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Agassi and Meidan argue that argumentation (debate, dialogue, discussion, dialectic) can avoid the pitfall of 'frustration'. Using the well-known and ancient rules for the logic of dialogue or dialectic lead to having rewarding discussions. That is their entire answer to the question – how can we have discussions that are both fruitful – where those involved learn something – and that are fun? The presumption is that dialogues, where no one learns anything and that are not fun, are frustrating – and people run away from frustrating activities. Moreover, the premise is that debate-avoidance is even more frustrating than having frustrating debates: 'This then is our central point: *efforts at reducing the frustration that debates cause by seeking to avoid debate is useless; there are better and more efficient ways to reduce the frustration that debates cause*.' (12)

There is a great misconception, or at least confusion, about argumentation or discussion that has been around since dialogue was invented by the early Greek philosophers. Agassi and Meidan set out to clear up the confusion as quickly as they can. The confusion is between argument for the sake of truth and argument for the sake of persuasion or victory. For instance, though not mentioned by the authors, Schopenhauer's sarcastic book, *The Art of Controversy,* trades on this confusion for the sake of irony and humour. Many recent books trade on the confusion for the sake of book marketing – people often engage in discussion with the idea that if their interlocutor other party points out errors in their argument, either factual or logical, the other party wins. That is, arguments are treated as zero-sum games, along the model of game-theory, and the object is to win the game. Or, in more prosaic terms, argument is treated as a form of negotiation or bargaining, and the idea is to win by getting the better of the other party – more money, more benefits, and so forth.

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Though Agassi and Meidan do not want to lengthen their concise book or complicate it excessively by arguing against books that treat argument as a zero-sum game with the goal of winning or persuading the other party, I think a few remarks are needed to demonstrate both the novelty and importance of their book. Why does the Agassi-Meidan book stand out from the crowd? Because the book does not buy into the current pessimistic and, at the worst, nihilistic or cynical outlook, of those who treat argument as a power-game. At best, some would argue for the model of treating argument as a power-game, as a form of negotiation or zero-sum game on philosophical principles: there is no external (objective) truth, and so nothing can be learned from argument. People engage in argument, at best when friendly, as a form of social cohesion. They want to show the other party, that since we all agree on basic principles, you tacitly admit that our current disagreement is minor and so we can agree to disagree (or so the saying goes), or you can agree to come to my point of view because your point of view is out of alignment with our common principles. Once you do this, or so the conciliatory person goes on to say, once you agree to disagree, or once you accept my viewpoint (because we agree on the basics, the area of disagreement is picayune, and your position is out of sync with our common principles), we can get on with the party, so to speak. The worse case scenario occurs when people have hostile disagreements, and in an odd way, social cohesion occurs by treating the other party to the dispute as an outsider – as people who are not really to be invited to the party. People who are outsiders or those who have hostile disagreements with each other, each take the stand that they don't have principles in common. The only peaceful resolution of the hostile disagreement is either to part company or to be hoodwinked into agreement by the use of psychological, and rhetorical strategies that trick the other party into admitting defeat. The last resort (though sometimes the first resort) is to use the relatively mild force of bullying and threatening – the cold war type of force – and if all else fails, to use hot war force. In short, these remarks highlight how firstly, the Agassi-Meidan book is novel in assuming a notion of objective truth available in some degree to all people regardless of their differences in opinion and background. Secondly, the book is optimistic and anti-nihilist in presenting an option where the parties of a dialogue do not need to employ tricks or strategies to win a power-game. Instead of employing chicanery, people can employ the well-known rules of impartial logic to engage in a game where the outcome is neither win nor lose, but mutual learning about important questions of substance. So, not to

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keep the reader waiting for my conclusion until the end of the review: the book is novel with respect to providing an alternative view of argument as a non-power game. The book is important with respect to providing an answer to the question of how to argue fruitfully where there is no trading on the confusion between arguing for the sake of truth and arguing for the sake of a victory over the other party.

The structure of the book – because it wants to provide practical advice on how to have fruitful and enjoyable dialogue in various areas – limits its theoretical discussion of the principles of dialogue to the first four chapters and to an appendix on scepticism. The appendix on scepticism forms the philosophical background, and the variety of scepticism that Agassi-Meidan prefer is basically an extension of Popper's *fallibilism*, one might say, carried to the extreme: 'We follow him [Popper] in advocating the idea that every informative statement is doubtful, never certain, plausible, corroborated, or justified – in the philosophical sense of these terms – and we include here even logic, especially since logic is the theory of rational criticism and this can hopefully improve (and thus render this handbook obsolete).' (131) The practical part of the book occurs in chapters 5 through to 11, with chapter 12 serving as a concise summary or wrap up. Because the book is so concise, I will fill in the missing context before going on to the main argument of the book. However, not to delay their answer to the question – how can we have non-frustrating (or at least minimally frustrating) debates where both parties to the debate learn? In my words: ask a question or agree to a question, provide alternative answers that are different enough so that at least some of the alternatives cannot be true together (*genuine alternatives*), and look for faults in those answers that are genuine alternatives – and continue the cycle with new genuine alternatives. Agassi-Meidan state their answer to the question of how to carry on a fruitful dialogue (with mutual learning) that is enjoyable (or non-frustrating) in terms of questions (following unintentionally, the well-worn joke, ask a question of a philosopher and the philosopher will answer with more questions):

'1.   What is the question put for debate?
2.   Is the question interesting or important?
3.   Can the answers under dispute be simultaneously true?' (31)

The *cynic* (not sceptic, who is not a nihilist), at this point, might interject: the whole theory collapses because of the uncritically held assumption of an objective truth. The so-called 'confusion' or 'misconception' between dialogue as persuasion and dialogue as truth-seeking, is not confusion but the reality – the only reality that

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exists, power struggle. The only debates that are genuine and authentic are debates that openly admit that the aim of the debate is to persuade – and use whatever techniques are available. The reply to this cynical answer is that regardless of the objectivity of truth, firstly one can abstractly use traditional binary logic as a technique for distinguishing how statements (or viewpoints) differ and treat 'truth' and 'falsity' as binary values of the sentences under question; secondly, one can treat learning as relative to a context, where learning occurs when viewpoints are modified, rejected, and then replaced with different viewpoints. (See chapter 7, 'Metaphysical Disputes' for how to transform traditional unsolvable philosophical debates into more concrete practical debates. My suggested modification of the unsolvable questions 'What is Truth?', or 'Does Absolute Truth Exist?' to more tractable and debatable versions, would be, 'How can we use binary truth-values in logic and semantics to clarify our understanding of different viewpoints and how those viewpoints differ in terms of their logical consequences?' I think I am applying the practical advice of the authors in chapter 7 to the problem of truth, though not discussed by the authors – a procedure, I think, already in use by the philosophical descendants of Tarski.)

Before returning to the argument of the book, I want to fill in some more missing context. The missing context will further highlight the novelty and importance of the book. The book is an indirect response to the cynic or nihilist who might admit some kind of learning exists. The cynic at least might think that cynicism is an improvement over scepticism. The cynic might at least admit that dialogue, as a power-game, can be used as means of changing the minds of people – and that is tantamount to learning. The Agassi-Meidan book as a whole answers an unasked question: how does learning occur? Traditionally, the two large-scale answers (each with many sub-varieties) are: (i) Learning occurs by building upon previous knowledge; (ii) Learning involves overturning what we think we know through dialogue as a dialectical process. Even the cynic can allow this – dialectical processes can change minds. But the cynic cannot allow that this can occur without the use of power-games. Agassi-Meidan argue: we don't need to use power-games in dialogue, and moreover, we need to eliminate power-games or rhetoric. Hence, and this is where the novelty and importance of their book occur. The Agassi-Meidan book is an alternative to the widespread cynicism. The current epidemic of cynicism is buttressed by current politics and business, but also importantly, if you think that books are still important, by books on persuasion. There are all too numerous books on how to win in all sorts of areas such as business, law, politics,

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and marriage, often disguised in terms of 'win-win, 'tit-for-tat', or 'tit-for-tat with minimal forgiveness' strategies and other such popular applications of game-theoretic notions.

Also, the Agassi-Meidan book is novel in recognizing that certain attitudes towards various viewpoints that one holds (some philosophers call these *epistemic attitudes*) can impose limits to dialogue in order to avoid frustration. Agassi-Meidan mention throughout the book, various limiting attitudes towards dialogue that could cause frustration if one engages with another person who holds those attitudes. First, the attitude of the dogmatist and the fideist, unlike the cynic may have a theory of truth, but will not open certain basic tenets of the viewpoints to discussion. Moreover, if the dogmatist and the fideist are explicit about their viewpoints that are not open to discussion, one can not only avoid frustration when attempting to discuss those viewpoints, but also one can save time and keep friends, by staying away from discussing those viewpoints. Also, unlike the cynic, the relativist has a theory of truth, but will expect discussions to stay within their own point of view, and so the only discussions that can be fruitful with the relativist are discussions that avoid challenging the framework or point of view of the relativist. One further point that Agassi-Meidan make throughout the book about the dogmatist is that one should look inward before labeling someone else as a dogmatist. Specifically, if one finds oneself dogmatic about a certain viewpoint, one might want to engage in a discussion of that viewpoint so as to rid oneself of dogmatism – if one wants to advance one's learning through engaging in dialogue or dialectics. As Agassi-Meidan advise: 'If a debate starts turning around in circles, you may suspect that one party is dogmatic. (It may be you! Just consider this as an option for a while before dismissing it.)' (126) Indeed, the concluding chapter 12, may be a good point to read early on to get a concise summary of how to avoid frustrating debates by doing a little bit of preliminary investigation into one's own epistemic attitudes and those of the other parties concerning the viewpoints under discussion – relativist, dogmatic, fideist, or sceptic.

Within the above schematic overview of learning, the Agassi-Meidan book falls within the second large-scale answer, as stated previously, to the fundamental question of how learning occurs. How does learning occur? Learning occurs in dialogue (virtual in one's mind, or in social reality and wherever). Dialogue is not an incidental social process – something for social gatherings or parties, or for debating societies, or as an intellectual game. Rather dialogue is the central process of how learning occurs, and without dialogue (or at

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least virtual dialogue carried on by the individual reading alternative answers to questions, or thinking of alternative answers to questions), no learning occurs. But is there a widespread understanding of how to have dialogue – given that the majority answer to the question of how learning occurs has been the first answer of building upon previous knowledge? I think not for two major reasons. The first major reason for not understanding how dialogue works is that the concept of dialogue as dialectic has been hijacked by Hegel and Marx and treated as a special logic that sanctions contradiction and this thankfully, has been mentioned in the book: '...followers of the famous philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, including all followers of Karl Marx, repeatedly confuse conflict with contradiction and they even use these two words as synonyms when they declare that some contradictions are true. This makes debate with them useless, since the way to help people see a mistaken [view] of theirs is to show them that they contradict themselves.' (39) Many reject a dialectical view of learning because they associate dialectic with the Hegel-Marx view as welcoming contradiction, where it is well-known according to standard logic that everything follows from a contradiction. Any absurdity can be proven if we allow contradictions. (The reverse applies to truism or tautologies: every thing, even absurdities, imply a truism or tautology.) The second major reason for the widespread misunderstanding of how dialogue works is due to equating dialogue with informal disagreements and exchange of opinions that occurs mainly in coffee shop or pub chatter: how people usually discuss differences about rival sporting teams, or political parties, or even religious differences – in terms of my view as opposed to your view, and your view is just wrong. So, when people over-hear dialogue in serious situations such as in educational institutions they are most likely to only hear the exchange of opinions, and not hear the argumentation.

Hence, in order to overcome the bias against dialogue, we require formal training or, at least instruction, in dialogue – it is largely no longer, if it ever was, an intuitive and well-known process for learning. Thus, using the context just provided, we can see the importance of the Agassi-Meidan book. It is important as an instructional and formal guide on how to have dialogue not only where learning can occur, but as the only means for learning to occur since no learning can occur that is outside dialectic. Moreover, the book has an important sub-text that presents an implicit argument against the three main ideas about dialogue mentioned in the preceding – first, the view of dialogue as frivolous chit-chat, second, the Hegel-Marx hijack of the concept of dialectic, and third, the confusion of dialogue as

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truth-directed with dialogue as persuasion and chicanery (or simply, the replacement of dialogue as truth-directed with dialogue as persuasion).

Before I return to the main body of the book, and discuss the Agassi-Meidan answer to the question of how to have fruitful and fun dialogues where learning can occur, and frustration can be avoided, I want to mention what many readers might already know. Joseph Agassi is known as a historian and philosopher of science whose writings have been one persistent virtual dialogue with his former teacher Karl Popper. So, those readers who know this about Agassi might guess that the book leans in the direction of the general philosophical approach of *critical rationalism,* an approach invented by Popper and honed through the critical discussion of Popper's work by Agassi, and others. I don't mention this to endorse the book, nor to dismiss the book. Rather, I mention this part of the context of the book as another implicit reason for its importance. The book is important as a test case for the general philosophical approach of *critical rationalism*: if the book fails in helping us understand how dialogue can work as the means for learning, then since dialectic is the core of *critical rationalism*, either the book is bad at explaining dialectic; or, dialectic and thereby *critical rationalism* fail at grasping how learning occurs. Not to delay stating another part of my conclusion until the end of the review: I do think the book, as I will discuss in the following, is good at explaining how dialogue can work as a tool for learning. However, I doubt that all frustration with dialogue will go away, even when there is mutual learning going on in the dialogue. Rather, as Agassi-Meidan touch on, societies are inherently conservative, and so, dialogues challenging to current social norms, beliefs, and so forth, are discouraged, inhibited, and even prevented and stopped. More on the social blocks to dialogue later.

The core questions explicitly raised and answered in the book are: Firstly, how does the logic of argumentation go? Secondly, how can using the logic of argumentation avoid the common frustrations of debate when debate does not properly use the logic of argumentation? At this point, I want to make it clear – if it is not so already – that the book is treating argumentation as a social tool or instrument. The authors approach argument or dialectic as social as opposed to *algorithmic*. Dialectic as social does not merely provide the rules for the transformation of symbol sets or sentence sets. Dialectic as social as opposed to *metaphysical*, such as in *dialectical idealism* and *dialectical materialism*, does not describe the laws of the historical development of spiritual nor physical nor economic reality. Nor do the authors, if

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this is not clear by now, treat dialectic as *naturalistic* – such as in *evolutionary epistemology,* and in *cognitive/developmental/social psychology*. Rather, Agassi-Meidan treat dialectic as social, a set of conventions or rules for social interaction that we can agree to use, modify, and even recursively argue about.

I have already mentioned how Agassi-Meidan answer in general the questions of how to conduct argument, and how to avoid frustrating arguments: ask questions, present genuinely alternative answers, and find flaws in the answers, and repeat the cycle as often as needed. Strictly following this procedure will avoid frustration, for the most part, as long as one realizes that not all debates can terminate because some questions are very complex with many layers of sub-questions, and many interconnections with other questions. The difficult and interminable questions are nested and often logically dependent on answers to very remotely connected questions, and after thousands of years of argument, those questions are still on the borders of our knowledge – or we are still immersed in great ignorance about the most important questions that have been asked. However, there are some fine points that need explanation about this simple sounding procedure of asking questions, discussing alternative answers, fault-finding, and repeat. Firstly, we need to agree to the statement of the questions – not merely to their wording but to how to understand those questions and their assumptions or presuppositions (chapter 3). We also have to understand who in the discussion is supposed to find-fault or in some cases, as in existential statements that occur in the discussion or even in the question, who in the discussion is supposed to demonstrate existence since non-existence cannot be demonstrated (chapter 4, 'The Burden of Proof').

However, suppose we can avoid frustration by sticking to the rules or the logic of argumentation – by focusing on clearly understood questions, by looking at genuine alternatives, and by impartially and thoroughly debugging the alternatives – and we avoid such common errors as trying to logically prove non-existence, there is one major unavoidable frustration briefly discussed by Agassi-Meidan, that I think deserves further elaboration. The unavoidable frustration is that societies are inherently conservative, and tacitly block disagreement and dialogue – making ventures into discussing, especially fundamental questions, difficult to carry on even in academia with academic freedom guaranteed (for instance, do qualifying exams qualify? – see *The Hazard Called Education by Joseph Agassi: Essays, Reviews, and Dialogues on Education from Forty-Five Years,*

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2014), let alone in politics, business, religious institutions, and in general daily life. Even in pubs. I explain in the following.

Dialogue can destabilize societies and institutions – including the institutions of science and technology. Generally, societies and institutions prefer stability to instability. So, dialogues that could cause instability when detected are either discouraged, or stopped:

> The most popular political attitude or style is conservatism; it has the backing of the most forceful political principles: conservatism. The conservatives observe a few very common and quite imposing principles. First, individuals learn their mother-tongues and adopt their fathers' professions (notice the dreadful sexism of this expression), and this fixes most of their character. Second, when in Rome, do as the Romans do – or else you do not count and you will scarcely survive. Third, individuals cannot survive without society but society survives in every individual.

> Fourth and last, tradition is the fund of the experience of the whole society. (114)

Attempting to overcome conservatism needs to be done with eyes wide open in order to keep a debate ongoing and not end in frustration by an arbitrary closure of the debate. The risk for arbitrarily stopping the debate is an end to learning, and frustrating the members of the debate. The risk to continuing the debate is destabilizing society, and causing another form of frustration not discussed by Agassi-Meidan. This form of frustration occurs when those who persist in continuing socially challenging discussions are socially exiled. Unfortunately, even in liberal, open societies where change is basically the norm, the inherent conservatism of our main social institutions leads to the social exile of Socratic gadflies or of those who ask challenging questions. Especially now when we are still in the early stages of the accelerating global change due to and as part and parcel of the development and implementation of the super-speed evolution of information technologies, those who challenge are even more threatening to pushing our major institutions into a more unstable state. Those who persist in challenging what is held to be socially fundamental, risk informal ostracism, or social banishment, or social marginalization, or loss of employment and underemployment. Rocking the boat in a social storm leads to throwing the social boat rocker over board to avoid the feared social overturning of our main institutions.

Agassi-Meidan, to reiterate as they themselves do throughout the book, seek criticisms and improvements that they could implement

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in the next edition, and hope this edition of their book improves the abilities of their readers to engage in dialogue, so that they can turn around and help improve the book: 'And if your ability will develop far enough, you will be able to criticize and improve upon this handbook.' (129)

I take the authors at their own word and make the following suggestion: Given the risks and frustrations of challenging one's own society's norms and generally held fundamental beliefs through engaging those norms and beliefs or socially fundamental viewpoints in critical discussion, ask and discuss these questions: How can current day critics gain social encouragement to persist in their activities? Has this question been discussed – and if not, how can we begin the discussion?

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It is difficult to discuss, in a short format review, a collection of essays that examines in detail the points of contact between two distinct fields of enquiry. Doing so can be especially challenging for a reviewer – like myself – insufficiently versed in one of the fields. My located knowledge relates to the philosophical tradition of moral psychology; my understanding of psychoanalysis and its practice is more patchy.

A further dimension to reviewing Jonathan Lear's new book, *Wisdom Won from Illness*, concerns the style of the collection. There is no single line of argument on offer. One might imagine, for example, that Lear is straightforwardly making the case that contemporary moral psychology in the philosophical tradition would benefit from contemporary psychoanalytic theory, and from insights gleaned in the practice of psychoanalysis. This is certainly *one* of the central lines of argument running through the text (and one I discuss below), but there are others – including a framing historical argument situating psychoanalysis within a Western ethical project that Lear takes to have been variously sketched by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

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