



# Dialectical Readings: Three Types of Interpretations

*Stephen N. Dunning*

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Interpretation pervades human thinking. Whether perception or experience, spoken word or written theory, whatever enters our consciousness must be interpreted in order to be understood. Every area of inquiry—art and literature, philosophy and religion, history and the social sciences, even many aspects of the natural sciences—involves countless opportunities to interpret the object of inquiry according to very different paradigms. These paradigms may derive from the language we speak, the nature of our education, or personal preferences. The abundance and diversity of paradigms make interpretation both fascinating in its complexity and often frustrating for the conflicts it generates.

In *Dialectical Readings*, Dunning distinguishes three types of interpretation, each defined in terms of a distinctive dialectical way of thinking: theoretical interpretation, which assumes binary oppositions; transactional interpretation, which seeks reciprocal relations; and transformational interpretation, which discerns paradoxical meanings. Dunning offers new and insightful readings of familiar texts by B. F. Skinner, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Lee Benson, Roland Barthes, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Michel Foucault and sheds new light on works by Thomas Kuhn, Joseph Campbell, Reinhold Niebuhr, Søren Kierkegaard, Paul Tillich, and Paul Ricoeur. *Dialectical Readings* enables readers to recognize diverse dialectical approaches to understanding—their own as well as those of others—in a way that provides new and helpful insights into a wide variety of subjects in which conflicting interpretations abound.

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