RESONANCE AND ALIENATION

The Mediation Triangle and The Mediator as a Responsive Space

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INTRODUCTION

In ESRI 2021 we presented our perspective on the resolution of conflicts through the discipline of mediation.

On that occasion, we drew analogies between mediation practice and meditative practice, especially in the Mahayana meditative tradition.

The central thesis we formulated then was the following: mediative practice has as its main objective to re-establish constitutive relationships that have been impeded or interrupted due to the confrontation of conflicting interests between the parties in a conflict.

We propose now to think of mediative practice as a mechanism of re-establishing 'resonance' between the parties, interrupted by the staleness and deafness to which certain conflicts lead.

In our initial presentation, we drew an analogy between the various levels of motivation formalized as stages of spiritual development in the Mahayana tradition, and the various goals that inform the practice of the professional mediator.

In this sense, we distinguished between superficial practices of mediation, focusing exclusively on an understanding of conflict resolution that conforms to the mere accommodation of the conflicting parties' interests, and those deep practices that focus on the re-establishment of a resonant relationship between the parties.

In the first case, as social and political philosophy teaches us, the conflict is between individuals conceived as pre-existing the relationship. In the second case, the relationship is primary or original, and the conflict is the expression of a rupture that is – if not resolved - deeply affects the identity of the parties, who define themselves through or within these relationships.

In the present poster, we propose to explore a second stage of mediation practice, which concerns two phenomena:

(1) the mediation triangle, composed of the parties to the conflict and the mediator who facilitates a responsive space in which it is possible to re-establish the relationship muted by the conflict; and

(2) the characterization of this responsive space as an ontological horizon that can be accessed through a moral phenomenology oriented towards the full realization of our relations with others, with things and with the world as a whole, realizations threatened by the inescapable conflicts imposed by our finite condition, interrupting, hindering or destroying the conditions of this realization.

In addition to the works of Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Andreas Weber, the works of Charles Taylor and Harmut Rosa inform our research.

DEVELOPMENT

The ultimate goal of mediation, or conflict resolution practice, is to restore muted relationships. However, the path towards the restoration of such damaged relationships is complex and sometimes has to be done gradually.

Originally, conflicts reveal epistemological and ontological distortions. The parties to the conflict perceive their interests in exclusively individual or partisan terms, disregarding the relationship itself as constitutive of their respective identities. The epistemological distortion is expressed ethically through solipsistic, self-centered and egoistic interpretations.

In this framework, the mediator's first task is to offer tools to engage the parties involved in a suspension of mutual aggression in order to move towards an accommodation of competing interests.

However, such a solution offers only a circumstantial response to what underlies the conflict, which is not only a clash of individual interests (that can be overcome through a calculated accommodation of them), but a re-establishment of the relationship interrupted by the solipsistic struggle framed by the muting of the relationship.

According to H. Rosa's definition, «Resonance is a kind of relationship to the world formed through affect and emotion, intrinsic interest, and perceived self-efficacy, in which subject and world are mutually affected and transformed. Resonance is not mere echoing, but a responsive relationship, requiring that both sides speak with their own voice» (H. Rosa, 2016).

The opposite of resonance, according to Rosa is alienation;

«Alienation denotes a specific form of relationship to the world in which subject and world confront each other with indifference or hostility (repulsion) and thus without any inner connection. Alienation can therefore also be defined as *a relation of relationlessness* (Rahel Jaeggi)».

Muting, in this respect, is the gradual (and often abrupt) transition of a resonant relationship to an alienated, relationless one.

Mediation, understood as meditative practice, has a deeper aspiration; It is about going beyond partisan interests, facilitating the interrupted communication that expresses the constitutive relationship between the parties, muted due to the conflict. The result, as we said, is mutual recognition and the possibility of recovering the resonance that nourishes conviviality.

The mediator's task is to make the words of the parties to the conflict audible to their counterparts. That is to say, to facilitate the re-establishment of the relationship, going beyond the merely strategic objective of the parties to achieve a beneficial result with their backs to the very viability of a lasting solution expressed in a relationship of mutual recognition and resonance in which our identity is realized in the very mirror of the relationship.

To this end, it is essential to pay attention to the triangle that the mediator establishes with the parties involved and the role of the mediator in facilitating the reunion between the parties. The mediator, the third party in the dispute, adopts the appearance of a responsive witness. He or she does not take sides, but uses the voice and gestures of the parties to make them sound sympathetic to the other. The figure of the mediator is often associated with space. However, there is a risk of interpreting this space as a neutral, non-valorising space that threatens to become indifferent. The space expressed by the mediator is a responsive space that allows for mutual interpretation and assessment of the parties, as well as being a mirror for self-interpretation and self-assessment.

The responsive character of this non-audible space, which allows the mutual hearing of the parties muted and deafened by the conflict, is established by the transvaluation that the will to mediate imposes on the parties. Mediation imposes different valuations than conflict. While in the conflict, strategic ability, resilience or courage are valued, the mediator resignifies the moral order in the space established to re-establish the relationship, making reasonableness, sensitivity and generosity the pre-eminent values to which he or she responsibly assumes, as opposed to manipulation, intransigence or stubbornness.

In this context, the mediator must embody a horizon of constitutive relations, whose value order is oriented towards that which facilitates the restitution of the relational apprehension of our common existence, as opposed to a horizon informed by the agonistic struggle of the parties to achieve circumstantial balances through force or instrumental-strategic reason alone.

In this sense, although the mediator maintains a strict observance of impartiality as far as the specific object of the conflict is concerned, he or she responds significantly to the inherent values promoted by mediation itself, thus becoming a pedagogical strategy based, as in any pedagogical process, on a transvaluation of values and a far-reaching moral reorientation.

CONCLUSION

Initially, we drew an analogy between conflict mediation practices and certain meditative and contemplative practices. The paradigmatic element linking our conception of mediation practice and contemplative practice is that, in both cases, the aim of such practices is the restoration of a relationship that is conceived as original, which the conflict forgets, conceals or mutes.

The role of the mediator, as with the meditation instructor, is to facilitate a space for such restoration or re-establishment of the muted relationship where the parties can more fully express a reinterpretation of their competing identities. The space, however, despite the mediator's principled demand for impartiality, cannot be a neutral space, but a responsive space. The mediator embodies a new moral horizon, in which evaluations and compromises are no longer oriented towards the mere accommodation of conflicting interests, but towards making possible, restoring and guaranteeing the viability of the relationship itself.

In this framework, the conflicting parties have the possibility of adopting a new way of being, in which the relationship itself is achieved through mutual recognition as part of a common sphere of conviviality.

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