FEELINGS, ORIENTATION, AND SURVIVAL:

The Psychological Dimension of the Current Human Crisis

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Thoughtful people are aware that in the year 1967, there is a world-wide crisis in human history which is also a crisis in the history of all life on earth. Our very survival is in question: The possibility exists that the human species may destroy itself, and perhaps all other species also. Not only is this outcome of the evolutionary experiment of our planet likely, but it even seems to be increasing in probability. I assert that the present state of the human condition can be characterized by a single phrase: **acute suicidal emergency**.

When a human being is determined to kill himself, attempts to prevent the suicide by means of persuasion or coercion not only predictably prove ineffectual, but worse, they virtually insure that the suicidal person will end up by committing suicide: the "persuader" constitutes an "external" audience for whom the suicidal person can then play out his "internal" drama. Generally, in this kind of emergency, suicide can be averted if and only if the person who is contemplating taking his own life can be helped to discover for himself some aspect of his situation which he had previously overlooked, which in effect means to discover and eliminate some elements of confusion or disorientation in his assessment of his own situation that made him unable to see alternatives more constructive and satisfying than suicide. Once alternatives more satisfying than suicide are clearly seen as real possibilities, then little incentive to commit suicide remains. However, the discovery of satisfying alternatives to suicide constitutes a major reorientation, and to the best of my knowledge, no therapist reports that he is able to catalyze such a reorientation every time it is needed. Even when a man determined to kill himself is under the best care available, the outcome usually remains in question for a long while.

But in this instance, the 'patient' comprises the entire human race, which of course is made up of me and you and about 3 billion others much like us. In this essay, I intend relentlessly to address myself to the task of describing and thus challenging the disorientation observable in contemporary human behavior: your behavior, dear reader, and also my own. Many of the things I shall say should prove unpalatable in direct proportion to the degree to which they are correct.

For the sake of analysis, I subdivide this crisis into four interdependent problems, which in briefest summary can be stated thus:

 1. We do not know, reliably, how not to have wars;
 2. We have not figured out how to stop having too many human babies;
 3. We are contaminating the biosphere, destroying the biological resources which make it possible for life to continue; and
 4. We do not have sane societies: nowhere have we created human environments truly fit for humans to live in.

I assert that these problems are interdependent, so much so that it seems that any one of them cannot be successfully dealt with until the next has been solved; until it becomes a puzzle to know where to begin. For instance, by unrestrained use of our present weapons of war, there

1

is no question that we now have the power to sterilize our planet. In our efforts to work out alternatives to war satisfactory to all parties concerned, we may show great ingenuity and courage, but still, if we do not bring the rate of human population growth under conscious control, eventually the increasing demands of the increasing populations for an inherently limited supply of food and other necessities will lead to armed conflict. If we succeed in avoiding war and in abating population growth but continue to contaminate the environment with pesticides, detergents, industrial wastes, sewage, smog, etc., then we shall certainly continue to make the globe less and less habitable; we may in fact soon succeed in sterilizing our planet without resorting to all-out war. And as long as we allow our societies to remain inherently dissociated or neurotic, with the result that, growing up under these existing conditions, practically every human being on the face of the earth comes to be chronically at war with himself, we are unlikely to have enough available "free energy" to solve any of our urgent problems within the finite period available to us; for the energies of a person at war with himself are mainly spent in trying to keep from solving his own problems. In particular, we are not likely to succeed in solving the problems of being at war with others while each of us remains at war with himself.

Perhaps here is our clue: Through each of these problems, there appears to be a common denominator of psychopathology. I shall focus on the psychological dimension of our crisis, and take a good hard look at the exact behavioral mechanisms by which we are stabilizing our own intra-personal problems. When we can see what we are in fact doing to stop ourselves from solving our own problems, then we should be able progressively to stop blocking our own problem-solving activities; and as we gradually abandon the frozen posture of self-paralysis, I assert that we will become able decisively to handle other aspects of our urgent problems also.

In a previous publication (1), it was pointed out that human beings constitute mechanisms for generating and testing behavioral hypotheses, and that human behavior is therefore intrinsically self-correcting in the same sense that scientific research is self-correcting. But it was also pointed out that under chronically unfavorable circumstances, a human organism may despair and become resigned to the universal misery, and that actions performed under conditions of resignation are NOT self-correcting. For example, 'neurotic' symptoms, in which resignation constitutes a necessary component, are not ordinarily eliminated by our spontaneous self-correcting activities, but rather tend repeatedly to recur for decades without significant change.

Furthermore, it was asserted that resignation can develop in one man's life only in the presence of widespread resignation in the social milieu which forms the matrix of that man's life; and finally, that the resignation of one man demonstrably affects all other men. In this essay, I shall examine in greater detail the extremes of human behavior: those operations which make up unimpaired self-correcting behavior, and those operations which make up self-paralyzed behavior; and I shall examine the relations between intra-personal and inter-personal transactions under both kinds of conditions. These considerations will offer further documentation for the assertion that it is no longer necessary to REMAIN at war with oneself. The process of making friends with oneself proves painful and difficult, but at this point in human history it is at least FEASIBLE. And sanity turns out to be even more contagious than unsanity or insanity, once we know for ourselves how each one works. Thus the point in human history when racial suicide

seems closest at hand also constitutes the point in human history where racial suicide makes the least sense.

In order to develop my arguments, I shall now incorporate the two notions of a physical-biological-social field which forms the matrix of all life, and the self-correcting structure of human behavior, into two related "organizing principles," which I call **one's relationships with self-and-others**, and **one's representing-operations**.

a) RELATIONSHIPS WITH SELF-AND-OTHERS

Each human being has relationships with other humans. Also, perhaps equally obviously, each human being has relationships with himself. But it is not generally recognized that these two sets of relationships are **isomorphic**: We treat others the same way we treat ourselves; be treat ourselves the same way we treat others. For example: If at a given moment I find myself nagging someone else ("Johnny! Stand up straight!"), then I must conclude that at times I nag myself also; if in my attempts to understand my own actions I discover that I am bullying myself, like the brutal police officer pursuing the third degree, then I must conclude that at times I bully others. If I do in fact treat myself-and-others that way, I am not a good friend to myself; what is more, others will see me as one who (at least at times) acts unfriendly, and they will defend themselves against me accordingly. Under such circumstances, my life will be less well sustained and nourished than otherwise it might be.

b) REPRESENTING-OPERATIONS

As a consequence of the way living things are organized, I can detect only those events which produce certain kinds of changes inside my skin. When light falls on my retina, it produces small photo-chemical changes in the nerve-endings there. By means of further nervous-system activities (**representing-operations**), I can produce a perception, an image, a picture; ;and I might say, "I SEE something." (If I cannot or will not perform these activities, no one else can perform them for me.) What is more, I may make the guess that if I reach out with my hand, I will encounter an object "out there" which corresponds with the nervous-system representing I have done. Of course, when acted upon and thus put to test, this guess may or may not be falsified. A mirage is a real phenomenon, which can be explained in physical terms, seen, and can even be photographed; but it will not slake the thirst of a desert traveler.

Likewise, LIGHT TOUCH, DEEP PRESSURE, PAIN, SOUND, SMELL, and TASTE are words used to name some of the feelings which can be produced by appropriate manipulation of other kinds of nerve-endings in my integument. But any of these sensations can also be produced by appropriately manipulated electric currents, or by other harder-to-specify conditions, e.g. hallucinations. Therefore, in any given instance, I remain uncertain, I cannot know for sure, precisely what transactions between me and my environment have resulted in the sensations I feel.

Here, then, is a fundamental issue: "The things out there" are intrinsically different from "the pictures in my head." To confuse the two, to take the mirage for a lake, constitutes a fundamental error, and will necessarily get us into trouble. Adaptive (**sane**) behavior consists not in abandoning the guessing-game (which we couldn't do even if we wanted to), but rather in TESTING our guesses. I can never know for sure whether what I SEE is "really there"; but if I also

HEAR, SMELL, TASTE, and FEEL it, my uncertainty is lessened for I can then operate on the basis of a TESTED GUESS.

Let us now interpret my preliminary remarks about the current human crisis in terms of these two "organizing principles." In light of the isomorphism of one's relationships with self-and-others, the existence of the planetary life-threatening problems posed by the social institution of war, the population explosion, and environmental contamination, implies the existence of some species-wide distortion of our relationships with self-and-others; and since we arrive at the actions which display our relationships with self-and-others by means of our representing-operations, the existence of these problems and this distortion implies some species-wide distortion of our representing-operations. The immediate problem in this essay is to show the structure and the operation of these distortions. Since the assumptions underlying behavioral distortions prove not only self-paralyzing but also self-defending (1), it should prove particularly difficult for each one of us to let himself feel the existence in himself of these distortions. Therefore I shall examine these relations in somewhat greater detail.

From what I have said, it follows that when I am in contact with you, I form some kind of picture of you. My picture of you is not YOU, but rather is a part of ME. It is useful to me only in the ways that a map is useful; and it shows the same limitations as any other map: It can never be complete, but necessarily must leave out many details; moreover, it necessarily must include details which have nothing to do with YOU, but rather have to do with my own past experience. It is relatively static, whereas YOU (and I) are ceaselessly changing. And it is self-reflexive, in the sense that I cannot produce even approximately adequate pictures of YOU unless I also produce adequate pictures of ME, which would have to include answers to the "orientation questions": Who am I? Where am I? What am I doing here-now? and Why am I doing it?

The importance of 'my picture of me' can best be emphasized by pointing out that my picture of ME comprises the **inverse** of my picture of YOU. For example, if I look you over, my nervous system must then process at least two sets of data: the information obtained from the retinal stimulation produced by the light reflected from you, and the information obtained from the stimulation of the proprioceptors in eye-muscles, skeletal muscles, etc., produced by the act of looking you over. After you pass from my field of vision, I will attend to other environmental objects, and form pictures of them also; and in each instance, I will also handle the proprioceptive and other information generated in the process of forming pictures of them. Thus the information from which I derive my picture of ME comprises the one common thread which runs through all my transactions with my ever-changing environs.

However, my picture of me is not ME. It also has usefulness only as a map. As such, it proves indispensable for the executive function of directing my choices and my actions: for under no circumstances can I do anything at all which does not rest on my picture of ME.

If these things be true, then it seems that I would be well-advised ever to be ready to revise and enlarge my picture of ME, as the events of my life and the details of my transactions reveal the changing, developing ME. Yet, all too often, I find that I do not WANT to know more about myself. I seem to regard at least some of my opportunities to increase my self-knowledge as being emergency-situations, posing a real threat to my continued existence; and I defend myself

against such opportunities vigorously. (The mechanisms by which I do this 'defending" were discussed previously (1), and will be reviewed and extended below.)

At this point, I am touching on a very painful issue, which I designate as the process of **defending one's picture of himself**. This phrase expresses the central relationship which I use to organize my own picture of the psychological dimension of the current human crisis. In this phrase, the use of the combat-word DEFEND implies the perception of one's human life-situation as a literal battle, a persisting threat to the integrity of the body. And in accordance with the isomorphism of one's relations with self-and-others, this threat would have to come not only from dangerous aspects of the environment, but also from certain aspects of oneself. If, in action, one shows the need to defend his picture of himself, then he gives *prima facie* evidence that he is at war with himself: His actions say, "Part of me is felt as a dragon which is trying to eat the rest of me up."

Perhaps now, with this appalling image before us, we can begin to feel the degree and severity of the distortion of our representing-operations: In the face of chronic psychological malnutrition, chronic threat, each of us has despaired, become resigned, and turned against his own needs. In other words, each of us has learned how to REPRESENT his indivisible and unitary SELF as if it were split into two warring camps. This absurd distortion would be contradicted by the raw data of experience, and therefore would be eliminated by our own spontaneous self-correcting activities, unless somehow the raw data of experience were altered by means of one or more tricks of perceptual distortion. Generally, three main forms of perceptual distortion are found:

    i)   one can keep the "dangerous" parts of himself entirely out of awareness, and insist that they do not exist ("You know goddam well that I NEVER GET ANGRY!"); or,

    ii)   one can allow the "dangerous" parts of oneself in awareness, but coldly keep them at a distance ("Oh, yes, I know that I have a slight tendency toward narcissistic exhibitionism, but, really, I have no trouble at all keeping it under control."); or else,

    iii)   allowing the parts of oneself in awareness on an equal footing, one can insulate them from one another, by maintaining that they are "irrelevant" to one another.

(I once knew a young physician who had finished his residency training and had become board-certified in psychiatry, and who had gone on to earn a PhD degree in education; and this man soberly and unshakably insisted that '\psychotherapy' and 'education' are utterly unrelated.) In each of these types of perceptual distortion, the most obvious result of maintaining the distortion is that interaction and conflict between the parts of the self is prevented, thereby avoiding the resulting suffering, and growth (2).

In brief, then, in the process of becoming resigned, we set up distortions of our representing-operations: and thereafter, in our further transactions these distortions functions as unquestioned GIVENS of our experience. Thus these perceptual distortions comprise one of the mechanisms by which behavioral distortions prove self-defending.

Yet from another point of view, this entire syndrome of resignation and concomitant distortions constitutes a behavioral hypothesis; and like any other major behavioral hypothesis, this one will necessarily be held as a universal truth, and be acted upon, until the accumulating

weight of evidence unmistakably indicates a contradiction between the expectations based on this 'universal truth' and the actual outcomes. The observable facts that a) this particular type of behavioral hypothesis appears to be shared to some extent by virtually everyone alive, and b) that to put it to test proves especially difficult, indicates that this particular type of behavioral hypothesis has a CULTURAL basis. It is of course well-documented that the beliefs and values of the culture to which a man belongs necessarily function as a set of GIVENS in that man's experience. I maintain that the particular set of pictures of self-and-others held by the contemporary members of any tribe constitute that **theory of the structure of human psycho-dynamics** postulated by that culture at that date. In most tribes, of course, the theories remain tacit, unformalized, and perhaps entirely unexamined; but they still can in principle be disclosed by studies of the behavior of the members of each of the tribes. Conversely, the picture of self-and-others and its implied theory of the structure of human psycho-dynamics held by any man defines which tribe he belongs to; and here too the theory can be inferred from a study of his behavior.

Seen in this perspective, the evidence for species-wide distortions of behavior which are shared by the members of different tribes indicates that the theories of the structure of human psycho-dynamics postulated by each of our presently-existing cultures, though differing in detail, must be equivalent in at least one respect: each one must leave out of account at least one common and crucial variable involved in human psycho-dynamics. To paraphrase the point made in the previous paper (1), this common 'forgotten factor' comprises the double-variable composed of the unavoidable uncertainty inherent in 'perception,' and the intrinsically self-correcting structure of human behavior (by which it becomes feasible for us to operate so as to stay alive-and-growing a few moments longer despite the incompleteness of our 'perceptual' information).

But this notion comprises the test of a hypothesis. To recognize this common cultural deficiency is in effect to analyze our own situation for ourselves, and to find that we have falsified the traditional psycho-dynamic assumptions of our own culture. This act leaves us free to modify the traditional set of assumptions, or to reject it and select some new set of assumptions instead. In either case, no human being ever functions outside a physical-biological-social field: The act of falsifying the traditional set of assumptions of our culture places us in some new system, based on some new set of assumptions; and we are constrained to elaborate our new theory of the structure of human psycho-dynamics to the point that it can serve as the basis for a new culture. But as I pointed out in the publication already cited, a new general theory of the structure of human psycho-dynamics, based on korzybskian assumptions, has already been devised. Furthermore, it has already been subjected to intensive analysis, and, as judged by the standards of modern set-theory, has been shown (thus far) to be free of self-contradiction. So the theoretical basis for a new culture already exists, in a high state of development.

A man who is fully a member of this new culture will behave differently from members of the older ones e.g. he will not show the signs of being at war with himself. But the feat of falsifying our traditional psycho-dynamic assumptions will prove generally useful if and only if this new system provides means whereby those who choose to enter this new system can in fact alter their behavior, which means to alter their assumptions. However, in the cited publication, it

was pointed out that such therapeutic methods already exist. By helping our 'students' to focus on those behavioral mechanisms (of which they were previously studiously unaware) which function as necessary components of their psycho-dynamically stable distortions of behavior, these therapeutic methods turn these mechanisms into tools with which to destroy the distortions of behavior.

Finally, according to this theory, I am required to be able to account for the account I am giving (i.e. the structure of these two papers (4). From the evidence presented, it should be clearly apparent how these therapeutic methods and this theory of the structure of human psycho-dynamics which they imply have interacted in me to make it possible progressively to put to test the traditional set of assumptions of our culture, and to present the results of these tests in this trenchant fashion.

As a further way of testing the hypothesis just presented, I shall now present an example dealing with a currently controversial issue, which involves the first type of perceptual distortion mentioned above.

I have discovered that if I were to operate with certain portions of my self kept out of awareness, I could don a white hood, join with my hooded brethren, and use a blowtorch to produce third-degree burns on one of my fellow-humans. A dispassionate and skillful observer present on the scene could see that I was showing **sadistic** behavior, that I seemed to be getting pleasure from inflicting pain; and he might try to tell me so. Naturally, I would be OFFENDED at this contradiction of my self-image, and would heatedly deny it: "No, no, no, you don't understand—I'm just keeping social order!" If this hypothetical observer recognized the isomorphism of one's relations with self-and-others, he might try to tell me that I treated some parts of myself the same way I treated my victim: that specifically, the "social order" I was intent on keeping was **intra-personal** rather than social. That is to say, he might try to tell me that I had divided my self into a sadistic "slave-driver and a passive-aggressive, sabotaging "slave," and that my attack on the victim serves as a "cover-up operation" for an attack by the aware "slave-driver" parts of my self, which the victim somehow REPRESENTS. But these would constitute exactly the facts about myself I least wanted to recognize. I would find I was compelled to make the most extreme efforts to keep from knowing what he was talking about: this questioning of the 'unquestionable' would throw me into a severe emergency, which I would first try to handle by means of those behavioral tricks which have the effect of 'turning off' my eyes and ears and my understanding. If I couldn't dispose of this unwelcome commentator by means of significant incomprehension or other intra-personal maneuvers, I might suggest to my hooded brethren that the unwelcome commentator was in sympathy with the victim, and that we proceed to refute his unwelcome observations with the torch.

These remarks refer to a rather marked example of the process of defending one's picture of oneself in the face of a direct challenge to the dissociated state. As such, they should stir up some fundamental problems. Now I ask my readers to focus on their own reactions to these remarks. You will have reacted SOMEHOW to this tale; and I'm now trying to get you to ask yourself what this response of yours tells you about YOU. For by explicitly constructing this example out of some of the *dramatis personae* of my own self, I have provided an opportunity

for you to become aware (or more aware) of the echoes awakened in you by my remarks. And these echoes can tell you about YOU, but not about ME.

At this point, I can show the mechanism by which it turns out that I cannot produce even approximately adequate pictures of YOU unless I also produce adequate pictures of ME, pictures which include answers to the "orientation questions." For if you, like the hypothetical 'unwelcome commentator' above, are doing those things which, because of my resignation and consequent self-paralysis, I don't allow myself to do, and if, worse still, you seem to be getting away with doing these terrible and appealing things, then I will be tempted to try them again myself: The act of perceiving-and-understanding your actions is composed of tiny, covert, imitative movements; while the impulse to execute the acts myself is also composed of tiny movements —as far as I am concerned, THE SAME tiny movements. But the moment I detect my own impulse to do these terrible things, I find I must again paralyze myself in order to block the execution of the acts, for the acts, from my point of view, are still by definition DANGEROUS. Yet I cannot watch you do them without being tempted. Therefore, I will feel that I must persuade, manipulate, or compel you to stop doing these terrible things, in order that I might cease being tempted by your example. This constitutes the psycho-dynamics of **resentment**, and of its inverse, the process of **challenge**. The affect involved in resentment was described by Burrow (3) as **all-might** and by Perls, et al. (op. cit.) as **delusional omnipotence**.

The behavioral distortions under examination involve a profound refusal to accept the facts and conditions of one's own existence here-now, a refusal to face "what I do in fact do," an unwillingness even to CONSIDER one of the orientation-questions. The actions which follow from these distortions, thought of as efforts to build satisfying lives set in human environments truly fit to live in, could plausibly be expected to prove clumsy, inept, maladaptive. Upon reflection, this comment proves to be an understatement. But there is a point of view from which these actions do make sense: that of TRYING TO MAKE IT A LITTLE EASIER TO LIVE WITH THE UNENDURABLE. The unstated feeling inferable from these behavioral ineptitudes can be expressed in the words of the chorus in **Oedipus Rex**: "It would be better never to have been born." This is coupled with a denial of any personal responsibility for the unsatisfactory situation: the whining comment, "It's not my fault. Shorn of its component of unaware terror, this comes down to size as THE IMPULSE TO BE SOMEWHERE ELSE: Anywhere else, not here, not born of THESE parents, not living THIS life, not **here-now**.

The price of our auto-narcosis is almost beyond imagining: but on societal levels, it includes the four interdependent problems listed earlier in this essay, which we humans have created for ourselves; and on personal levels, it includes psychopathological syndromes and symptoms, restricted awareness of self-and-others, the inability to experience joy, a generalized desensitization to the pains and pleasures of being alive, and the sense that 'life is passing me by'.

To summarize, so far I have painted a gloomy picture indeed: We humans hold the power of life and death over ourselves and our planet; and we are severely and perhaps increasingly distorted and disoriented. It seems to me that the probability that we will exterminate the life of our planet without quite knowing what we are doing or why we are doing it is great, and is growing greater.

But my avowed aim is to do what it is possible to do in order to stop this frenzied flight toward racial suicide. I feel that the first requirement for this task is clear vision: we must see the magnitude of these appalling problems with a fearsome clarity of outline. Soft smudgy comforting illusions are for this purpose an unendurably expensive luxury. And secondly, we must have equally clear vision concerning what it is possible for you and me to do to avert the planetary suicide.

Therefore, let us now take a second look at the principle of the isomorphism of one's relationships with self-and-others. Stated in alternative form, this principle maintains that the first reality is **contacting**: It makes no sense to consider the **breathing** of an organism, unless we also consider the existence of air and the possibility of an exchange; or **eating**, unless we also consider the existence of food, and food-getting; **walking** implies the existence not only of an intact neuro-muscular apparatus, but also of relatively firm surfaces in a gravitational field of appropriate magnitude; **male sexual function** implies the existence of the female of the species, and vice versa; and so on. Such notions as "I" and "you," or "self" and "others," or "organism" and "environment," stand as abstractions—WORDS—whose content is given in the non-verbal actualities of what I am calling CONTACTING.

Human contacting involves a degree of complexity which goes beyond that shown in the contacting of other organisms: An adequate discussion of human behavior must take into account a unity composed of interactions of physical, biological, and social-symbolic components. Yet the existence of social-symbolic components in human behavior introduces an essential circularity, or **self-reflexiveness**: We must be able to account for the account we are giving. (4) I have already referred several times to this self-reflexiveness, for example when I interpreted nervous-system pictures in terms of interdependent maps. In order to present a more searching analysis of the self-reflexiveness in human contacting, I shall now have to draw on materials which stand outside conventional Western viewpoints. In Zen Buddhism, there is an exercise or "meditation" which goes as follows: Select some object in your actual field of vision, say, a moving automobile. Try to imagine what you would be like if you WERE that auto: which parts of you would become the headlights? the windshield? the wheels? and so on with the other parts. Try this with other visual objects: a tree, a stone, a bird, a sunset, a carpenter's hammer. For a time, say to yourself of everything you meet, "This otherness is myself," and see if you can imagine how this would work. One can even try this with other types of objects: auditory, tactile, gustatory, olfactory, etc.; although it is often necessary to do this in a bit more sketchy way. (5, 6)

My comments about this exercise and its implications can be tested by anyone who has succeeded in doing it at least once, but will be entirely lost on anyone who cannot or will not actually do the exercise.

In order to do this exercise, it is necessary to cease one's interior monologue and to become **internally silent** for at least an instant, long enough to manipulate non-verbal visual and proprioceptive data, or feelings. When I am doing this with a visual object, I am aware of making more or less covert, small motions of skeletal and oculo-facial muscles, as, in imagination, I adjust the physical parts of myself into the shape of the object I am confronting. There is good

evidence that practically all imagining, in this sense, involves covert muscular movements (just as most of what passes for "thinking" consists of the covert movements of sub-audible speech, which under certain circumstances can even be detected by electromyography of the speech muscles). (7) In other words, even the most complicated and elusive of those phenomena which most people call "the mind" are demonstrable PHYSICAL activities, which require nothing beyond the equipment our bodies are already provided with.

This exercise constitutes a method for studying the processes of human perceiving in situ. As such, it does not demand that we do anything which is in principle impossible for us, nor does it teach anything which is necessarily new in principle. But its power as a method of study is indicated by how often its use elicits the response of SURPRISE, the indicator of new information. Especially for Westerners, with a two thousand year cultural history of dissociation, it can lead to some very salutary and integrative insights. Among these would be the recognition that many aspects of the major Eastern viewpoints, which we Westerners, in our imagined superiority, tend to dismiss as "mysticism," would be better understood as a finely-honed appreciation of the process-nature of existence.

The crux of this exercise lies in the way that in doing it, we are forced awarely to do that which we always and unavoidably do anyway, though more unawarely. Considered in context, any human perceiving involves the psychological mechanism of **projecting**; the important question is: With what degree of awareness is this projecting done?

The exact structure of this projecting can be stated with reference to one's representing-operations: I produce nervous-system pictures of anything which I am contacting; but if, as I said, male sexual functioning implies the existence of the female, then in my very structure I already carry around a built-in (although blank) representation of, or need for, a possible sexual partner. If I come in contact with a female, and form a nervous-system picture of her, then according to this Zen meditation, I necessarily compare this picture with my built-in need, to see how close a correspondence there is between the two. So far, this gives only the biological aspect of contacting; but synchronously with this biologically-based sizing-up operation, there is a sizing-up on the specifically human levels also: I watch what this creature does and says, and compare her observed actions with things I have done and said. If I detect no correspondences, then she remains entirely unknown to me; but if I detect one or more correspondences, in effect I say, "If I were blinking my eyes the way she is, then I would be feeling such-and-so. Therefore she must be feeling her version of such-and-so." To express my perception of these correspondences, I would say that I **recognize her as a part of myself**; or, alternatively, that I **see myself in her**. These phrases express the relationship of **loving**: If I detect such correspondences, I love her (in the sense of *agape* love). Now, if we remember the fact that I cannot feel your feelings, nor can you feel mine, then in these terms it becomes apparent that the human capacity to understand another human being necessarily and uniquely rests on this kind of projecting. A moment of understanding or empathy can be a profoundly moving experience; it can have the deepest consequences extending over a lifetime; but in the end, it is based on a GUESS.

So what is precious in my beloved is not her anatomical splendors; rather, it is these correspondences between my specific and individuated picture of her and my need, and between my picture of her and my picture of myself. But please note the possibilities for error: I could mis-perceive her; and I could mis-perceive myself and my need. In order to act appropriately in a loving relationship, I must be sensitively aware both of my partner and of myself.

If at a given moment one is showing sensitivity to the uniqueness of objects, persons, and situations, this necessarily involves investing personality in things, feeling them as ALIVE. Thus, alert in a parking lot, I perceive MY CAR brightly and clearly, against a background of more dimly-perceived other cars. It seems fairly to leap out at me into my field of vision, whereas other cars do not do so; nor is it necessary to examine the license plates to make certain of its identity. This brightness of perception constitutes *prima facie* evidence for the investing of personality in the thing: it indicates its recognition as a part of myself, it indicates that the thing is loved.

These last comments apply also to one's sudden recognition of a member of his own family amid a crowd of strangers.

In our best moments, our perceptions are clearer and brighter, our feelings are deeper and more intense, our movements more graceful, our actions more spontaneous, than in more ordinary moment; that is how we recognize our best moments. Those persons whom we are contacting at such moments can also recognize the existence of heightened contact, both from the way that they are treated with more regard for their individuality and dignity, and also from the fact that at such times, there is less contradiction between the several messages we send out by different channels of transmission, i.e. by choice of words, tone of voice, gestures and facial expression, visceral behaviors such as blanching or flushing, etc. And I cannot overemphasize the point that it is one of the deepest possible satisfactions to be treated in this contactful way, satisfying to all parties involved.

On the other hand, when one is displaying behavioral ineptitudes, he becomes a cluster of solecisms. Feeling that one's life is in danger, and that the danger comes not only from the environment but also from parts of the self, one cannot be bothered with sensitive awareness of self-and-others. Instead, one blots out or otherwise distorts the "dangerous" parts of himself, the threatening need, and ignores the uniqueness of objects, persons, and situations which might be used to satisfy the need; the perceptions are less bright, less interesting, feelings are confused, movements are clumsy; and the messages we send out by the several channels of transmission are likely to be in flat contradiction. To give an example of this type of contradiction: earlier I interpreted the message inferable from behavioral ineptitudes as the statement, "It would be better never to have been born," coupled with a denial of personal responsibility for the unsatisfactoriness of the situation: "It's not my fault," said in a whining tone of voice. One whines when he feels defeated, but because of false pride, does not want to admit his defeat to himself-and-others. In this example, the whining tone of voice flatly contradicts the sense of the verbal statement, "It's not my fault." For if in fact I had no hand in the creation or perpetuation of the unsatisfactory state of affairs in which I find myself—say that my beloved has abruptly died—then indeed I may be defeated, totally and irrevocably; but if so, what sense does the false pride make? In total defeat which is not self-defeat, there is a tremendous dignity and strength,

with no room, or need, for false posturing. The whining tone of voice in the example asserts, "Of course, I had a hand in creating and maintaining this horrible situation, but I'm too terrified to be able to admit it, or to do anything about improving it."

Again, those whom we are contacting in our moments of ineptitude can tell what is going on, both from the way they get treated with little or no regard for their feelings and needs, and from the cross-channel contradictions. If they are not themselves paralyzed with terror just then, they are likely to respond with anger or indignation, and to refuse to allow themselves to be "used" or "manipulated" in this unfeeling way. But usually it happens that all parties involved in a moment of behavioral ineptitude tacitly consent to operate in this inept mode of behavior, and so the replies are given in kind.

Berne (8) has provided detailed descriptions of the way behavioral dialogues are carried on in this inept mode of behavior. He refers to this kind of inept-dialogue as a 'game', which he defines as "an ongoing series of complementary ulterior transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome. Descriptively it is a recurring set of transactions, often repetitious, superficially plausible, with a concealed motivation; or, more colloquially, a series of moves with a snare, or 'gimmick'...."

> The most common game played between spouses is colloquially called 'If It Weren't For You,' and this will be used to illustrate the characteristics of games in general.

> Mrs. White complained that her husband severely restricted her social activities, so that she had never learned to dance. Due to changes in her attitude brought about by psychiatric treatment, her husband became less sure of himself and more indulgent. Mrs. White was then free to enlarge the scope of her activities. She signed up for dancing classes, and then discovered to her despair that she had a morbid fear of dance floors and had to abandon the project.

> This unfortunate adventure, along with similar ones, laid bare some important aspects of the structure of her marriage. Out of her many suitors she had picked a domineering man for a husband. She was then in a position to complain that she could do all sorts of things 'if it weren't for you.' Many of her women friends also had domineering husbands, and when they met for their morning coffee, they spent a good deal of time playing 'If It Weren't For Him.'

> As it turned out, however, contrary to her complaints, her husband was performing a real service for her by forbidding her to do something she was deeply afraid of, and by preventing her, in fact, from even becoming aware of her fears. This was one reason her Child had shrewdly chosen such a husband.

> But there was more to it than that. His prohibitions and her complaints frequently led to quarrels, so that their sex life was seriously impaired. And because of his feelings of guilt, he frequently brought her gifts which might not otherwise have been forthcoming; certainly when he gave her more freedom, his gifts diminished in lavishness and frequency. She and her husband had little in common besides their household worries and the children, so that their quarrels stood out as important events; it was mainly on

these occasions that they had anything but the most casual conversations. At any rate, her married life had proved one thing to her that she had always maintained: that all men were mean and tyrannical. As it turned out, this attitude was related to some daydreams of being sexually abused which had plagued her in earlier years....

ANTITHESIS. The presumption that a certain sequence constitutes a game is tentative until it has been existentially validated. This validation is carried out by a refusal to play or by undercutting the payoff. The one who is 'it' will then make more intense efforts to continue the game. In the face of adamant refusal to play or successful undercutting he will then lapse into a state called 'despair', which in some respects resembles a depression, but is different in significant ways. It is more acute and contains elements of frustration and bewilderment. It may be manifested, for example, by the onset of perplexed weeping. In a successful therapeutic situation this may soon be replaced by humorous laughter, implying an Adult realization: 'There I go again!' Thus despair is a concern of the Adult, while in depression it is the Child who has the executive power. Hopefulness, enthusiasm, or a lively interest in one's surroundings is the opposite of depression; laughter is the opposite of despair. Hence the enjoyable quality of therapeutic game analysis. The antithesis to 'If It Weren't For You' is permissiveness. If instead of saying 'Don't you dare!' he says 'Go ahead!' the underlying phobias are unmasked, and the wife can no longer turn on him, as demonstrated in Mrs. White's case.

In my terminology, any 'game' serves as a way for the 'players' to cooperate in a series of maneuvers by which each one defends his own picture of himself. From the data Berne provides in his example, we can see that Mrs. White uses the game of "If It Weren't For You" to conceal from herself-and-others her own phobias, as well as to relieve herself of the opportunity for genuinely satisfying sexual relations with her husband. Thus both these aspects of this game serve to cover up and perpetuate the intra-personal war between the parts of herself which she represents as "the mean, tyrannical men" and the parts of herself she represents as "sexually-abused ME." In passages not quoted here, Berne also shows how, by consenting to play this game, the husband also conceals from himself-and-others the salient facts about his own life.

In terms of the current human crisis, the crucial point of Berne's formulations, and of my own, is possibly the most difficult to face, even to comprehend: The disorientations, the behavioral distortions under discussion, are **shared**, and are **mutually reinforcing** from one individual to others. They involve impairment of inter-personal as well as intra-personal relationships. Indeed, these distortions comprise one of the most important organizing principles on which Western society is based. As Berne has pointed out, these distortions are "handed down" from one generation to the next; relationships with family and with peers, the 'education' given via schools, churches, mass media, etc., serve to transmit the message that we dare not test our pictures of ourselves, but must defend them instead. (If in relationship with my 3-year-old daughter I make the opening move of a game, and she tries to give a spontaneous, charming, mutually-nourishing and non-stereotyped reply, I will respond with resentment, and, showing the affect of all-might or delusional omnipotence in facial expression, tone of voice, posture, etc., I will apply sanctions—withdrawal of love, or threats, or actual physical violence—to compel

13

her to stick to the 'safe', non-nourishing, stereotyped game. Soon my daughter will 'learn' the significance of this syndrome, and out of both fear for her own safety, and the innate need to emulate or copy her parents, she will comply with the 'rules' I am 'teaching' her.)

If you are unconvinced on this point, consider your own reactions to the experience of reading this essay: in it, I am "rocking the boat" by advising that we test rather than defend our pictures of ourselves; and my fellow-passengers are likely to find my efforts somewhat unsettling.

Our psycho-dynamically stabilized distortions of behavior are shared, and are mutually reinforcing from one individual to others. Up until this point in human history, our behavioral distortions have proved self-defending, and thus we have managed to prevent the destruction and the replacement of these distortions by humanly more satisfying behavior. But now, with a new theory of the structure of human psycho-dynamics available, the shared or cultural nature of these distortions suddenly makes them vulnerable. If, under circumstances I regard as appropriate, I challenge the assumptions which underlie behavioral distortions (my own, or somebody else's), the challenged person will respond with anxiety, hostility, or other emergency-functions, and will try to force me or manipulate me to cease challenging. He will show as much vigor in this effort as if he were defending his very life. If I didn't INTEND the challenge, or can't back it up, or if I give in and withdraw the challenge, then the relationship will probably revert to the *status quo*; but if my challenge cannot be defeated, the challenged person (me, or somebody else) is thrown out of his habitual pattern of behavior, and has to work out a new solution to the problem. This kind of working out involves pain and suffering, but it is not the meaningless suffering of trying to adapt to the unendurable. Instead, it stands as the price of growth. For example, when my own untenable assumptions were first systematically challenged, at times I felt that I would DIE as a consequence; but when it became evident that this fear was unrealistic (even though real), I found that I gradually entered into the challenging-process with the joy of battle.

Now I am offering a new challenge; partly to myself, of course, but since I am already committed to the process of destroying these behavioral distortions, my challenge goes mainly to my fellow humans: I claim that the means are at hand by which we can irrevocably destroy these behavioral distortions and the 'insoluble' problems which stem from them. I challenge my fellow humans to join with me in making use of these resources, in order to bring about a major reorientation of the human race, so that the suicide with which we threaten ourselves and our planet may be averted.

The first step in this process will be for each one of you to convince yourselves, on the basis of the evidence available to you, whether my claim is clearly falsified. (And if you can falsify this claim, please let me be the second person to know it.) When it comes to the second step, the decision of whom to work on, it is obvious that I can influence my own orientation more directly and effectively than I can affect that of anyone else. In my opinion, any man brave enough to be able to SEE the problems discussed here is psychologically strong enough to take on for himself the task of improving his own orientation—if he wants to.

If we reach agreement about the necessity, and the possibility, for each man to improve his own orientation, then the rest of the solution to the problem consists of developing criteria for estimating the degree of one's orientation, and methods for its improvement. Detailed treatment of these two topics is beyond the scope of this paper; but by summarizing a couple of my points, I can offer a few general comments about both.

By the example of my own argument, I have demonstrated my conviction that improvements in orientation cannot come about unless one improves his awareness of and acceptance of his own actions here-now; or, stated as an injunction, "Try to see what you DO in fact DO." As shown in the previous publication, judgments about one's actions in either-or terms, such as 'good-bad', 'nice-not nice', 'childish-mature', and so on, are an almost insuperable obstacle to this kind of awareness and acceptance (1).

Moreover, on pages 10-14, I have already discussed the criteria, inter-personal as well as intra-personal, by means of which we distinguish our best moments, and our worst moments, from more ordinary ones.

In distorted behavior, the tacit assumption is made that the existential differences between you and me are insignificant. I reject this assumption; I maintain that you are unique, and that I am unique, and that our job as human beings is to become more different, i.e., to extend the range of our personal experience, and our understanding of our own experience, until we can see ourselves in anyone. In the most general terms, I am asserting that the most effective, and perhaps the only, way to improve the present state of the human conditions, and thereby to further the course of human evolution, consists of cultivating one's own individuality.

In my opinion, amelioration of the human condition is not easy or automatic. If we look closely, in human evolution there are no blind impersonal forces (except in representations, based on despair or weary resignation). Past crises in human history have existed, and have been met by the choices and actions of people who saw more clearly, felt more intensely, and acted more courageously than the rest of humanity. Today we have come to the choice-point between unprecedented fullness of life, and unimaginable catastrophe. Which way we go now will be determined by the choices and actions of you and me and the rest of the human race. Those who can see that this is so, and can sense which way the choices open to them tend to move us, have the opportunity to expend their lives in such a way that they know what their suffering is for.

Copy available as document 006 at < http://www.hilgart.org/research.html>, with the following synopsis:

Lists four survival crises humans have not found a way to solve: war, overpopulation, pollution and social instability, and addresses these crises in the language of self-correcting vs. self-defending. Presented at the Ninth International Conference on General Semantics, San Francisco State College, August 1965.

Notes and References

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