



An Analysis of Dialogism in Mikhail Bakhtin's Thought: Convergence of Philosophy and Methodology

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Abstract: Undoubtedly, the twentieth century can be regarded as one of the richest periods of the history of philosophy and thought which globalized this tradition, generally, because of the spread of mass media and even the published books, and joined all vast and narrow streams, here and there, together and at their Juncture a big sea is formed which is the most important gain of the century. One of the narrow streams that was flowing through the fearful and dictatorial land of Russia and joined the ocean of century's thought was that of Mikhael Bakhtin, the Russian linguist. In this article, an attempt will be made to use Bakhtin's dialogic viewpoints in order to show that one of the important possibilities in Mikhail Bakhtin's ideology is to unite methodology and philosophy, as an introduction. This quality might fill the historical gap between methodology and philosophy. Here, we try to access the methodological possibilities with emphasis on Bakhtin's dialogism and by speculating about and rejoining the conceptual elements in his ideas. It is believed that they can make a new basis for theoretical conceptualizations in humanities and social sciences. Thus, in this article we try to investigate on two philosophical and methodological aspects in the analysis of Bakhtin's ideas.

Keywords: Dialogism, Philosophy, Methodology, Methodological Possibilities.

Introduction

As it will be discussed in detail, the concept of, Bakhtin's Dialogism which entered the scientific field in Iran is quite rich, theoretically, through which social science and humanities can get their classic viewpoints revised. In this article, an attempt will be made to use Bakhtin's dialogic viewpoints in order to show that one of the important possibilities in Mikhail Bakhtin's ideology is to unite methodology and philosophy, as an introduction. This quality might fill the historical gap between methodology and

philosophy. The most important help dialogism can give to our social approach is to find ways to solve this problem. The purpose of this article is dissection of Mikhail Bakhtin's idea and rendering a new analysis of his thought innovations in a new format.

Undoubtedly, the twentieth century can be regarded as one of the richest periods of the history of philosophy and thought which globalized this tradition, generally, because of the spread of mass media- and even the published books, and joined all vast and narrow streams, here and there, together and at their Juncture a big

sea is formed which is the most important gain of the century. This means that the twentieth century has joined all scattered islands and philosophy and thought and created a big world whose expanse is not known properly. One of the narrow streams that was flowing through the fearful and dictatorial land of Russia and joined the ocean of century's thought was that of Mikhael Bakhtin, the Russian linguist. Bakhtin, also, like many of those who lived before, got aftermath fame; but his popularity and fame increased day by day. He was discovered very late in Iran, but attention to his idea can increase our analytical possibilities in the domains of philosophy, linguistics, sociology, and even politics. In other parts of the world these possibilities are manipulated today, and, thus, in the academic environment of Iran, also, those potentialities can be beneficial. In this article an attempt is made to access one of Bakhtin's important innovations which is actually, the totality of his philosophy and deduce possibilities from his mere philosophical thoughts. Here, we try to access the methodological possibilities with emphasis on Bakhtin's dialogism and by speculating about and rejoining the conceptual elements in his ideas. It is believed that they can make a new basis for theoretical conceptualizations in humanities and social sciences. Thus, in this article we try to investigate on two philosophical and methodological aspects in the analysis of Bakhtin's ideas.

Dialogism from Different Perspectives

Dialogism is a topic, specifically used for description of Mikhail Bakhtin's viewpoints. Bakhtin, himself, although benefited from this concept, never accomplished his activities under this heading, and this was a title that posterior investigators assigned to his works and to the famous gathering under his name. Here, also, it is believed that dialogism is an interesting introduction for our discussion about Bakhtin's ideas. Yet, the concept of dialogism like many

other western thoughts cannot be easily and properly translated. In Persian literature, dialogism has been translated as the logic of oral communication and has been known equal to conversation and talks (Ahmadi, 1991; 93-121). Although this translation seems unavoidable, dialogism cannot be mistaken, conceptually, with conversation and even with discourse, and, in fact, thinking about its non oral meaning is of speculative importance. Although dialogism has the meaning of discourse hidden in the word, it cannot be degraded to that, semantically, since it might leave the readers in misunderstanding. In English literature, also, lack of sufficient attention to the non spoken semantics of dialogism has caused mistakes. This mistake has been, generally, driven from over emphasis on the meaning of conversation or dialogue taken from dialogism. Some researchers like Morson and Emerson have emphatically mentioned that the concept of dialogism should not be mistaken with the meaning of conversation in Buber's concept of you/I or Hegelian Dialectic (Morson and Emerson, 1990: 40). Association of dialogism to conversation or even discourse has moved some researchers toward accounting Habermasian insight for the works of Mikhail Bakhtin (Niesen, 2002). In this regard Bakhtin's dialogism, conceptually, decreases to inter lingual thought and these two concepts are taken at the same level while they are originally different or even in some cases they are contradictory (Such concepts can be seen in the book of Conversational Democracy, when mixing the concepts of Habermas and Bakhtin; Ansary, 1384). As some researchers of Bakhtin's works have noted, dialogism should be studied with reference to its a priori philosophy. Nina Muller suggests that using the concept of dialogism in relation to language, interaction, existence, multipurpose theories, carnivals and discourses (Anderson, 2002; 45) and Linell suggests using dialogism as method or procedure, analysis, and interpretation

to show the internal relations between ideas (Linell, 2002). He attracts our attention to this concept that we should distinguish among dialogue, dialogicality, and dialogism which are in close relation with one another but in different applications. According to his idea, dialogue refers to actual interaction between two individuals in social- cultural performances. Dialogism then refers to the framework of knowledge, in general, and the purpose of being dialogical is to refer to dialogic characteristic of language, discourse, and cognition (Linell, 2002). Some other researchers, however, believe that dialogism should be considered as knowledge which is united to a type of existentialism (Lahtrrnaki, 1998;75). Dialogue can be defined in two limited and expanded meanings; in limited concept it refers to specificity of language, like multi vocalism of language. The expanded concept, which should not be ignored, is that what is derived from dialogue is a model of the world or existence whose meaning refers to the relation between the “others” and the “self”.

With reference to what was mentioned, it is tried to present an understanding from dialogism that sheds light on unseen aspects of Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea to prevent us from dealing with unauthorized understandings. In this regard according to Ongstad (2004; 60) Mikhail Halquist’s interpretation is effective. Halquest in his book entitled “Dialogism” has tried to give a different interpretation from Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas. We believe that his interpretation from dialogism can prevent us from conceptual faults previously mentioned and help to present an accurate understanding from dialogism.

The Meaning of Dialogism

What is Dialogism? Although many interpreters have a more literal tendency to the definition of dialogism and consider it as a linguistic or Meta linguistic concept (Toodorf 1998; 47), the response to this question is actually sought when

getting closer to the essence of dialogism and considers it as a philosophy, with all problems involved in a philosophical discussion. That is why some of the interpreters like Halquist consider his work as a philosophy and a continuation of Kant’s epistemological problems and some others like Graham Peachey (Peachy, 2007; p. 7) assign another concept of philosophy to his work. As we understand, although dialogism is essentially a philosophical tendency, it is generally a reaction to the crisis in the modern philosophy. With the advent of the 20th decade in the world of philosophy, the philosophy of Subject Matter taken from Descartes on which the modern world is established, has confronted many questions and challenges to which he was not capable of answering; Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger and Later constructivists and post modernists and even characters like Hubermas all question the philosophy of subject matter (D’ Entreves and Benhabib, 1997). Mikhail Bakhtin also who was involved in his undesired solidarity, also was challenging the philosophy of Subject Matter, and eventually referred to the philosophy of language to find answers to the philosophical problems, there. This was the most important sharing he had with other philosophers of the 20th decade. This might be the reason why linguists took his philosophy to the benefit of their own discipline and introduced him as a great linguist. The researcher believes that Bakhtin is a philosopher who enters the domain of Meta linguistics to find answers to his questions. And reaches the philosophy- linguistics from the philosophy and language dialectic, and calls it Dialogism. Now we try to present a clear definition from Dialogism as philosophy- linguistics.

As it was indicated before, the modern philosophy was based on duality of subject matter/ object or in another meaning to object/ mind. Kant introduced his triple philosophy based on criticism which tried to fill the gap and solve

the duality. Although his solution seemed very strong, later philosophers like Hegel had to put the relation between matter and mind in the center of their world of philosophy. It seems that Kant had provided an exact formation of the duality of subject matter/mind or objectivity/subjectivity. But his solution did not seem to be pleasant. That's why by Hegel's death crisis in philosophy increased, and people like Nietzsche ridiculed the modern philosophy. This became more critical when the scientific era started and Einstein's Modern Physics appeared. Einstein's physics put the modern philosophy in despair by presenting a different picture from the mechanism of the world. It was then that Mikhail Bakhtin's idea was born. Because of this, according to Hallquist, dialogism is a tendency in the European idea that tried to make more compromise between epistemology with new understanding from the mind and revolutionary models of the world which appeared in the natural sciences of the nineteenth century. In fact, dialogism is an attempt to access the knowledge for a period of time in which relativity has gotten dominance over physics and cosmology.

Bakhtin initiates his work with reference to the reasoning of Kant that there is an unrecoverable gap between the mind and the world: Non-Identity of mind and world are the philosophical cornerstones on which Dialogism is established (Ibid, 16-17). Bakhtin's idea was under the influence of new concepts of time and place that was introduced by revolutionary physicists after the demolition of Newtonian cosmology. Einstein's physics can help understanding Bakhtin's idea in this regard. According to Hallquist conversation orientation is a type of relativism (Ibid; 19).

Dialogism reasons that any meaning is relative in order to escape the duality of objectivity/subjectivity. This means that assigning meaning is the result of the relation between two objects which have occupied different but simultaneous

spaces; either be physical objects or political institutions, and the like. Everything gets its own meaning from non itself. The meaning of day is not imaginable without the meaning of night, and woman cannot get meaning without man, democracy cannot be meaningful without dictatorship. But, according to Bakhtin, except these relations there is an observer's position which is very principle. If there is supposed to be a meaning for movement, not only two different objects should exist related to each other, there must, also, be a person to understand such a relationship. Lack of centralization of objects necessitates a focal point which is shaped by an observer. Because of this, it can be stated that reality is always experienced, but an experience related to a special position. Einstein also believed that in any experiment the existence of an observer is vital. The meaning of movement without an observer who defines it is meaningless. The movement between two objects gets meaning when it is observed by a third eye. That is why the movement of two objects in relation to each other has a different meaning from the movement of an object with another object and, what is important here is the centrality of the experimenter. Looking at the Moon from the earth is, totally, different in meaning from looking at it from the Mars. Therefore, when an observer looks at the moon from Mars his understanding is, totally, different from that of the one who looks at the Moon from the Earth. Because of this Einstein's physics movement is relative and is defined by reference to the positions of the two objects. This is the basis of relativism.

This is not the whole story, however. Bakhtin bases his existential views upon relativity (Markova, 200). He sees the whole existence as a type of relation between the "self" and the "other" which gets meaning from the view point of a third observer. The meaning of two objects, two phenomena, two individuals, two institutions

are dependent on the specific position they have toward each other, and if because of any reason, this relation gets separated from that condition, the meaning will change. Day and night have meanings in specific positions, but if the concept of day and night is looked at from the Moon, its meaning will change. That is why Bakhtin defines condition or situation as an event. Of course, this condition has a construction which is formed around the categories of time and place- the purely Kantian concept. In dialogism the law of location is dominant, meaning that everything is understood because of the specific position it has in the universe. It can be concluded, here, that the meaning of anything observed can be determined by its location, i.e. where it is looked upon. You can observe what there is behind me, what I cannot see, and I can observe what there is behind you, those you cannot see. We, both do the same things but from different positions. Although both of us are involved in the same event, the event is different for each of us. Our position is different, because we have, not only, occupied different positions, physically, but also, because we look at the world from different centers in different cognitive time and space. The cognitive time and space are domains in which understanding takes place. Dialogism like relativity takes this issue for granted that nothing can be observed without another object's perspective. The principle and important supposition of dialogism is that no picture is defined without a background. Our mind is constructed in a way to recognize the world from the perspective of this conflict. Bakhtin states that the "self" (receiver) and the "other" (received) not as separate identities but as relation between two conversions in which one distinction is at the service of the other. Cognitively, beyond the physical (material) world, two objects cannot occupy the same place at the same time. "I" as an object should not or cannot share the time and space of an object. One is in the location of completeness,

while I am experiencing the times as an open and unfinished issue and am in the center, by location. Yet, "self" has limitations, like any other limited location. This limitation in the definition of "self" indicates that my existence as "self" cannot be defined by me. In order to see something necessitates being outside, what is supposed to be seen, to some extent. In the domain of culture this outsideness is a powerful factor in understanding. When I look at you, I see the totality of your body, and I see a body that has occupied a specific location in the formation of a perspective. I see you as an entity that has occupied a specific location next to other people and objects in a perspective. Moreover, "you" have not only specific physical characteristics, a specific cultural situation, but definable characters. I see you as a person who is good or weak in trading, or a good or bad spouse, and the like. In this way, according to Bakhtin, existence is not only an event or happening, but a receiver. The happening of existence with the meaning mentioned possesses the nature of a dialogue (Ibid, 26). Existence is in totality of meaning of a dialogue. Sidorkin considers this look toward dialogue, an approach of ontology which is in contrast with a one-sided look toward dialogue. In Ontology, dialogue is not only an instrument or communication but it means existence (Sidorkin, P.24). Even living means participation in dialogue (Bakhtin 1984a:293).

According to Bakhtin:

Neither the primary, nor the eternal speech exists, limitless. They extend to the farthest in the past and in future. Any meaning which is born in the farthest past in dialogues cannot be understood once and for all. In any present moment of dialogue there is a big mass of forgotten meanings, but they are called upon at specific moments during the next dialogue and a new life of them begins. There is no absolute death for anything. Any meaning sometimes

celebrates its entrance in to its home (Estetika Bakhtin; P.373).

But the meaning of such dialogue is different from discourse as Habermas defines it. Existence in Bakhtin's dialogue means conditioning of the meaning of a phenomenon, an object, or matter to another phenomenon, an object, or matter. This means that existence of everything gets meaningful through the existence of another object. This conditioning of the being of one object to another is a necessary interaction that is called dialogue, by Bakhtin. In fact, dialogue is the interaction of beings with one another. But this interaction does not necessarily mean peaceful conversation in Habermas' terms. Habermas accounts at least two participants necessarily human beings for a conversation to take place, while the concept of "existence is totally dialogue", Bakhtin goes beyond the limitations of human beings, although human being is a necessary element to narrate such existence. Bakhtin's dialogism includes the whole existence; two objects, two humans, two political institutions, or two ideologies. In Bakhtin's dialogism three elements can be observed all the time: "self", "other", and "the relation between these two". As it will be detailed, "self" gets meaning and identity by the existence of the "other" and from Bakhtin's perspective, there is no such a thing as "absolute self". "Self" gets its meaning and even its being from the "other". There is no world without the "other". Bakhtin's world of dialogue is three dimensional. Type and proportion of relations between these two and the meaning born, meanwhile this relation is the topic of investigation in dialogism. Dialogism by Halquist is the science of the discovery of the relations between 'self' and the "other": dialogism is a type of construction or the science of ordering the sections inside the whole. In other words it is the architecture of the science of relationship. Relationship, in an ongoing fashion, necessitates

sharing and proportions (Ibid, 28). Dialogism tries to make the proportion of "self" and "other" understood and to show the relation between these two in different times and spaces.

Therefore, dialogism is both philosophy and methodology, at the same time. This characteristic tries to give a different picture of the world and methodology to show us how we can make this world understood. At this stage of understanding, dialogism has a profound relationship with language and language is placed at the center of our understanding of the world of the "self" and the "other". Bakhtin's tendency to language has similarity to the linguistic diversity which happened to the philosophy of the primary decades of the twentieth century and which was occurred because of the deep crises in the object-oriented philosophy (about the depth of crisis in the object philosophy we can refer to the topics proposed by Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, and Later on post modernists). According to him the relation between the "self" and the "other" is manifested clearly in language, and the responsibility of dialogism as a science to recognize relationships is to find such a relationship in language. That is why he turns to an absolutely different definition of language which is known as metalanguage in the linguistic theories. He believes that language and speech occupy the totality of language, which will be talked about later, extensively. Considering what was mentioned, dialogism needs to be defined with reference to some of its instinctive characteristics:

1. Dialogism is the theoretical framework of ontology; In agreement with writers like Sidorkin, it was mentioned that our world becomes meaningful only "with the dialogue", not "Through the dialogue". Dialogue is not an interactive instrument, but is a human instinctive matter. Human being without dialogue is no longer a man and dialogue with the present meaning is

- not equal to words. In this form, silence is also a type of dialogue.
2. Dialogism, as many of Bakhtin's interpreters have pointed out is regarded as a kind of epistemology and in continuation of Kant's epistemological discussions.
 3. Such ontology and epistemology are based on four distinctive and determined characteristics.
 - 3.1. Interactionism: communication and cognition always require interaction with others (other people or other systems). Such interactions are so much intermingled that cannot be reduced to cause and effect relations. The principle elements of each discourse are interactions rather than interacting people.
 - 3.2. Contextualism: context bound discourse is dependent on contexts. Discourse cannot be meaningful out of its context. Communicative Constructionism: The meaning of discourse and text is materialized through linguistic and communicative processes. Pre-planned thoughts cannot be transferred through communicative dialogues. In this way, it can be stated that meaning, also, is shaped communicatively, in a more exact way. It can be said that meaning, also, is shaped through dialogues.
 - 3.3. Dialogicality: The outcome of Behaviorism and constructivism is the appearance of a characteristic which is called, here, "Dialogicality"; dialogues happen not only in interpersonal talks, but at the level of performance, societies, and social- cultural institutions. This property shows, perfectly, that dialogism is a framework which can be used, not only for analyzing relations, discourses, and awareness, but also for its use in the social and cultural sciences.

Relation between the "Self" and the "Other"

Now that dialogism is defined as an ontological and epistemological philosophy, one of the most important concepts introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin will be recognized which places his philosophy and methodology in contrast to other philosophies.

Thinking about "self", is as old as the age of human being living on the earth, and a large portion of philosophy has dealt with this issue. Modern world is also built on the basis of a definition of "self" which is referred to as the Cartesian "Self". Although Descartes was not the initiator of such discussion about "self", he rendered such a definition from "self" which has turned to be a part of the strong foundation of modernism: I think, so, I am. Man was the center of his awareness, and the "self" of an individual (Individualism taken from humanism) could achieve perfect recognition following his own intellect. With this meaning in mind, the modern intellectualism can be summarized in self-understanding; self understanding of the modern self was not related to any other metaphysical source and it was self- disciplined (Taylor, 1989).

This is exactly where Bakhtin's philosophy gets is shaped by getting detached from this concept of the "Self"; Bakhtin in the concluding section of his book, "toward the philosophy of action" puts emphasis on what Husserl calls "other people's problem" and concludes that the philosophy of true traits cannot be established beyond confrontation of the "self" and the "other". According to him; principally, there is no such a thing as self awareness in Cartesian concept. Any type of recognition is related to a matter (element) that he calls it the "other". "Self" gets meaning with the "other". In this sense, "self" is not an a priori, self constructed identity. That is why Bakhtin in his book *Freudism: a Marxist*

criticism” which is published under the authorship of Volosinov, writes:

There is no human being beyond the society and beyond the observed socio economic condition. Man is not born in a package of biological organism, but is born as an owner, a farmer, a bourgeois, a proletariat, and this is the basis for human being’s existence. Therefore, s/he will be French or Russian, and born in 1800, or 1900. Only such historical and social conditions make the reality of human beings and determine his cultural and personal contents (Tudorf, 1998; 176).

Therefore, human is not born human, but he becomes human. This human becoming is shaped in relation with the “other”. Bakhtin calls this ontological relation between the “Self” and the “Other”, as dialogic relationship. This dialogic relationship is far beyond discourse; dialogue, here, means relatedness of meaning of the “Self” with the ‘Other’. The relationship between day and night is dialogical; meaning that the definition of day is related to the definition of night and vice-versa.

Conclusion

In this article, an attempt was made to show how it is possible to overcome one of the most important conflicts between philosophy and methodology using Bakhtin’s dialogistic approaches. Mikhail Bakhtin’s Dialogistic Approach shows, in a best way, that philosophy and methodology can be put together and in this way s/he creates a system which has philosophical bases and at the same time can be used methodologically. It could be claimed, now, that Bakhtin’s ideas presents us to a theoretical possibility that is able to put two superficially conflicting aspects next to each other. Thus, in this article the researcher tried to look at Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas from a new perspective and show how it is possible to access the theoretical aspects and use them in presenting new viewpoints in

political and social ideas. One of these concepts is that of the “self” and the “other”, by the use of which it is even possible to reason the creation of concepts or at the political levels to talk about the relations between the East and the West.

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