Understanding Communication

Algis Mickunas

Abstract: Without adding one more theory of communication, this article explores how we understand communication. There is an abundance of theories defining practices and processes in their own way. Through a discussion of miscommunication, the archaic, and dialogue and monologue, this article emphasizes the hermeneutic circle in meaning making as interpretation, which does not provide access to the way things are. The language we use is constructed, not real. The task of philosophy involves maintaining dialogue in which all claims can be tested and contested. This article outlines requirements of dialogue involving the co-presence of communicators engaged in a common venture capable of leading to transcendence.

Keywords: inter-subjective, monologue, polylogue, meaning, reflection

Introduction

There is no denial that we are in the age of communication appearing in most diverse media and technical innovations. And there is no denial that there are numerous theories of communication. Given this context, it would be redundant to add one more theory or metatheory to the crowded field of contenders. The questions in this discussion are simpler and more concrete and the answers more resilient to any efforts to cover them over with traditional or even advanced theories of communication—even if the latter would employ the latest data from global surveys. It is simpler insofar as it seeks to disclose who are the "communicators" or who is the "last interpreter." This is not to say that the presumed simplicity need not be explicated, specifically by arguments which challenge the many and silent assumptions of numerous theories. Testing of assumptions has one requirement: each theory posits principles which are proposed as explanations of all phenomena. This means that it cannot introduce phenomena through "the back door" which such principles would have to deny. But if such phenomena are introduced, then there must be "more" than a given explanation can account for. In this sense, the "more" must also be accepted as a given in order to obtain a fuller understanding of our world and who we are as communicators, specifically in the current context of "many truths," or a "post-

truth" world, a world of multi-discursivity, and even multi-culturalism. This is the context of all "post" claims, including post-modernism. Although this situation might appear laudable, it has one fundamental flaw: rejection of *human essence*. The rejection appears in various forms: death of the subject, death of author, death of truth, God, and all premised on the claim that who we are depends on a specific discourse, or a specific cultural framework. Thus, "subject" is a "product" of modern Western discourses delimiting what is "objective" and what is "subjective." If everything can be explained by scientific discourses, physically, then subject disappears. He is a biological, chemical, physiological creature, a bundle of vital desires, requiring no meddling subject hindering scientific objectivity. Meanwhile, each culture also defines who we are differently, leading to the conclusion that what is called *essence* is one Western discourse among many others, and any effort to demand that it ought to be recognized as universal is identical with post-colonial imposition of one Eurocentric story on the rest of the world. All such stories are "constructs" which do not represent anything, although they define everything in their own ways. Even philosophy is one more constructed story, leading to the conclusion that philosophy should become creative and construct more interesting stories, including one more construct: logical construction of reality—but none of such constructs have a subject who does the constructing, since even he is just another construct as would be human essence. As will be seen shortly, no one can accuse a person of being a "racist," since "race" is one more construct, just as a Jew is another discursive product—and no Nazi need apologize.

There is another effort to abolish the presence of human essence and the modern subject; it is premised on ethnology, a special place in the human sciences, not for reasons of anthropological research but as a methodological ploy. Its task is not to decipher the historically established cultural experiences, but to extricate the unconscious compositions and norms which enable the cognitive experience of cultural beings. For example, for Foucault, ethnology is distinguished from the older humanities, and from the current social sciences, insofar as it investigates the human not as something given, but as something that is produced by the cognitive and normative codifications of a culture. Ethnography is regarded as more fundamental, since it brings to awareness the cultural conditions of science, seen as the "cultural unconscious." The latter must not be confused with any of the psycho-analytic schools, simply because such schools, as scientific, presuppose the codes of the cultural unconscious. Indeed, even psychiatry as a science depends on cultural codes.

The difficulty of such an undertaking is the problem of methodology. Ethnography as a method is a structural component of Western modernity to which any researcher belongs, and yet a method that emerged in the analyses of alien, non-Western cultures. If ethnography is a science, does it not code foreign cultural phenomena in terms of modernity? It seems that a resolution to these paradoxes must be found at another level, perhaps the social. To accomplish a methodological feat, the task is to take an "external" position to all culturally produced phenomena in order to note the process of their emergence. But, ethnology as a method must also be investigated with respect to its emergence in another constellation, in modern society. What one attempts to accomplish is to treat his cultural phenomena that

define him equally from an external vantage point from which ethnology treats all foreign cultures. Yet a full cognizance must be given to the fact that ethnology as a method applied to his own and other cultures is concurrently a social phenomenon. The presumed theoretical advantage of this move is a promise to treat one's own culture as any other culture. Obviously, one must demonstrate the possibility of taking such an external view, specifically in light of the claim that one's own comprehension and categorical framework is intimately connected with one's own culture which one attempts to investigate. The problem can be avoided only when one can show that sociology in a given society can repeat in principle the same scientific achievement which must be generated by ethnography in its confrontation with alien society. Such a premise leads to those social theories which contend that within one society there can be social groups with such disparate conceptions of reality and daily affairs, that they would face one another as alien cultures. Given this theoretical postulate, it is assumed that a social research encounters the "second" culture as equally foreign, as ethnography would encounter some archaic culture. The pitting of cultures as different from each other is not yet sufficient to "alienate" oneself from one's own modes of thought in which one finds oneself.

The impetus to take up an ethnology of his own culture stems, for example, for Foucault, from literary texts of Blanchot and the convergence of French avantgarde literature which was seen by Foucault as "external thinking." Such thinking maintains itself apart from any subjectivity and, by revealing its limits, shows a dispersion and finally an absence of subjectivity. The avantgarde of that time is bent on showing the vanishing of the subject. The world is depicted in an alien way where the human is submitted to the libidinal anatomy, the silent rules of a language, or a nameless sequence of daily events. Once events become detached from the subject, the latter appears to dissolve under the weight of alien forces in whose context the subject follows predetermined vectors. Such literature constitutes aesthetic alienation wherein the events are detached from the horizon of human meaning and are made into a meaningless succession of objectivities. Every cross section of social activity appears to resist any interpretation.

This literature seems to reveal a possibility of a speech which excludes the subject. Here the events no longer allow a privileged position to the individual subject, a center of experience. No longer surveyable, the active cultural events make of the subject a contingency of processes which he cannot master. This would be the case with a given language. The concept that the human subject is subordinated to discursive rules which surpass human capacities is a key permitting a distanced view toward the Western cultural system. Distance from the subject shown by literature offers a theoretical possibility for assuming a viewpoint outside culture. This might be plausible for persons who are not familiar with French society and its cultures. Any intellectual, artist, writer, "philosopher" must be "alienated" in order to have any status. Alienation belongs intimately to French society. Given this understanding, the use of alienated writers as a ploy to have an external view is precisely what guarantees one's inherence in this society. This is one of the theoretical difficulties: in order to estrange oneself from a culture so that the latter appears as any alien culture, one must propose methodical access to all cultures which also would be in a position to purify one's own theory from the culturally given modes

of thought and to yield a character of neutrality. One could justify such a claim by showing that his method has the ability to assume such a neutrality, i.e., an ability to exclude his own cultural epistemic and discursive categorizations, frameworks, and codifications.

Apparently, the authors of these explanations are either subject to their theories—principle of self-inclusion—or assume a position of a Self, which is a transcendental subject capable of surveying the cultural unconscious, its codes, and telling the rest of us what they are. In brief, they assume a position of "non-participating observer," capable of disclosing the truth. Such a distance must be founded on the classical notion of an essential self: a rational person, free from prejudices, searching for unmediated access to anything, any subject matter, even one's own culture, and even oneself. Such a self constitutes a reflexive view of the phenomena of all cultures. Our engagement so far comprises this type of reflection. Moreover, the method of this reflexive view is the domain of human studies, leading to the positing of the different types of cultures, theories, histories, languages for analyses without accepting a commitment to any. The analytic engagement with them is a traversal, a going through all of them in order to disclose their invariants, variations, and, if available, interconnections. This is what comprises the essence of rationality and freedom. Freedom is not to "do what I want," but precisely to reveal the very Being of the world. For philosophy freedom is being open toward the world. It is the ground of *theoria* as a "presentational thinking": to think is to think the presence of the very Being, given in its immediacy, untainted by any hint of utility. Wisdom is the effort to capture the world, for its own sake, in a "carelessness" that overlooks any interest in knowledge as a useful weapon, as power, a means to preserve oneself in face of a threatening tomorrow. In brief, it has nothing to do with modern representational mode of understanding. Wisdom for the unconcerned gaze is capable of knowing the richness of the teeming world and Being and its conjunction with beauty. The revealed beauty of the world and the acquired wisdom lend only joy and fulfillment. Free spontaneity is enhanced by well-worked-out rules which not only do not restrict creativity, but, to the contrary, lend creativity its variations. Thus, the engagement in dialogue is both spontaneous and respectful of sensible rationality and, above all, the essential limit of any given subject matter, entity, topic, whether it is a just society, the origin of the world, the nature of humans, or the presence of Being. Thus, true dialogue is "light" and "dancing," appearing quite effortless because it embodied a complete mastery of form and rules. Only a complete mastery lends thinking its ease. For example, true Socratic dialogue seems to be "playful" and contentious, challenging, daring, and all the while mastered by good form that was present in things. This means that philosophical reflection depends on the world as a medium and not a subject, dominated by all sorts of media for interpretation of the world.

When knowledge either looks only toward itself and becomes enamored with its own play of constructs, or restricts itself to social pragmatic purposes, both so well exemplified in modernity, it forgets its own source from which it stems: freedom to dare, to challenge, and a duty to act responsibly. Knowledge can be fruitful as long as it reminds itself of the source from which it has originated. To the extent that free knowledge is cognizant of its essential source, the striving for knowledge requires

little reminder of its responsibility to tell the truth and to accept responsibility for mistakes. Such a knowledge becomes a motive for preservation of freedom and its defense. In brief, knowledge has a precise relationship to freedom. When the seekers for knowledge elevate their free mode of being as an origin of their knowledge, then their knowledge is a *theoria* which discloses the essential forms of worldly beings. Without freedom there is no knowledge. It is to be recalled that when Socrates defended his right to philosophize, he was not making a choice between philosophy and Athens; he was claiming that to forbid philosophizing is equal to the destruction of Athens. The allegiance to the Athenian *polis* cannot be separated from free philosophizing in the public arena. Of course, for us, the latecomers of this classicism, the burden of such a thinking is almost too difficult to bear.

The question of responsibility of fallible humans is *the* philosophical question of freedom. In brief, it is impossible to practice philosophy, to engage in communication, and not to raise this question. As mentioned, Socrates stood his ground unto death with the demand that he and others have a duty to interrogate all claims to truth regardless of their origin. Intellectual honesty was for him a requirement to keep open the dialogical domain wherein the search for truth could be pursued. This means that the task of philosophy as such is identical with the maintenance of dialogue wherein all claims and propositions can be tested and contested. But responsibility is coextensive with freedom. A person who is determined by causes of any kind cannot be responsible. The latter also requires clear knowledge of the nature of the world of things within their limits in order to treat them responsibly.

Mis-Communication

Is there some common feature among such claims which, in fact, lead to all sorts of global confrontations, ethnic violence, racism, Nazism, communism, terrorism, and mis-communication? From scientists to all sorts of "culturalists" there appears an ambiguity: Are humans free or completely subjected to strict laws of causality? If the latter is granted, then even this discussion is determined by such laws and whatever we say is not our free expression. Meanwhile, the view of causality has indefinite variants, including the so-called post-modern "philosophy." For example, "all language is fascistic," or "we are determined by our cultural unconscious," or we are mere play-things of "discursive powers." Even the claims that, unbeknown to us, we are manipulated and controlled by all sorts of mass media, relieves us of talking about freedom and responsibility. If this is accepted, then we are living an innocent and infallible life—certainly causes do not make mistakes—and hence we are not responsible for our expressions, and resultantly there is no need for free *society and its laws which include responsibility*. But we are confronted by peculiar phenomena: if we and various others are subjected to discursive parameters, then there is no communication. After all, I have not been subjected to their discourses and hence cannot understand what they wish to say, just as they cannot comprehend my discourse. It is like speaking different languages without the possibility of translation.

The issue is similar facing all empirical explanations. If we are a biological system, reacting to stimuli from our environment, then no two systems can understand one another because it is, in principle, impossible for them to be in the same place at the same time; one system cannot transmit its "experience" since it reacts to different stimuli at a different place and time. In short, if someone wants to see what I see, then she will have to step into my position to get the same stimuli. But that is impossible, since for her to step into my location, I will have to move and hence she will be at a different point in time and miss what I have experienced. This is the dilemma of perspectivity and multi-perspectivity extended to discursive and cultural perspectivity: from Hindu perspective, from physical perspective, from aesthetic, ethical . . . perspective, suddenly suggesting, as if by miracle, that there is a presence which understands this multi-perspectivity without positing one more perspective, and yet engaged in dialogue with the proponents of multi-perspectivity about a theme which is limited "by essence" to multi-perspectivity. Such proponents, before recognizing that, as dialogical partners, they too are not positing their "perspective" and are cognizant of the issue of "multi-perspectivity," suggested above. Who are these communicators engaged in a dialogue, despite their theoretical stance which makes such dialogue impossible?

At the outset, it is necessary to explicate and—hopefully—to resolve a central issue of awareness, first, framed as culture, premised on the primacy of a historical tradition and its language, composing the context of a life world, or, second, as a human, as a subject. The latter can be called "transcendental subjectivity." This issue is most relevant for communication studies due to the prevalence of modern and post-modern conceptions of languages or discourses as grounds for all life worlds. While it may be that there is no unified view of "awareness" and no resolution concerning the basic linguistic theory, the requirement for communication studies is to demonstrate that language-based claims of cultures and awareness positions maintain certain principles without which they could not be understood. Any discussion of such positions is possible within essential limits; otherwise, communication "about" such positions would fail. Meanwhile, within the understanding that language is primary over awareness, there is an assumption that a historical tradition is inescapable. Hence, we shall have to address some of the basic issues facing "language" that dominate the thought of the twentieth century. There are numerous schools of language, from the field of linguistics, through language games, to semiotics and even to deconstruction, and various hermeneutics. Despite their differences, the common claim is that all meaning and sense, all understanding, inhere in language. In this sense, the awareness question seems to be surpassed, since there is no need of a subject who can claim of being a source of making sense of events. We find the sense of events in our linguistic tradition. This is to say, there is no longer any requirement for the last vestiges of essentialist metaphysics located within the sphere of "transcendental subjectivity."

Whether this is a solution or a mere postponement and a relocating of the question of sense will be seen in the development of the problematic of theories and methods. Counter to the claims that all sense inheres in a historical tradition

and language, there is the transcendental argument purporting to show that all awareness, even the linguistically laden positions, are premised on an essential moment of reflection whose presence cannot be denied without the denying thesis becoming nonsensical. If this holds, then it could be said that any thesis, any position is, in the final analysis, transcendental. This appears in a tacit introduction of awareness into every position, theory, or method. It can be claimed that such introduction fails to notice what can be called "attentional modification." If one states that it is possible to look at mathematics as at any other subject matter, one will also recognize that "looking at . . ." as a subject's intentionality does not look like the subject matter that is being intended—in this case, numbers. Yet how easily the sense of "looking" or awareness can be modified in cases when one states, "Let us look at things mathematically." This suggests that mathematics becomes a mode of perception that is very distinct from the things or subject matters that this mode intends. Here, the medium becomes the way that all events in the world are understood. Without such medium, sciences could not communicate. Other modes are just as available: we can look at things theoretically, practically, theologically, aesthetically and realize that such modes are not at all "subjective" in the sense of mental or psychological states. In this way, we can also say, "Let us look at language," whereby the looking or awareness of language is not part of language, or we can say, "Let us look at the world linguistically," and make a transcendental claim that all awareness is linguistic—forgetting the subject who makes this claim and thus assumes that there is no subject apart from the linguistic medium.

What would be the consequences for communication if media, of whatever kind, is the sole mode of awareness? The communication scientist, as cultural and historical, is also a factor in the domain of investigation. If he/she is a part of his/her own history, he/she cannot claim to obtain the phenomena of the world as they are without changing the very media of research. The theoretical explanation that assumes a historical or cultural position will itself transform the subject matter of such explanation. While being shaped by historical and cultural contexts, the explanations offered will also change the contexts. In turn, if a theory is part of a culture and a history and is shaped by them, then no theory is sufficiently broad to encompass and offer a position as a final interpretation. It is only one aspect of a historical tradition, a culture, or a language. If positivism were to offer two contesting meta-languages, each claiming to account for all the usages of a given language, then the debate between them would involve an awareness of both meta-languages, without the need to introduce another such language. Indeed, this can also be said of historical-philosophical hermeneutics that posits a historical tradition as the unsurpassable ground of all understanding of things and being itself; it too is one historically contingent position that may belong to a specific historical period of a specific tradition and hence cannot offer a universal claim. Another context, of the same tradition, might not have a historicizing language and hence no such understanding, not to speak of entirely different traditions.

Perhaps the most pronounced way of this manner of theorizing, i.e., proposing a universal explanation that intends to overcome the problems of

inherence in a historical tradition or linguistic culture, was offered by positivism and is still offered by mainstream analytic mode of theorizing. First, there is an a priori position that posits a reality in itself that is untainted by historical traditions and can be accessed by "objective" method. This reality is physical (composed of parts) and inaccessible to qualitative perception. But this means that all experiences in and of the world have to be discarded or reduced to the posited reality. Yet these positions do not escape the issue of the communicating subject to the extent that the method, formulated as mathematical logic, does not in any way imply a direct access to the posited physical reality. The method must be applied from a valuative position which, for these trends, is pragmatic. What works for human benefit, at the price that humans must also be reduced to the same reality. In brief, such reality does not offer itself in its purity but in terms of what we can make of it, and thus to transform it through our pragmatic intervention. The mathematical method which, as mentioned above, has become mediated mode of awareness: Let us look at things mathematically, and mathematics became reduced to "instrumental rationality."

All that we have attained so far is that a given communicative theory or a selected method cannot be by themselves the last moment of interpretation, since they are either one aspect of a given historical tradition, or are interpreted by some valuative point of interest which might be seen as the last point of interpretation. Moreover, the very objectivity that is being sought is not attainable since every effort to reach it results in changing the "object" (as another medium). Indeed, the very process of application of mathematically constructed theory to "reality" is radically selective of what will count as objective among the various options of reality and thus posits an a priori decision of what will be the data of a given theory. This is to say, all other data will not be tolerated as objective and dismissed as theoretically redundant, perhaps subjective. But such a position will not include a justification for the principle of selectivity of the required reality or its own position. If an explanation is to be universal, then it must be explained by the selected reality and the prescriptive methodology. If not, then neither the theory nor a methodology, posing as a theory in its formal and quantitative language, can be all-encompassing and provide the domain of the final communicator.

From what has been said so far, it can be concluded that the communicative subject, or the last interpreter, who constructs theories, correlates them to selected phenomena, and evaluates such correlation, cannot be, in principle, investigated by any of the empirical sciences. If this were the case, then the very subject of selectivity, correlation and interpretation, would be selected as an object of another subject of selectivity and interpretation, leading to an infinite regress. In brief, the communicating subject, as the selecting and correlating awareness, cannot be a subject matter of any specific objective or subjective science and theory, and resultantly it is inaccessible to theories and methodologies of any science. Of course, the communicating subject might show up in many other forms which are tacitly present but are submerged in the constant assumption of the priority of media—the priority such as "let us look at things mathematically."

To state this issue in terms of a general hermeneutical principle, any theory, any method, any meaning of anything, including the subject, emerges as an aspect

of its historical tradition and in turn points back to it, thus forming a hermeneutical circle. Any theory that offers an explanation of everything converges into the historical horizon of that tradition; the latter is vaster than the explanatory theory. But such a circle also intimates—one more time—that all awareness is a result of a language, culture, customs, and even prejudgments of a historical tradition within whose horizons the human dwells. All is interpretation, and even the most admired strict sciences do not offer an access to the way things are. After all, if one looks at scientific language, one notes that its logic and structure is not derived from experienced phenomena. In brief, it is different from such phenomena and thus when applied, it becomes an interpretation. Of course, we must make a note here: If one claims that a given language is distinct from the experienced phenomena, then one must also admit that she has an awareness of things that is not bound by language; otherwise, the distinction between language and things could not be made, and "things" would belong to one more linguistic construct. Let us leave this issue aside for a moment and point out that the hermeneutical circle, interpreted as language or tradition, claiming to be the last interpreter, cannot be cognizant of itself. If language is the medium in which all events, theories, methods are understood, in which selectivity and designation of what is real, unreal, objective, and subjective appears, then language cannot be a subject matter of any philosophy or theory, since the latter would be one aspect within the vast linguistic tradition. If a tradition and its horizons comprise the dimension in which we dwell, then such a tradition could not be grasped by any theory about a tradition, since such a theory again would be a minor aspect of it. It could be said that even the very notion of a hermeneutical circle and convergence of horizons of a tradition and of an interpreter would have to be one claim within a given tradition. All these claims, by virtue of their self-destruction, become essentially contingent. And yet, left to their own devices, they seem to be incontestable.

The constant appearance of the communicating subject who is irreducible to any modern materialist and even cultural explanations is the background condition for the proclamation of Universal Human Rights, including the right to free speech, and the numerous celebrations, organizations, and debates promoting and defending such rights. Still we face the current psycho-babble in "philosophical" rhetoric about human reality as a bundle of desires, and even the "neo-neo" army of neo-Freudians, or neo-Marxists, marching against human rights as a "subjective" construct of white dead men. Having discarded human subject and more fundamentally, human essence, they have to contend with the rights of "others," of other cultures to have their ways of life without Western colonial impositions of rules and customs. West can have its culture and the others theirs. Since "human rights," including free speech and even tolerance, is a construct of the West, then the others need not accept such a construct. Even the designation of "philosophy" of other civilizations must be avoided; Western tradition is in principle philosophical, and it would be inappropriate to burden other traditions with such designation. To call Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, shamanic pronouncements philosophical would be an imposition of external and thus unfitting terms—one could even say it would be an insult and just another form of colonialism. The dilemma is obvious: We, just

as the others, are subject to our cultural "unconscious" or "unconscious drives," "economic" causes, and yet we also want rights, including the rights of the others to be subject to their cultural unconscious, and at the same time we negate the communicating, dialogical subject. Not only for ourselves, but for the others. After all, the others do not speak; it is their culture and their discourses that speak and thus negate the other as being essentially a human.

The More—The *Archaic*

The constant appearance of a communicator who does not seem to belong to any explanation suggests that there is a "presence" which is more to the extent that it "escapes" the great varieties of scientific, cultural, discursive parameters, and yet communicates about science, culture, being dominated by discourses, and does so in dialogue. How are we to understand this presence without making it into an object or even a modern, solipsistic subject? Is it possible to discover something essential which cannot be denied? Aristotle contended that all thinking requires principles—*archai*—by whose presence an entire region is delimited for explication. The delimitation allows everything in a region to be seen in its essential configuration. The most astounding result in Aristotle's exhausting efforts to justify such principles revealed that they are not only unjustifiable, but that any means of justification are based on these principles. The awareness of *archai* is very different from knowledge that requires justification. They are not groundless, since they are not arbitrary; all justifications necessarily rest on them. They have a necessity that is distinct from the necessity of any other justification. They must be, then, self-warranted to such an extent that every truth claim is based on them. It seems that at the very beginning of philosophical quest, a dimension is disclosed which is in excess of any specific thing—indeed it does not even look like anything. Yet it is a primal condition of communication—even if it is unnoticed.

To attain the *arche* of the world and ourselves, we must point out that the appearance *of arche* is a primal reflection, provided by visuality and vision. Without any distance, visuality reflects vision as a dimension pervading, but not identical with visuality. Vision is not only visuality, but also "seeing as" something that reflects the many events, the visual variants, which would otherwise be "flat," without depth, simply empirical, without suggesting anything more. The worldly events, even those which seem to be stable, change. They have no necessity. Yet change evokes permanence without which change would not be perceived. The mentioned disclosure of *arche* not as some entity, but the very condition for recognizing not only things, but "things as . . ." encompassing a great variety of things, has a philosophical background. The latter shows up in the dialogues of Plato. Going through the fire of debates in Plato's writings, one discovers interesting and necessary domains for the understanding of communication in terms of the visual phenomena and their "intentionalities." One should immediately notice that the term "intentionality" has been shifted from human positional awareness to other features of awareness. Plato traces various levels of

transcendental awareness comprising the ways that experienced phenomena become "intentional."

In the Allegory of the Cave—present in Plato's work *The Republic*—there is a depiction of an empirical world, experienced by normal people. This world is given as "figures" on a wall—nothing more. Such figures do not imply anything more; they are flat, and no matter how the observers behave, they will see flat figures without depth. Even if the figures are turned, one will simply see another flat surface. Elizabeth Stroeker, in her work *Investigations in the Philosophy of Space*, has argued that empirical awareness of anything, such as a tree, is equivalent to Plato's flat figures on the wall. All one has empirically is a flat surface and, by going around to see the "other" side, one will still have another flat surface. Meanwhile, the flat figures on the wall are the only reality for the observing entities. Yet there appears an awareness which discovers something "more," and turns the flat, empirical figures into "shadows." To say "shadows" is also to say shadows of . . . ; to have an awareness of . . . requires a reflective moment which allows them to be shadows. It is interesting that at this level of awareness, the images contain both reflection of . . . and intentionality—pointing to . . . or meaning something or other. The reflecting shadows "intend" some sort of original. In this setting, Plato sees through the shadows and correlates them to the original and discloses the original as a different level of reality which is in excess of the shadows. The more, as depicted by Plato, are statues carried behind a wall, and behind the statues there is a fire which allows the casting of shadows seen by persons tied to the wall. Meanwhile the statues, for Plato, intend what they are of . . . and thus efface themselves and disclose some original—whether it is a human, an animal, or a plant. The disclosure is made obvious once we leave the cave and, for a moment, are blinded by the sun, till finally we see the original reality intended by shadows and the statues—there are people, animals, plants, buildings, all different from each other and constantly changing. This is obvious and should not be of any concern. Among the variety of specific kinds of things, there appears an identity setting a limit to each thing in such a variety and the limit comprises an essence of such things. Thus, having exited the cave, one is aware of a great variety of changing things, but also, one is aware of the distinctions among things which allow one to see more than the empirical variety—*to see things in terms of their essential limits—to have a vision. The latter does not look like any empirical variant, and yet it is required to set a limit to what distinguishes empirical things into their essential compositions.*

It is at this level of awareness that the classical controversy of intentionality unfolds. Having ascended to the region of sunlight among real things, Plato is troubled. While moving through various levels of intentionality, showing how each level requires specific awareness of given phenomena which suddenly shift to a reflective "image" disclosing something more. This also shows that such a shift belongs not only to Plato's awareness, but in its own right. After all, the experienced phenomena become images signifying something other, something more which, while "absent" in visuality, is given to vision. In other words, empirical phenomena become transparent, reflecting and "intending" the more. Even after ascending to sunlight and gaining awareness of all sorts of things, there

appear diverse identities despite changes and differences among specific things. Among different sizes, shapes, colors, abilities, occupations, we encounter a "human," an identity among differences, one among many, permanent among changes.

The disclosure of the one among many, of the identical among differences, of the permanent among changes, requires another intention, another awareness which makes all the encountered things into "examples of . . ." reflecting an invariant as a dimension, an *arche*. Despite the concrete fact that the described events are presented by an individual Plato, it led him to this discovery of a complex domain: a "transcendental shift" as a condition for reflection—shadows become of . . . —and thus intentional in their own right without admixture of psychological, human-all-too-human sophistry. The awareness called transcendental simply means the disclosure of an awareness of things as they are and reflect or "mean" an *arche*. In other words, transcendental awareness, enacted by Plato and by anyone who would read Plato, is a "reflection" on the phenomena from another domain, shifting the phenomena to images and finally examples of . . . , disclosing *archaic dimensions*. The latter do not look like anything, are not images, and are not derived from empirical generalization or rational deduction— they are *archaic and are present as vision through visuality, such that the latter are transparent with the vision. While visuality might be explicated empirically, vision is noetic.*

The latter is reserved for the quest to disclose the basic principles—the *arche* that constitute the very essence of nature, including humans and even a just society. The latter has been a debate within and among major Greek philosophers, yet all of them, despite variations, understood all natural events from their limits (*peras*). Every being is determined to be a specific kind of being by the limit which cannot be transgressed. Whether the limit is located in *topos noitos* (the place of mind), or is the *morphe* (the inherent form of a thing), in each case they are *the very essence* of a given thing, its *arche*. The essence of a being is what comprises its intelligibility. This means that the necessity of all beings is inherent in them. *Arche is a principle* which cannot be denied without a contradiction, and the proof for it had to include it in the very demonstration of its validity. In brief, in its denial and its affirmation it is a given presence—a vision. Despite the tsunami of all "explanations" of who we are—multi-cultural products of material and other conditions such that if conditions will change, there will be a "new man" (ala Marx) or an Uebermensch as long as we purge ourselves from those racial others who have not yet fully evolved to be "pure" humans, there is always a flash of the *arche.* Greeks would ask a more fundamental question: across all the variations you say that "humans" can and do define themselves in variety of ways, except that there is an assumed *arche—human.* This is also the question in all sorts of evolutionary and historical theses where man emerged from other creatures, or man is a product of historical conditions and if we change such conditions, we shall get a "new man." Curious—What is this constant appeal to "man"? In the background is *arche* as a limit without which one could not speak of different definitions of "man" or evolution. *The limit "human," by its own admission, is fallible and thus responsible for his mistakes and their correction in public dialogue.*

Dialogical Requirements

By now there might be a question from the side of contemporary "thinkers": What does the "story" told above have to do with "communication"? In light of the various methodologies in currency, ranging from qualitative to quantitative, from neo-positivistic to culturally relativistic, we maintain that any subject matter requires an articulation of its own access. This is to say, it would be not only inadvertent, but also arbitrary to "apply" our favorite method, dogma, or theory on all phenomena. The above "story" disclosed what is required in any communication: discussion of any theme, subject matter, issue involves a principle, an *arche* which sets a limit as to what is being discussed. If we are discussing mathematics, no need to obfuscate the discussion with brain physiology—looking for 2 + 2 = 4 in brain cells. And the discussion of brain physiology need not involve mathematics. Current discussions of democracy and autocracy accept the difference between them and hence allows for the notion that they are *essentially* different. If that were not the case, we would run a gauntlet of mis-communication, leading to a question: "What are we talking about?" Thus a discussion, purported to argue against anything *essential*, is *essential.* To say that "there is no *essence*: everything is contingent" is to make an *essential* claim. As argued in the above "story," the negation of *arche involves its inclusion*. Messages are understandable to the extent that they efface themselves in order to signify, point to, delimit some "subject matter." The latter may be cultural, physical, theoretical, psychological, mythical, science-fictional, etc., yet in all cases it is required as a dialogical focus. Despite the disagreements that may occur concerning the delimitation of a subject matter, the latter is a required condition for the continuity of communicative engagement. If the common subject matter is lost, the question will arise: Are we talking about the same thing?

The "story" also disclosed that all "explanations" of the communicator by its exclusion, inevitably assume its presence—the human *arche recognized both as self and as another self*. Both may be present to each other in their social designations as a doctor and a mechanic, or in different cultural categories as "ghost hunter," an "eagle" but in all cases they are transparent with a vision of human *arche*. There are numerous stories, apart from philosophical disclosure, of this transparent presence of a *vision of an arche* which should both please those claiming a cultural variety, and amaze them by constant communication of such a vision to all essential denials of essence. While mentioning such social designations, it must be noted that they belong to different societies and cultures as "values." The latter provide categorical differentiations of hierarchy of functions which persons assume in their life worlds. In fact, an identity of a person is associated with such valuable function. She is a doctor, he is a conservative, they are coal miners, and still others are students. Personal status and pride are closely tied to such functions and social "competition" is premised on climbing to a higher position—without leaving this value hierarchy. Communication between persons and even groups assumes an understanding of what is being said by someone due to her functional expertise. The Self—which nonetheless is "more" than any functional value—is, in

most cases, reduced to such a function and thus is deemed to be valuable and respected. In modern philosophy, the Self—the *archaic vision, was reduced to an Ego, leading to solipsism and individual egoism*. "Philosophers" are still debating whether I know that the other is a human or another mechanical body.

Apart from values, the presence of the communicating partners shows not only their social, categorically defined functional values, but through them the *transcendental self-worth given as a vision—an arche*. We are human and, in our engagement with a subject matter, an issue, we expect mutual respect, honor, truth, justice, not as categorical values of a given life world, but as activity. There is a mutual requirement: to be honorable, one must honor the others, just as to accept truthfulness, one must speak the truth, to respect oneself is equal with respect for others. Some examples of *self-worth* and its negation can be found across ages and cultures. While for modern ontology, values are subjective constructs, *self-worth is disclosed as the most objective and absolute presence*. This must be made clear: our awareness is always world oriented and our orientations, or intentional directions find, in their life world if not total, at least partial perceptual affirmation. This is an epistemic aspect which takes for granted the division of our life world into categories and the way they are concretized or given perceptual fulfillment. But the fulfillment of our taken-for-granted intentions and the categories to which they correlate, including the numerous value gradations—the epistemic understanding—leave out the legitimating question given in live awareness that something is not fulfilled, something that no value can account for: *self-worth*. To reach the latter, one must suspend her life world and explicate an access to the transcendental lived awareness that correlates to *self-worth* which demands legitimation of the life world in which one has so far lived in full belief and affirmation. The lived awareness and its intention toward *self-worth* asks whether the life world offers any fulfillment and confirmation of this intention. At this level of awareness, the categorical and epistemic understanding fails, and an existential question of action becomes preeminent. Can I act, as I have always acted, and fulfill the intention of my *self-worth*? The latter embodies such requirements as honor, honesty, dignity, self and other respect, and justice. If honor, honesty, dignity, and respect cannot be fulfilled in my activities, then the legitimacy of this life world is placed in absolute question, revealing at the same time the awareness of *absolute self-worth*. At this level, it is a person who speaks and not a valuable discourse. The latter not only obfuscates but also degrades the *self-worth* of oneself and the others.

Yet we cannot degrade a creature in its life world and demand of it to justify its actions and to choose another life world. In other words, to call dog a dog is not a degradation. Degrading and despising is possible only in light of recognition of the *worth of another and self as noble, honorable, just and truthful*. This recognition founds numerous contemporary phenomena, inclusive of racism, ethnocentrism, and ideologies. Degradation of others by self-elevation, reveals the other's elevation, and our anxiety in face of the other's *self-worth*, his/her significance—beyond any social value. This logic leads all the way to condemning the other to death: unable to withstand the presence of *self-worth* of the other, we condemn him to death and thus reveal that we have denied our *self-worth*, have degraded

ourselves, and thus hate the other not only for exhibiting his/her dignity, but also for revealing our own self-degradation. This is well depicted by Victor Frankl's experience in a concentration camp. If a prisoner would show any self and other respect, treat oneself and others with respect, he would be either beaten or immediately eliminated; he was a reminder to the camp guards as "valuable" and socially "respected" functionaries that they have lost *self-worth*, specifically visible in their obscene pretense to be "superior." This is to say, the very presence of the other who is aware of her *self-worth* performs a tacit phenomenological bracketing and hence challenges a blind inherence in this life world. One can then raise a question whether such a life world is worthy of one's *self-worth*.

Self-worth, as a discovered given, appears not only through degradations and oppressions, but also through actions demanding mutual recognition of self and other. And it appears irrespective of culture, historical period, or social standing. Gandhi angered colonial rulers by his bearing, his dignity, his dignifying those who were at the lowest social rung, his demand that the colonial rulers have truthfulness and honor and thus made them recognize their own *self-worth* and not merely their value for the empire. Gandhi reminded all that the life world of an empire is illegitimate because it does not allow the fulfillment of the lived awareness of *self-worth*. Hence he asked for legitimation of his own value in such a life world and whether he must rise to a transcendental level and reveal a crisis in his own life and that of the empire based on recognition of what is the ground of final human self-awareness and all the values. While being an object of derision and quixotic depictions, he took the blows with dignity, demanding dignity from those who administered the blows. It is to be noted that he did not claim *self-worth* as a value of a specific culture, but as an unconditional and absolute ground that raises the question of legitimation of any life world and demands the active fulfillment of transcendental awareness that correlates to *self-worth*. In face of *self-worth* of this slight person, the British Empire lost all its moral, political, and military superiority and lost to, what Churchill, in a demeaning way called, a "naked fakir." In face of proudly strutting military might, this empirical nobody was transparent with human *arche* for the world to see and ponder. He communicated what are the primary and most fundamental communicators: self and other respect, truthful, honorable and honoring others, and just.

Two more examples from world literatures might make the point quite clear. In the writing of Cervantes—*Don Quixote*—we find an impoverished gentleman, Quejana, reading books about knights and their honorable deeds and comparing their world to the emergent modern, iron age, in which honor is bought, lying and cheating are wisdom, exploiting and oppressing others is good business, slavery is profitable, and every value is for sale. Recognizing that knighthood as activity is honorable, respectful of others, just and truthful, he assumes a name, Don Quixote, and seeks to reveal the crisis of the modern age. Of course, knighthood, as a symbol of *self-worth*, is completely out of context in the iron age, indeed a comical caricature, and yet a presence which comprises a transparent awareness of what is present, even if covered over by some dark and incomprehensible forces. To reveal *self-worth*, Don Quixote must reveal *self-worth of others*, whether it is a noble, honorable Dulcinea seen through a garlic-smelling bar maid Aldonsa,

or a knight transparent through his humble neighbor Carcaso. They all are present as *self-worth* and thus Don Quixote's *self-worth*, as a noble, truthful, just, and honorable knight, is and must be confirmed by others of equal nobility. Led by his search for *self-worth*, he finds it even in the degraded others, even disclosing their self-degradation and challenging the life world concerning its legitimation with respect to human *arche, human essence as absolute self-worth*.

The same issues of truth, honor, justice, respect, dignity appear in Russian literature which deals with profound metaphysical, social, economic, and moral issues. Russian literature reveals a struggle between the immediately lived, even if not thematized intentionality toward *self-worth*, expressed in sacral and secular modes of writing and the world of modern Westernizing values. The great Russian literatures faced this Westernization and "modernization" and hence were written between two life worlds: one that was maintained as an established tradition, the other as a construct of Scientific and Political Enlightenments of the West. The former, the feudal-aristocratic, was deemed to be decadent, corrupt, specifically its serfdom. The latter, the West, while partially unknown and alien, was regarded as the bearer of ideas that would transform Russia and bring it into its proper place as a European nation. The price: acceptance of fundamental understanding that everything is premised on constructed values, above all the *labor theory of value dominating capitalism and Marxism*. Fundamental human value is labor, producing technological progress and the environment as material resource—including humans as such resource; capitalism and Marxism agree on this basic point: humans are labor implements and with changing technologies, they must be constantly "retooled." The entire Marxist-Leninist "experiment" was to make a "new soviet man," i.e., a more advanced tool for production.

It is at this juncture that the transcendental lived awareness in Russian literature recognizes that the world of values, constructed by Enlightenment and the world of decadent aristocracy requires evaluation as to their adequacy for human *self-worth*. Such a question is one of principle that required an essential delimitation of the constructs of both worlds and whether they could be adjusted, discarded, or become open to the absolute requirement of transcendental awareness of *self-worth*. We are in a position now to attempt our venture into lived awareness that is led by the intention correlated to *self-worth* and thus place itself at the point of crisis. While a tradition demands respect for customary rules and social hierarchies, but respect for them implies something more basic, some lived awareness that connects to the *self-worth* of a singular person beyond his/her value and demands a treatment of oneself and the others in an honorable, noble, truthful, elevating manner *for its own sake*. It is, then, the task to unfold the lived awareness that is compelled to bracket, to place out of action, the life world of tradition and enlightenment and to note the presence of this lived awareness across diverse phenomena. All the intentional orientations toward a life world in which she has been immersed appear to be groundless constructs; the life world of functional values without human essence cannot be maintained in light of the presence of *self-worth* even in its denial. Thus, which life world would provide actual fulfillment of the *arche* of *self-worth*? For Dostoevsky, the traditional life world where the master's favorite dog is more valuable than a child's life is not

acceptable. Dostoevsky's rejection is an affirmation of human *self-worth for its own sake*. He raises an absolute question: Is life worth living in a world where such a degradation of human *self-worth* is a standard? The entire corpus of Dostoevsky's writings is a striving to disclose this awareness. In *Brothers Karamazov*, the main figure, Karamazov Dimitri, insults and degrades an impoverished elderly captain who no longer has any social value; yet toward the end of the story, Dimitri attempts to apologize by offering the captain money; impoverished as he is, the captain refuses to be bought and thus degraded again. He reveals his *self-worth* as being above any price, above any social value, and "compels" Dimitri to recognize his own *self-worth* in face of the other and his nobility, dignity, and honor. In short, it is "illegitimate" to attempt to place a monitory value on *self-worth*. This is the place where *self-worth* of both persons is disclosed, accepted, and recognized. In this context, it should be obvious that reducing humans to functional values, Marxism-Leninism betrayed the true Russian revolution advocated by daring writers.

Dialogue and Monologue

These considerations suggest that the requirements to understand communication are human *arche exhibited in action of self and other respect, truth telling, justice, honor, and responsibility*. This also suggests that before any theory, explanation, degradation, *self-worth appears in dialogue*. This is to say, the dialogical understanding is a principle, *an essential arche*, which is involved even in the very explication of dialogue, and even if denied, it is included. In this sense, any method, any theoretical controversy, any question of the racially or culturally other, are dialogical. What is required, then, is to delimit the dialogical awareness and to show what types of dialogue attempt to negate the other, even though the other never leaves the dialogical setting, and what are the dialogical requirements which form communication. There are numerous thinkers who have done a great service in exploring the dialogical region, and there is no need to repeat their contributions (see Mickunas 2019).

At the outset, the notion of dialogue will be extended to include the "others" whom we never met and will never meet, but who are "present" to form a deeper understanding of dialogue in terms of "polilogue." The latter includes numerous others to whom we refer in a discussion of a specific subject matter. Thus, in this writing, we were already engaged in polilogue by communicating with Plato and Aristotle about "vision" and *arche*, and speaking with Cervantes and Dostoevsky about honor, dignity, and transparency, not to speak of the anonymous language and culture theorists; we borrow their "awareness of . . ." these subject matters, fully understanding them in their limits without which neither dialogue nor polilogue would be possible. Having all necessary factors in place, the world of communication can be unfolded.

In dialogue, the other is not present as an object, a given entity, a mind inhabiting a body, but as a co-presence engaged in a common venture. One speaks with someone about something, some topic, concern, subject matter, prior to

regarding the other as other. The commonality, here, is a subject matter in which we are engaged, which we confront, dispute, or agree upon. There is granted an orientation toward something prior to an orientation of a self to the other. Just as was the case in discussing the shift of flat figures to shadows of . . . and finally solid beings—variety of humans—as examples of an *arche*, with Plato as our dialogical partner, we always face a subject matter with the other. Thus, the dialogical partner is not merely the currently co-present other, but the others whose orientations toward the world, their perceptions of the topic, the subject matter, are equally co-present. The books I read, the conversations I had with others—perhaps long forgotten—comprise an extension of my perceptions and constitute a policentric dialogical field. I perceive with the perceptions of the others, perceptions that contest, extend, and modify my own regard of a given subject matter. The same is true of my current dialogical partner; she too is founding of and founded by a policentric field, and in our dialogue we mutually involve our policentric awareness and hence extend our policentric participation. This also constitutes the basis for transcendence of one's own limitations and resultantly for openness and freedom. Without the other, and without our being co-present to a policentric field, we would lack the transcending movement.

The most significant feature of dialogue is that the co-presence of the other not only decenters mutually absolute positionality, but also constitutes the initial awareness of human situatedness as well as a reflective self-identification, each through the other. One recognizes oneself only due to the difference from the other in modes of awareness of a subject matter. This is the transparency principle: I know myself to the extent that I reflect from the other, from how she articulates a specific theme. I see myself through the different perceptions offered by the other that connect us by way of a common theme, task, subject matter, and allows us our recognition of our own positions. Even if we engage in a dialogue about the other, we shall find that she cannot be understood apart from her perceptions of something, of some concerns inherent in her world. We shall understand her only to the extent that she is engaged in some task or concern, and thus is an aspect of our own policentric field. After all, to discuss Virginia Woolf is to discuss her views about something and thus introduce her as our dialogical partner. Even if we were so crude as to intrude into her "private feelings" we would still understand them as "feelings about something." She, and we, are comprehensible only with respect to the world we address, contest, and share in our different ways.

The debates concerning the "final communicator" included many claims of human subjection to discourses, cultural unconscious, economic forces, bundles of desires, biological, chemical, psychological explanations which assume a principle of monologue. It is not we who communicate, but the "genes which want to propagate themselves," or "libidinal drives," or Dialectical Materialism," and so on. In each case, the subject, the human *arche as self-worth*, disappears. He/she becomes innocent and thus irresponsible. They do not speak the truth, respect others and themselves, and are without honor, dignity, and even existence. Yet, an all-encompassing, undifferentiated, homogeneous thesis would not be recognizable, would not possess an identity, and would cease to be dialogical; it would be a speaking without any co-presence of the other. It would be a denial of

the other's existence as co-presence through difference. But, at the same time, it would destroy the presence of the proponent of a monologue, since he/she too would become a function and not a communicating self proclaiming the knowledge of the sole truth. Without introducing the other *as arche, there is no archaic self who could claim a monological awareness*.

Postscript

We reached a juncture at which the founder of Western philosophy—Socrates—can make his entrance. Although scholars locate Socrates as the relentless seeker of truth, i.e., categorical epistemologist, we must also recall that the first condition of the search for truth is the good and a life world where a person can live in accordance with the demands of the good as one expression of intrinsic worth. Only under these conditions can Socrates search for truth as another aspect of intrinsic worth. After all, the search for truth was, for Socrates, a practical-existential commitment and activity of a good and truthful life. Thus, Socrates, like many others, was an object of derision and caricatures. In short, he was a person without a social value, since he had no position, and raised strange questions of unsuspecting citizens, challenging them to search for truth and justice in mutual respect. He accepted the Athenian verdict of death in order to show that his and others' *self-worth* demands a life world in which the search for truth cannot be forbidden. He placed his *self-worth* as the good above his personal life and could demand that such a good should be a part of his life world. The decision by the jury to forbid Socrates his daimon, his eros, to "philosophize" was equivalent to a destruction of a life world in which his *self-worth* once had a place. Socrates is compelled to face a crisis and reveal a crisis of his life world. He reaches and lives an awareness that places his entire life world into question and demands a decision: Is the life world, offered by Athenians, adequate to fulfill his *self-worth*? In turn, are the Athenians, by their own action, degraded themselves to a level of social value where truth, dignity, honor will have no place? After all, such a degradation to social value is obvious from the trial when Socrates is offered a chance to surrender his troublesome quest and thus become a valuable citizen, and when Socrates offers, ironically, to accept a pension from the state for "whatever little services that he might render." Here appears a depiction of the first crisis of democracy and Socrates reaches a lived awareness which demands a legitimation of the life world which is being offered to him. Can his lived awareness, correlated as it is to *arche as self-worth*, have any perceptual affirmation in such a life world? The latter, after all, demands self-degradation and thus the denial of *self-worth*. Socrates resolves the crisis by accepting the verdict of the Athenians with a warning: *If you condemn me, my fame will spread far and wide; do not do this, because it will be forever a black mark on Athens.*

Algis Mickunas (PhD, 1969, Emory University) is Professor Emeritus at Ohio University. He has published and co-published over fifty books in three languages and over

200 articles in five languages. He co-founded the International Circle of Husserl Scholars in 1970 and the International Circle of Merleau-Ponty Scholars in 1976. In 1980, he was appointed to the board of directors for the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology and to the Council of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations. In 1983, Mickunas formed the International Gebser Society for the study of histories and transformations of consciousness. In 1996, with professor Hiroshi Kojima of Niigata University, Japan, he established a Japan-West consortium of scholars to discuss West-East thought. In 1999, with professor Bienvenido Argueta, he established a program of conferences on the study of globalization at the Universidad Rafael Landivar in Guatemala City. In 2007, the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture awarded Mickunas an "outstanding foreign contributor to humanities and social sciences in Lithuania" prize. In 2008, he was appointed to the Lithuanian Academy of Science. He has read approximately 300 conference papers in Japan, India, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Lithuania, Guatemala, Peru, United Arab Emirates, Canada, and the United States. Mickunas has received four honorary doctoral degrees from Klaipeda University, Lithuania (2000); Universidad Rafael Landivar, Guatemala (2009); Vilnius University (2011); and Mykolas Romeris University (2012). In 2017, Mickunas was awarded "Knight of the Cross" by the president of Lithuania and given "Laureate Fellow" status by the International Communicology Institute. Vilnius University Library and Mariaus Katiliskio Pasvalio Biblioteka contain copies of the archives of Algis Mickunas.

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