



## Designing for Dialogue: Or how to foster virtue in the public sphere

Harry Jones

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Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT United Kingdom

T: +44 (0) 121 414 3602 F: +44 (0) 121 414 4865

E: [jubileecentre@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:jubileecentre@contacts.bham.ac.uk) W: [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk)



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# Designing for Dialogue:

## *Or how to foster virtue in the public sphere*

### (Draft December 2017)

Actual human virtue is frail, and dependent on conditions beyond the voluntary control of the individual whose character is in question.

—Robert Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*<sup>1</sup>

We need systems that are wiser than we are. We need institutions and cultural norms that make us more honest and ethical than we tend to be.

—Sam Harris, *Lying*<sup>2</sup>

## 1.0 Introduction

Each summer in the U.S., congressional representatives from the two dominant parties come together for the annual Congressional Baseball Game. In the summer of 2017, a Boston Globe article referred to this game as, “[...] one of the last vestiges of bipartisan camaraderie” but was quick to note that it takes place “[...] in a city that seems to grow more bitterly divided by the year.”<sup>3</sup> One day prior to the 2017 game, a man motivated by political differences opened fire on one of the teams as they were practicing. This incident captures, in a tragic way, the relationship between opposing sides of the present political landscape in the U.S. It points to the “increased polarization [...] within societies, and the breakdown of civic friendships [...]” that seems to be increasingly the case across various political landscapes.<sup>4</sup> I am unsure how true this is around the world generally, but entrenched polarization around a variety of issues, especially in the political realm, is the new normal in the United States. As such, productive dialogue around contentious issues is the exception, not the rule. In what follows, I will argue that tools and methods from the design community of practice could help

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<sup>1</sup> Adams, Robert. *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*. Oxford University Press (Oxford: 2006), p.12.

<sup>2</sup> Harris, Sam. *Lying*. Four Elephants Press (United States: 2013), p.79.

<sup>3</sup> McGrane, V. and Arnett, D. “Congressional Baseball Game is a Centuries Old Tradition.” *The Boston Globe*, 14 Jun. 2017, <https://www.bostonglobe.com>

<sup>4</sup> The call for papers for the 2018 Annual Jubilee Center Conference with the theme “Virtues in the Public Sphere,” Oriel College, Oxford uses this language. <http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1723/conferences/virtues-in-the-public-sphere>

facilitate more productive dialogue in the public sphere. In essence, we need to *design for dialogue*.

## 2.0 Polarization and Public Dialogue in the U.S.

A 2016 Washington Post article claims, “The sense that America is more divided than it used to be is backed by hard data.”<sup>5</sup> The authors cite data collected by the Pew Research Center showing that “more than 4 in 10 Democrats and Republicans say the other party’s policies are so misguided that they pose a threat to the nation.”<sup>6</sup> While polarization in the U.S. appears to be at an all-time high, it is not necessarily the case that we have *more* disagreement than in previous points in our history. It may be true that citizens do disagree more. But it may turn out that citizens merely appear to disagree more because the internet has simply given voice to far more citizens. Indeed, anyone with a smartphone can now operate as their own private media company. So perhaps the disagreements are merely more visible than in previous eras. Whatever the case, it need not be true that disagreement itself has increased as disagreement is not equal to polarization. Polarization, in the sense intended above, seems to me to describe not the disagreement itself but the end result of the *way* we disagree. Disagreement itself is healthy for all the obvious reasons. Disagreement can be accompanied by mutual respect and admiration or by indifference or by contempt and hate. Charitably, let us assume that most citizens and politicians do not hate one another. It does seem fair to say that most at least appear to have contempt for one another. This is a substantial block to productive dialogue. Contempt for the other greatly hinders our ability to sort through our disagreements or even to understand one another at the most basic level. Though I’ll contextualize my analysis with U.S. examples, the argument I offer will be broadly applicable to other societies, even where cultural norms are markedly different. Among the problems associated with this polarization is a lack of fruitful dialogue.

The focus of this essay is to consider the way we practice dialogue as well as the situational factors that influence the quality of our dialogue and to identify ways that employing tools from design thinking could help us be better. Beyond our individual experience and the survey data, consider a few recent items that are intended to serve as anecdotal evidence of the broader problem. Each will point to a factor that contributes to unproductive dialogue. In the 2017 Wriston Lecture to the Manhattan Institute, NYU Professor Jon Haidt claimed, “Today’s identity politics...teaches the exact opposite of what we think a liberal arts education should be [...now...] Many students are given just one lens—power [...] Every situation is analyzed in terms of the bad people acting to preserve their power and privilege over the good people. This is not an education.”<sup>7</sup> While Haidt made this comment in the context of a discussion of identity politics and higher education and was, as

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<sup>5</sup> Achenbach, Joel and Clement, Scott. “America Really Is More Divided Than Ever.” *Washington Post*, 16 Jul. 2016. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/america-really-is-more-divided-than-ever/2016/07/17/fbfebee6-49d8-11e6-90a8-fb84201e0645\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.02f3daa7a145](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/america-really-is-more-divided-than-ever/2016/07/17/fbfebee6-49d8-11e6-90a8-fb84201e0645_story.html?utm_term=.02f3daa7a145)

<sup>6</sup> Achenbach and Clement. See the survey results here: <http://www.people-press.org/2016/06/22/partisanship-and-political-animosity-in-2016/>

<sup>7</sup> “Notable and Quotable: Jonathan Haidt on Identity Politics.” *Wall Street Journal*. 23 Nov. 2017. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/notable-quotable-jonathan-haidt-on-identity-politics-1511464920>

such, not directly addressing dialogue in the public sphere, his analysis highlights one of the limiting phenomena. An inability or unwillingness to see the world through multiple lenses inhibits our ability to understand other citizens who, in fact, see the world very differently. Haidt's comments suggest that a trend in higher education is a tendency to promote a single lens through which to see the world, a singular interpretive grid by which to make sense of one's experience. If there are multiple levels to the dialogue problem, we might think of this as being a *dominant narrative* problem. A univocal worldview will, of course, tend toward a homogeneity of viewpoints. This tendency toward homogeneity is not limited to higher education.

Commenting on the state of affairs in Silicon Valley with respect to diversity of viewpoints, author Tim Ferriss laments, "I'm as socially liberal as you get, and I find it nauseating how many topics or dissenting opinions are simply out-of-bounds in Silicon Valley. These days, people with real jobs (unlike me) are risking their careers to even challenge collective delusions in [San Francisco]."<sup>8</sup> He does not specify which views he is calling "collective delusions," but the idea is clear. Though there are many competing views, topics, and opinions, but there is also a known orthodox set of views. Anything that would challenge the orthodox views are not welcomed. Ferriss' comment suggests not a univocal interpretive grid so much as a homogeneity of "acceptable" viewpoints. We might think of this simply an orthodoxy problem.

Each of these comments suggest slightly different, but related points, and in both cases, a lack of diversity comes through. The result is that fruitful dialogue is not happening. But these are not the only blocks to dialogue. Another block to dialogue occurs when we disagree and are speaking but not listening. In this case, we have not so much dialogue as we have something like multiple monologues happening simultaneously. Partner and Global Managing Director for the design firm, IDEO, said in a recent article, "I'm going to posit that we are getting dialogue wrong [...] Turn on any cable news program or scroll through Twitter, and it's painfully clear that we're often talking at each other, rather than with each other. And that solves nothing."<sup>9</sup> Again, the observation is that there is plenty of "talking" happening through various media, but it is *talking at* rather than *talking with*. This phenomenon is prevalent enough that, for at least the past three years around the time of the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday, numerous authors have recommended employing hostage negotiation tactics to navigate mealtime conversation.<sup>10</sup> And this is in the context of dialogue largely with one's own family! IDEO is attempting to tackle this problem through two related

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<sup>8</sup> Ferriss, Timothy. *Reddit* Nov. 22, 2017.

[https://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/7erct8/i\\_am\\_tim\\_ferriss\\_host\\_of\\_the\\_tim\\_ferriss\\_show\\_and/](https://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/7erct8/i_am_tim_ferriss_host_of_the_tim_ferriss_show_and/)

<sup>9</sup> Ellie Anzilotti. "Why IDEO's Fred Dust Thinks We Must Relearn the Art of Dialogue." *Fast Company*, 24 Oct. 2017.

<https://www.fastcompany.com/40483243/why-ideos-fred-dust-thinks-we-must-relearn-the-art-of-dialogue>

<sup>10</sup> See Alford, Henry. "Crisis Negotiators Give Thanksgiving Tips." *New York Times*. 21 Nov. 2014,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/23/fashion/crisis-negotiators-give-thanksgiving-tips.html>

and Shapiro, Daniel. "Talking Politics at the Thanksgiving Table." *Psychology Today*. 22 Nov. 2016,

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/transforming-conflict/201611/talking-politics-the-thanksgiving-table> and Anderson,

Jenny. "Expert Advice on Surviving Thanksgiving Dinner—from a Hostage Negotiator Marriage Guru and Others." *Quartz*.

23 Nov. 2017, <https://qz.com/1136395/expert-advice-on-surviving-thanksgiving-dinner-from-a-hostage-negotiator-marriage-guru-and-others/>

initiatives, Designing Dialogues<sup>11</sup> and Creative Tensions or “*conversations that move.*”<sup>12</sup> Dust’s comments are aimed more at the *way* we communicate rather than what we are communicating. We may think of this as an individual skill problem. We simply are not doing dialogue well. When considering how to engage in dialogue better, I will include concerns about external factors such as the dialogue space, the media through which the dialogue takes place, the fundamental postures that dialogue partners take toward one another, and so forth. I will also consider public dialogue as a form of communal practice that is relevant to the development of virtue.

### 3.0 Dialogue and Virtue

Dialogue is a platform for virtue development. For any given dialogue, we have at least three layers to consider. Each person brings, inescapably, an interpretive grid to bear on the facts. Each also brings a point of view, a position on the particular issue under discussion.<sup>13</sup> Lastly, persons bring their dialogue skills along with attitudes, postures, their own unique history and experience and the like. Though my primary aim here is not to alter the interpretive grids of others, I do think that engaging design would help people become adept at seeing the facts through different interpretive grids, holding competing narratives in tension. That said, my focus here will be on the orthodoxy and skill level problems. In what follows, I argue that design can help us advance in both areas. If we can design for productive dialogue as a first step, we will better be able to understand the views in question, why different people hold them, and what is at stake. When all that is on the table is clear, we might then be able to have fruitful conversations about the merits of one worldview over another. Design can both help create the conditions for productive dialogue and provide participants with tools for conducting productive dialogue. This is valuable not merely because productive dialogue is better than not. The way we dialogue is a venue for virtue development, and the quality of our dialogue serves as a barometer for where we are as a nation.

There are at least three ways one might conduct dialogue. I will call them productive dialogue (PD), unproductive dialogue (UD), and counterproductive dialogue (CD). I use the term ‘productive’ to capture some minimally positive outcome, depending upon the aims of the dialogue. Where PD occurs, some minimal good is obtained through the dialogue process. The standard for success I propose here is very low. UD will not yield any such minimal good. And CD, by contrast, yields negative goods. CD creates additional problems, breaks down relationships, erects or reinforces barriers, and otherwise hurts the overall situation.

Furthermore, it seems that PD rides on the exercise of one or more virtues. Some collection of the following virtues would surely enable PD: creativity, curiosity, fairness,

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.designingdialogue.com/>

<sup>12</sup> See <https://creativetensions.com/>

<sup>13</sup> Ideally, one’s worldview will drive one’s view on a particular matter. But this certainly is not necessary. People may be wildly inconsistent across points of view. This is a separate problem that I will not address here.

gratitude, honesty, humility, kindness, love, self-regulation, and social intelligence.<sup>14</sup> UD, it seems to me, is marked by indifference but perhaps not necessarily vice. Where CD obtains, one will find a lack of some or all of the virtues listed above. Lack of imagination, failure to be curious, dishonesty, pride, meanness, and other vices will likely be present in CD. Put another way, CD seems to flow, at best, from a fundamental lack of regard for the other and in the worst cases, from an active disdain or contempt for the other. This posture of contempt belies a functional disbelief in equality. This would seem to entail a denial of equal worth, human dignity, and the like. Waldron notes, “These terms—‘basic equality,’ ‘equal worth,’ ‘equal concern and respect,’ and ‘human dignity’—are not synonyms. But they cluster together to form a powerful body of principle.”<sup>15</sup> Regardless of one’s theory of equality, the idea that humans have an equal moral worth, and are owed a corresponding basic level of respect, seems uncontroversial for most 21<sup>st</sup> century global citizens. If our national conversation is dominated by counterproductive dialogue, and counterproductive dialogue is enabled by one or more vices and entails a commitment to inequality, it seems like a problem that goes far beyond a desire to “get along” or even to “find acceptable solutions” to social problems. I argue that CD is a form of vice habituation.<sup>16</sup> As such, one might argue that our national dialogue reflects says something powerful about our national character. What sort of people do we claim to be, and does our civic conversation affirm or deny that claim?

To this point, I have suggested that we, at least in the US, have a dialogue problem. I have further argued that to account for the ways dialogue happens, one must consider the virtues and vices associated with productive and that which is counterproductive. This is not to say that the phenomena of counterproductive dialogue is merely a symptom such that were we to address a deeper character problem, the dialogue problem would go away. Perhaps that is true, strictly speaking. But the way we talk to one another *just is* one of the ways we develop a variety of virtues. When we talk to one another in a way that fundamentally recognizes the equal worth of persons, we are exercising a variety of virtues such as love, humility, and so forth. It is no good merely to assent to equality or to appear to embrace equality. We must treat one another in ways consistent with the embrace of equality. To do otherwise creates a case where, as the saying goes, “the audio does not match the video.” When we say one thing and do another, we are inconsistent at best. We might be lying, though I do not think that accurately captures what is happening with respect to our dialogue. Though not necessarily the case, the inconsistency between what one says one believes and what one does may just reveal that one does not actually believe that which one claims to believe. If it turns out that we, as a nation, have paid massive lip service to the idea of equality but few actually believe it, we have an even deeper problem. Charitably, I suggest this is not the case.

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<sup>14</sup> These are drawn from the Virtue Institute on Character (VIA) classification of character strengths. See <http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths>

<sup>15</sup> Waldron, Jeremy. *One Another’s Equals: The Basis of Human Equality*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (Cambridge, 2017), p.3.

<sup>16</sup> I generally embrace the way Julia Annas’ uses the skill analogy with respect to virtue development. I acknowledge the difficulty in talking about vice the same way. Those difficulties notwithstanding, I see the consistent practice of counterproductive dialogue as a way of practicing something vicious, even if unwittingly.

Let us assume that most citizens do, in fact, believe in basic equality, and they aim to act in ways consistent with that belief. Despite their best efforts, they still find themselves participating in more counterproductive dialogue than not. I recognize that there are aspects of our “national conversation” that may importantly differ from dialogue between two individuals. What I have in mind is largely the dialogue that happens in public, whether in official capacities, or through social media, or some other means that are not private. If it is true that citizens aspire to have productive dialogue, I argue that design has something to offer.

#### 4.0 What do we mean by ‘design,’ and how can it help?

‘Design’ as a term is in vogue but often used to denote a wide variety of disparate activities. The Museum of Modern Art employs design curators. Engineers employ a design process. Apple is known for great design. IDEO has firmly established human-centered design, or design thinking, as an essential part of the business lexicon. Stanford University offers courses aimed at designing your life and even has a lab dedicated to such.<sup>17</sup> The U.S. Army even has a design methodology!<sup>18</sup> Some of these activities are clearly overlapping; others do not seem at all related. What have Charles and Ray Eames to do with military campaign planning? What does product design have to do with figuring out one’s future? My aim here is not to answer those questions, though I consider it worthy of a future project. I only aim here to specify what I mean by design for our purposes here.

Herbert Simon, 20<sup>th</sup> century interdisciplinary scholar, wrote that one designs when one “devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.”<sup>19</sup> My sensing is that this is too wide, but it does immediately rule out reducing ‘design’ to crafting an object or upgrading the aesthetic of a room or an outfit. Purposefully crafting ways to shift existing conditions into preferred ones hints at the problem-solving nature of the kind of design I have in mind.<sup>20</sup> But it is important to note that good design is not merely solving a narrow problem as presented. It is uncovering root causes and sometimes designing entire ecosystems if necessary. At the very least, we might say good design respects the complexity of the challenge at hand. In fact, I have become reluctant of late even to talk about “problems” to be “solved” when it comes to complex human problems where the network of variables in play is large and the interactions between the variables are always shifting and are difficult or impossible to map in any stable and fine-grained way. Instead, I have come to prefer referring to problems as challenges which invite us to make progress rather than strictly focus on *solving*. Problems that lend themselves to definite solutions probably lack complexity and are usually not that interesting or challenging. Problems that are far too

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<sup>17</sup> See <http://lifedesignlab.stanford.edu>

<sup>18</sup> See ADRP 5-0 *The Operations Process*, (Washington DC: 2012), Ch2.  
[http://www.apd.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/pdf/web/adrp5\\_0.pdf](http://www.apd.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/adrp5_0.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Huppertz, DJ. “Revisiting Herbert Simon’s ‘Science of Design’” *DesignIssues*, Vol. 31, No. 2, Spring 2015, MIT. Legendary designer Milton Glaser employs a similar definition of design.

<sup>20</sup> For a very thoughtful take on design and problem solving, see Peart, Rob. “Why Design is Not Problem Solving + Design Thinking Isn’t Always the Answer.” *AIGA Eye on Design*, 19 Jan. 2017. <https://eyeondesign.aiga.org/why-design-is-not-problem-solving-design-thinking-isnt-always-the-answer/>

complex for any one person or discipline to address probably are complex enough that they may be addressed by any number of ‘good’ solutions. These problems are interesting on account of not being easily solved. In order to respect that complexity, I prefer to refer to the presenting phenomena as a challenge such that the aim in exercising a design process is to “make progress,” to move forward, to move closer to the preferred condition. This is what I have in mind here. Our national dialogue is a complex set of phenomena that takes a variety of forms and involves participants with vastly different contexts, commitments, and skills of their own. This is not something to be “solved” so much as something we ought to work to improve in a deliberate and iterative way. That is another way of saying we ought to design our way ahead.

Our existing situation with respect to dialogue leaves much to be desired. Surely each of us have had dialogue experiences that make us long for a better way. Leave aside, for the moment, what exactly might count as ‘better.’ One small step is simply agreeing that we are aiming at something better. The problem of shared aims is real in our post-truth cultural situation marked by fake news and alternative facts. That problem is significant and worthy of serious consideration, but, as a worldview level problem, it is beyond the scope of this paper. My focus is on leveraging design in at least two distinct ways in service to the dialogue challenge. First, design can help individuals participate in more productive dialogue. Second, design could be employed to help create the conditions that are conducive to productive dialogue.

#### 4.1 The Power of Framing

In politics, we tend to focus on solutions to “issues” or problems. This is good and understandable. But a too-narrow focus on solutions can have the unintended effect of limiting the number of possible solutions, sometimes blocking the best solutions. This is especially true with respect to well-worn issues or issues that seem intractable. In these cases, we need new solutions, yes. But in order to open up new solutions, we need what Doorst describes as “new approaches to problem situations” or “framing.”<sup>21</sup> Creating new “frames” within which we might approach problems is the “key and special element of designers’ problem-solving practices.”<sup>22</sup> Framing is a powerful tool and can be very consequential. The way we frame an issue delineates in a very concrete way the set of possible solutions. If one is given the challenge to build a boat to cross the river, there are a number of ways to do this. But there are exponentially more ways to address the challenge “devise way to get across the river.” The solution to the former just is the set of all possible boats. The solution to the latter includes the set of all possible boats in addition to all possible modes of flight, tunneling, swimming, and a variety of other options.

Our national polarization is, at bottom, a human problem. It should not be surprising that an approach that focuses on the human at the center of the issue might unlock new ways

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<sup>21</sup> Doorst, Kees. *Frame Innovation*. MIT Press (Cambridge, 2015), p2.

<sup>22</sup> Doorst, 2.



forward. Human-centered design, or design thinking, is a way of approaching complex problems that begins with empathy, under the assumption that one does not fully understand the problem being addressed. In order to understand the problem, one must engage with those who have a stake in the issue. One must listen patiently to a variety of voices in order to gain a richer understanding of the problem and all the complexities created by its context. This is why Doorst speaks of “problem situation.” It serves as a reminder that all problems are situated in a complex collection of factors. We must respect the complexity of the problem situation and approach it with due humility.

Weston describes creative problem-solving as “the art of expanding possibility.”<sup>23</sup> Similar to the way Doorst describes the concept of framing, Weston says creative-problem solving, “[...] is the ability to cast a situation in a new light [...] and thereby open up new possibilities in it that were not evident before.”<sup>24</sup> Frames are conceptual tools we can use to do this work of expanding possibilities. Reframing dialogue, then, is a good first step. With respect to contentious issues, which probably captures most issues in the political realm, we tend to approach dialogue as combatants. We see the other as our “opponent.” We have taken certain ground, and we are going to fight for that ground, or perhaps we are fighting to gain additional ground. We find solidarity with “our people,” and we will stand together to fight “them.” This is a kind of war in which one (intellectually and socially) kills or gets killed. This has numerous implications for the way we view the other and ourselves, and it sets certain (unhelpful) expectations for the interaction. What if we, instead, framed dialogue as collaboration? How would we approach dialogue around a contentious issue if we saw the other not as an opponent but rather as a fellow collaborator? How would that change the way we approach conversation around difficult topics?

## 4.2 Applying a Design Model to Dialogue

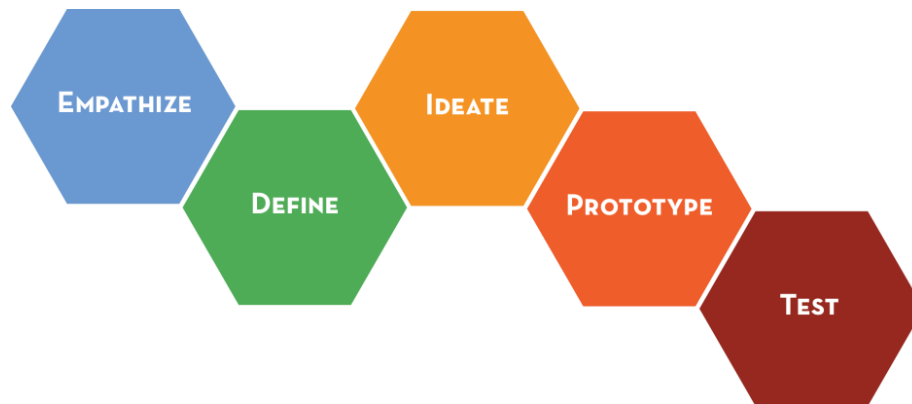
Having reframed dialogue as collaboration, we are now ready to take an approach that is well-suited for complex, ill-defined problems. Enter design thinking. Consider this design-thinking model, as used at the Stanford d.School.<sup>25</sup> Imagine what shape a dialogue might take if approached with this in mind.

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<sup>23</sup> Weston, Anthony. *Creative Problem-Solving in Ethics*. Oxford University Press (Oxford, 2007), p3.

<sup>24</sup> Weston, 3.

<sup>25</sup> See <https://dschool.stanford.edu>



Again, we have reframed dialogue as collaboration, not combat. So we approach the other as our partner in dialogue with the shared expectation that we are working together to make progress on a challenge, which is the subject at hand. If step one is “empathize,” how does that shape the way dialogue takes place initially? About the empathize phase, the d.school introductory guide to design-thinking says this,

Empathy is the centerpiece of a human-centered design process. The Empathize mode is the work you do to understand people, within the context of your design challenge. It is your effort to understand the way they do things and why, their physical and emotional needs, how they think about world, and what is meaningful to them.<sup>26</sup>

“The work you do to understand people”—step one of dialogue under this reframe. This will involve more listening than talking and an honest attempt to understand where the other person is in their thinking, why they are where they are, and how they approach the world generally. Even if we were to stop here and only get empathy right in our quest for better dialogue, we would be taking a significant step in the right direction. It is only after we have understood what we are talking about that we can engage in productive dialogue. Listening actively and empathetically do one’s conversation partner would, I think, go a long way toward easing the friction that typically marks our dialogue. Only when we have listened honestly can we start to pin down what it is we are arguing about (or, the problem situation we are working together on, under our collaborative frame). Then we might move to step two: define. What are we talking about? The define phase is

[...] your chance, and responsibility, as a design thinker to define the challenge you are taking on, based on what you have learned about your user and about the context. After becoming an instant-expert on the subject and gaining invaluable empathy for the person you are designing for, this stage is about making sense of the widespread information you have gathered.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See here to download the introductory guide: <https://dschool-old.stanford.edu/sandbox/groups/designresources/wiki/36873/attachments/74b3d/ModeGuideBOOTCAMP2010L.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Stanford d.School Introductory Guide.

The language used here is geared toward designing a product or experiences for someone. So some amount of translation is required for our context. There is a sense in which when we consider this process as a way of *conducting* dialogue, the persons involved both form the collaborative team *and* serve as the subjects of investigation. One way to move through the empathy phase is to have dialogue partners interview one another. Another way, however, would be to have the would-be dialogue partners work together to conduct field research. They would identify others who represented their own views and then interview them together as a way to gain better understanding of one another. This endeavor should be marked by a genuine of curiosity and an interest in understanding the other person, gathering as much information as feasible. One should make an honest attempt to understand the other person's interpretive grid, their point of view, and why they hold that view. What are they hopeful for or afraid of? This will provide a much richer shared understanding of the issue at hand and what is (or at least perceived to be) at stake. Only then can you begin to generate ideas for the way ahead. Now you are ready for the ideate phase.

By this point, participants ought to have a very good idea of the real challenge and the true areas of disagreement. The ideate phase “[...] is the mode of the design process in which you concentrate on idea generation.”<sup>28</sup> If in service to a particular challenge, one might straightforwardly apply this process with good effect. When thinking about what this would look like when applied to the, it is less straightforward when we get to the prototyping and testing phases. But I suggest that framing one's own ideas as prototypes, rather than precious cargo, will help one interact critically with them. When considering issues for the first time, idea prototypes are going to be of a more low fidelity sort. For issues that one has thoroughly worked out in one's mind, those prototypes will be more high fidelity. Either way, conceiving of them as prototypes urges us to continue to improve upon them. It expects us to try out ideas and discard that which does not stick. Physical prototyping here is important too, even for abstract ideas. Drawing can make ideas concrete and communicable in ways that sometimes words are unable to do. The d.School guide describes prototyping as “[...] the iterative generation of artifacts intended to answer questions that get you closer to your final solution.”<sup>29</sup> This part of the process allows for some experimentation and improvement.

The next step is testing, which is, in a very real sense, a way of circling back to the first step. The model as portrayed above gives the appearance of a linear process. But it is not. The process is intended to be iterative. Definitions are meant to be revised and refined. Prototypes are tested by going back to stakeholders, further gaining insights from interactions with those affected by the challenge under consideration. Testing involves “[...] solicit[-ing] feedback, about the prototypes you have created, from your users and [getting] another opportunity to gain empathy for the people you are designing for.”<sup>30</sup> The aim is to devise better solutions, not one solution. There are many better solutions to any given complex problem. When we approach other persons with humility, respecting their individual complexity, we will be slower to judge, quicker to listen, and curious to understand. In this way, we get improve our dialogue skills by exercising relevant virtues throughout the entire process. We patiently practice our ability to hold different particular

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<sup>28</sup> Introductory Guide.

<sup>29</sup> Introductory Guide.

<sup>30</sup> Introductory Guide.

views, prototypes of varying fidelity, in tension. And by asking why a good deal, we even learn to consider competing narratives, the various interpretive grids through which people make sense of the world around them.

Going further, we might investigate ways to craft dialogue conducive spaces. One could design experiences for diverse groups that lead with human connection and empathy-building prior to attempting to have substantive dialogue. The congressional baseball game is noteworthy not because it highlights our polarization. Recall that the baseball field was referred to as “[...] one of the last vestiges of bipartisan camaraderie.” It seems to me that the game itself serves as a kind of relationship reframe for those involved. For a few hours each year, they are not primarily Representative X, democrat or republican, and constrained by party lines. They are simply fellow humans participating in a longstanding American tradition. I imagine that participants see each other, if only for that one moment of the year, as fellow human beings, rather than as opposing party politicians. This is not magic. It can be deliberately arranged. We could design for this type of interaction if we chose to do so.

The way we tend to engage in public dialogue in the U.S. is counterproductive. It is not merely ineffective. It is furthering polarization and other negative goods such as anger and resentment as well as serving to hinder progress around enormously impactful policy items such as healthcare. I have argued that design tools can be helpfully employed to shift these norms. Specifically, reframing dialogue as collaboration rather than combat could be a powerful first step. Second, applying a design process to the very act of dialogue may help foster understanding and progress, rather than escalation and anger. Practicing curiosity and empathy will be productive within individual dialogues and could help us get after variations of the orthodoxy problem. The hope, of course, is that designing for productive dialogue will yield better relationships across the proverbial aisle as well as better policies for everyone. Lastly, and most importantly, designing for productive dialogue, will provide a context to self-consciously talk about, practice, and develop the virtues critical to progress as a society. In other words, designing for dialogue is a way of designing for virtue.