handled by using proof and argument, and by maintaining polemical exchanges at the realm of either discussions or controversies. A stratagem may be effective, but it is clearly undesirable from an ethical standpoint. It may even seem obvious from a rational point of view to reject stratagem as a move. Although argumentation is not necessarily conflictive, there is an irresistible attraction to contention, especially if the issues at stake involve not just relevant interests and beliefs but also commitment.

However, why does fair and reasonable argumentation lead to tricky stratagems? Why do disputes seem to be so inevitable?

A hypothesis that can be worked out is that dispute, at a strategical level, contain a strong element of certainty that awakens in the contender an overwhelming desire to win; and, at a tactical level, there is at the disposal of the contender a broader repertory of argumentative maneuvers ranging from arguments not committed with validity or fairness to arguments with strong elements of

rationality especially of juridical character.

Dispute deals with differences of attitudes, feelings, or preferences which are invariably based on beliefs. Belief refers to something we take to be the case or regard it as true. Therefore, beliefs nurtures and supports our certainties.

José Ortega y Gasset, widely known for his 1930 work *The Revolt of the Masses*, made a fundamental distinction between ideas and beliefs in an essay entitled "Ideas and Beliefs" (Ideas y Creencias), published in 1940. "Ideas" we have and "beliefs" we are. "Ideas" may be disposed of or changed at convenience, or by empirical testing or by rational proof. According to Ortega, "ideas" are "the thoughts that we have about things, were it original or received, they do not possess in our life the value of reality" (Ortega y Gasset 1959, p. 10). "Beliefs", as Ortega says, "constitute the base of our life, the terrain that it happens in". Following on, he says, "Because it poses us in front of what is for us the proper reality" (Ortega y Gasset 1959, p.10).

In this study, "ideas" and "beliefs" will be taken as guiding poles through which a possible way toward dialogue departing from a dispute will be discussed.
It is a natural and very frequent phenomenon that a good debate turns into a quarrel, and that a fair dialogue sadly ends up in a conspicuous contention. Proofs and arguments may also turn into tricky stratagems, and discussions and controversies may turn out to be fierce disputes. This attraction to contention leads to a lessening of the possibilities for the solution to the issues at stake. Dascal (Dascal 2008, p. 34) gave the name "dichotomization" to the process of radicalization of the debate through emphasis on the incompatibility of the poles and the disavowal of intermediate alternatives. Dispute implies certainty of decision procedures in a negative way, so the issue cannot be decided. On the other hand, discussion implies certainty of decision procedures, but in a positive way, so the issue can be decided. Once the dichotomy is accepted by the contenders, it will alternate the debate between discussion and dispute. Discussion treats the issues as "ideas" which scientifically confront each other for the sake of truth. Dispute treats the issues as "beliefs" which are opposed to each other like armies in a trench battle. It is more frequent a truth-searching discussion to incline toward a belief-laden bitter dispute instead the contrary, i. e., a belief-laden bitter dispute to incline toward a truth-searching discussion. Belief-laden arguments, even when fallacious, are many times "heavier" than informative-laden arguments even when they are clear and sound reasoning.

In a controversy, the space for possibilities of the issue at stake is widened through a process which Dascal (Dascal 2008, p. 35) named "de-dichotomization". This approach leads to a breaking of the poles so as to search for a cooperative dialectical solution for the debaters. Controversy implies a questioning attitude of deliberative procedures that view the issue as not susceptible to being reduced or simplified but instead to being made more complex. Although controversy appears to be a flexible and open-ended way to persuade rationally by favoring the growth of knowledge and interpersonal cooperation, most of the real polemical exchanges are irresistibly attracted toward dispute. Disputes are conveyed in a dogmatic manner owing to the certainty that belief-laden arguments yield. They have a restrictive scope and as it pushes the debate to an imperative and imposed solution it is quite often that the debate get stanched at a dead-end. It is at this moment that polemical exchanges gets harsh and become a bitter quarrel. What can be done to make things flow again without mutual aggression? How can we turn a quarrel into a good debate? How can an angry contention be turned into a fair dialogue? How can a tricky stratagem be turned out into a reasonable argument? How can a dispute be changed into a wider scope controversy?

Belief is in the background of most disputes and it is the main force that nurtures them; it controls our lives and plays a vital role in our actions and produces certainty in our speech. To believe something implies certainty without the necessity of reflection. The term "certainty" means the psychological state of being without doubt. Belief and certainty are not evil in themselves, but all fanaticism and dogmatism are full of beliefs and certainties. As William Butler Yeats said in his poem "Second Coming":
"The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity."

It is a well-known fact that differences in belief can give rise to perilous states of affairs and can provoke much bloodshed and disgrace such as those of the religious wars that devastated Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, the totalitarianism of the 20th century and currently Islamic fundamentalism. These events involve disputes over religious and political ideology which the protagonists are full of a certainty that their beliefs are unquestionably true. How do we deal with the ruinous and pernicious consequences of the confrontation of beliefs? How do we face the clash of personal certainties avoiding humiliation and nullification of one of the contenders? How can ethical values play a fundamental

role in polemical exchanges?

A common maneuver of controversy is to doubt the alleged certainty of the decision procedures. To question fundamental beliefs directly is philosophically legitimate, but this questioning is a very dangerous and inadvisable move in certain contexts. It can give rise to our most terrifying sentiments, in a manner similar to the opening of Pandora's Box. Prudence and respect are essential when dealing with beliefs. Hence, it can be distinguished in a debate certain dogmatic assumptions that are held as "beliefs", and as "beliefs" these assumptions, when they are questioned or cast into doubt, they invariably provoke a defensive reaction full of passionate feeling. On the other hand, if these dogmatic assumptions are held as "ideas" they can more easily be questioned or cast into doubt without provoking such defensive reactions full of excitement. Therefore, it is reasonable to enlarge the domain of assumptions that can be taken as "ideas" and restrict the core of the assumptions that can be treated as proper "beliefs". Henceforth, we should direct all questioning and all doubts over the assumptions taken as "ideas" in order to proceed the debate and take for granted all assumptions held as "beliefs". Even so, the debate may undermine itself and give rise to exchanges of insults and aggressions.

At this point we can turn the attention to the anti-dogmatic tradition of philosophical skepticism.

3. Suspension of Judgment: The Benefits of Doubt
The history of philosophy presents us with endless debates between great systems, each trying to represent the true answer to the problems of being and knowing and each trying to convince the others of its own truth. In the history of science the controversies are so common that we may trace the succession of theories and concepts as if they were a succession of oppositions of scientists trying to convince each other of the truth of their results and conclusions. Also the ordinary life is interlaced with confrontations and disagreements. This experience of conflicting opinions brought about the Skeptical Tradition starting at the time of the ancient Greeks and continuing to the Renaissance and Reformation with thinkers like Montaigne, to the development of modern philosophy with Descartes, Hume and Kant until the present day (Popkin 1979; Popkin & Stroll 2002). As Richard Popkin pointed out in his preface (Popkin 1979), the argumentations of the early Greek thinkers tried to establish either that no knowledge was possible or that there was insufficient and inadequate

evidence to determine if any knowledge was possible, and hence that one ought to suspend the judgment on all questions concerning knowledge. The first type of skepticism is the so called Academic skepticism of Arcesilas (315-241 b.c.) and Carneades (213-129 b.c.) and was formulated in the Platonic Academy. The second type is the so called Pyrrhonean Skepticism of Pyrrho of Elis (360-225 b.c.), Aenesidemus (100-40 b.c.), Agrippa (around the end of 100 a.d.) and Sextus Empiricus (160-210 a. d.). Pyrrhonean skepticism and its relationship to the theory of controversies will now be focused on.

Pyrrhonean skepticism had flourished mainly in the medical community around Alexandria and had Sextus Empiricus, a physician and philosopher, as responsible for the most complete account of ancient Greek skepticism. His two remaining works are the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (*Hypotypōseis Pyrrhōneioi*, thus commonly abbreviated *HP*) and *Against the Mathematicians* (*Adversus Mathematicos* in Latin or *Pros Mathematikois* in Greek).

The skeptical tradition of Sextus Empiricus called *diaphonía* this perpetual divergence of opinions. Sextus asserts that face the interminable conflict with regard to the object presented and unable either to choose a thing or reject it, is left over for us to suspend all judgment (Empiricus 1990, p. 63). Sextus defined skepticism as follow:
"an ability, or mental attitude, which opposes appearances to judgments in any way whatsoever, with the result that, owing to the equipollence of the objects and reasons thus opposed, we are brought firstly to a state of mental suspense and next to a state of "unperturbedness" or quietude" (Empiricus 1990, p. 17).

In this passage, the main features of Pyrrhonean skepticism is exposed by Sextus as a three-step sequel that firstly considers the equipollence or the equal force between dogmatic arguments contrary to non evidence, which may be called the principle of *isosthéneia* (equipollence); secondly, the attitude of *epokhé*, the suspension of judgment in the face of different propositions equally plausible or equally "weighted"; thirdly, the attainment of *ataraxia*, a state of quietude, derived from the interruption of dogmatic discrepancies. The disturbing situation of dogmatic quarreling about disparate points of view is seen by Pyrrhoneans skeptics as a disease to be cured.

The third step shows a very important characteristic of Pyrrhonism: that stillness and tranquility of mind is more important than the attainment of knowledge by all

means, in spite of considering themselves as the type of philosophers that keep on searching the truth. The word "*Skepsis*" comes from the Greek and means investigation. Pyrrhonean skepticism is perhaps best described as a deep and persistent commitment to the searching of truth. Sextus classified philosophers with regard to the truth of an object as of three types: 1) the dogmatists, who believe that have discovered the truth, as for example the Aristotelians, the Epicureans, and the Stoics; 2) the academics, who considered it inapprehensible as Arcesilas and Carneades; 3) the skeptics, which persist in their search (Empiricus 1990, p. 15-16).

The state of suspension of the judgment, *épokhé*, is an intellectual state that does not assert or negate any proposal or assertion; all are equally plausible and unverifiable. It is not a permanent state, but a provisional one that the investigator or debater arrives at, moments after verifying that the arguments of each system are of equal force (*isosthéneia*), and that is an obstruction to a final decision. Hence, incapable of deciding between equal weight arguments the skeptic suspends the judgment.

The Pyrrhonean skeptics are as truth searcher as dogmatists, but the last ones are much more compelled to certainty than for truth properly. This makes a sharp difference of attitudes because the dogmatists are more susceptible to be certain to have reached the truth than the skeptics. Having certainty about a truth is a strong guidance for action in life, so how can the skeptics live without such guidance?
The dogmatists frequently argue the Pyrrhoneans about how they can live and act without beliefs, and keep doubting uninterruptedly all apophantic judgments. The Pyrrhonean philosophy has been answering these objections since the time of the ancient Greeks (Porchat Pereira 1993, p. 174).

Is there any proposal that the Pyrrhoneans can not incontestably reject? Sextus had answered this question by concluding that appearances or phenomena (*tò phainómenon*, that which appears) imposes unquestionably to us: "when we question whether the underlying object is such as it appears, we grant the fact that it appears, and our doubt does not concern the appearance itself but the account given of that appearance …" (Empiricus 1990, pp. 21-22). Skeptics do not try to dogmatize or to assent to a non evident object. They do not transcend the phenomenon; they make all of their assertions in the realm of that which appears. Adhering to appearances, the Pyrrhonean skeptics can live undogmatically in

accordance with the normal rules of life. By rules of life, Sextus means a fourfold orientation (Empiricus 1990, p. 23): (1) guidance of nature, which means "we are naturally capable of sensation and thought"; (2) constraint of passions, which means we are commanded to satisfy hunger and thirst; (3) accordance with tradition of customs and laws; (4) instruction of the arts (*techné*), which means that the skeptics accepts whatever technical results may benefit them.

For the Pyrrhoneans a phenomenon is a criterion for action in the world. It does not direct the argumentative battery towards that which appears but towards all pretension to explain what underlies the phenomenon. Sextus says that "even if we do actually argue against the appearances, we do not propound such arguments with the intention of abolishing appearances, but by way of pointing out the rashness of the dogmatists …" (Empiricus 1990, p. 22).

Dogmatic argumentation, be it through the Socratic practice of the antinomies of the Platonists or through the Aristotelian dialectic, proposes to persuade opponents to construct a truthful epistemic knowledge which yields certainty. The Pyrrhonean skepticism argumentation makes every effort to break the pretensions of dogmatic discourse by driving the polemical exchanges to an undecidable situation where things continue to be in opposition. That situation favors the suspension of judgment in order to interrupt the conflicts or the quarrels that arise when the disputants seem to be moving in circles and repetitions.

Pyrrhoneans skeptics, as great debaters, organized patterns of reasoning or argumentation, called *Tropos*, which in the face of undecidable disagreements, it followed the suspension of judgment. The patterns of argumentation (*Tropos*) of the Pyrrhoneans consists of a certain set of arguments each focusing on a specific issue on which the suspension of judgment followed as an inevitable result of endless disputes. According to Popkin the *Tropos* are "ways of proceeding to bring about suspension of judgment on various questions" (Popkin 1979, p. XI).

For our purposes in this study we take from the Pyrrhonean skepticism three procedures that will act in order to avoid the aggressive contention: firstly, the argumentative ability of the Pyrrhoneans to question and to test the certainties of their opponents; secondly, the attitude of suspension of judgment (*épokhé*); and thirdly, the attitude of *ataraxia* or tranquility of mind which follows *épokhé*. Therefore, when a debate is deeply mired in a dispute and the debaters do not

seem to understand each other anymore and the mood are exalted enough for to end the polemical exchange in a respectful and friendly manner, the first maneuver is to introduce the seeds of doubt in order to cool down some certainties, especially those based on "ideas", not those based on "beliefs". The Pyrrhonean action of pure rational questioning without the purpose of establishing a point of view can move the polemical exchange from the condition of dispute to a controversy. At this stage of the debate when some controversy begins to set and emotions are properly dammed is the right time to trigger the second maneuver which is to suspend judgment. Suspension of judgment (*épokhé*) and the state of "unperturbedness" or quietude (*ataraxia*) are maneuvers deeply connected to the dialogical attitude developed by the philosophy of Martin Buber. Both Buber and the Pyrrhoneans follow a common path of wisdom that seeks to avoid the fierce willingness of debaters trying to massacre each other by all means imposing their point of view.

Robert Nozick pointed out, at the beginning of his introduction to *The Nature of Rationality*, that what philosophers really love is reasoning instead of wisdom as could be supposed by the very meaning of the word "philosophy" (Nozick 1993, p. xi). It can be said that not only philosophers but also politicians, lawyers, theologians and ordinary men, especially when they are full of certainty, seems also to accede to an endless and bitter reasoning, not rarely producing offenses, humiliations and lack of respect. The Pyrrhoneans, in this regard, seem closer to wisdom since they aim at quietude and moderate feelings in order to avoid sterile disputes. Buber´s approach takes dialogue as way to bind the disputants, one toward the other, without any previous requirement to each one give up their point of view (Buber 2006, p.7).

However, before getting to the state of *ataraxia* (stillness, quietude), the skeptic suspends all judgment and adopts the attitude of *epokhé*. It is in the *épokhé* the terrain that dialogue can grow and expand. Dialogue for Buber is not just talking to each other or exchanging words with cultural significance. It is fundamentally the reciprocity of the self towards the other, the mutual contact that makes the one's presence to the other an open experience of genuine communication that includes silence as well (Buber 2006, p. 1-45). Principles of sound reasoning alone cannot bring groups or individuals together; these principles, however, are a necessary condition for doing so. For managing controversies, it is not sufficient to appeal to rationality alone in order to avoid fallacies or to keep deliberating

correctly. We ought to reflect on ethical values in order to deal with attitudes that are not attained exclusively at a cognitive level, and that can be disposed of by an inductive experienced process based on information exchange. Sentiments, desires and beliefs are the ground in which differences of opinions are most explosive, and irrational elements develop, getting stronger. Ethical values deals with sentiments, desires and beliefs and are at the core of a dialogical attitude that can keep the disputants in touch while the judgments are suspended.

4. The Interhuman as the Sole Ground for a Genuine Dialogue: Preparation for an Ethics of Encounter

When discussing social phenomena there are several approaches that try to understand the interplay between the individual and society by using concepts like, for example, Durkheim's social facts, Marx's social class or Weber's social action. All these approaches roughly consider values, cultural norms, and social structures that are external to the individuals and coerce them, as is established in the sociology of Marx and Durkheim; or the interaction of individuals determining the changes on the external structures, as is established in the sociology of Weber. At the sociological level, the individuals are tied to groups, classes, institutions etc., but do not have necessarily any kind of personal relation with each other. Martin Buber's approach looks at the personal level, which is an existential relation between one individual and another or an interhuman relation (Buber 1965, Ch. III).

The wide range of conflicts in society that are basically determined by human differences (class, value, culture, ideology, interest) can be seen as an intercourse between disputant groups or individuals trying to impose their own points of view on each other. In order to establish the contextualization of these polemical exchanges not only social but also behavioral sciences should be considered. However, all these fields omit the personal or existential sphere treated by Buber.

This sphere leads to the perspective of searching for a real encounter between the self and the other; this real encounter is the deepest ground for dialogue. It is an inter-human sphere that is not the purely social one usually defined as what is shared in common by individuals and that previously coerces them. Instead, the inter-human sphere is a face-to-face relationship, a one to the other connection that sustains the dialogical dimension. Genuine dialogue is not just talking to each other or exchanging opinions as an intellectual activity. It is fundamentally the reciprocity between the self and the other, the mutual contact that makes one

person present to another in an open experience of genuine communication that includes the mutual acceptance of partnership (Buber 1965, p. 85-88; Buber 2006, 1-45).

According to Martin Buber, dialogue happens when the relationship between one human being and another is not perceived as consisting merely of specific, isolated qualities, but as having a unity of being, a subject-to-subject relationship that Buber himself expresses as the primary word "*I-Thou*". This primary word guarantees that human beings' integral and dialogical relationships must be founded on reciprocity and mutuality and not on detachment and separateness as in a subject-to-object relationship. Dialogue is thus on an ontological ground. Hence for Buber "all real living is meeting", and any postures or attitudes that would lead to a disruption or separation at either side of an encounter would obstruct such a meeting. What could obstruct this meeting? What postures or attitudes would lead to a disruption at either side?

At the very beginning of *I and Thou* Buber (Buber 1958, p. 3) asseverates that "to man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude." Going further he says that "the attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks."

The first attitude is a subject-subject attitude which is characterized by the primary word *I-Thou*. This attitude presupposes a connection between one human being and another. The second attitude is a subject-object attitude which is characterized by the primary word *I-It*. This attitude presupposes the separateness of human beings from the world around them. *I-Thou* and *I-It* signify relations rather than things.

When a debate between individuals points irrevocably to an undecidable and harsh dispute between one disputant and another, it means that they do not recognize each other as partners or do not foresee a horizon of cooperation. Then the skeptical argumentative machine may work to disrupt certainties about the ideas at issue, and go into a state of *epokhé*, i.e., to suspend judgment.

At the moment that all judgment is suspended, the words that are spoken may not be those of the ideas at issue but may be those that go in search of a common human and existential ground. The relevant words that move us towards an ethical claim of communication are those who say that the other person must

always count in our deliberations; that the other person is not a thing to manipulate or to experience, as in an *I-It* relation, but it is a whole being presence of the one to the other that we ought to pursue. The relevant words ought to reflect our intentional consciousness which has a fundamentally relational character. Buber says:

"Let it be said again that all this can only take place in a living partnership, that is, when I stand in a common situation with the other and expose myself vitally to his share in the situation as really his share. It is true that my basic attitude can remain unanswered, and the dialogue can die in seed. But if mutuality stirs, then the interhuman blossoms into genuine dialogue". (Buber 1965, p. 81)

The demand for being rationally critical seems to be insufficient not only for preventing angry contends and recurring discussions that are solidly grounded on beliefs and certainties, but also for entering into a genuine dialogue. Genuine dialogue is rooted in the terrain of inter-subjectivity whose first move is to recognize the other as a partner. This recognition demands the capacity to realize a subject-subject, or an *I-Thou* relationship. Buber says:

"If I face a human being as my Thou, and say the primary word I-Thou to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things. (…) I become through my relation to the Thou; as I become I, I say Thou. All real living is meeting." (Buber 1958, pp. 8-11)

The ethical commitments that we can take from Buber's philosophy of dialogue are then solidly grounded on an ontological level. This ontological level reflects itself as speech and counter-speech, as words that are spoken between people in the mutuality of *I* and *Thou*, in "the between". "Trust" is a purely relational term that is free of all content and just expresses the turning of oneself toward the other. It is a confident affirmation of the acceptance of the other as a subject. Another relevant term which Buber frequently uses is "spirit". Buber says:

"Spirit in its human manifestation is a response of man to his *Thou*". (…)

"Spirit is not in the *I*, but between *I* and *Thou*." (Buber 1958, p. 39)

"Spirit" for Buber is the capacity and the propensity to encounter another person as other and as a singular person; it is the capacity and the propensity to realize the meeting of the one to the other. Buber also uses the term "faith" to mean the confidence that this meeting is realizable.

The terms "spirit" and "faith" are connected ontologically and do not necessarily refer to God or have necessarily a religious character. One may be an atheist and

have faith and spirit.

If I trust you as a singular person, I will respect you in my deliberations, and I will be fair in my argumentation. This attitude brings about tolerance, but tolerance does not mean putting up with disrespect, unfairness and manipulation.

5. Concluding Remarks

The main purpose of our study was to find a way to overcome the deadlock in a situation in which a debate became bitter, harsh and offensive with no prospect of solution. In order to avoid this situation we proposed a maneuver to move from a contentious and confrontational attitude to a dialogical attitude by exploring an interplay between Pyrrhonean skepticism and Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue.

To join two matrices of thought as diverse as Pyrrhonean skepticism and Buber's philosophy of dialogue we made intuitively some reflections on the problem of the change of rational and polished discussions to offensive and harsh disputes. Our purpose was not to prove any advantage of being a skeptical philosopher or to induce any adherence to the ontological commitments of Buber's philosophy. What we tried to show is how the different aspects of these two philosophies can find a common ground and work together. The common ground is the context of a contentious debate whose arguments have degenerated into mutual aggression. One need not be a Pyrrhonean or a Buberean, or even be sympathetic to them, to use in polemical exchanges rational strategies to challenge certainties of the first and the ethics of meeting of the second. We do not attempt to offer a solution to the argumentative quarrels. They are part of our nature. However, we can and must seek a way to deal better with them.

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