

## Foreword

This issue of the ABAC Journal ranges widely both in relation to geography and academic discipline. A number of philosophers and other thinkers have focused on the notion of a conversation as a critical element of intellectual life. Rather than seeing intellectual life as a simple matter of linear truth-seeking, these scholars find that the play of various opinions and perspectives provides a unique opportunity for the development of concepts and, more importantly, for the development of consensus and mutual understanding among men and women who may begin with very different cultural orientations and belief sets. This model of intellectual life is very congruent with the basic assumptions behind the ABAC Journal, an international publication with a readership that intentionally transcends academic and cultural boundaries.

The initial article by Professor Dr. David Tin Win provides a fascinating look into traditional Buddhist ritual ways of dealing with death in Myanmar culture. The issues raised by human mortality are of course universal and exposure to various concepts of death and the afterlife certainly can expand the awareness of the nature of mortality even among those who may come from quite divergent traditions. Death is an integral aspect of life and this consideration also provides the possibility of an expansion of our understanding of life and the meaning of a good life. One particularly interesting aspect of Dr. Win's article is its incorporation of dialogue in the form of e-mails and phone conversations, demonstrating from within the importance of dialogue in intellectual life.

Professor Mohammad A. Ashraf's and Muhammad S. I. Noor's article considers what has been considered by many an important technique of encouraging ground-up economic growth in the developing world: microfinancing. It has been proposed that programs that provide financing to small-scale economic enterprises can play an important role in raising the standard of living among the poor of the developing world. Looking at the specific situation of Bangladesh, the authors provide an evaluation of the success of MFIs in that country and find that for all of the attractiveness of the technique it did not in this context achieve its goals. What is distinctive about the study is that it is designed to measure this success from the standpoint of those who participate in the MFI enterprises, thus adding an important and perhaps underheard perspective to the ongoing debate about microfinance.

The next two articles confront the issue of the possibility of ongoing dialogue directly through the consideration of learning of foreign languages, in both cases considering English, which tends to act as the lingua franca in many parts of the world. Only with a shared language in which to communicate can dialogue and an exchange of information take place in an efficient manner and thus the consideration of language learning is an important one. Dr. Pornpun Oranpattanachai examined the importance of English reading strategies used by a group of Thai pre-engineering students, some of whom were very proficient and others of which

were less proficient. This consideration of strategy is very important as there may be no single method of gaining skills in a foreign language that is appropriate for everyone or appropriate for all types of texts. Dr. Kasma Suwanarak, on the other hand, looks at the effectiveness of native speakers of English and those who may have learned English after mastering their native language with regard to the teaching of spoken rather than written form of the language. This has become an important issue in the professional life of teachers of English in Thailand and thus has an important impact on the educational system responsible for developing English competency. It also raises the issue of the nature of competency and thus the basis for the ongoing dialogue that the teaching is designed to elicit.

The final article goes to the heart of concerns of dialogue on the world stage. Only if this dialogue occurs at the level of nation and individuals will it be possible to avoid the wars and conflicts that impede human, economic, and social development throughout the world. In his article, Dr. Noel Jones looks at the functioning of an institution that has as its main purpose fostering cooperation and conflict resolution on the international level, the United Nations. Dr. Jones finds that the particular power of the permanent members of the Security Council, the most important body of the UN, in fact prevents the United Nations from being representative of the total body of its members and thus impedes the effectiveness of the United Nations as an institution which furthers world peace. One way of interpreting this claim is to see a weakness of the UN as one of an inequality that prevents it from being an effective source of dialogue.

In this issue of the ABAC Journal there is also included a book review and article review by Professor Thierry de Gorguette d'Argoeuves in which he states: "What is the possible link between Virtual Reality, Metaphysics, Process Philosophy and Politics? The link is, according to the author of the two reviews, an ontological one. Through technology, the "virtual" has invaded our daily lives as a reality, but it has always been the "essential part of the being". The virtual stands after the potential and before the actual. Highlighted by Process Philosophers, the process of virtualization starts to enter the political arena and represents the continuous building of the self".

With these five articles and two reviews relevant to issues of dialogue, we hope that this issue of the journal will itself not only be about conversation but play an important role within a number of ongoing conversations.

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