

September 30, 2002

LEVEL: 10

[Chapter 4]

***The Only Ultimately Reliable Political Stance Is the
Elimination of All Oppression***

[URL: ReliablePoliticalStance]

SECTIONS (& perhaps subsections):

- I The Oppression Olympics and the Importance of Solidarity
- II Tactics vs. Strategy in Addressing Oppression

Thus suffering completely fills the human soul and conscious mind, no matter whether the suffering is great or little. Therefore the ‘size’ of human suffering is absolutely relative.

— Viktor E. Frankl (1984:64)

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[Note that this follows from my ideas of the relational principle and (in particular, and consequently) of seeing one another as fellow members of a common moral universe. How so? Well, the common moral universe comes down from a sense that any line drawn between me and thee is bullshit. One might draw it for a temporary, contingent, pragmatic reason, but it is bullshit to pretend it has any deeper validity. If we allow any such line to be given validity, we open ourselves up to separating ourselves from others through any other bullshit reason. Justifications for separation are easy to make up; the only response is to see that they are all bullshit. Thus, as my bumper sticker says, “no one is free when anyone is oppressed”: once we open Pandora’s box of separation, we are all, implicitly, under the threat of being separated if we don’t behave.

I Title of First Section

Thought: We put up with people because of their enormous needs. Vicky thought she should get things by right, and I suppose she died not knowing that people gave them to her because they just saw this as an irrational need. (Or perhaps she knew, subconsciously, but she could not admit that and certainly could not thank other people for their tolerance of her little ways.) Perhaps the same is true of people with high n Ach, high n Aff, high n Pow, etc. David McClelland seemed to think so, or at least implied it indirectly when he said that people with high n Ach weren't fun to be around.

I'm thinking the same thing of people who pursue wealth ferociously: they are sick, but people let them have their wealth, for two reasons, one good and one bad. The good reason: because we can see it means so much to them. The bad reason: because they screw us out of it. Our tolerance of them is not matched by their tolerance of us, or at any rate, the system effects result in the suppression of some forms of life and the non-justified advancement of others. In our society, of course, money (and/= material possessions) has become the standard to which attention and general social discourse orient.

I just realized that this is a more general form of the problem I laid out in my "Heritable Intelligence" article. Certainly I have been hypnotized by it in both my teaching and my general critical orientation. I notice that my students are also dominated by it. The women's movement was caught in it by stressing only one form of liberation instead of the general liberation of all women to be respected for what they choose. Habermas broke free of that with his distinction between communicative action and strategic action; his critical work does not condemn wealth but just its *colonization* of other ways of relating, meaning that these other ways of life are

ignored at best; more usually they are directly bashed when they interfere with the colonizers' desires and are forced out by the attention the colonizers force the colonized to pay to the colonizers' view of things. It's hard to think when someone is (metaphorically) jumping up and down beside you shouting "Look at me, look at me!"

Now, back when I talked about Vicky I started to write a paragraph about my own irrationalities but hastily stopped. This discussion cut too close to the bone. But I think that for my own intellectual integrity and more importantly¹ for my own mental health, I need to face these irrationalities. I can't do so entirely on my own, however; the deeper the irrationality, the better-defended it is and the more I need the independent perspective of others. And I need that – we all need that – even in recognition of the possibility that their heads might get bitten off. I can do some things myself, but as I say, I don't think it's possible to do so alone.

So what are my irrationalities? The thing that pops into my head first is my demand that stuff be given to me because I'm smart – because of my "potential". I see my writing of this book as a redemption of myself, as in,

I've been telling people all these years that I have profound ideas in me and am waiting for them to mature, and I've been a bad teacher as a result – forcing ideas on students that they clearly aren't interested in, refusing to recognize that they and I are embedded in a certain machine and that it's not my responsibility to force them into material they didn't anticipate and don't want to learn. I've also been a bad colleague in this way: not producing the stuff that will get me and the department recognized. I absolve myself of a bit of this on the grounds of "academic freedom", our recognition that we as a society benefit as a result of letting some people explore ideas freely. However, that doesn't give me license to screw the people I'm immediately

¹I say "more importantly" because at the moment I don't see "intellectual integrity" as a Good unto itself but rather as one more absolutist desire that I demand people grant me. I suppose it is indeed an absolute Good, but only within some limits that I'm not recognizing, limits having to do with our need to accommodate such a Good to the demands of other, also-important Goods.

with – students and colleagues – for some abstract goal. (This is a concrete example of the issue I discuss in the essay, “[Weighing Direct vs. Indirect Relationships](#)”.) At any rate, I see this book is a redemption of all the claims I’ve made for special treatment and for tolerance of my injustices: “*This* is why I demanded these things of you.”

However, I think it’s unwise to tie the two together. Far better (more honest, even if more painful) to acknowledge how I’ve been relating to people and to work with these issues separately, leaving the book to take care of itself and not get distorted by having to bear the burden of justifying my life.

My major issue was to figure myself out. I believed that the problems I face (from facing them in my childhood, with less understanding) were parallel to / isomorphic with the problems of liberalism itself – a parallelism between personality structure and social structure.² I still believe that. I have been taught about the perils of doing this – projection, number one, and committing the fallacy of composition, number two – and I agree that these are real concerns that must be considered. But I also still believe that if these concerns are recognized and properly addressed, which I have tried to do, the connection can be made.

Now why am I saying this here? Probably in the end the discussion above will have to be parceled out among essays more appropriate to the subject. But the reason it appears in this essay is to say that oppression exists for all forms of life. Liberation movements like the women’s movement of the 1950s-1980s reproduced the oppression by saying that women should seek only one form of life, or maybe that feminism was only about the denial of one form of life. But in the denial of other forms of life, this women’s movement reproduced the existing dominant form of

²That’s why I always liked works that rested on that, e.g., McClelland (19xx [and many others]) and Aronoff (19xx [and many others]).

life's suppression of different forms of life generally. It wasn't a totally bad thing, in that certain types of women with the desire for a particular form of life (i.e., the professional way of life) were indeed being oppressed, and also in that each instance of a demand for liberation carries with it the potential for its extension. But the general principle that all forms of life need support: that is always still further on. So the process of the extension of liberation in these limited steps is a hermetic project.