

## **Organizing and destruction: a Socratic dialogue**

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*Abstract.* By means of a brief Socratic dialogue, I consider the question of whether organizing involves destruction, prefaced by a poem of course.

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*What does “organization” mean*

*To trees evergreen—*

*Seasons are but one,*

*Time is undone.*

*Socrates:* Donald Davidson writes, “We cannot attach a clear meaning to the notion of organizing a single object (the world, nature etc.) unless that object is understood to contain or consist in other objects. Someone who sets out to organize a closet arranges the things in it. If you are told not to organize the shoes and shirts, but the closet itself, you would be bewildered. How would you organize the Pacific Ocean? Straighten out its shores, perhaps, or relocate its islands, or destroy its fish.” (1973-4: 14)

*Fish:* Does organizing involve destruction? Is it not about the arrangement of beings rather than destruction?

*Socrates:* I am not sure.

*Fish:* If you are reorganizing the university, you may change the structure of faculties and schools, having fewer faculties say. And you may relocate staff. But you are not destroying staff,

are you?

*Socrates:* But if you have been told to reorganize the material in an essay, you may have to remove certain sentences as part of that task. They are called signpost sentences. “Now I am going to consider this objection...” Those sentences express the old organization, not the new one.

*Fish:* Well, I don’t know that much about writing essays, but fish are not signposts are they? A fish is not a signpost saying, “Sunken submarine this way,” is it?

*Socrates:* If organizing can sometimes involve destruction, then the absence of destruction is not of the essence of organizing. And for any case of organizing, you cannot rule out destruction.

*Fish:* Socrates, I have to go somewhere now. I cannot see how to object to you, but still I don’t agree. Destroying the fish is never part of organizing the Pacific Ocean.

## **Reference**

Davidson, D. 1973-74. On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme. *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47: 5-20.