

[Chapter 1]

Therapeutic Discourse

[URL: TherapeuticDiscourse]

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You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent-resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension." I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, we must see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.

— Martin Luther King, Jr. *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (1963:¶10)

I believe that no one can "save" his fellowman by making the choice for him. All that one man can do for another is to show him the alternatives truthfully and lovingly, yet without sentimentality or illusion. Confrontation with the true alternatives may

awaken all the hidden energies in a person and enable him to choose life as against death. If he cannot choose life, no one else can breathe life into him.

— Erich Fromm, quoted in *Maryknoll Magazine* [n.d., alas]

I Issues with IROGs

The previous essay presents IROGs as the solution to the problem of authenticity. Given that one has multiple Goods and cannot find a way to satisfy them all, and given that one knows each of the Goods intimately, one is able to conduct a true discourse among the personas and to settle on an IROG that is truly agree to by all one's personas. The IROG is then one's authentic self, at least for choosing action in the world to satisfy one's Goods. As long as the original conditions apply, one is able to function without internal conflict.¹ When I negotiate an IROG, I have a sense of unity among all my personas, and I am able to present a single face to the world.²

¹Here I distinguish between tension and conflict. There will of course be a tension among the different personas, but that tension comes from their common, contingently objective circumstances, not from each other. Personas are in conflict, as distinguished from tension, when one persona peremptorily rejects the claims of other personas.

The awkward phrase “contingently objective” characterizes constraints that are not under our control but yet may change. We may discover a creative solution that circumvents or transforms the problem we face. Our technology may eliminate old constraints. Socially imposed constraints may cease to exist. One's self-understanding of one's Good(s) may change. Any such changes may be reason to re-open negotiations among the personas and agree on a new IROG. But these changes are still not under one's control, at least immediately, and so the situation one faces in creating any IROG is objective at the moment, even though it might change.

²The distinction between tension and conflict is not new. It goes back at least to Martin Luther King, Jr., as shown in the epigraph above, and surely Gandhi before him, and probably others before Gandhi. I originally made the distinction in the context of therapy, as presented in the short essay in Appendix I, [“Pressure Is Love”](#).

II Senses of the Good Can Be Severely Unreconciled

Unfortunately, this happy state of authenticity can be, and often is, difficult to reach in practice.

Here are some sources of this difficulty:

- The ultimate source of difficulty is a conflict among personas. There are at least two ways in which such conflict is played out: open warfare and internal oppression.
 - In open warfare, evenly matched personas take command adventitiously, each seizing the reins when it can, but never giving up the struggle for them even when it can't. While individual battles may be lost or won, the conflict itself never ends. For example, I have a bad habit – less now than in the past, mercifully – of cycling between two personas. Goof-off Steve plays Baldur's Gate (say) until, in a fit of revulsion, Parental Steve overthrows him, swears off video games, and works on what Parental Steve thinks Steve "ought" to do: professional writing, washing dishes, replying to neglected emails, whatever. This continues until, in another fit of revulsion, Goof-off Steve overthrows Parental Steve, rejects his dictatorial habits, and defiantly start playing video games again. Neither persona really accepts the other's claims, and so they do not negotiate with each other but simply become (or remain) dominant as much as possible. I do get my various needs met to some degree within this pattern, but they are not met well. First, there is no guarantee that I am striking a reasonable balance of time and attention between these two personas. Second, because these two personas won't talk to each other, I am unlikely to discover any creative solutions to pursuing both Goods effectively. Finally, and worst, I am in a constant state of war inside. Neither persona lets the

other enjoy itself. When Goof-off Steve plays Baldur's Gate, a substantial portion of my experience is of Parental Steve's criticisms and Good-off Steve's holding his hands over his ears and chanting, "I'm not listening!" When Parental Steve does my professional writing, house cleaning, and so on, a substantial proportion of my attention goes to beating back Goof-off Steve's resentment at having to do these things. If my life is a heart, then this heart is only fibrillating, not pumping. I do a tenth of what I might do otherwise, and I don't get to enjoy what I do manage to do.

- The other way in which internal conflict is played out is the oppression of one persona by another. Xx...

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[Gives us multiple personalities. (Distinguish this from the practical questions of false memories, iatrogenic pathology, deception.)]

[Add a link to [Revenge Is Not a Moral Emotion, i.e., Has No Weight in Moral Decisionmaking](#) and [Praise and Blame Are Not Moral Categories.](#)]

[Note also that while therapeutic discourse *includes* deliberative / rational discourse, it also includes dealing with emotional attachments or antipathies.]

[I need to extend my discussion of therapeutic discourse (when applied to morality) to include material showing that "therapeutic discourse" doesn't just mean psychotherapy. Examples: Gandhi's work. MLK Jr.'s work? Counseling the child whose parents have forced him into

counseling? Counseling the crying baby in the hospital? Charlie counseling his cat? Madres de la Plaza?]

III In a World of Respect for Each Others' Goods, How Can Therapeutic Discourse Be

Legitimate?

If IROGs are non-rational and contingent and can't be judged from the outside, how can we justify therapeutic discourse? Before answering that question, however, let's look at how people might give evidence of their lack of authenticity and the unreconciled nature of their IROG;

- the pursuit of different Goods without rhyme or reason
- the pursuit of what appear to be crazy Goods, e.g., being flogged
- non-truthfulness, even beyond strategic action³
- repression instead of agreement; inability to speak freely
- anger
- sense of meaninglessness

We are left with a confusing situation. On the one hand, people certainly can have problems with finding authenticity, and they generally give external signs of their inward conflicts. On the other hand, we have no philosophical authority to claim we understand them, much less to take it upon ourselves to wreak therapy upon them or reform their sense of the Good. Even if they ask for therapy, we still cannot know that we understand them or, even with their permission (an

³I am ignoring here the issue of whether strategic behavior might always be evidence of some problem of authenticity. My words are not meant to imply either that it is or that it isn't.

uncertain concept anyway in the face of inauthenticity), judge what's right and wrong for them.

What are we to do?

IV Therapeutic Discourse Is for Authenticity

[Therapeutic discourse is to help to gain authenticity by modeling acceptance of all parts and let the client proceed from there. Suggestions and observations must be made, if at all, with no *moral* valence but rather in a sense of play & experimentation. Resolution takes care of itself.]

[We rarely, if ever, know for sure whether we are dealing with a primary Good or an IROG. If the latter, the original reconciliation can be reevaluated, reconsidered.]

If authenticity is the reconciliation of one's personas, how does one reach it? [Let's unpack that: *Not* a moral imperative (at least within oneself; being authentic to others is a different story. Ain't broke, don't fix.)

Generally a natural process that takes care of itself. One *experiences* cognitive dissonance or *recognizes* the conflict between what one does now and what one will do later. Cognitive development takes work, sure, but it just trots along. And if there's no real spur to make it trot, who cares if it stands still? Deontological, not teleological.

General process is just speaking to each other and coming up with a best solution. And if not perfect, then we return to it, either when the issue arises again or at our leisure. ("Strong emotion recollected in tranquility.")

[All through this, my image is of Piaget's "pouring water" (conservation) experiment.

Perhaps I need to include a description of it as an appendix.]

So in one's sense there is no need for any "therapeutic discourse" essay: either authenticity takes care of itself, or else it doesn't matter. No problem either way.

Therapeutic discourse is not the property of official therapists (psychotherapists, psychologists, counselors, etc.). Anyone can play. Nevertheless, therapists have several advantages. They have training in observation, in being sensitive to the client. They acquire an armory of techniques that others (and they themselves) have found useful. If they are trained well, they are able to respect the autonomy of the client. And their official position creates an atmosphere of safety, so that clients find it easier to trust the counselor to respect their autonomy than they would if talking to the next stranger on the street. I emphasize, however, that none of these are the exclusive property of therapists. I know many non-therapists who are sensitive to others. (And I've known a couple of therapists who weren't.) I know a number of people who know a variety of useful therapeutic techniques, either instinctively or by observation and experience. I know people who can talk directly to others while still respecting their autonomy. (And I've known a couple of therapists who couldn't.) And while the lack of an office might make it hard for someone off the street to trust one, there are advantages to being a civilian: one knows people longer, one doesn't carry the implicit threat of being Officially Right, and so on.

Whoever conducts it, therefore, therapeutic discourse is possible. Our role is to hold up, as if a mirror, what one sees. A wooing, not an abduction, etc.

V Therapeutic Discourse Can Be Useful

Nevertheless, therapeutic discourse can still be useful, and there are situations where it is even necessary. Useful in assisting the resolution. Noting and highlighting the conflict: *suggesting* resolution. Nothing beyond what the person would do naturally, but quicker. When I say it is “useful”, I *only* mean useful to the person seeking authenticity. The therapist is seeking the client’s sense of the Good. The therapist will inevitably, inescapably be influenced by his own understandings (of the nature of the conflict; of the possible resolution(s)), but that doesn’t *drive* the counseling. And if the client adopts the therapist’s suggested resolution; it’s still the client’s choice; he isn’t a victim of the therapist. (Here I’m excluding manipulation. These issues belong in the next section.)

VI Therapeutic Discourse Can Be Necessary: Recovering Authenticity by Reconciling the Alienated Personae

In the conservation experiment there is no pain associated with the different perspectives. Maybe effort in switching perspectives (turning one’s head, either literally or metaphorically) but no pain. (And I’m not sure yet how to clarify the distinction.) The subject has (ideally) no emotional stake in saying that the water in one glass is more, less, or the same, compared to the other.

In some cases, however, each persona is laden with a *rejection* of the other personae.

They aren’t just *different* perspectives; they are bad, wrong, naughty, whatever.

Such pain causes dissociation.

Hard for personae to recognize each other. Hard to talk to each other. Hard to remember one perspective when one is in the other. Freudian slips; ignoring consequences.

Goal of the therapist: to remember the different personas, even when the client can't. To recognize them *all*, to model for the client and acceptance of all, even if they need to be reconciled and refined. ("Yes! That water *does* look like more! And yes, it *does* look like less when you turn your head! No, nothing's wrong! – let's just see how these perceptions fit together.") ("The people aren't the problem; the problem is the problem.")

[Is repression a solution? Note Fritz Leiber's *Fafhrd & Mouser* story about the man who, afraid of his dogs, locked them in a cellar without food or water. Their howls got weaker & weaker but then came back again stronger when they died & turned into spirit dogs, whom he tried to keep sated by feeding them other people.]

VII Conditions for Therapeutic Discourse

"I believe that no one can 'save' his fellowman by making the choice for him. All that one man can do for another is to show him the alternatives truthfully and lovingly, yet without sentimentality or illusion. Confrontation with the true alternatives may awaken all the hidden energies in a person and enable him to choose life as against death. If he cannot choose life, no one else can breathe life into him."

— Erich Fromm, quoted in *Maryknoll Magazine* (xx, 197x, p.xx)

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A. Against some misuses and misunderstandings of therapeutic discourse

[XX FLESH THIS OUT: ISSUE OF FALSE MEMORIES: THEIR FACTUAL TRUTH IS NOT THE ISSUE; TAKE THEM AS METAPHORICAL REALITY. *SOMETHING* HAPPENED; THE CLIENT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ACTUAL PERSON IS DIFFERENT. ALSO NOTE THAT THIS POSITION IMPLIES NOT GETTING INTO

JUDGMENT OF THE OTHER BUT RATHER LISTENING TO THE CLIENT’S (CURRENT) EXPERIENCE.]

B. No fixed theory

[XX THEORIES OF PERSONALITY DYNAMICS ACT AS PLACEHOLDERS, NOT TEMPLATES. THEY ARE USEFUL AS A START TO THERAPY, BUT NOT AS ITS BE-ALL AND END-ALL. RECONSTRUCTIVE SCIENCE; *ANYTHING* ELSE (EVEN WITH THE BEST OF INTENTIONS) DENIES THE CLIENT FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RECOGNITION, BECAUSE IT PUTS THE THERAPIST IN THE POSITION OF PRETENDING THAT HE KNOWS THE CLIENT BETTER THAN THE CLIENT DOES. THIS IS A FORM OF IDIOLATRY, IN PHILLIP WOGAMAN’S (19XX ON FREE SPEECH) SENSE.]

C. Therapeutic discourse must be mutual

Here is a very tricky and important point. The (unfortunate but apparently unavoidable) term “therapy” connotes an unequal relationship: e.g., me the “healthy” therapist, you the “mentally ill” patient. Even if decisions are supposedly “in the end left in the patient’s hands”,⁴ I risk nothing when talking to you. I am shielded by believing that if you do not accept my advice or see any problem in my behavior, that’s never because I am wrong and need to rethink my own beliefs but rather because you are “resistant” or, at worst, because I don’t yet understand your

⁴Q: How many therapists does it take to change a light bulb? A: Only one, but the light bulb has to *want* to change.

Q: How many economists need to change a light bulb? A: None, because the invisible hand of the market will replace inefficient producers of light by new, more efficient ones. (Once more I am indebted to Aki Halme for this little bit of silliness.)

illness. True therapy is always a discourse, just as true teaching means an openness to being educated oneself. To convince you, I have to be open to being convinced by you.⁵

Communicative actions vs. strategic action: oriented toward understanding / agreement vs. oriented toward an outcome I have preordained.

This is not to say that the counselor and client occupy identical roles. Perhaps in the final analysis they do, but within the limits of a specific counseling relationship the counselor and the client have different roles and make different commitments. The counselor commits to being knowledgeable about psychological dynamics (and to continue this study), and to have trained (and continue training) h/her empathic sensitivities, and to remain aware of the client's fundamental humanity even when the client reveals the worst, most shameful feelings, and so on. The client commits to work to reveal these feelings, and to listen carefully to what the counselor says, and to maintain the physical safety of the counselor, and to paying the counselor (if payment is part of the bargain), and so on. As I say above, these roles are not beyond challenge, and I think it is well for both of them to recognize that each ultimately has the right to renegotiate the relationship. This keeps the counselor from believing s/he is God and the client from believing that s/he is a victim. *Any* lesser relationship is, finally, abusive.⁶

⁵This goes back to the idea that one can have as one's authentic Good only what one has the right to reject. Hence the rebelliousness of teenagers as they move out of subordination to their parents and into adulthood. Parents' suggestions of possible Goods get bound up with resentment at the implicit coercion, even if the Goods themselves are acceptable. To put this another way, it is the way of relating that is the real issue, far more central than any specific Good. (I will note that the "natural method" of child-raising, which I discuss [elsewhere](#), avoids these problems by refusing to subordinate children in the first place.)

⁶Here we are faced with issues of morality and its relationship with authenticity. I just note the connection here; the real discussion of these issues appears in Chapters 2 & 3.

VIII No Guarantee of Success

[xx Nothing says therapeutic discourse will succeed on a fixed schedule. This is a conceptual model, to help us understand what we're doing. But actual counseling is extremely difficult. Start with the situation that people don't want to be counseled,⁷ and – the same thing, really – their neuroses are well-defended. Issues of trust. Issues of social embeddedness and mental habit.]

[xx I won't talk here much about how to do therapeutic discourse. I'm pretty good at it (in some forums), but except for a few examples incidental to other issues I don't go into it in this work. It is at root only the application of empathy, and I want to concentrate on empathy, not the many methods useful in implementing it. All I know is that therapeutic discourse *must* occur. Why? Well, we need to deal with differences of the Good in a way different from "rational" discourse over authenticity or morality. "Rational" discourse, as commonly understood, when done alone, does not deal with the painful emotions that get in the way of clear thinking. Reversing our ordinary understandings of reason and emotion, discourse without a way of dealing with emotions becomes irrational, while discourse that allows the expression of emotion can remain rational.]

⁷Mediators often face a worse situation than counselors in this respect. Of course, some counselors deal with clients whose presence is required as a condition of their parole.