

Rap Session with Peter G. Osorio The 18th Annual Conference of the Society for Descriptive Psychology 1996

This rap session was conducted in a question and answer format, with the bold section headings below each representing one of the questions that was asked.

Status Dynamics of the Death Penalty

Ossorio: It used to be I'd get a lot of easy questions. People are learning here. Let me start with this one. Could you discuss the status dynamics of the death penalty?

That one is fairly straightforward but it's not simple. It goes back to the notion of the degradation ceremony. If you recall, there are five conditions for a successful degradation ceremony. The first is that there is a community with a set of values such that adherence to that set of values is a requirement for being purely and simply one of us. Second, there are three statuses involved here: a denouncer, a witness, and a perpetrator. Third, the denouncer acts as a member in good standing of the community and he does this in two senses: One is that it takes a member in good standing in the community to be a denouncer. Secondly, that when the denouncer does his thing he is acting in the interest of the community and representing it rather than out of personal motivation.

Okay now those are the background conditions. There are two things that have to happen. The first is that the denouncer says to the witness that the perpetrator has committed an act, and he redescribes the act if necessary so that under the redescription it's a tautology that that's a violation of the community values. Second, the denouncer makes whatever case needs to be made to the effect that the act as redescribed is a genuine expression of the perpetrator's character. It is not to be explained away, for example, by reference to extreme circumstances or to unusual states of mind. Now if he does this, it follows that the perpetrator is not purely and simply one of us. That's the degradation. Now, what goes with degradation is a loss of behavior potential. And different violations call for different losses and different degrees of loss.

Now with that as a background, ask yourself, "What would happen if the perpetrator committed the most serious possible violation?" Well, it's basically a tautology that the loss of behavior potential would be the greatest possible. And what that amounts to is that either he is expelled from the community or he is put to death. Well, that's the status dynamics of the death penalty. It's reserved for the most serious violations. And it is a degradation that is as extreme as the violation. Now there is more to be said but basically that's what I would call the status dynamics of the death penalty. Any commentary on that?

Member of Audience: I have a couple of them. One is that I think that in the forensics literature there is a discussion of "competency to be executed" such that if, for example, someone who has been sentenced to death goes into a coma, he may not be eligible for execution. And I think that there was a recent incident of that...

Member of Audience: So he wasn't psychotic at the time of the crime but became schizophrenic since then and they can't kill him because ...

Member of Audience: Right.

Member of Audience: You've got to know what's happening to you.

Ossorio: Yeah.

Member of Audience: And it strikes me like an incomplete degradation if the person doesn't quite know what is happening to him.

Ossorio: It sounds like the reasoning is that you have to be, if not a member in good standing, at least a member in some substantial sense. You have got to have something that can be taken away from you. Now in these cases basically the person has become a non-person, that is, he has become so disabled that he isn't really a responsible participant in the society.

Member of Audience: He is also no longer the person who committed the crime.

Ossorio: Something like that. So what it amounts to is you can't take it away from him if he doesn't have it.

Member of Audience: You also said that as a condition in the description that the person's behavior couldn't be explained away by...

Ossorio: Yeah, well what was stipulated is not that he was in an unusual frame of mind at the time he committed the crime. That's what that condition is for. It's that after the whole thing is over, something happens.

Member of Audience: Any comments on the status of the individual or the entity that makes the pronouncement that condemns to death?

Ossorio: Say that again.

Member of Audience: Any comments on the status of the individual who exacts the punishment, no, not who exacts the punishment but who does the condemning?

Ossorio: Okay, the question is any comments on the status of individual who does the condemning. I think that's simple sociology. Either you have an institutionalized form, a court that passes the judgment, or it happens from the participants who are around. You get a mob and they say "Kill the bastard". That's one way of deciding. And sometimes you have the institution and sometimes you don't.

Member of Audience: What about the difference between exiling the person vs. putting him to death?

Ossorio: Okay, what about the difference between what I described as the two most extreme, mainly exiling the person vs. putting him to death. Reflect on when classically one does one and when one does the other. Exiling a person is what you do when you just want to get rid of him. You don't want to be bothered by him anymore. This is a noxious person, a destructive person, something like that. You put the person to death when society has suffered from this person, where in effect he has attacked us, where the violation is a violation of us. Remember, provocation elicits hostility.

Member of Audience: Having families and friends of victims come forward in trials has increased the number of denouncers, like we saw last night in the trial of the fellow who murdered Polly Klaas. The father came forward. It was an incredible denouncing mechanism, far more effective than saying "I sentence you to death." The father said, "You deserve to die." So we have added that community representation rather than just... It's a full-fledged ceremony.

Ossorio: Yeah, I think that has arisen recently in response to a general feeling that too much attention was being paid to the perpetrator's rights and not enough to the victim's rights. At least that's the form in which you read about in the newspaper.

Member of Audience: Do you have any thoughts about contrasting two societies, one where they did not do a death penalty and one where they did a fairly significant amount, and what that might say about the society or those people?

Ossorio: Not too much because in different societies, different violations and different degrees of violations would be possible. And if you wanted to give a benign interpretation of the difference between two societies, one of which had a lot of death penalties and the other didn't, I would say, "Well the one provides lots of opportunities for severe violations and the other doesn't. And so you get a lot of them here and therefore a lot death penalties, and over here you don't."

Member of Audience: But there are just as serious crimes in some other countries that just have said it is savage and uncivilized to have the death penalty no matter what someone does. You know, we just don't think it is right to take another life. Period. It's uncivilized. And they may not have as much crime but just as serious crimes have occurred.

Ossorio: You can take that position, and as you say some countries have. But the ones that do have a death penalty have a response to that. They say you are trivializing the violation by treating it as a trivial violation.

Member of Audience: By not having a death penalty?

Ossorio: Yeah.

Member of Audience: Does this mean you are in favor of the death penalty?

Ossorio: Only as a last resort. [laughter]

Member of Audience: Why should we let you off that easily?

Ossorio: It all depends. [laughter] Okay, looks like we are ready to move on to another one.

Language Behavior

Ossorio: What is it that makes a set of behaviors language behavior? That's an interesting one.

Member of Audience: What was the question?

Ossorio: What is it that makes a set of behaviors language behavior? Now one reason it's interesting is that nobody else that I know has an answer to this. Psychologists study behavior; other people study behavior; and they have theories of behavior. And from those theories you would never suspect that there was such a thing as language. You would never suspect that there was such a thing as verbal behavior. Linguists study verbal behaviors. They study language. And from what they say you would hardly know that language was a form of behavior. The ones who are sensitive to this problem have invented their own psychology in

order to create a place, a notion of behavior within which language fits. And they are not very good theories as psychology.

[writing on board] $\langle B \rangle = \langle I, W, K, KH, P, A, PC, S \rangle$ Now there's the general formula for behavior. It has eight parameters: Identity, Want, Know, Know-how, Performance, Achievement, Person Characteristics, and Significance. That's the general notion of behavior. So what we need to say is "What do you need to have in addition to that so that you have not just behavior but, specifically, verbal behavior?"

Here is the formula for verbal behavior. $\langle V \rangle = \langle C-L-B \rangle$ C is a concept. L is a locution. And B is a set of behaviors that consists of acting on the concept. A slight variation in that is that B is a set of behaviors that consist of treating something as being of the sort identified by the concept. So for example, "chair". You need a concept of the chair. You need a locution which is the word "chair", and you need a set of behaviors that consist of treating something as a chair. The concept is simply part of the "K" value. "K" is the distinctions that are being acted on. So the concept here is simply one of the distinctions that's being acted on. The locution is part of the value of the performance parameter. And these behaviors are simply other behaviors like this, that have this [points to "chair"] as part of the "K" value. And that's all it takes.

Now, what this shows is that to say that a behavior is a verbal behavior is not to describe a certain kind behavior. What it is, is to give an incomplete description of a behavior. This description is an incomplete version of this. So when you have a behavior that not only is this way [points to $\langle B \rangle = \langle I, W, K, KH, P, A, PC, S \rangle$] but is also this way [points to $\langle V \rangle = \langle C-L-B \rangle$] then you have a verbal behavior. Linguistics is what looks at the performance. What kind of words, what kind of sentences, what kind of structures do you have to have in order for this performance to be the right kind of thing to be a locution? Not any old performance is going to be a locution. So the field of linguistics is right here [pointing to P]. What kind of performance? What qualifies as a locution? They have very elaborate theories about that.

Member of Audience: So you would say that linguistics is the behaviorism of verbal behavior and that it focuses only on the performance parameter...

Ossorio: Yeah, there is something paradoxical there. The linguists say we are not dealing with performance; we are dealing with competence. In their framework that makes sense. In this framework I would say clearly they are dealing with performance. But notice that since they are dealing with performance you could easily say that, "Well, since the performance is neither chance nor random, what is implied is a corresponding know-how." So it makes sense for them to say "We are dealing with the know-how." But the payoff is not that they are dealing with the know-how. The payoff is that they are dealing with the performance.

Member of Audience: Does anybody deal with the other two?

Ossorio: No.

Member of Audience: Could you say a little more about linguistic theories? I'm not that familiar with them but from what I have read, they seem to say some pretty weird things about competencies in terms of what kind of competence people have. I am not sure how much of it makes sense.

Ossorio: Well, think of how complicated it is to specify what kind of performance is a locution and all of the different possibilities for English -- let's just talk about English -- for sentences. It's a complex formalism that it takes to lay out the various possibilities of what is an instance of the English language. Now, since that's complicated, you might conclude that the skill is equally complicated. But you might not. If you took this to be a theory of competence then you would say "That's a tremendously complicated competency." If you take it to be a performance, it may be a fairly simple competence.

Now, what they have done to a large extent is to think "Maybe a lot of this is wired in." You have heard the phrase I am sure. There is one outstanding reason why they say this. And that is, if you were investigating a

language and you asked "What kind of sample of the language would I need to have in order to figure out what language that was, and not merely what language that was, but all of the rules for that language so that I could speak it?", "What kind of data would I have to have?" "How much data?" And the answer they get - and they always get this answer - is what a child gets in the way of input from hearing people talk, etc. is nowhere near the amount and kind of data that you would need if you started out with zip and had to figure out all of the rules that apply to the language that you speak. Therefore, some of it must be wired in. That's how it goes. Now there is a fallacy there. Namely, who is to say how much you need to see in order to figure it out? You might argue "Well, the fact that kids learn without being taught, isn't that evidence that the amount of data you need is really much smaller than these guys think?" You could say that. And in fact that is what I am more inclined to say than that other.

Member of Audience: ...adequate as an explanation at best...

Ossorio: Not so much that it is adequate as an explanation, because I don't think that either of them are particularly explanatory. It's two different ways of handling the same problem, the same facts.

Member of Audience: Does that apply to music as well?

Ossorio: I would think it would.

Member of Audience: Cause everybody does music.

Ossorio: No, I don't see why all of the stuff about language wouldn't apply directly to music.

Member of Audience: What was the question?

Ossorio: She said "Would it apply to music too?" And I said I don't see why not. It seems to me a completely parallel situation.

Member of Audience: What about things like [hitting his glass with a knife], meaning "Can I have your attention?" That seems to fit C-L-B. We don't normally call that a word. Is that language?

Ossorio: That's not a locution.

Member of Audience: How come?

Ossorio: It isn't. Remember you have elaborate theories for specifying what is a locution. But behind that we have the native speaker intuition because we are speakers. Any speaker will tell you "That's not a locution."

Member of Audience: That's a gesture.

Ossorio: It's a signal. Given the right set of conventions, it is a signal. It's communication, but you are not saying anything.

Member of Audience: ...the "B" that's on the end...

Ossorio: That's outside the scope of that. That's a set of behaviors.

Member of Audience: Could you comment on when you use...

Ossorio: I just ran out of room here. Otherwise I would have put the B down here. There is no correspondence between the B and any of this. There is a correspondence here from C to K and from L to P. There is no correspondence with the B. The B is simply another set of behaviors like this.

Member of Audience: So those outside the bracket.

Ossorio: Right. It is outside this bracket [points to = <I, W, K, KH, P, A, PC, S>] but it is within this bracket [points to <V> = <C-L-B>]. Okay, those were the easy ones. [laughter]

Member of Audience: Could you give me an outline of some kind of theory of the beginnings or development of language...

Member of Audience: Jim, could you say that louder?

Member of Audience: Well, what would a theory of language development look like within the Descriptive framework if you were just starting...

Ossorio: You have to be careful when you say "What's the Descriptive approach?" to anything. There is no Descriptive approach to anything. Any one of you could use the Descriptive framework and develop a theory of language and language development and they would all be different. It is not that there is a set of answers built into Descriptive that all you have to do is read it off.

Member of Audience: But my question was what would *you* do? [laughter]

Ossorio: The way that I would go is to say there is an age at which kids learn this [pointing to the formula for behavior]. And roughly speaking it is the age where they are going around asking "Why?" And when parents ask them "Why did you do that?" and start getting some kind of answer. And that to me is a very fundamental point in development. Once you acquire the notion of doing something, then there is a whole lot of things, in fact, almost everything else is simply an instance or a variation on that. Because one of the things that you can do is talk. You can say something. So once you have the notion of doing something, the notion of saying something is simply a special case. So that would be how I would approach a developmental theory. Okay, any more on language?

Member of Audience: I have just a comment that you can comment on if you want. When I was in Saudi Arabia I was told that there were many Arab people who could recite the Koran by heart who couldn't read and couldn't write. I wonder how they do that. They just rattle this thing off.

Member of Audience: Could you repeat that, please.

Ossorio: Okay, the question is that there are people in Arabia who can rattle off the Koran and how long is that? It is about an inch thick book and they can rattle it off from start to finish. There are people that can do that with a Bible. I bet you that not every Arab can do that. I bet you that not everybody in this country can do it with a Bible. So what does it take to be able to do that? Well, one thing you can bet is lots of exposure, lots of rehearsal, lots of practice. You don't get it just from listening once unless you are one of these eidetic memory people. So by listening, by rehearsing, by practicing, if you do enough of that, these people are evidence that you can go that far with it.

Member of Audience: Without being able to read or write.

Ossorio: Yeah, remember the first thing we learn to do is talk, not read or write.

Spiritual Experiences

Ossorio: Okay, let's see if some of these are even answerable. [laughter] Here is another interesting one. Is there a way to conceptualize spiritual experiences in a way that does not diminish their super-cultural experience? Could we get a little elaboration on that?

Member of Audience: That's mine. Any time you talk about something that is beyond culture, you have to talk about it through the confines of your culture. Is there any way around that?

Ossorio: Okay, any time you talk about something beyond your culture you have to do so within the confines of your culture, and is there any way around that? I am not sure that there's anything to get around there. Think of culture not as confining you but as providing you opportunities. One of the opportunities it provides you is to talk about things that are not part of your culture. Again, remember every culture has the notion of the stranger, the foreigner, the world beyond. So part of culture is that there is something beyond our culture. Even though it is part of our culture, it is also beyond and that is how come you are able to get beyond your culture in that sense.

Member of Audience: I am thinking of people who go outside Christianity or Judaism. Now that's becoming enculturated as sort of an identifiably American "New Age" thing. So that's within the culture again. It's not the universal thing that I think it's set out to be.

Ossorio: Okay, people have gone out beyond a culture and picked up other sorts of religions and because they have, now these have become part of our culture. And in becoming that, they are no longer what they were before we touched them. Right?

Member of Audience: We have sort of Americanized it; we have made it into our culture.

Ossorio: Right, and there's a problem with that?

Member of Audience: We have limited our ability to describe what really is beyond our culture again.

Ossorio: Not to describe it but to participate in it. We can't be Arabians because we are Americans. But we are not missing anything.

Member of Audience: Well, maybe.

Ossorio: No. In the sense that you can only be what you are and not something else. In fact, one of earliest aphorisms in Descriptive is "Things are what they are and not something else instead." That was part of the spirit out of which Descriptive Psychology grew. And that was in the face of theories that always told you that things are really something else that you can't see and that what you do see isn't the real thing. The same way with your person, your culture, etc. You are that; you have that; that is you. And you are not missing something by not being somebody else. You can lament it [laughter] and we often do. Shakespeare had a line: "admiring this man's art and that man's scope". We often do wish that we didn't have the limitations that we do. But it's not as though things could be otherwise because no matter how we are, we have limitations. So there is no getting around the fact that we have limitations. I wouldn't overestimate the degree to which we have violated those religions. You said they are not the same. Maybe they are not, but does the difference make a difference?

Member of Audience: If the locution can't be heard, is it still verbal behavior?

Ossorio: Yes. In a way what you have raised is the old problem of skepticism. I can talk learnedly about all kinds of things spiritual or otherwise and in the end say "But, of course, that's only my poor views of things". Why? Because I have no way of getting beyond myself to establish the real truth other than my views. That's a peculiar sort of lament. What are we missing if we can't get beyond ourselves? Who's to say that there is any true view that we are missing because we can't get beyond ourselves?

Member of Audience: Well, I think some of us feel that we've been there, but to try to describe it limits us.

Ossorio: There are lots of things that you don't and can't describe, including how an orange tastes. You can't describe how an orange tastes. You can talk about the taste of an orange and it will communicate to, guess who? somebody who has tasted an orange. It will communicate something else to somebody who hasn't tasted an orange, because saying "the taste of an orange" locates that in the scheme of things. So even somebody who hasn't tasted an orange will know what you are talking about. But only somebody who has tasted it, will understand what you mean.

Member of Audience: The word is not the thing.

Ossorio: Yeah. And so whether it's the taste of an orange or a spiritual experience, it's the same problem. And it would be unreasonable to expect that the word would be the same thing as the actual taste. So you don't want to count on describing it. You work with it in other ways. You try to get people to have experiences. You locate it for them in the scheme of things. You do other things but you don't try to describe it.

Member of Audience: I'm going to ask a question, but I'll probably regret it.

Ossorio: I'll see to it. [laughter]

Member of Audience: We say we can't describe the taste of an orange, but then we talk about locating things in the scheme of things. Do you want to elaborate on that just a little bit - locating things in the scheme of things?

Ossorio: Everything has a place in the scheme of things. Oranges have a place. This orange has a place. Because the orange has a place, the color of the orange has a place, and the color of this orange has another place. The taste of the orange is like the color of the orange. Its place in the scheme of things is tied to the place of the orange, and the relation of the orange to somebody who can taste it. That's what I mean by locating something in the scheme of things. Locating something in the scheme of things basically is equivalent to or enables you to pinpoint that thing as against anything else, because only one thing has that place in the scheme of things.

Member of Audience: This conversation makes me think about one of the things that I see as a, I am not sure of what the right word is, as a dynamic in the process of hearing people talk about spiritual experiences. People seem to have a concept of "this experience that is beyond explanation" and yet they spend a lot of time trying to explain it... It couldn't be that concept anymore if the concept... Does this make sense?

Ossorio: Yeah, but I don't like it. [laughter] For much the same reason I don't like the question about getting beyond yourself. If you describe something as beyond description, that's a perfectly good description. That locates it in the scheme of things. On the other hand, it's not a given that what strikes you right now as indescribable really is. So people often then try and sometimes they succeed to some extent. You just never know. And with that kind of thing usually any hint, any piece that you actually can describe will help. Just because it's on the whole indescribable. So people try.

Member of Audience: Assuming someone would want to describe it.

Ossorio: Yeah that's why somebody would try, because it would be nice if you could.

Member of Audience: I want to get back to the scheme of things.

Ossorio: A schemer.

Member of Audience: And I think this will help answer your questions. If you take it that people have their own worlds that they operate out of, then the fact that this person tasted the orange - that taste has a place in that person's scheme of things. So you have n people and each has a world and then you say taste has a place in what? Their scheme of things? Or each one's scheme of things?

Ossorio: Usually both. Your scheme of things is not just independent from everybody else's scheme of things. If it were, there would be no communication between us. There would be no possible understanding between us. Most of your world we share, particularly if you allow minor variations. That's why we all know what taste is. We all share that. There are other things that would be really peculiar to you, for example, one of these indescribable experiences. It might be that none of us has ever had that kind. But things like taste, etc., no. We do share that. And its place in your scheme is roughly the same as its place in our scheme.

Member of Audience: We go through a certain amount of trouble to talk about what we mean by taste and once we get that settled...

Ossorio: No, you never settle that. Remember definitions are not fundamental.

Member of Audience: Well, the taste of an orange, for example, we come to some kind of understanding. It won't be a definition for sure. Now her concepts could fall into that category too. It seems to me if enough people discuss...

Ossorio: Yeah, except that indescribable is much more open-ended than the taste of an orange. The taste of an orange has a fairly definite place in the scheme of things. The indescribable may be of various sorts. So there is no one place that the particular ones have. There is a general place for anything indescribable, but that doesn't do us much good. Because even with the indescribable, if you don't get down to which indescribable, what kind of indescribable, there is not much you can do with it.

Member of Audience: Do you have a three-minute lecture on totalities and boundary conditions that might shed some light here?

Member of Audience: Could you repeat that please.

Ossorio: He said "Do we have a three-minute lecture on totalities and boundary conditions that might throw light on this?" I can give you a three-minute lecture, but I am not sure how much light it would throw. One way of approaching the notion of spiritual is to define it in certain terms. And to the extent that I have worked with that issue, I have defined it in certain terms. And what I have said is that the spiritual domain is defined by three fundamental notions, namely: totality, ultimacy, and boundary condition. When you ask "What is it all for?", "What is it all about?", you are asking about totality. When you say "In the end what does life amount to?", you are talking about ultimates. When you say "There is no limit to human potential", you are talking about boundary conditions.

Now totality and ultimacy are fairly familiar and easy to understand. Boundary condition is less familiar and less easy both to understand and to say what it is. In fact, I have a running project to try to improve the statement of what it is. Now, the paradigm case for boundary conditions is the curvature of space. If you

think of curved space, you have the phenomena that if you go off in this direction and you go far enough, you come back from the other direction. You also have the result that no matter where you start from, there is a distance such that you can't ever get further from your starting point than that distance.

Now what's characteristic of the boundary condition is that it is not located anywhere in the space. It's not about some part of it. It's not about some place in it. It's a statement about the whole thing that makes a difference in what happens within that space. That's a boundary condition. And that's why saying that human potential is unlimited is a boundary condition. It says that there's no limit to what can happen within that space. Now that one, by the way, I don't agree with. I don't believe that the human potential is unlimited. What I do think is that we don't have any way of setting limits. So that for many purposes you might as well say it is unlimited. But, in fact, we know it's limited. We just can't say what the limits are and partly because there's no reason why the limits have to stay the same from one time to another, from one person to another. So talking about the limits is going to lay the foundation for nonsense.

Member of Audience: I want to touch on that notion of the scheme of things, and if the formulation of the person concept is a map to the scheme of things.

Ossorio: Yes and no. In one sense it is because it encompasses everything. On the other hand, if you take the scheme of things to be like a description of things, then the answer is no. Instead, what the person concept does is to provide persons with the wherewithall to give their own description of what the scheme of things is. And what I was saying a while ago... (Change tape)

Member of Audience: If it's not possible to describe how an orange tastes, is it not true that it's not possible to describe any real experience?

Ossorio: Right. Yep. I got in trouble five years ago for saying exactly that. [laughter]

Member of Audience: Could you repeat it again?

Ossorio: Yeah. There is no way of describing any experience.

Member of Audience: Wait, you mean I'm not? We can describe it all again...

Ossorio: Things that you commonly take to be descriptions of an experience turn out always to be something else. The main thing they turn out to be is a description of what it was the experience of.

Member of Audience: Locating it in the scheme of things.

Ossorio: The second most common - that between the two take up at least 99% of the cases - is the effect that it had on you. It was a sudden experience; it was an inspiring experience.

Member of Audience: But isn't that the experience?

Ossorio: No, the experience is what inspired you. The inspiration is not the experience. That is simply the effect it had on you.

Member of Audience: Well where is the experience? Did it fall in the cracks between conscious of and conscious as...

Ossorio: There is no crack. That is one of the problems of consciousness.

Member of Audience: So the inspiration is then itself another experience?

Ossorio: You can experience the inspiration.

Member of Audience: Well, this takes me back to when you were talking about spirituality involving totality, ultimacy, and boundary condition. In the context of a person having a spiritual experience, that person is probably conscious of that?

Ossorio: Of what?

Member of Audience: Of totality, ultimacy, and boundary condition.

Ossorio: No. Probably not.

Member of Audience: Well...

Ossorio: When was the last time you were conscious of everything? When was the last time you experienced a whole world? When was the last time you even thought about it? We don't go around thinking of these things. On the contrary, what's on our mind most of the time is tables and chairs and cups of coffee and glasses of water and driving to work and those things you can see, hear, touch, and feel.

Member of Audience: That's very pedestrian. [laughter] I have loftier thoughts.

Ossorio: But that's what's on our mind most of the time. We don't spend our time thinking up here.

Member of Audience: But sometimes we do.

Ossorio: Sometimes we do.

Member of Audience: Sometimes it's like "Oh I see what it all means now. I couldn't possibly tell you, but I see what it all means."

Ossorio: Okay, now one reason why we get to spiritual things and why spiritual has to do with ultimacy, totality, etc... It reflects the fact that every culture we know has a religion of some sort. Many cultures have more than one religion. And my explanation for that is that you are driven to it starting from the world of tables and chairs. There are certain sorts of questions that are repetitive. One of them is "Why?" Another is "How do you know?" Another is "What's it for?" Another is "What good is it?" You can ask those of anything. "What good is this coffee cup?" I give you an answer. You say "Well what good is that?" I give you another answer. You say "Well, what good is that?" Eventually I run out of answers. And when I run out of answers, then I have to talk differently. Either I invent a transcendental thing, a super coffee cup or something, or I explicitly talk about boundary conditions and totality. But there you see we have reached the ultimate answer. If you say "What's it about?" or "What's it for?" or "What's it good for?", as you move through the successive answers, you do it by taking in greater and greater context. And when you reach the last answer you have taken into account the broadest possible context you could. So at the same time you reach ultimacy and you reach totality. And when you reach those limits you gotta do something different.

And that's why all spiritual talk sounds peculiar. It is because our standard is talking about tables and chairs. We are driven to these things because what could be more reasonable than to ask "What good is it?" Or "How do you know?" These ordinary sorts of questions. Obviously you have to ask them. And when we do, if we just stay with it, lo and behold, we are way out there on a limb and we have no answers. So we have to talk about things in a very different way. For example, if the question is "How do you know?" and you run out of answers, what do you say? Well one sort of answer is "I have faith." Now if you use the standard of tables and chairs on that, you say "Faith is sort of foolish. It's a claim to knowledge with no evidence, because you can't answer the question 'How do you know?'" Well, that's not what it is. See. It's not just another move. It's a way of rejecting the why question. It's a way of handling the fact that you have

come to the end of the why questions. It could be paraphrased as "Here I stand. This is what I am going to act on. This is what is real for me." And that's not a matter of what I know.

Member of Audience: It more than a choice to treat the world that way though.

Ossorio: It's more than a casual choice. You see in a sense it's a choice, but it's the kind of choice that you, being you, can't help making the choice you make.

Member of Audience: If you're an existentialist, you have the right to say "I don't know" as your ultimate move. "I don't know that."

Ossorio: No. You wouldn't even if you were an existentialist. Because if you have really reached the end, there isn't something that you don't know. It's that there is no answer. So you are not lacking knowledge there. You really have reached the end of the line.

Member of Audience: It can't be known.

Ossorio: No, not that it can't be. It's that we have no way of recognizing a further answer even if there were one. In our personal development or in our social development, later on there may be an answer to that, and then we have one more answer to the "Why?" question before we reach the limit. But you know that we are going to reach the limit anyhow. So no matter how much we improve our ability to answer those kind of questions, we know we are going to reach that limit. Anytime we try, we will reach an actual limit and what do we do? Well, we switch. As I say, if it's a "Why?" question or a "How do you know?" question, it's faith. "Here I stand. Here is the way I am going to act. Here is what I am going to act on."

Member of Audience: So what does it say about people who say "I don't believe in God" and are not spiritual. They just have not pursued the questions far enough?

Ossorio: No, they misunderstand the point. They think it's a question. And it isn't. They are treating it like a question about tables and chairs. "Is there a thing there or isn't there?" They say "No, there isn't." It's not that kind of question. The question is "Where do you stand?" And their answer in effect tells you where they stand. So they have accomplished that anyhow.

Member of Audience: How so? Could you elaborate.

Ossorio: Well, because somebody who says "I believe there is no God" has taken a stand. It's not a matter of knowledge that he knows somehow. That's his faith. That's where he stands.

Member of Audience: Just as there are people who are more disposed to see color than others, or spatial relationships than others, I think that there are people who are oriented to have a relatedness to matters of ultimacy and totality.

Ossorio: Yeah, it would be surprising if that weren't so.

Member of Audience: And with it they may also experience awe.

Ossorio: Yeah, that's often reported.

Member of Audience: What?

Ossorio: Awe. A-W-E. Not A-W. [laughter] And not A-H.

Member of Audience: But that person isn't obviously going through any kind of process. They are just observing the world and they happen to observe it this way. Just like another person observes...

Ossorio: Yes. I didn't say you had to go through the process to reach there. I said you do go through the process if you pursue these ordinary questions, and that's why people do reach there. You don't have to reach there that way. Particularly if you have gone through the steps some number of times, you eventually just go directly there.

Member of Audience: But would that qualify then as conscious of totality, ultimacy? And is it not that they can be conscious of everything that is but of the matter of totality...

Ossorio: No.

Member of Audience: Conscious of themselves as...

Ossorio: It's more like having a theory and you see things in terms of the theory, but you are not conscious of the theory. And goodness knows we have plenty of theories about this domain.

Member of Audience: But it does seem like it's something that happens to you.

Ossorio: She says it seems like it's something that happens to you. Yeah, that's true, but again I wouldn't overdo that because there are lots of things that simply happen to you, like the taste of an orange. Or like feeling tired. There are lots of ordinary things that work exactly the same way. You don't choose them. You receive them.

Member of Audience: Is it just that you are reacting to something?

Ossorio: That's a constant temptation, that there is a thing that you are reacting to. The comment was that it sounds like there is something that you are reacting to when you are overcome with awe, etc. And what I am saying is, that may or may not be. It doesn't follow from the fact that you have the feeling of awe that there is something out there or somewhere that you are reacting to.

Member of Audience: How would an experience be described? What is it that I am doing when I taste the wine and say "It tastes very full, round in the mouth?"

Ossorio: You are placing it in the scheme of things. It's one of these rather than one of those. It's this kind of wine rather than another. It's the kind of wine that tastes this way, not the kind of wine that tastes that way. And that has implications for how you treat it.

Member of Audience: It sure looks like it describes.

Ossorio: And if I ask you "How can you tell?", you say "I can taste it." And you can. But at no point are you describing the experience.

Member of Audience: But you are describing the wine.

Ossorio: Yeah. Remember I said the first thing to look for is that it is a description not of the experience, but what it was the experience of. There is a case in point.

Member of Audience: I wonder if we could also look at the institutional aspect of spirituality and religion, because it seems that in a religious context, quite often people feel that they can talk about their experiences because they share enough of the religious language in a way that is integrated and they know what they are

talking about. But the problem seems to arise in the transitions between religious and spiritual paradigms in a way that is not so different from the problem of the transitions between scientific paradigms because the epistemological values seem to shift along with the theories. So, maybe the problem is the informality of the judgment required in transitions between both established views.

Ossorio: Well, it's true that you talk differently in different contexts. You talk differently in scientific or religious contents. But, it is not that you can talk about your experience in religious context and not in ordinary context. You can say something different about it, but you can talk about your experience in ordinary context. What you don't do is describe it. You don't do that in a religious context either.

Member of Audience: But the scientists can't describe the epistemological judgment when he judges that a new theory or radically new paradigm...

Ossorio: Judgment is different from experience. You can describe your judgment; you can't describe your experience.

Member of Audience: Ultimately it's the experience that the scientist calls upon when he makes that sort of judgment.

Ossorio: Maybe. And he could also be calling upon lots of knowledge. You don't know what goes into his judgment. He can tell you some of it sometimes, and you can guess sometimes, but you have no way of establishing firmly what he's using, and all of what he is using. There is simply no way. You wouldn't know it if you had it.

Member of Audience: But why is subtle epistemological judgment different in any way from subtle ethical judgment?

Ossorio: It's a different kind of judgment. Otherwise there is no difference. It's judgment. Yeah, it's judgment about different things. It takes a different background to do it well. It takes a different kind of learning, a different kind of sensitivity, etc. But it's all judgment.

Member of Audience: I just wonder because we imagine that there is progress in science, but it would be harder to show that there is progress in religion.

Ossorio: Do you think there is progress in science? If anything there is progress in technology, not science. And the only progress that I am sure of in science or philosophy is an increase in sophistication. We are not getting nearer to the truth. We are not doing better at the job of explaining things. We just get more sophisticated because we don't repeat the things we now know we did wrong before. We learn by our mistakes by not making those mistakes and by inventing new ways of doing it that don't involve those mistakes. And those are more sophisticated. They are not necessarily more correct. They don't necessarily represent an advance or anything else. Now that might strike you as pessimistic but ... what the hell. [laughter]

Member of Audience: Here I stand.

Member of Audience: There was something on a TV program the other night. An Indian chief was saying that even though technology brings us a lot of things, it limits us because in order to perceive technology you first have to destroy magic. So, I don't know how that ties in but it should be related to...

Ossorio: Without the science, technology is magic. If I walk over and push this thing and the light goes on, that's magic. Unless you happen to have the science behind it that says "No, this is how it happens." You can define magic in those terms. It's something that is causally efficacious, and you have no idea how it works.

Member of Audience: You could, but you don't have to.

Ossorio: Right.

Member of Audience: ...magic.

Ossorio: That's not what people usually mean when they say "You take the magic out." Sometimes what they mean is you have taken the mystery out, and I am in favor of that if you have done it legitimately. There are enough mysteries in the world to satisfy us. We don't have to invent them.

Member of Audience: The reason that poets and writers and songwriters use metaphors and similes is because you can't describe them.

Ossorio: That's one good reason.

Member of Audience: ...saying "My love flows like a river"...

Ossorio: Yeah. See, that is a way of letting you know what it is like. That's sure not a description. Or if it is, it is as you say a metaphorical description. But it does say something. It might even be for some purposes better than a description. It has a little bit of magic. [pause] To what extent did the three-minute lecture do anything?

Member of Audience: It took a lot more than three minutes.

Ossorio: It was all those damn questions that took so long. [laughter] Are we ready to move on to something else?

Member of Audience: Just one more thing. We can't redescribe our phenomenology, our experience... Does that also relate to a certain aloneness in terms of existence? We are alone with the experience?

Ossorio: I am not sure. We would be alone anyhow. Even if we could describe it. I am not sure if it adds to that. You might say at face value it does, but who knows how much.

Member of Audience: There is a lot of good poetry and literature that really does justice to shared experience. We aren't alone because lots of that stuff works. You know when I hear that "Love is like a river," I say "Yeah."

Ossorio: Okay. Let's see if we can come up with something else.

Conceptualization

Ossorio: This one also looks like it might be interesting but I might need some help. It says "Could you talk about the process of conceptualization vs. formalization and codification?" Could you say a little more about that?

Member of Audience: When you conceptualize something, it's like making it a thing. Also you use words in referring to things, and somehow that seems to be within the whole domain of conceptualization. I just wanted you to talk more about that.

Ossorio: Say some more.

Member of Audience: I have an idea of what formalization is. You have a formula and it helps you differentiate one thing from another thing. But when you conceptualize something, you know like, if you have the concept of verbal behavior... We talk about conceptualization all the time and I can never pin it down very well from something else. Because I think a formalization is also a conceptualization. Is it just more generic?

Ossorio: A concept is simply a distinction. Now if you've got a formalization, that will embody certain distinctions, and they are related to one another. Any time you have distinctions that are related to one another, you not only have a concept. You have a conceptual structure or a conceptual system. And a formalization is almost always a conceptual system. But it is not a simple contrast between formalism and conceptualization. Formalism has to do with the form that you put it in, whereas conceptualization has to do with the fact that it has to do with distinctions.

Member of Audience: So it is a different domain?

Ossorio: No. Like I say a formal system embodies distinctions so it is a conceptual structure. But not all conceptual structures have the same kind of, what would you say, structure as a formalism. For example, North, East, South and West are a conceptual structure but there is no formalism. Now with formalism you generally do something with it and generate new things. You know like with arithmetic, you generate new numbers out of old numbers. That's what formalisms are mainly for. Whereas conceptualizations may be totally static or they may be of that kind.

Member of Audience: So, therefore, formalization has a part-whole relationship to conceptualization.

Ossorio: No, it's a genus-species. It's a special case, namely a set of distinctions with a certain kind of structure.

Member of Audience: Okay, how would we put codification on that?

Ossorio: Codification is a little looser term. It implies that you have introduced system and order. When you codify something, you put it in an orderly systematic form. And explicit. So when you codify the laws of the land, you write them down. There they are. Explicit. Systematic. And that contrasts with the common law principles that everybody knows but nobody has ever written down. Those are not codified.

Member of Audience: You say a typology is an attempt to make sense of a codification...

Ossorio: Well, a typology is a codification of whatever the typology is about.

Member of Audience: Would it help to mention that in the SA formulation, a concept is a status category?

Ossorio: No, because a formal system is also a status category.

Member of Audience: In other words the nature of concept itself is not like an object or a process...

Ossorio: Right, but the same goes for a formal system, so you couldn't use that to differentiate the two. As I say, a formal system is a special case. There is one other possible important difference. Some formal systems allow you to make or represent statements that have truth value, whereas a distinction is merely a

distinction and couldn't possibly have any truth value. You think of the English language as a formal system because there are rules for what you can combine with what. You can use that to generate sentences that are statements and those have truth values. That's more than just a mere distinction, because distinctions per say have no truth value. Like the difference between saying "a cup" which has no truth value, and saying "The cup is on the table" which does have truth value. Okay.

Member of Audience: So when you talk about the cognitive parameter as being something that you give value to, something as being specified as a distinction or as a conceptualization, the distinction then is out of the verbal behavior and then when we talk about specifying the conceptualization we are talking about verbal behavior.

Ossorio: No. What's in that parameter, the values in that parameter, are simply which distinctions are you acting on. They don't have to be structured; they don't have to be a formal system; they can be; they may or may not be. The only thing implied is that there is some distinction, distinctions usually, that you are acting on, whatever the form that they take. It's a very inclusive sort of thing. It is a very general and noncommittal thing. And that's because behaviors come in all sizes. I can have lots of different things up there but they are all distinctions.

Member of Audience: What the next step is is to specify the value of the conceptualization?

Ossorio: You don't specify values of conceptualization. You simply specify the conceptualizations.

Member of Audience: Okay.

Ossorio: And when you talk about conceptualization as against concept, you almost have to mean a conceptual structure. Because if it's just a single distinction, why talk about conceptualization instead of this concept? There is a usage in Descriptive that that's relevant to. One reason you talk about conceptualizing -- conceptualizing a phenomenon -- is that your conceptualization of something is what you take it to be. And that contrasts with a theory of it, because to have a theory of it you first have to have a description of what it is that the theory is about and that description is your conceptualization. You start from that. Then you can do other things with it. But your conceptualization of it is what you take it to be. And part of the history of Descriptive is to contrast with theories. With theories you always have to have something else there first, in order for there to be something for the theory to be about whereas with a conceptualization you don't. That's where you start. You might say that's another version of "Here I stand." "This is how I conceptualize things, and I am going to act on it."

Member of Audience: You mention that in science what we see is increased sophistication. Do you feel the same way about mathematics?

Ossorio: Yeah. You have a lot of new inventions but by and large mathematical language is more sophisticated than it was. Let me just give you an example. I am old enough so that I can remember the days when mathematicians were actively embarrassed by the existence of imaginary numbers. I laugh when I think of it because I remember sitting in a college classroom and the prof was talking about imaginary numbers and you could see he was embarrassed. Why? Because these are very peculiar sorts of things. They are very unlike any other numbers that we have. It was obvious and so that was an embarrassment to him, because it was a dangler. And the only reason they kept them was that they had certain value. Well, nowadays they have more sophisticated mathematical systems and language that can incorporate what used to be a dangler. Now it's simply part of the system. Now that's an example of increasing sophistication.

Culture, Ways of Life, and Worlds

Ossorio: Distinguish and relate culture, ways of life, and worlds. Draw a visual or a picture that includes all three.

Member of Audience: Guess whose question that was?

Ossorio: One way of doing it is to say that "Culture and a way of life are synonymous. A culture is a way of life." If you do it that way, though, then you need to take account of the kind of distinctions that are made by somebody who distinguishes cultures from ways of life. So one way or another you are going to have to account for certain distinctions. My preference personally is to say that they are the same. But that is a personal preference. You could do it the other way.

When it comes to culture you have not a definition but a parametric analysis. And the parametric analysis for culture starts with World, Members, Language, Social practices, and Statuses. Those are ways that one culture can be the same as another culture or different from it. That's a parametric analysis. Now notice that that connects culture and world directly. World is one of the parameters of culture. Every culture has some account, some understanding of the world in which that culture exists. It has some story about what's in it. It has some story about where they are in the world. It has some story about what's beyond the border. It has many stories about what goes on in the world. There is lots of detail involved in that parameter.

Member of Audience: It tells us what's possible and what's not possible.

Ossorio: Did you hear that? He said "what's possible and what's not possible." That too is part of the cultural picture of the world. Okay now, social practices come in structures. A culture is not just a jumbled collection of social practices. Those social practices are organized and by convention the next larger unit from a social practice is an institution. Institution is defined as an organized set of social practices. A culture provides the members with lots of possibilities of social practices and institutions to participate in. And everyone of those has lots of options of how you can participate in the same practice in the same institution in different ways. And as you might guess, some of those are not good. It's not good to step out in front of a moving car. It's not good to go around hitting people over the head. Those are options you have, but they are not good options from the cultural point of view.

Now what takes up the slack there is choice principles. And choice principles are a kind of protean notion because there are many ways to specify choice principles. The most common way is to talk about values, cultural values or personal values. The choice principle as you might guess is a principle for making choices. When you are faced with choices about which things to do and which options to take, you are not on your own. The culture also provides you with a variety of choice principles for how to live your life by making certain kinds of choices.

Choice principles, in turn, can be divided into central ones, intermediate, and peripheral. And Fernand is an expert on that because he did his dissertation on that. The dissertation said that when a person enters a new culture, the thing that changes first are his peripheral choice principles. Because those are most responsive to the milieu and if you move to a different milieu, very often your old ones are literally impossible. You can't come over here and still eat rice if there is no rice here. So those change quickly and are the first to change, and easiest. Then, the intermediate ones. And finally, if they change at all your central ones change. Why? Because the central ones are usually compatible with any milieu. After all, in your original culture there were plenty of different milieus and those choice principles applied across the board. So in a new culture they will also apply across the board. For example, if one of the primary choice principles is "Look out for your family above all else", you can do that as an immigrant to this country in the midst of all kinds of new social practices just as easily as you could do it in the old country with a familiar set of social practices. That's the nature of core principles. They are immune to ordinary things. You don't have to

change them in the face of circumstances. But there are reasons why you might anyhow and if you don't, probably your children will.

Okay, now choice principles are where you locate the notion of a way of living. Which choices you make forms a kind of pattern. It gives a qualitative ... a distinct quality to your life. And it's a kind of thing that we by and large share. Now with the culturally approved choice principles are ones that lots of people will use. That's how you get social norms. There is also enough variety, at least in a culture like ours, so that different people can draw on the fund of choice principles and circumstances and live very different lives and still be living in accordance with the culture. Not being oddballs.

Now if you want to say that ways of living are the same as culture, then you have the problem of what do you call this. And I couldn't swear to it but I think that what I have done, in fact, is to distinguish between a way of life and a way of living. And a way of life is what goes with culture. A way of living is what goes with the person. Now as I said, those are not sacred. It's simply that you have this distinction that's real and you need to mark it with some different description. And either you use the contrast between culture and way of life, or you use the contrast between way of life and way of living or something else. It's the distinction that's important.

Member of Audience: You mentioned the parameters of culture. How are they different from the parameters of community?

Ossorio: Oh, a culture is a kind of community. Oh, by the way, choice principles is one of the parameters of culture.

Member of Audience: So you have the same list of parameters for cultures as you do for communities?

Ossorio: Pretty much, I think. Tony's differ from mine in very minor respects. I think he has social practices and locutions and I have a language, something like that.

Member of Audience: Does that make culture synonymous with a community?

Ossorio: No, one is a special case of the other. See, a culture is what you might call a stand alone community. It's one that can survive on its own without needing some other community. Now a community of psychologists does not have that feature. If you've just got a bunch of psychologists and nothing else, they are not going to survive unless they have a culture in the real sense. So, a culture is a stand alone community that is self sufficient enough to survive without any other culture in the picture. And that makes it a very special kind of community because any other community depends on this kind.

Member of Audience: Sometimes it seems to me there ought to be another parameter for cultures or communities analogous to personal characteristics, but called culture characteristics.

Ossorio: The choice principles are the main things to distinguish one culture from another.

Member of Audience: Not to withstand, but there are groups of choice principles. There are a lot of times that people want to talk about kinds of choice principles.

Member of Audience: Yeah, that...

Ossorio: Yeah, you mean like Germany is an authoritarian culture and England is a...

Member of Audience: Something to put it down to one culture.

Ossorio: Yeah. That's not one choice principle; it's a whole set of choice principles.

Member of Audience: That's what I say.

Member of Audience: Don't you do that through the standard old principles?

Ossorio: Yeah, but that's not part of the parametric analysis.

Member of Audience: Seems to me you could do that by taking central choice principles...

Ossorio: Well as I say that's how we mainly distinguish one culture from another. But you could do it the way you did it. It's hard and you have no guarantee that you will have interesting PC's. There are a few that we know about and can mention like authoritative Germany, but there's no guarantee that every culture has some interesting characteristic like that.

Member of Audience: When we talk about a way of living, I take it that creates a personal way of life. Here you could distinguish personal characteristics not just in terms of choice principles but in terms of dispositions as well, powers and dispositions. An example would be in your personal way of life may be heavily influenced by your affinity for mathematics or your affinity for art, color, etc. And I don't know that to just put that into terms of choice principles does it justice.

Ossorio: No, what I said is that you have a set of choice principles from which you draw. And, indeed, your characteristics are one of the main basis on which you draw these rather than those. Your circumstances are another. But, once you mention those two, guess what? It's simply a model for understanding behavior in general -- person characteristics and circumstances.

Member of Audience: I have a quick question there. I think I know what choice principles are, but to me a parametric analysis is something big...

Ossorio: What do you mean "big?"

Member of Audience: Wouldn't parametric analysis include choice principles?

Ossorio: No, parametric analysis is a purely formal notion. It even has a definition. Let me give you the definition. To give a parametric analysis of a domain, a logical domain, is to specify the ways that one element in the domain can be the same as another element or different from it as such. So if you are talking about persons, a parametric analysis would be the ways that one person can be the same as another person or different from the other person as a person. Not as an organism, not as a physical object, but as a person. Because you are dealing with the domain of persons. And the same for behaviors. This is the parametric analysis for behavior [points to the behavior formula]. These are the ways in which one behavior can be the same as another or different from it as a behavior. Some parametric analyses are very simple; like, brightness, hue, and saturation is a parametric analysis of visible colors. Others are more complicated, like this one of behavior. There is no implication about simplicity or complexity. And the definition covers any degree.

Member of Audience: No, I was saying that to me the parametric analysis of persons would have to include more than just choice principles. I thought that was what I was hearing.

Ossorio: No, there is a parametric analysis of person and there are 11 parameters. In fact, no, it is even worse than that. There are 11 categories of parameters, each of which has an indefinitely large number of actual parameters. Let me just rattle off the list. (Change tape) ...Every one of them is a person characteristic. Every one of them is a way that one person can be the same as another or different from another. So that's an extraordinarily large number of parameters for persons. But guess what? You can derive them all in a more or less tortuous fashion, or at least some of them, from the definition of a person as an individual whose history is paradigmatically a history of deliberate action. Because if you schematize

a life history and introduce a series of deliberate actions and you say "How can one of these things differ from another one of these things or be the same?" The answer is, "Well there are only two ways." One is "Which behaviors occur?" and the other is "In what pattern?" Now because the number of patterns is essentially unlimited, instead we do crude groupings and that's how you get things like traits, attitudes, interests, etc. So there is a parametric analysis of persons and, indeed, it has a large number of parameters.

Member of Audience: Yeah, I was planning on bringing it up but I appreciate that description. But the notion of choice principles is starting to get...

Ossorio: No, the point that Walter was making is that a personal way of life or a way of living involves a person selecting from the choice principles that the culture offers. What he was saying is that that choice reflects your personal characteristics and I said indeed it does.

Member of Audience: Is the description of central, intermediate, and peripheral choice principles tautological?

Ossorio: More or less.

Member of Audience: And of which ones change?

Ossorio: I prefer to treat them as empirical but only by about that much [indicates a small space]. Reflection might view the result that they are really tautological. Not that the choice principles are tautological, but the fact that the central ones change less readily than the peripheral ones. One of the reasons for not just going straight down that path is that Fernand and I ginned up an interesting empirical hypothesis. Namely, that with refugees, in general it would be the case that the peripheral ones would go quickest and the intermediate ones would go more slowly. But we also ginned up the hypothesis that a few of the peripheral ones would outlast just about anything else. And the reasoning was that the peripheral ones are your last concrete hold on your old culture. And so they acquire additional value. They don't become central but they acquire additional value which means that they don't change that readily. Now that's not tautological. And what we found? We didn't find that result. It might still be true but we didn't find it.

Member of Audience: ...central vs. peripheral...

Ossorio: Well, there's two angles. One is exactly the kind of data he got that shows they change readily. The other is, again, native speaker intuition. You ask people from the culture what's most important. The other is that you can usually arrange them in a hierarchy so that the less central ones are ways of implementing the central ones. When you've got all of that, there is a very little question about it.

Member of Audience: ... the choice principles vs. values?

Ossorio: Choice principal is the general and rigorous term. Values is one way of identifying choice principles. There are other ways. For example, policies are direct ways of identifying choice principles. A policy is a choice principle. But you also have strange things like mottos and slogans. For example, "Duty, honor, country." If somebody is living by that motto, it is easy to tell. It's easy to recognize it as a choice principle because it guides his choices. And it's very hard to paraphrase that one in terms of values or in terms of anything else. That's why we have these various ways of specifying choice principles. What I said was the most common way I think is values and the next most common is policies. And then it's up for grabs any other way.

Member of Audience: Where would something like traditions fall? I am thinking of the idea of people holding onto some peripheral things that may not even be beliefs or choice principles, but traditions.

Ossorio: What are traditions?

Member of Audience: What are traditions?

Ossorio: Yeah.

Member of Audience: Ceremonies, maybe.

Ossorio: Ceremonies are social practices or institutions. And, indeed, one of the things immigrants do is to try to preserve some of their social practices and institutions.

Member of Audience: But those aren't choice principles as far as...

Ossorio: No, but there are choice principles applicable to both. What they've done is they have saved part of their culture within the new culture and that usually over time will disappear. Because it doesn't have the same backing as it did back there. So you can sort of brute force maintain it because it is important to you, but over time you don't have the support and it dies out. Now as I said, if it doesn't die out for you it will probably die out for your children because they don't have the same background; it's not as important to them as it is to you.

Member of Audience: But then what about the third generation, you know, that goes back after it?

Ossorio: Well, that's predictable. We have another dissertation around that. About the time you start losing your core principles, or you have difficulty with your parents because you have lost them and they haven't, about that time you start searching for your roots. You say "What does it really mean to be a Japanese?" And so that kind of problem is predictable somewhere in that sequence.

Member of Audience: How come some people go through searching for their roots and some don't? I have a great grandparent who came over here from Lithuania in the 1880's and I never gave a thought to my roots. It is an interesting notion, I suppose.

Ossorio: Well, there are two kinds of answers that come to mind quick. One is if you assimilated it. You don't feel the need of roots because you have them. You know, it is just a new set of roots. The other is if nobody keeps reminding you that you came from Lithuania. These days you get reminded all of the time that you came from Lithuania, and that's one reason why you are driven to "Well, I am a Lithuanian." Remember that principle that people become the way they are treated. Then you have the problem of "What is it to *be* a Lithuanian?" You don't have it in here. Or if you do, you don't know it.

Member of Audience: Well, it could be that's the way Lithuanians are.

Ossorio: Yeah, but you probably don't know that either. Okay. Um, let's see.

Member of Audience: What about the one you were saying about being reminded of it.

Ossorio: What?

Member of Audience: You said you don't have to search for it if you weren't reminded of it.

Ossorio: If they had assimilated because they would have roots.

Satori

Ossorio: I don't know if we can get anymore mileage out of this one. How would you describe this experience of satori or pure awareness? How can we talk about it?

Well, one way we can talk about it is to call it pure experience. But if you give up the notion that you are ever describing experience, then that means that you've got to work to make this an honest question. So we need some help on the question.

Member of Audience: If it's impossible to describe an experience, at least trying to describe an experience, talk about it or think about it and simply have the experience. Is that not satori or whatever?

Ossorio: I don't know. How would you know?

Member of Audience: We all did agree that we cannot talk about it or...

Ossorio: No we can talk about it but we can't describe it.

Member of Audience: You can't describe experience. We have to all agree that we have experience.

Ossorio: Yeah. But that's why I say if you followed all of that about other experience, is there anything that remains to be answered about this experience? Walter, you are looking troubled.

Member of Audience: Well, you correctly detect my experience. [laughter] If you can't describe experience, does it make sense to say that we can observe each other's experience?

Ossorio: You could make some kind of sense out of it but it wouldn't help. If you explain that by saying "Well we can often tell what sort of experience somebody is having", I'd say "Yeah, but it doesn't help much."

Member of Audience: Why not?

Ossorio: Because nobody doubts that. So that isn't going to satisfy people who have questions about experience.

Member of Audience: Well, what does it mean when you say "Oh yeah, now I know what you mean."

Ossorio: That's not problematic. That's not puzzling.

Member of Audience: But somehow we have recreated our experience enough so that the other person recognizes it.

Ossorio: Yeah and that's commonplace. That's why I say it. If that's all you mean, I don't know anybody that would disagree or be much interested. I mean somebody who talks about indescribable experiences is not going to be satisfied with that.

Member of Audience: I thought you used to avoid the word "experience."

Ossorio: Yeah, there is nothing in the formulation that says "experience". It's all carried by this notion of making distinctions. And making distinctions, if you want to get technical, can be paraphrased into information processing, which I don't do. On the other hand, there is nothing in the formulation that denies that there is any experience.

Member of Audience: Can you be a person and not have experience?

Ossorio: Well, that's an interesting question and you can go either way. Some people prefer one way. I prefer to be conservative and say "Yes." You might say "It's a burden of proof thing." I am willing to say "No," but the burden of proof is on somebody who wants to say that. Without any such thing I would say "Yes."

Member of Audience: For example, a computer would qualify as a person...

Ossorio: Not a computer, but a creature.

Member of Audience: Say what?

Ossorio: A creature.

Member of Audience: A creature in a mechanical sense.

Ossorio: No, not a mechanical creature. No, a non-biological creature. See, if you say machine or mechanical you are biasing the answer because by definition those aren't persons. So you have to get something neutral like creature in order to be able to say something with it.

Member of Audience: We can assume burden of proof wise that experience is possible and yet not be a human, not be a person. I'm sorry. But can you not have experience and yet be a person?

Ossorio: Yeah, that's what I thought you were saying.

Member of Audience: Is Hal a candidate for that. In 2001, Hal the creature...

Ossorio: By implication, yeah. If you didn't know how Hal worked, if you didn't know that it was just a computer system, you might take it as a person.

Member of Audience: You can't know if somebody is not having an experience either, you know. Because they can't communicate it to you, doesn't mean that they are not having some kind of experience.

Ossorio: No, but remember that communication -- language -- is the best way that we know about other people's experience. There isn't a better way. That's the prime way.

Member of Audience: Yes, but that doesn't mean that if you are in a coma or sleeping you could still be experiencing and not be able to tell about it.

Ossorio: You might. You could be dreaming.

Member of Audience: Regarding the description of the experience again, are the person characteristics the parameters that distinguish between two different cases of experience?

Ossorio: No.

Member of Audience: Does the person characteristic...

Ossorio: No. Person characteristic merely helps to explain why you have the experience that you do. It's not a way distinguishing one experience from another.

Member of Audience: But then if two behaviors differ because they involve different experiences when all other parameters are the same, wouldn't they differ only in the person characteristics?

Ossorio: No. They would differ here [pointing to K]. If at all. You see the question is "What do you mean by experience?" "What is this extra something?" You don't just want to stipulate that there is an extra something because that's what the argument is about. But if it's an extra something it's going to be this kind of something.

Member of Audience: But that doesn't require...

Ossorio: This doesn't require it. I am saying that if there is an extra something like that, it will be this kind. It will involve distinctions because experiences are of one kind or another. And you can tell if you are having this experience or that one.

Member of Audience: Is that the same thing as saying whatever distinction you are making when you engage in that behavior?

Ossorio: Say that again.

Member of Audience: Would that be the same as saying it's whatever distinctions you are making when you are engaging in that behavior?

Ossorio: Yeah.

Member of Audience: That's the equivalent of saying that's what your experience is?

Ossorio: No. I am saying if there is something called experience that enters into behavior, it will enter here.

Member of Audience: That would be a special case.

Ossorio: It would be a special case. A special kind of value of K. See, you might pursue it by saying "Well after all, on this burden of proof thing, shouldn't it be the other way because all of the people we know have experience?" So, then I direct your attention to your knowledge of yourself and your knowledge of your behavior, and your knowledge of your behavior is not via experience. And that's because it's an author's knowledge that you have before the behavior even exists because you have to have it before the behavior exists in order to create the behavior. You can only experience what's already there. You can't experience something before it exists. So you see your knowledge of your behavior is not because you have an experience of it.

Member of Audience: Then wouldn't it show up under PC instead of under K?

Ossorio: Nope. It's a distinction but it's not experience. It's not experiential. That's the point of bringing it up now. You can distinguish what behavior you are going to engage in. That's what you've got here. And that's what you need in order to go ahead and engage in it. But, it appears here [points], not as an experience, because it doesn't exist. It appears there [points] as a distinction.

Member of Audience: In the same way that you have a connection between what you want and the distinctions you make, couldn't there be that kind of connection between personal characteristic...

Ossorio: Of what?

Member of Audience: Of that distinction you make...

Ossorio: You got me confused here.

Member of Audience: I guess I am trying to see if there is a connection between that individual's experience of that distinction. Is that where it could fall?

Ossorio: Is what where it could fall?

Member of Audience: Do you want to say encounter with instead of experience? Would that make any difference?

Member of Audience: I'm raising the issue of making a distinction and what we call the experience of that, and to the extent that people detect the differences in the making of that distinction. I am wondering if that falls into the styles, or something under...

Ossorio: No. Let me tell you what has happened in history. Following that approach there is a PC, a type of PC, that you could use. That's the notion of a state. People talk about states of mind. You can talk about an experience as a state of mind. And you could hypothesize that whenever you make a given distinction, you are in a corresponding state of mind. You can also hypothesize that when you have a particular experience, you are in a corresponding state of mind. But then what? Then you get all of the same questions about states of mind. But that's how people have done it. They talk about states of mind. And state of mind will not help you distinguish between experience and simply making a distinction.

Member of Audience: Except I think it allows for differences, a certain qualitative difference from the distinction.

Ossorio: No, that's simply a different distinction.

Member of Audience: What do philosophers mean when they talk about qualia?

Ossorio: ... the irreducibly experiential aspect of your consciousness.

Member of Audience: Raw feels.

Ossorio: Yeah, raw feel is the other term they use. The analogue is seeing nothing but blue. You know when you look up at the sky and you don't see your surrounds. You've got a visual field and what is it? It's just blue. You just have a simple, single quality. And that's the kind of thing that quale is. And, indeed, if anything is irreducible, I would bet that that is. That's why they use it and that's how they use it. They say you can account for everything else but you cannot account for this. You can't reduce this to something non-experiential. And as far as I know they are right. There are arguments about it, but... One way of putting the argument that consciousness is not essential to being a person is to say that "Experience is simply our way of making distinctions." And one can make distinctions in other ways, and it's the distinctions that matter as far as being a person, not doing it the way that we do it. That goes with being homo sapiens, not with being a person.

By the way, there is a set of definitions that might help here. First, a definition of a person, an individual whose history is paradigmatically a history of deliberate action. Then a human being. A human being is an

individual who is a person and a specimen of homo sapiens. An alien is an individual who is a person and has a non-homo sapiens embodiment. And an authentic robot is an individual who is a person and has a nonbiological embodiment. Now the formulation of the person concept is directed at persons, not homo sapiens, not human beings. Human beings are simply naturally occurring examples that we can observe. But since we would admit as persons little green men from Mars, etc. if they showed us the right stuff, it follows that our present concept of a person is not limited to homo sapiens. And by extension the same thing applies to an authentic robot. If there were a creature who showed us the right stuff and wasn't a biological thing, we would still say it's a person. You know, just think of all of the science fiction where there are such things and they are accepted as persons.

Member of Audience: What an experience that would be!

Ossorio: Yeah, mind boggling.

Member of Audience: I am still remembering the...

Ossorio: So the fact that we have only one kind, namely, homo sapiens, that we observe doesn't mean that we don't already leave room for these others.

Member of Audience: I think in the last couple of years I...what an authentic robot is as opposed to an inauthentic robot.

Ossorio: No, that's not the right contrast. The difference between an authentic robot and an inauthentic one is like the difference between an authentic person and an inauthentic person. The right contrast is the difference between an authentic robot and a piece of automatic machinery. See, these days, any piece of automatic machinery gets called a robot. A movable arm on the factory floor gets called a robot. So the definition I have of a robot is in a sense a polemic one. Why? Because I don't think it's worth calling something a robot if it isn't a person. You know, if you call it automatic machinery that's fine. It describes what it is. Why call it a robot?

Member of Audience: Could you tell us what an authentic robot is?

Ossorio: It's an individual who is a person and has a nonbiological embodiment.

Member of Audience: Are there any yet?

Ossorio: I said the only persons that we know of are homo sapiens. But we already leave room for the others. Take that from a different angle. There is almost nothing that we define in terms of what it is made of. You don't define a cup in terms of what it is made of. You define it in terms of what it is for. You don't define a lectern in terms of what it's made of. It can be made of lots of different things. You don't define an automobile in terms of what it's made of. You define it in terms of how it works. In fact, the only thing that I can think of off hand where we have gone the other way is in this very question of what is a person. Somehow there we insist that it's got to be made of flesh and bones or it's not a person. Well, it's just as bad policy as describing an ashtray as something that's made out of glass. You can do that but then you have to account for the fact that there are other things that are exactly like ashtrays except they are not made out of glass. So all you've done is lose the use of one word and you have to introduce another to do the same job.

Member of Audience: What if they discovered one day that what it takes to be a person includes consciousness?

Ossorio: You don't discover that...

Member of Audience: ...empirical discovery and that furthermore it requires a certain kind of material structure.

Ossorio: There's no such possible discovery. You have to decide that. No matter what the evidence is you can decide one way or the other. It's a matter of decision, not of discovery. And it depends on how you conceptualize a person.

Member of Audience: It would be persuasive though in terms of a connection between our brain processing...

Ossorio: Not at all. We already know there is a connection. We already know there is a connection and it doesn't do a damn thing in that direction. All it does is create a mind/body problem.

Member of Audience: What we said was consciousness is so far...

Ossorio: One of the problems of consciousness is that you can't say what it is.

Member of Audience: I was kind of hoping that you would say that but... (Change tape)

Ossorio: People are conscious of things. That's the fundamental statement involving consciousness. People are conscious of certain things. I am conscious of your voice as you talk. I am conscious of the sight of the group here. But in that sense it's synonymous with experience. I experience the sound of your voice. I experience the sight of the door. That's how we encounter it in real life. Other than in academic contexts, people generally don't talk about consciousness or experience. They say I see, I taste, I smell, I know.

Member of Audience: Wow, what an experience.

Ossorio: Yeah. And notice it has nothing to do with this kind of thing, this notion of experience. There you are talking about the impact that it had on you. Okay, are you ready to move on? Going once...Well, let's see.

"People become what they are treated as being."

Ossorio: Hum, what do you know. What's your reaction to "People become what they are treated as being"? I would say it's illuminating, and it's not true. However, it only takes a minor modification. There is a tendency for people to become the way they are treated as being. And under certain circumstances, the tendency may be very strong. And in others it may be weak.

Member of Audience: Is that treatment by others, or treatment by others and themselves?

Ossorio: Let me review for you the notion of Move 2. Move 2 is one of several Influence Principles. It goes like this. "Making Move 2 makes it difficult for Move 1 not to have already occurred." Well, treating somebody as being a certain sort is making a Move 2. It's going to make it difficult for him to be anything else. That's why there is a tendency for people to become that. On the other hand, it's also a status assignment. And with status assignments they not only have to make; they have to be accepted before they are successful. And there are several other principles. One that says "Coercion elicits resistance." Another that says "Threatened degradation elicits self affirmation." And a special case of that is "Provocation elicits

hostility." So if what I'm treated as being amounts to a degradation, there is a good chance that I won't become that way. Instead I will self affirm. I will reject it.

Now it happens that kids are poorly placed to reject their parents' status assignments. But it can happen. And in organizations and in groups, it's often difficult for one individual to reject a status assignment made by all of the rest of the people. Because if everybody insists on treating you as a nerd and that's the only way they will deal with you and no matter what you do, that's how they deal with you, it's pretty hard to fight. See all you can do is that up here [points] you say "Screw you." But it's very easy to go along with it. It's much easier than you might think. One of the clinical places where that shows up is when people visit their parents. And the parents treat them like the children that they were and people fall into the very same old things that they used to do as children with their parents. And it's a very powerful influence. And when they come back it's like they are immigrants. They can sort of shake it off.

So, yeah, there is a tendency for people to become the way they are treated as being. And unilaterally I can assign you a status and no matter what you do, I'll keep assigning you that status. In that sense you have no choice about it. What you have a choice about is you don't have to accept it. But you also can't make me stop assigning you that status. So then it may be a stand off. Again, one of the things that makes a difference in how easily you become the way you are treated as being is how easy it is to be that way. Some times it is very easy to be that way in which case you are more likely to do it.

Member of Audience: What are your comments on how that applies to therapeutic principles for kids being bullied or school situations where there is a lot of peer pressure...

Ossorio: Say that again.

Member of Audience: The status assignments of the group. How individuals can resist certain groups.

Ossorio: Okay. Let me try a slightly different angle. If I make a status assignment on you, it's like I hand you a contract and I have already signed it. And the contract says "If you will be this way, I will treat you that way." That's how you do business with me. And all you've got to do is put your name on the dotted line and we are in business. So a status assignment gives you the opportunity to be the way I have assigned you. If that's attractive, you don't need to be forced into it. You will walk right in because it's an opportunity. Now with peer groups, you see, there is enough attraction there so that often people walk right into it. They don't see anything wrong with it and there it is. It's like honey attracting flies. How would you prepare them not to be attracted, not to see that as a great opportunity?

Member of Audience: Actually, yeah, you are giving a different case than I was thinking of. I was thinking more of the bully situation. I think you are thinking more of the appeal of drugs, gangs, one of those.

Ossorio: Yeah.

Member of Audience: I am thinking of how somebody can reject negative status assignments.

Ossorio: Well, anything that will build self-esteem, genuine self-esteem, will serve as insulation against that and increase the likelihood that instead of going along, the person will self affirm. Any way of implementing the self affirmation makes it easier to self affirm and follow through. So when a father teaches a kid to fight, he is teaching him how to implement rejecting that kind of status assignment. If he can implement that, then it is much easier for him to carry off the self affirmation. And more generally, providing alternatives that are again implementable and attractive.

Stress

Ossorio: See, here's one that says formulations of stress, e.g. good stress/bad stress seem awkward. Does Descriptive Psychology offer a way of formulating stress that is damaging?

You already have a prominent example in Ralph Wechsler's analysis of psychological trauma. There's stress that is damaging. Now if you wanted to start from scratch, you would probably start by either defining or at least clarifying "What is stress?" It's one of those words that everybody uses and when you come right down to it, what is it? What is it to be under stress? Well, I have come up with something that's probably not a definition but will serve in place of one until we have a good one. And that is that stress depends on uncertainty. When there is some kind of outcome that's important to you and the outcome is uncertain, then you are under stress. Now a special case of that is if you are in danger and you don't succeed in escaping, you are under stress. Because that fits the picture of something that's important but the outcome is uncertain.

Now what happens when that's the case? What do people do when they are under stress? What happens to them? Well one possibility is that they do what they can. And that may be bad. An apparent example goes back to when the lion comes into the room, and I see the lion and in this example, there is no window or door for me to run out of. He came in through the only door there is. So what I do is simply tip over the table and hide behind it. Now if you look at that behavior and judge it by normal standards you say "That's stupid. That's not going to save you." But on the other hand, if you look at it from my point of view, you say "He's doing the best that he could. It's about as much as he can do in that situation. And it's not of much help but that's as much as he can do." Well, you can see that in a situation where you are simply out of desperation doing what you can, you may do things that are inadvisable. You may do things that are foolish. You may do things that are destructive.

Member of Audience: So would stress be a state?

Ossorio: No, I'd follow the physical model because that's where this came from. In the physical model you have a wire with a thing attached to the end. And you twist the thing. Twisting it is the stress. What the stress does is put strain on the wire. So the condition that the person is in is strain, not stress. Now in the physical model, if you twist it too much it won't come back. It won't recover. And that has been used as a metaphor for too much stress and you won't recover from that. But that's just a metaphor. It works very well but if you ask "Why is it that too much psychological stress and you don't recover?" you don't have an easy answer the way you have an easy answer for the wire. Now that's a mark that it's a metaphor for you. Even if there is an explanation, you don't have it and so for you it's simply a metaphor. But suppose you try thinking along those lines. Why is it that if you have too much stress, you may not recover or recover fully? And what would qualify as too much stress? It's almost a tautology: too much stress means you don't recover from it. What does recovery depend on? Well, presumably it depends on the removal of the stress.

Member of Audience: The what?

Ossorio: The removal of the stress. As long as you keep twisting that wire, it is not going to recover. It's only after you let go that then it can recover.

Member of Audience: It seems to me, thinking about The Face in the Wall, another way of recovering from stress is changing your world view in a way that absorbs whatever is stressing you to the point that you can go on.

Ossorio: Yeah, and when people do that in clinically relevant ways, we call it a distortion of reality and that's bad. But that's one of the destructive things people can do when they are doing the best they can out of sheer desperation. Well think about that one. If I distort reality and under my new view of things I am no longer in danger, then I am not under stress any more. The only stress, if there is any, is in maintaining that view given evidence to the contrary. If I'm good at it that stress will be minimal. If I'm not then that's a different source of stress. It's a different stress.

Member of Audience: Why are all of the bite marks appearing on my arm?

Ossorio: Out of hypnosis. I need to have faith. [laughter]

Member of Audience: But aren't there also some types of stress that you can go on in a different way and it's not that sort of thing.

Ossorio: Yeah, but that's the point: Too much stress and you don't recover. If it is not too much, you just go ahead and recover. And if you just go your way in spite of it, then it wasn't much stress to being with.

Member of Audience: Yeah but if you change your world view, you are not...

Ossorio: Okay. Yeah, that's what I meant. If you change your world view and that makes life easy, then the one remaining stress is maintaining that new world view in spite of the evidence to the contrary.

Member of Audience: Although it could be something like changing your Type A outlook or something like that where it wouldn't be a distortion of reality.

Member of Audience: Or accepting a loss. Accepting a loss and discovering you can go on even with a loss. It may not be as great a loss as you thought it was going to be...

Ossorio: That's not a change of world view. That's simply finding out that it wasn't as bad as you thought. The lion has all of his teeth pulled. So I am not in quite the same kind of danger as I thought I was. Well, changes in world view though provide one kind of example of a kind of adaptation that can be destructive. And it's easy to think of it being maintained for a long time.

Member of Audience: Is it possible that the stress itself could create the kind of situation where people could do more, that their behavior potential was more limited than until the stress occurred at which point they have more behavior potential. It was a stress at the time that it was a stress, but by virtue of it happening it becomes not a stress. Because I think of people with cancer, for instance, what is a stress at the time of diagnosis is not a stress maybe a year or two years down, because they've found behavior potential they didn't have.

Ossorio: I would put it that they didn't realize the potential that they did have. In general, people's notion of their possibilities is too narrow rather than too broad. Just routinely it's too narrow rather than too broad. And in part that's predictable because you learn about your possibilities by what you do and what you experience, and you can't experience all of your possibilities. So you know you are going to have possibilities that you don't know about, until and unless something brings it out in you. Well, a stressful situation may be exactly what brings out something that you never knew you had. If you can do that, then even though you are acting out of desperation you have discovered something, you have that increased your behavior potential, and if you're effective, you have removed the danger of whatever it was and you are okay. That's known as trial by fire.

Member of Audience: I heard something else now with diagnosis. That diagnosis is partly the outcome you are uncertain about and once you have got the diagnosis, that bad thing already happened and you have...

Ossorio: How about an example.

Member of Audience: ...The state of the unknown. But once you know this has happened you can figure out...

Ossorio: Yeah, and therapeutically one of things I do with people who are facing some negative things is what I call a disaster scenario. "Think of the worst that could happen. What would you do if that happened?" If you can anchor on that, the whole thing becomes much more manageable because now it has a structure, now it has a limit. Whereas before it's just like a black cloud over you with indefinite scope and extent and you just sort of adapt.

Member of Audience: Seems like there's a maxim about uncertainty and stress, that a person requires the world to be...

Ossorio: One of the relevant maxims is: "If you don't know what the answer is, don't do anything that depends on what the answer is." In the kind of case we are talking about, you can't be that noncommittal. And that's where the uncertainty kills you.

Member of Audience: In the interest of eliminating stress...

Ossorio: I think it's a good time to stop.