

Dialogue Revisited

Instead of asking, “Are there truths out there that we shall never discover?” we would ask, “Are there ways of talking and acting that we have not yet explored?” Instead of asking whether the intrinsic nature of reality is yet in sight..., we should ask whether each of the various descriptions of reality employed in our various cultural activities is the best we can imagine—the best means to the ends served by those activities.¹

If you have followed the Journal for a while, you may recognize the quote above, from the late American pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty. At the risk of using old material, this is the same quote with which I began my first editorial for the Journal, in the Fall of 2016. At that time, having just taken over the editorship, one of the things I was most looking forward to was transforming *Confluence* from a static publication to one which would offer more opportunities for genuine conversation and collaboration, a place where the ideals of liberal education—providing the intellectual foundation and the necessary tools with which to question, to discuss, and to recognize and cultivate new manners of relating—would be both valued and exemplified. As I noted at the time, the *liberation* intrinsic to “liberal” education is of immense importance, as it is only through a clearing away of preconceptions, presumptions, and prejudices that the openness that is necessary for true learning and growth can be achieved. It was in this spirit that I offered a new mission for *Confluence*:

to become an organ of dialogue in the spirit of what “Liberal Studies” means. To this end, and

¹ Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6.

from this moment, *Confluence* will stand as a forum for constructive dialogue, in the spirit of the kind of intellectual openness that both defines and allows for a “liberal” education. There will be no Truth in these pages; rather, here you will find opening statements, questions, and invitations to think, to question, and to *participate*. At times, these questions will center around works of art or fiction, historic events, or philosophical/religious notions past and present. At other times, these questions will urgently seek to address circumstances of injustice, issues of equality, and conceptions of what it means to be a human being in the world, past and present. Yet underlying and uniting all of these discussions ought to be the development of a community committed to understanding human values and improving the human condition.

In some ways, thanks in large part to the variety and quality of manuscript submissions over the last six years, as well as to the intellect, discernment, and patient support of our tremendous Editorial Board and Reviewers (as well as the unfailing support of the Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Programs), the Journal has made great progress in accomplishing these goals. The work published in these pages consistently demonstrates the depth and breadth of the knowledge of our contributors, while equally showing their shared dedication to elucidating and rectifying the kinds of challenges—socially, culturally, and intellectually—faced by our culture. Yet there remains at least one area in which our work has fallen glaringly short—that is, in the fostering of open, ongoing, engaged *dialogue*. After six years, the Journal is still a very static organ for the dissemination of information, online and in print, for readers to consume without leaving any real trace on that information or on the community at large. If *Confluence* is to continue to justify its place, and realize its value, as an intellectual publication, we must do a better job of creating the space for this kind of dialogue to take place.

A few years ago, we introduced a new publication option for shorter submissions which, rather than attempting to define and address a problem in a comprehensive fashion, would instead offer an idea or connection for consideration, toward inspiring an

ongoing discussion. These Commentaries are intended to be a “snapshot, a single moment from the initial encounter with an idea or connection.” It is meant to not answer but *ask*; it is an “appeal to think about an idea, to consider a question, and to take up in earnest the possible conversation toward which the Commentary points.”

To further explore possibilities for open discussion, we have also just introduced Reader’s and Educator’s Corners—additional possibilities for shorter works to be published which introduce a text or classroom experience that may be of particular relevance to the community served by *Confluence*. All accepted manuscripts for the new Corners will be published online, with some accepted submissions also appearing in print (for submission details, please visit our Instructions for Authors: www.confluence-aglsp.org/ifa).

As Commentaries and Reader’s/Educator’s Corner essays are published, there will be opportunities for readers to respond—to answer questions raised, to pose additional questions, or to propose new aspects or directions for the conversation. Soon it will be possible to submit responses to any individual Commentary or Corner essay online, directly from the page where it is published; until that capability is in place, however, responses to any published work may be sent directly to me (editor@confluence-aglsp.org) for consideration.

The first such “dialogic” submission to be accepted, an excellent Reader’s Corner essay on literary treatments of death, is included in the present issue, along with a brief Reader Response which I hope will demonstrate one possible way in which our hoped-for opportunities for dialogue may be realized and inspire more comments, questions, and criticisms; you know, *conversation*.

In October of 2022, for the first time in three years, the AGLSP conference will be again held in person. At long last, we will return to time spent in the presence of the friends and colleagues we have missed, and we will re-engage in the kinds of conversations, both formal and informal, which make our conferences and the Society as a whole so wonderful. And although no “virtual” communal gathering can truly replace the experience of time spent in open and earnest conversation in person with one another, I hope that, on some level, *Confluence* can foster and sustain a more dialogic community, with contributors, reviewers, editors, and readers in equal standing as interlocutors—participating, listening, thinking, and conversing.

Confluence