

Engaging with our New Website: New Tools, New Opportunities, New Approaches

Paul Filmore, Chair (A slightly extended version of the editorial published in *Paradigm Explorer* 135, May 2021)

This editorial explores some ideas of how we can use the potential of our new website. Utilising the strength and diversity of our membership, we have the opportunity to begin to develop creative and inclusive ideas, and possible solutions, to offer towards the many crises that face our society. As an educational charity, having promoted diverse and visionary talks for almost fifty years, we have a large, and relatively untapped, library of speaker material. In addition, mostly within our conferences, we have explored ways in which thoughts and collective understandings developed within the conferences can be shared, and then published in our journal. With the recent introduction of webinars, more members than previously have the opportunity to attend SMN talks. The Zoom format, however, can tend to reduce two-way communication, so personal and group high-level processing of talks, enhancing a synthesis and a collective understanding, may have a more limited opportunity to occur. My suggestion is to re-explore the potential, here, in an online setting, of the Bohmian Dialogue process, to allow us to more deeply and more sensitively communicate together within Zoom.

To record the fruits of this communication and develop and deepen it further, we can use the social media tools very recently activated on the new website. The tools on the website allow a setting up of subject interest groups, and within these groups, using focused posts, members can share ideas and collaborate. There is, in addition, the facility to share collaboratively produced documents within the interest group, which can be taken forward to wider audiences for dissemination or further discussion. Using Bohm Dialogue in this way is new territory for us, and so, to support this development, I have already started a new subject interest group: 'Practical Bohmian Dialogue', to further our understanding, and for the sharing of good practice.

The SMN is not new to the work of the physicist David Bohm, the subject of a number of Network talks. For many years, I ran a forum on Bohm Dialogues from my university, which convinced me of their potential. Bohm prophetically said: '...it is proposed that a form of free dialogue may well be one of the most effective ways of investigating the crisis which faces society, and indeed the whole of human nature and consciousness today. Moreover, it may turn out that such a form of free exchange of ideas and information is of fundamental relevance for transforming culture and freeing it of destructive misinformation, so that creativity can be liberated.'

David Bohm, in his book *On Dialogue* (1996, Taylor & Francis), explains that his use of the word 'dialogue' has a different and deeper meaning than that commonly used. Referring to the Greek root *dialogos*, he suggests an alternative to the usual translation of *logos* ('the word') as, the 'meaning of the word'. Then he suggests that *dia* has the meaning of 'through', rather than the usual translation of 'two', so therefore a dialogue can encompass a group of people. He further suggests that, when the spirit of true dialogue is present, there is also present a special sense within a single person, or a flow of meaning within a whole group, which he describes as a 'stream of meaning'. This '*shared meaning*' is the "glue" or "cement" that holds people and societies together'.

Bohm then contrasts this 'shared meaning' or 'glue' to our usual activity of 'discussion' (which has the same root as 'percussion' or 'concussion') and which, as he explains, 'really means to break things up'. I like his description of a discussion as a game of ping-pong, where one may reject, or take up, another's ideas to support one's own. In Bohm's view, the conventional approach is to win the discussion game! In contrast, in a dialogue, 'we are not playing a game against each other but *with* each other', so nobody is trying to win, and everybody wins if anybody wins.

When practised correctly, Bohmian Dialogue can bring about a sense of the collective dimension of being human, a qualitatively new participative feature, bringing 'some sense of coherence and order' - a shared meaning. To get to this point, in Bohm's view, we have to first understand, acknowledge, and utilise dialogue to surface, and release, our hold on our basic assumptions or mind-sets. Bohm states that these basic assumptions are strong within us, encompassing assumptions about the meaning of life, our religious interests, our country's interests, our self-interest and so forth. And he states that these assumptions can sometimes lead to unforgivable acts, as, for example, in the case of a person from one culture having been brought up to consider people in another culture as almost subhuman. This makes me think of the book 'Emotional Awareness': a conversation between the Dalai Lama and Paul Ekman, with a forward by Daniel Goleman (2008, Times Books), where the Dalai Lama separates compassion for the human perpetrator from righteous anger towards the act.

Bohm states that basic assumptions are defended when challenged 'with an emotional charge'. They are programmed into us as opinions we identify with, and are experienced as 'truths'. As Bohm says, why react to defend them? 'If the opinion is right, it doesn't need such a reaction. And if it is wrong, why should you defend it? It is as if you yourself are under attack when your opinion is challenged.....In the dialogue we create an empty space where we don't have an object, we don't have an agenda or a program. We just talk with each other, and we are not committed to accomplishing anything. Nobody has to agree to anything. We simply listen to all the opinions. And if nothing seems to get done we don't care, because the process of dialogue is going to affect us at a much deeper level if we can create an empty space. Listening to all the opinions will bring us together.' And in a dialogue session, if we give space, 'people will gradually learn to give space to the others to talk. Very often when you don't give space in a group, everybody jumps in right away with whatever he has in his mind. But at the same time, you shouldn't be mulling it over in your mind - picking on one point and turning it over - while the conversation goes on to something else.'

Bohm concludes his book by saying 'The question is really: do you see the *necessity* of this process? That's the key question. If you see that it is absolutely necessary, then you have to do something. The point is that love will go away if we can't communicate and share meaning.' As an example and very pertinent to the SMN and the Galileo Project, Bohm as a physicist reflects back as to how different physics could have been if Einstein and Bohr (and their respective research groups) had not shunned each other over their basic physics assumptions on quantum theory and relativity. If they had managed to suspend their opinions by dialoguing, then we may have had a new physics! As Bohm says 'The love between Einstein and Bohr gradually evaporated because they could not communicate.'

In conclusion, I would like to warmly thank the team who have given us our fully operational website, with the added extra functionality of social media. It is now for us to enjoy exploring the site and experiment in using it.

Scientific and Medical Network 

OPEN DIALOGUE

*Infinite Potential:
The Legacy of David Bohm*

Clinical Lecture Theatre (Francis Bancroft Building),
Queen Mary, University of London,
Mile End Road, London E1
SATURDAY 21 NOVEMBER 2009

Speakers

Prof. Basil Hiley, Dr. F. David Peat, Leroy Little Bear
Donald Factor, Dr. Mary Cadogan, Lord Stone of Blackheath

Chair:

Prof. Bernard Carr

