

The Difference Dialogue

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Does "difference" exist or does it not? Does "difference" presuppose thinking and cognition or do these pre-suppose "difference"? But is not the case that this chicken and egg situation is the very embodiment of difference? 'The Difference Dialogue' between Harry and Sacks explores these themes. This is a brief extract, a snapshot, of their ongoing debate and ... differential dialogue.

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For reference:

Beadle, Megan & Levitt, Samuel (2005), 'The Difference Dialogue', online article, The Difference Site, <http://www.dif-ferance.org>, date of access.

Harry: Does difference exist?

Sacks: Are you talking to me?

Harry: Yes I just asked you a question.

Sacks: By your asking me that question, does that not make you different from me, therefore prove the existence of difference?

Harry: Maybe, ... but couldn't you just be a figment of my own imagination, making *you* and your voice, a part of myself.

Sacks: Well, if you can admit that your mind has parts, then there is difference within your mind; is there not?

Harry: But if there is only your mind, as Descartes said "I think therefore I am" there is only one and that one exists as your mind in its entirety.

Sacks: Oh wise one, riddle me this: if you know your mind exists, which you claim you do, and you also believe that there is no difference, then through knowing your mind would you not then inherently know ... everything?

Harry: Your dreams come from your mind, and although those dreams are a fabrication of your own imagination you still do not know it, before and necessarily after. So if your mind is the only thing that exists it can still withhold information in the subconscious, can't it?

Sacks: Well, I suppose it can; but then there is still a difference between what you know and what you don't know at one time, and so there is difference, even within your one mind. Look for instance at our friends: Accident has red hair and Stop has blond hair. The pigment in their hair is not the same, therefore it's different.

Harry: If you use biological essentialism to distinguish difference ...

Sacks: Come again?

Harry: Biological essentialism is basically distinguishing entities through physical characteristics, but it is faulty because looks can be deceiving: just because I appear to be dumb doesn't mean I actually am dumb. And in the end, are two identical twins really the same?

Sacks: No

Harry: So they are different?

Sacks: Yes.

Harry: But I thought you said they looked the same?

Sacks: They do. They are the same and different.

Harry: So then you cannot prove difference through appearances.

Sacks: I guess.

Harry: But isn't everything just an appearance interpreted from your own mind?

Sacks: So then you are incapable of proving differences because everything is just an appearance being interpreted from your own mind.

Harry: Exactly.

Sacks: But if there are differences in interpretation within your mind, is this not enough a proof of the existence of difference?

Harry: Ok, ok enough! We can go back and forth with this argument forever if we wanted to. In the end we're just chasing our tails. Can we come to some sort of conclusion as to how we look at difference.

Sacks: Well, according to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary Volume 1, difference is 'the condition, quality or fact of being different or not the same: dissimilarity, distinction, diversity'. It also says that it's an instance of a likeness.

Harry: But that just brings us back to the beginning again.

Sacks: But isn't this an instance of difference in your mind? I am not you and you not me, similar to what Heidegger says - it is a present difference between *being* and being(s), an ontological gap. Our relationship, because it is mutually dependent on the other, proves that difference must be, or I would not be here talking to you. My presence tells you that you are different from me! It's simple appropriation. Difference has the mediating role to keep *being* and being apart!

Harry: Well, if you assume that my mind isn't all there is, and that time really exists.

Sacks: You are so annoying! Assuming the premise that the present does in fact exist, then what about what Derrida says about difference?

Harry: You mean that at the heart of difference is existence as *différance*? Well doesn't that prove my point? If you don't exist then there is no difference.

Sacks: OK, I don't really understand a lot of what Derrida is talking about, but I do know that *différance* is the origin of language and culture; so then doesn't us, speaking to each other, prove existence of difference? Language and culture are there to represent difference.

Harry: Well, maybe you have a point, but we could go on *forever* like this. We can't ever prove anything, so we can therefore not prove a premise. And with a faulty premise the foundation of everything is unstable so you can't prove *anything*.

Sacks: Fine. I give up. For someone who doesn't think knowledge exists, you sure think you know a lot!