

The **BOISI CENTER** *for*

RELIGION *and* AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

Symposium on Religion and Politics

Introduction



BOSTON COLLEGE

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Excerpt from: "Notes on Dialogue" by Stringfellow Barr (St. John's College)

. . . . The many dialectical conversations in Plato's Dialogues suggest several rules of thumb that might be profitably used by [students], or at least more frequently followed. One hesitates to suggest rules of thumb for a kind of discussion that is essentially spontaneous. But it is hard to see how these particular rules could stifle spontaneity:

* The exchange of declarative monologues tends to be dialectically unproductive. The effort to be too complete is often self-defeating. An adumbration often contributes more to dialectic than a rotund speech. Brevity stimulates dialectic.

* I take it that Herodotus' "anecdote" that the Persians deliberated while drunk and decided while sober implies that in the early stages of a dialectic exchange a "wild idea" is often more fruitful than a prematurely prudent opinion. The imaginative and the unexpected are frequent ingredients of Socrates' style, though they are often introduced with an (ironic) apology. Since [students are] trying to see more deeply into current problems but are free of the burden of imminent, practical, political action, they might profitably stay "drunk" longer than the King of Kings and his royal counsellors could risk staying.

* The Socratic dialectic has another code of manners than the dinner party, where religion and politics are sometimes forbidden for fear that rising passions may damage "social" intercourse, and where interrupting a speaker and even a long-winded empty speech, is forbidden. In dialectic, a quick question is analogous to "point of order" in political assemblies. "Do I understand you to be saying . . . ?" always has the floor.

* Even these thumb-rules may seem guaranteed to produce bedlam. And, indeed, when they are first tried, they generally do produce it. But inexperienced dancers on a ballroom floor and inexperienced skaters on an ice rink also collide. Experience brings a sixth sense in Socratic dialectic too. The will of self-insistence gives way to the will to learn.

* In dialectic, "participational democracy" consists in everybody's listening intently; it does not consist in what commercial television calls equal time. When a good basketball team has the ball, its members do not snatch the ball from each other but support the man who has it, and the man who has it passes it to a teammate whenever a pass is called for by the common purpose of the team. But in dialectic, as opposed to basketball, the "opposing team" is composed only of the difficulties all men face when they try to understand. The point is that, in dialectic, it does not matter whose mouth gets used by the dialectical process, provided all are listening intently and exercise the freedom to interrupt with a question if they do not understand. On the other hand, reading or writing while "in dialogue" is a grave offense against the common purpose of all, not because they diminish the number of speaking mouths but because they diminish the number of listening ears. (Doodling and smoking are permissible aides to listening!)

* Whatever the touted merits of pluralism in democratic society today (and pluralism is, minimally, better than shooting each other with mail-order sub-machine guns or even than legislating on religious beliefs), the agreement to disagree is a disgraceful defeat if it means surrendering the hope of agreement through further dialectic. Even Socrates, on rare occasions, countenanced postponement of the struggle to a more propitious occasion.

* Perhaps the first rule of Socratic dialectic was laid down by Socrates: that we should follow the argument wherever it leads. Presumably, this means that some sorts of relevance that a court pleading should exhibit (and, even more the forensic eloquence that pleading encourages) are irrelevant to dialectic. The deliberate manner, and even more the ponderous manner, are mere impediments. The name of the game is not instructing one's fellows, or even persuading them, but thinking with them and trusting the argument to lead to understanding, sometimes to very

unexpected understandings.

* The chairman [of the Fellows of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara] recently abandoned the practice of recognizing speakers in the order in which their raised hands requested the floor. The abandonment of this device, so necessary in parliamentary procedure and even in small committees if they have not learned to discuss dialectically, was an immense step towards Socratic dialogue. The chairman, [like St. John's tutors] now has the more delicate task of intervening, preferably by question, only when he believes that there is a misunderstanding or an unprofitable (not a profitable) confusion, a confusion that in his judgment bids fair not to right itself.

* [Students], however, will need to be close listeners, in the event that we take Socrates' advice; we shall, indeed, have to be closer listeners than we now are. We are likely, if we meet that obligation, to attain to a level of friendship that not many men attain to. Aristotle, we may recall, held that friendship could be achieved on three levels. The lowest level is that of what we Americans call "contacts," a level on which two men are useful to each other and exchange favors and services. On a higher level, two men can find pleasure in each other's company: they amuse each other. On the highest level, each man is seeking the true good of the other. On that level [students] would be, even more satisfyingly than now, seeking in common to understand. We share the friendship, or *philia*, that Aristotle thought must exist between the citizens of any republic if it was to be worthy of men. It would certainly exist, and without sentimentality, in any genuine republic of learning. And it would heighten the courtesy that any good and rigorous dialectic demands.

* There is only one, final rule of thumb that I would offer: When free minds seek together for greater understanding, they tend to move, as the mind of Socrates so characteristically moved - with playfulness and a sense of the comic. This, perhaps, is because men are most like the gods when they think; because, nevertheless, they are emphatically not gods; and because, for godlike animals, this fact is so thoroughly funny. The truly relevant jest is never out of order, so long as we can pursue our dialogue with high seriousness and with relevant playfulness.

Were we to apply the ten rules of thumb sketched above, we would certainly produce many of those brief interludes of bedlam when dialectical collisions occur, even though these moments of vocal static would decrease in length and in number as we gained practice with free dialectic. Such static is not dialogue's worst problem. Plato and Shakespeare both speak of the mind's eye, that eye that alone sees intellectual light. I suggest there is a mind's ear too, a listening, mindful ear. I suggest that the chief reason that conversations deteriorate is that the mind's ear fails.

- January, 1968

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October 12, 2012

The Bill of Rights: A Transcription

The Preamble to The Bill of Rights

Congress of the United States

begun and held at the City of New-York, on

Wednesday the fourth of March, one thousand seven hundred and eighty nine.

THE Conventions of a number of the States, having at the time of their adopting the Constitution, expressed a desire, in order to prevent misconstruction or abuse of its powers, that further declaratory and restrictive clauses should be added: And as extending the ground of public confidence in the Government, will best ensure the beneficent ends of its institution.

RESOLVED by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, two thirds of both Houses concurring, that the following Articles be proposed to the Legislatures of the several States, as amendments to the Constitution of the United States, all, or any of which Articles, when ratified by three fourths of the said Legislatures, to be valid to all intents and purposes, as part of the said Constitution; viz.

ARTICLES in addition to, and Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America, proposed by Congress, and ratified by the Legislatures of the several States, pursuant to the fifth Article of the original Constitution.

Note: The following text is a transcription of the first ten amendments to the Constitution in their original form. These amendments were ratified December 15, 1791, and form what is known as the "Bill of Rights."

Amendment I

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Amendment II

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

Amendment III

No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.

Amendment IV

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Amendment V

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

Amendment VI

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defence.

Amendment VII

In Suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury, shall be otherwise re-examined

in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law.

Amendment VIII

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

Amendment IX

The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

Amendment X

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

[Amendments 11-27](#)

Note: The capitalization and punctuation in this version is from the enrolled original of the Joint Resolution of Congress proposing the [Bill of Rights](#), which is on [permanent display in the Rotunda of the National Archives Building](#), Washington, D.C.

Page URL: http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill_of_rights_transcript.html

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October 12, 2012

The Declaration of Independence: A Transcription

IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the

inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

The 56 signatures on the Declaration appear in the positions indicated:

Column 1

Georgia:

Button Gwinnett
Lyman Hall
George Walton

Column 2

North Carolina:

William Hooper
Joseph Hewes
John Penn

South Carolina:

Edward Rutledge
 Thomas Heyward, Jr.
 Thomas Lynch, Jr.
 Arthur Middleton

Column 3

Massachusetts:

John Hancock

Maryland:

Samuel Chase

William Paca

Thomas Stone

Charles Carroll of Carrollton

Virginia:

George Wythe

Richard Henry Lee

Thomas Jefferson

Benjamin Harrison

Thomas Nelson, Jr.

Francis Lightfoot Lee

Carter Braxton

Column 4

Pennsylvania:

Robert Morris

Benjamin Rush

Benjamin Franklin

John Morton

George Clymer

James Smith

George Taylor

James Wilson

George Ross

Delaware:

Caesar Rodney

George Read

Thomas McKean

Column 5

New York:

William Floyd

Philip Livingston

Francis Lewis

Lewis Morris

New Jersey:

Richard Stockton

John Witherspoon
Francis Hopkinson
John Hart
Abraham Clark

Column 6

New Hampshire:

Josiah Bartlett
William Whipple

Massachusetts:

Samuel Adams
John Adams
Robert Treat Paine
Elbridge Gerry

Rhode Island:

Stephen Hopkins
William Ellery

Connecticut:

Roger Sherman
Samuel Huntington
William Williams
Oliver Wolcott

New Hampshire:

Matthew Thornton

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