

Rap Session with Peter G. Osorio
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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.

C Space Technology

Introduction: . . . Descriptive Psychology and my dear friend, Dr. Peter Ossorio.

[Applause]

Ossorio: Better quit while I'm ahead. [Laughter] Well, unlike some previous years, all of these questions are reasonable. [Laughter] I didn't toss any out. I just put them in the order of difficulty. Some would take too long. Others I'm not quite sure how I would answer them, so I'll just take these in the order that I now have them in.

Audience: Easy to hard or hard to easy?

Ossorio: Easy to hard.

Audience: Tell us the ones you're unsure of. [Laughter - inaudible audience]

Ossorio: Okay, the easiest one is this: Would "C Space technology" be a practical innovation in today's search engine market? And the answer is "Yes".

There is a small company in Boulder that uses C Space technology for a search engine. Joe Jeffrey is getting into the business. My company Global Commerce Link is also getting into the business. So you will be seeing and hearing more of C Space technology as a search engine for the Web. There are also other applications that you may be hearing of, where it's not used as a search engine. So yeah, it's alive and well. After all these years, some good practical applications are coming up.

Audience: That *was* an easy question. That's the shortest answer that I've ever heard you give. [Laughter]

Insight and Responsibility

Ossorio: Okay, let's see. There are two of these here. One is: "How does an individual's insight fit into the scheme of Descriptive Psychology?" Second is: "What is the role of personal responsibility in Descriptive Psychology?"

To both of these, I would give fairly parallel answers. In a formal system, one of the tricks of the trade is how much you accomplish by *not* saying something as contrasted with the things you accomplish by *saying* something. And these two are a case in point. There is nothing, basically nothing I've written, that ever mentions insight or personal responsibility. They are simply not mentioned at all. On the other hand, it is not an accident that nothing that is written runs counter to these notions. And in fact, what is written makes these more or less inevitable.

For example, if you think of the definition of Deliberate Action, as one where the person knows what he's doing and has chosen it, one of the things that guarantees is that a person is the author of his own behavior. Now by our standards, by our common standards, the author of that behavior is responsible for it. So built into the system, even though it's never mentioned, is this central place of personal responsibility. It's there. You just can't see it.

Now the same thing goes for insight except that it's a little different in detail. Insight is not a phenomenon. That's one reason why there are no positive statements about insight. Insight is one of those hybrid terms, like creativity, that partially involves a description, but also partly involves an evaluation. Since it involves an evaluation, it isn't a phenomenon that you can simply describe.

What sort of thing do you call an insight? When do you say a person has insight? Well, at a minimum when he comes to see or understand something, but we do that almost every moment of our lives. You look around you, you see things. You look around you, you understand things. Why don't we call that insight? Well the evaluative component has to do with difficulty. We call it insight when it's a difficult achievement, when it's something not easily come by, when it's something that not everybody could manage. Then we say, "Ah, he has insight."

So it's because it's the kind of concept that involves an evaluation as well as a description that there's nothing directly written about it. The description part of it is not that interesting. It's only when you add the evaluation part and put them together, then it becomes interesting.

Audience: [inaudible] that discriminated between responsibility for deliberate action and responsibility for personal characteristics as the two kinds of responsibility found in most systems of law and most systems of therapy ...

Ossorio: I am dubious about that responsibility for person characteristics.

Audience: It was a notion of negligence: that one knows, or ought to know, the implications of being a certain sort of person.

Ossorio: Oh, okay. Good enough. That works for knowledge. For most person characteristics, it doesn't make sense because you don't choose your person characteristics.

Audience: I'm saying it's the same as the ordinary legal notion that has to do with tort except for the notion of negligence.

Ossorio: But we are all familiar with the famous statement "You should have known better". So as I say, it does work with knowledge, and that's about it.

Audience: I have a question about responsibility. It seems like that's a second sort of thing that's built onto the concept of action. In order for somebody to be held responsible, you have to have somebody holding him responsible. Once you get into that, you get into social ways, expectations, standards, and who to hold responsible, who not to hold responsible. In an accident you are responsible only if you had meant to hit the person, or if you were doing something illegal, like going too fast, you might be held responsible, or might not, depending on the circumstances. But, what we are talking about does not seem to derive from the concept of intentional action; it has to do with other people being moral agents, and collectively assigning responsibility or not, in sometimes very, very complicated ways.

Ossorio: There are, I think, two different concepts of responsibility at work here. The one that I brought out amounts simply to a reaffirmation that it *is* behavior. That's what it amounts to to say he's responsible for it as an author. It's his work. It's his thing. Now, that has nothing to do with the other things that you brought out, except as I mentioned, that by our common standards that makes him responsible. And that's the connecting link to the kind of thing that you're talking about.

Working Together

Ossorio: Okay, this one says "Do you think that the three components of SDP (technical, clinical and organizational) can work together on projects of interest in DP?" Let me just get a show of hands. How many of you have that question?

Audience: Could you repeat it please?

Ossorio: Yes. "Can the three components of Descriptive or the Society, namely technical, clinical and organizational, work together on projects of interest in Descriptive Psychology?" The question is, how many people would raise that question? [Laughter]

Audience: How about the *four* components, including spirituality?

Audience: Under what circumstances did the question arise?

Audience: Why don't you give us three minutes on it?

Ossorio: The question arises because of the lack of overlap in subject matter, the lack of overlap in expertise. If you think of the history of interdisciplinary research, it's not very good. Somehow, throwing together people from different disciplines has not generally resulted in what people hoped would result, namely, something that took advantage of multiple frameworks and points of view. So I take it that that's the basis for the qualms.

One of the things that occurred to me is you're not stuck with your expertise. Just because you are an Organizational Psychologist doesn't mean that that's all you know. So one of the ways that people from these three groups can work together is if you don't lean too heavily on your expertise, and just take a common approach to a problem that isn't clearly one of these. So, in effect, don't let your choice of problem be determined by your area of expertise. Just ask yourself, "Is it an important problem?" and if it is, just go to it. You will probably get more cooperation that way, under those circumstances, than if you deliberately try to select people for their expertise and address the problem that way.

When I try to think, "Well, haven't we already done this?" I have to admit, it's limited. We have done it, but not to the extent that you'd feel real proud of it.

Audience: My experience is that it's hard to do in academia, but it's not hard to do it in an organization with a mission. I've worked in a setting with researchers from typically five or six fields, and we worked interchangeably. If somebody was too busy for the project, someone else would just pick it up and do it. If you needed to find out something special, you just asked, and that worked fine.

Ossorio: That's what would happen if you weren't just operating within your special expertise.

Audience: There is kind of a pattern here, though, which seems to be that the non-clinical people can have useful things to say about the clinical stuff, while most of us clinical people don't seem to have enough to say, or much knowledge base, about the

other stuff. There's a sort of interesting phenomenon: Which language provides the greater access? Joe Jeffrey can always say something intelligible about anything that I say up there. There's not a damn thing that I have to say intelligible about any of the technical stuff.

Audience: Joe Jeffery that is not a good example. [Laughter]

Audience: But there are a lot of people who cut across. I do organization work, and I am really interested in the spiritual realm. The technical stuff I want to keep with, even though I am not going to be a "techie", because I do things that require it, and I want to have that contact. And on the clinical stuff, I've done it, and I've worked with people who do it all of the time, so I am in tune to that. I don't think that I am at all unique.

Audience: It seems to me that the organization/community overlaps both of them to a considerable degree, because all technology happens in organizations, and you always have organizational challenges to actually implementing technology successfully. And almost all clinical work happens to some degree, or at least people come to it with some kind of organizational understanding. They're in communities; they're in work life, etc. It makes sense to them. Community is the common factor.

Ossorio: My inclination is to guess that the clinical part is too close to the basic formulations. And the basic formulations are what you carry into these other realms. Since the clinical is so close to it, you carry the general formulations, not the specifically clinical ones which aren't all that different. For example, just the concept of a Person is one that you are using all over the place. You don't think of it as clinical, but in a sense that's where it came from. It came from some clinical insights.

Audience: I don't notice a real threshold from thinking clinically to thinking organizationally. To me it's a continuum. Because the same basic stuff underlies both, you have the potential to unify the clinical and the business, which are hopelessly fragmented. You can create something that has the seeds of logic for both under one meta-framework. I don't think it would be that difficult to collaborate over that particular one.

Audience: It seems to me that for the technical stuff, you need to learn baseball talk.

Ossorio: You need to learn baseball too. [Laughter]

Audience: That's true!

Audience: [inaudible]

Ossorio: I don't think there is an easy way.

Audience: I always thought that the State of Affairs system should do that job but, there is so much baseball talk to get translated that in my professional life I don't have time to

make the translation, I just do the baseball talk. To make the translation, the barriers would be so high.

Audience: It's the competence though; it's not just the talk.

Audience: Yeah, I was only half-serious.

Audience: I've been sticking my nose in technical things in the last few months, and I've found that as long as I keep to the higher levels of significance (the "What are you doing by doing that?"), I can have conversations with IS people that are remarkably tight. When it goes down a couple of steps, then I am out of business because I don't have either the talk or the competence. But if we keep the discourse at the higher level, then I can talk to a head of IS in a very meaningful way. It's meaningful conversation. I don't feel left out going from organizational to technical if it's at that high level.

Audience: Yeah, that's very good. There's a fear for people that are not used to that lower technical level. They don't even want to get into that higher technical level, where they could converse, as you are discovering perfectly well, because they think it's all based on this below, and it's mystical art. That's a problem for organizations.

Audience: I just work closely with a "techie" in a big organization and I was the information person. They call themselves information systems, but they aren't. They don't know what information is most often. They're very good at what they do, but they don't know information very well. I work with them all of the time and we have a nice working relationship.

What is Descriptive Psychology?

Ossorio: Here is another question for you. [Laughter] "How do *you* answer the question 'What is Descriptive Psychology?' when posed by a layman, that is, somebody who is not particularly dissatisfied with traditional psychology? There is a comment that says I take it that many beginning psychology students are like this and beginning is underlined.

Would you believe it has been many years since anybody asked me that question? So when it comes to how *do* you, I don't, because I don't get the question. However, if we allow ourselves to slip into the subjunctive, and say how *would* you... Let me give you the kind of answer that appeals to me most right now.

Oh, by the way, I was wrong. I have gotten the question, "What is Descriptive Psychology?" from laymen. I just say, "It is a kind of psychology." Period. And that satisfies them, because what would they know? [Laughter]

Audience: You are being deceptive.

Ossorio: No, it is a kind of psychology.

Audience: Are you comfortable that it is *psychology*?

Ossorio: No. [Laughter] Yes and no. It is psychology, in that you can use it to do the work of a psychologist without changing it. It's already in that form. So, why not say it is a psychology? On the other hand, since you can also use it to do all kinds of other things, in that sense it is not *just* a psychology. I think of it more as an intellectual discipline, a way of thinking rather than a subject matter.

Let me tell you the kind of answer that appeals to me. Philosophers particularly have always bugged me and it always comes out in the same form. Where does this theme you call Descriptive Psychology *fit* in the scheme of things? And until fairly recently, I just give them the back of my hand. I say "Forget that shit. Here it is." [Laughter] You can do it if you've got tenure. [Laughter]

But, if you think of the general nature of status dynamics and the dramaturgical model, the central notion is the place that something has in the scheme of things. And that to me legitimizes that question on their part that they've been asking down through the years and I've been sloughing off. And in the last, maybe half dozen years, I have tried to think of what would be a good story line that would tell them where it fits in the scheme of things or at least give them something that satisfies them on that score. And the best thing I have come across, and I think it is reasonably good, is to compare it to somebody who is writing the grammar of English.

See, natural language has this peculiar feature that you have two year olds and three year olds running around speaking English. It's that easy. It's that universal. Kids know how to speak English by age three. On the other hand, if you ask yourself, "What is it that they know when they know how to speak English?", you wind up with a tome that thick and you still haven't finished.

I would say the situation is parallel when it comes to being a person. Those of you who have kids will recognize that infants become kids even sooner than they learn to speak. They become visibly human even earlier than the ages of which they learn to speak and they continue to develop as persons. Obviously they weren't born with it. It's not an instinct. It's not simply a matter of maturation. Obviously it's something they learned. And they learned by growing up among persons. Now, like language, it's easy, so easy that every kid does it essentially. But, what happens when you try to say what was it that they learned that enables them to be persons? Once more you wind up with a tome and it's not finished yet.

So the task is to systematize in the form of knowledge, what we already have in the form of competence. We already know how to do it. We already know how to be persons but, when it comes to what is it we know, that's where the task is. So, one of the major characteristics of Descriptive Psychology is undertaking that task of formulating what it is that kids acquire that makes them persons, and that is the Person Concept. Secondly, the other half of Descriptive is applying that formulation to deal with problems. So there's at least these two major pieces: the formulation piece and continually working on refining, extending, etc., and applying it to problems of real life importance.

I take that back. Let me pull a switch on you and talk about something else for a minute. My company is what is known as a Web company. It does Internet work, and it does Internet work on a business to business basis. And what our CEO says is something like this: "We don't solve problems that companies have. We show them how to make more money by doing business on the Internet. You don't have to have a problem. We'll show you how to make more money on the Internet." So we're not just a problem solving company. There is a positive end to it.

Well, similarly when it comes to applying Descriptive Psychology. It's not just problem solving. There is a positive end to it. It's for self affirmation or liberation, those kinds of things. Once you've shown the fly the way out of the fly bottle, the sky's the limit. So that's the other half. There are these two major pieces in Descriptive Psychology. I think that the notion of writing the grammar of English is almost perfect as the parallel. It's not even a metaphor. It's almost exactly the same task.

Now one of the values of that is it answers an implicit question. In fact, it answers several. One is "Why is it so difficult and complicated?" Well everyone knows how complicated the grammar of English is and language is only a piece of the picture of persons. So if that one piece is as complicated as we know it to be, just imagine how complicated the whole thing is.

Secondly, it answers another implicit question, namely, "Who the hell do you think you are to sit down and write down what *you* claim is the grammar of persons?" And again the precedent is in the grammar of English because the ultimate criterion for the grammar of English is the native English speaker. It's all in his head. Any one of us has it all in our heads. Any one of us could sit down by ourselves and write the grammar of English because we have it in our heads. It's just as I sometimes say it's not there in computer readable form. [Laughter]

Audience: There's no theory.

Ossorio: Right. So it is a kind of task that in principle is all in somebody's head and it only remains to pull it out and put it in the right form.

Audience: Nevertheless, that type of talent for inventing symbolic representation for competence is very rare.

Ossorio: No, not many people would dare write the grammar of English just by sitting down and writing it. But, in principle you see any one of us could. In effect the logic of that gives any one of us the authority as a native English speaker or as a person to say "Here's the rules of the game". The closing sentence in the introductory chapter in *The Behavior of Persons* is, "In these matters, I speak for us." I have the authority to speak for us because I'm a competent player of the game. Anyone of us has that authority. Any competent player of the game has that authority.

Now once you get beyond that you get into the details of "Yeah, but you know you can have disagreements", and "Sure, there are ways of resolving them." It's not as though everything goes smoothly.

Audience: [inaudible]

Ossorio: Yeah, and sometimes you find out the hard way that you were wrong, but that's why you have peers. That's why you need a social group. Everybody acts as a check on everybody. Nobody is just out there in left field by himself.

Audience: What was the question again?

Ossorio: What is Descriptive Psychology?

Audience: And the answer? [Laughter]

Audience: He very nicely led us down a similar path.

Audience: If you were to do it all in one sentence, what would that look like?

Ossorio: It's another psychology. [Laughter]

Audience: Descriptive Psychology is the grammar of being a person?

Ossorio: Yeah.

Audience: I like that.

Significance

Ossorio: "What are your thoughts about significance deficits and brain function pathology? How does one gain or develop significance appreciation and/or lose it?" This one I can answer certain aspects of it. I think it connects to one of the others here. [looking through the questions] Another question is, "How does one develop what's significant, or how are Person Characteristics developed in general?"

We've got two questions on significance. I couldn't swear to it, but I would bet heavily that when I presented the schizophrenia paper about ten years ago, one of my tag lines was "There is no such thing as significance." [See "Cognitive Deficits in Schizophrenia" in Volume II of *The Collected Works of Peter G. Ossorio*.] Anybody remember that?

Audience: Significantly, no.

Audience: Is that when you were talking about concrete versus non-concrete?

Ossorio: Yeah. Remember I drew the ladder of these going upwards and downwards. If you go upwards that's in the direction of significance. If you go downwards it's in the direction of implementation. Ok.

Number one, significance is a relationship. It's a relationship between two behaviors, and you express that relationship in ordinary English by saying that you do one of those behaviors by doing the other behavior. Whenever you have a case of doing A by doing B, you have a case of significance. You also have a case of implementation. Significance and implementation are converses. Implementation is the inverse of significance. Now again what that tells you is that it's not a phenomenon.

Audience: So what you are saying in the analysis of significance is what's the next higher level of behavior.

Ossorio: What's a higher level behavior. Everything above is the significance of a given one. Everything below is implementation. Now like insight, there's a missing piece there. What does it take for there to be that relationship between two behaviors?

Remember when I was developing the "Staircase Effect" [in the schizophrenia talk], I said you add context. In this context doing B *is* a case of doing A. So by going to a broader context, you generate significance. And by going to the broadest context of all, you generate ultimate significance and anything in between.

So, how does one gain or develop significance appreciation? The answer in short is one acquires a world that serves as the ultimate context for anything that occurs in it. And that provides the significance of whatever behaviors occur in it. That's how one gains significance appreciation.

Audience: The word context is one that I don't hear you use that much.

Ossorio: I don't, but I did in connection with the schizophrenia talk. That's why I am using it again. It's a perfectly good thing. It just means additional facts. You bring in additional facts and that's your context, your broader context.

Audience: The word I tend to use is perspective.

Ossorio: Perspective is a standpoint or way of looking at things. That's *not* what we're talking about. We are talking about what's out there, facts.

Audience: Ok, you mean additional facts.

Ossorio: Yeah. The fact, for example, that you are sitting in the crowd means that when you say something, it has a different significance than if you were sitting in this room by yourself saying exactly the same things. That's not just a perspective or a way of looking at things.

Audience: There seems to be some lore that some folks have a lot more difficulty moving to those broader contexts and looking at higher significance than other people do. Is there some truth to that lore?

Ossorio: We have about six dissertations at significance levels ranging to five zeros as evidence. All of the research on performativeness deals with this, significance deficits.

Audience: I was just trying to look beyond the original question to see what might be... Maybe the person who asked the question might want to reflect on whether what's come up here has answered what they had in mind.

Ossorio: Yeah, what about that?

Audience: I was just going to say, I think most people know it but some don't. I think it is so helpful. If you could say a little about the example of moving your arm up and down and how when you add new facts... That might be very helpful.

Ossorio: Ok, yeah. This is the standard heuristic that goes with explaining significance. It's in the form of an image. Except that this particular image is simply taken from some long forgotten piece of philosophical literature.

Audience: Elizabeth Anscombe.

Ossorio: Think of being out there on a lonely heath in England. And the main thing that you see other than the heath is a farmhouse. And standing close by that farmhouse is a man and he's going like this [moving his arm up and down]. Now what's your description of the behavior? Well, you say he is moving his arm up and down. Then I tell you that he's got his hand wrapped around a pump handle and the pump is in good working order. I've added context. I've added additional facts. Now you have another description of the guy's behavior: he is pumping the pump. Then I add that there is water in the pump and the pump is connected to the house. Now you have another description of his behavior: he is pumping water to the house. Then I add some more facts. There are people in the house and they are drinking the water. Now you have another description of his behavior: he is pumping water to the people. Now I add some more facts. There's poison in that water and this guy knows it because he put it there. Now you have another description of his behavior: he's poisoning the people in the house. Finally I tell you the people in the house are a bunch of conspirators who are conspiring to overthrow the government and have a good chance of succeeding. Now you have one

last description of his behavior: he is saving the country from these conspirators. Now notice what it took to generate the new descriptions: simply the addition of some relevant facts. But each time you had a new description that was the significance of the earlier one. He was saving the country by poisoning the people, by pumping the water to the people, by pumping the pump, by moving his arm up and down. You said, "What was he doing by moving his arm up and down?" He was pumping the pump. "What was he doing by doing that?" He was pumping the water to the people. "What was he doing by doing that?" He was poisoning the people. "What was he doing by doing that?" He was saving the country. So there is your significance series and your implementation series. Now these are what I call empirical identities. They have no generality whatever. Take any of those. When somebody moves his arm up and down, what are the odds that his arm is wrapped around the pump handle? Well, it's vanishingly small and we don't have any data on that. What are the odds that if somebody is pumping water to the people he is poisoning them? Again, vanishingly small. But in this context, in these circumstances, doing the one thing *is* the same as doing the other thing. What are the odds that poisoning some people is saving the country? Zero. But, in this case there is an identity. In this case, in these circumstances, doing the one *is* the same as doing the other. That's how this stuff works. So what you need to see the significance of things is to have the larger picture in well-organized form so that you can make use of the connections and then you just see it. You have insight. [Laughter]

Audience: It's the relevant data, information, that's the context. It's not just you know and part of that, isn't it, there are tons of things that you know that are potentially related here, and part of this is that you are recognizing those that are the context that this person was acting from. Because significance is a significance of the behaving person and it either has that significance or it doesn't.

Ossorio: Let me bring out something else. There is an asymmetry between the Observer and the Actor. The Actor works from the top down. The top one is what the Actor is purely and simply doing. Now all of the other ones are there only because they are ways of doing that. So the behavior, the Actor, has no problem of significance. He has a problem with implementation: how do I save the country? Now the Observer looks, and what's most obvious is something on the order that the guy is moving his arm up and down. Well, unless he takes it that that's just what's happening, period, and basically he can't because that's not an intrinsic social practice, he knows there is something missing. He's the one who has a problem of significance. He is the one who has to ask, "What is he doing by doing that?" Because he knows that there is a missing answer. When he reaches an intrinsic social practice description, that's the first place where he has a genuine candidate for stopping and saying that's what's going on. Now it isn't that necessarily that's all there is to it. It's that any claim that there's more to it carries a burden of proof.

Audience: Is there a relationship between significance and appreciated significance? There are two things that I have a vague recollection that you used in the Projective class. One was the cow. For the other one, you drew a bunch of lines on the board and you asked, "What is this?"

Ossorio: Yeah.

Audience: Is there any connection between the two?

Ossorio: There is, but those two things were part of a set of three things, which were simply heuristics dealing with the fallibility of observation. You can have something right under your nose and fail to see it, if it's like the cow. You can fail to see it if it's too complicated and goes by too fast.

For example, if you've ever watched a football game and tried to follow the action, unless you are very experienced, it's just a jumble. It slowly sorts itself out and then you can tell what happened. But as it's happening, it's going too fast for you and you just can't tell what it is. But, the coach down there on the ground level can tell. He takes one look and he knows because he has the experience. He has the familiarity and so he can tell by looking but you can't. And yet it's right there in front of both of you. So those were simply to bring out some of the fallibility of observation, partly because of a philosophical background. There is sort of a general idea that if something is observational, it's foolproof, and it's not.

Audience: Did you say what the second one was?

Ossorio: What was the second one that you mentioned?

Audience: One was the cow and one was the soldier and his dog.

Ossorio: Oh, yeah, the soldier. [draws picture]

Ossorio: Something like that.

Audience: Right. Right. That's it. [Laughter]

Ossorio: I show you this and I say, "What's this a picture of?" And either you guess or you don't. And obviously some people are going to be better at this than others.

[Laughter] Let me tell you what it is. It's a picture of a soldier and his dog walking by a fence. Here's the bayonet and here's the tail of the dog. Now the trick on these is not to make it impossible. You can look at it and sometimes guess what it is. There's just enough information there.

Now, when it comes to observation you may be in exactly this position. You see a client for the first time, you hear this story and what you're getting is part of some larger patterns. If you are experienced enough, you recognize that what you are seeing is part of these larger patterns and which one it is. If you have no experience with them, you're never going to see it. And one of the troubles with observation is sometimes this is all you're observing. And from that you have to be able to see what else might go along with it that you are not seeing. By the way "Dinner at 8:30" is a good example that has that same feature.

Audience: Is that the third one of heuristics?

Ossorio: The one is that it goes by too fast and it's too complicated. The second one is that you are only seeing part of it. And the third is that you are seeing a degraded version of it. Unless you have a pattern clearly in mind, you're not going to recognize it.

Audience: And that was the cow?

Ossorio: Yeah, that's the cow.

Audience: I remember you used the [Escher](#) picture. And also the card that said "I think that I think that..."

Ossorio: Yeah, those are variations. No, one of them is a variation on the football game. The other is a sort of a hybrid because with the Escher picture you follow it along and there's no place where it looks wrong. It's not until you step back and look at the whole thing that you say "Hey, this can't be". Well you get the same experience spending an hour talking to a client. [Laughter] You get a story from the client and you interact and raise the same questions you usually do. And at any point, the client is making sense, giving you good answers to your questions. Then you step back and say "Wait a minute, this can't be." That's like the Escher picture. So, like I said, observation is far from fool-proof, but it's fundamental. That's where everything begins.

Audience: This might be a little peripheral but you told a story once about coming into the classroom and taking your coat off and then asking the students what you had done.

Ossorio: That's a variation on the football game. Just imagine that I came in and take my coat off and hang it on the hook up here. Then we are talking about behavior and somebody says "Well, what you've really got there is a set of movements." I say "Well, ok, tell me what I did when I walked in the room." And they say, "You hung your coat up on the hook." I say "No, no, no. If what's really there is a set of movements from which you deduce what I did, tell me what movements I made from which you could tell that what I was doing was hanging my coat on the hook." [Laughter] And nobody is able to answer that because in fact obviously they don't do it that way. See, what they recognize directly is the action. They don't infer the action from seeing the movements. They don't infer the action from the performance. They see the action. In fact, you could do a better job inferring the performance from the action. [Laughter] If you know that what I did was hung my coat on the hook, you could do a pretty good job of reproducing the movements.

Audience: Earlier in this question on saying something about getting better at appreciating significance, you said that you acquire a world. Is that the DP version of "get a life"? [Laughter] Or could you say some more?

Audience: I take it you don't acquire a world simply by observation.

Ossorio: You acquire what you might call a real world, not an abstract world, not a purely formal world, but a real world with all of the detail connections and gradations and variations, etc. that's there. Once you get that far, then think of the cow. See, you can see that cow there even though the conditions observationally are far from ideal.

If you've been in the world long enough, there are things in the world that you are familiar enough with to recognize. You have seen them, you have seen instances of them, and so when you encounter them you recognize them, like you recognize the cow. Now your recognition of those things is -- guess what? You're seeing the significance of the concrete behaviors.

Think of "Dinner at 8:30." The behavior was simply having dinner at 8:30 under one description. But, you know enough about anger, you know enough about human relationships, so when I tell you that I had that argument with my wife and we hadn't settled it, and that usually we have dinner at 7:30 not 8:30, and that I like steak but I like it rare and I hate it well done, it's like seeing the cow. You look at it and say "Boy she was really giving him the business." Now the interesting thing is that it's not necessarily true, but it sure as hell is obvious. [Laughter]

My rough figure is 90% of undergraduate classes will see that because they are all smiling and when I call on somebody at random and say "What was going on?", they say "Anger." So, it's your familiarity with that world that enables you to work it like seeing the cow. That's significance. That's the substance for which when we say significance we are implying that sort of thing. There's not a separate phenomenon called significance.

Audience: When linguists talk about context, is that different from the way you're describing getting facts here?

Ossorio: I am not in good touch with linguistics these days.

Audience: Some of the humor stuff gets real goofy.

Ossorio: Well, the humor stuff was always goofy. [Laughter]

Audience: The explanations of how they are understanding the context.

Ossorio: Linguists like everybody else make use of whatever theories are around at the time. And there's some awful goofy theories around, but that's what they have to work with.

Audience: For some reason I'm thinking of the pleasure of a good mystery, where all the clues are laid out, all of the facts are there, but you don't know who did it until the very end.

Ossorio: And you say "Aw, yeah." See it's too much like work to solve it. You can do it if they're playing fair with you, but I'd rather just read it for the enjoyment and be surprised at the end.

Audience: What is the difference between the real world that I have, which isn't necessarily *the* real world, because it only has a certain scope, and my world?

Ossorio: That is your world.

Audience: Say I live in a world, and there is also a world for each community that I am a member of. It's the world I take to be real. I might be wrong but...

Ossorio: No, it's the real world. There are some things that you can't disclaim and that's one of them. You can say of him that that's what he takes the world to be, but you can't say of yourself that that's what you take the world to be. For you that's the way things are. It takes somebody else to do that.

Audience: But, as an Observer I can recognize about myself that I don't have all the facts, I don't have all the facts straight. It's workable for me at the moment but, I know that's not all I am expecting. It's a reality check. I look for reality checks to see if I am going wrong.

Ossorio: There's a reasonably long argument, but you can't get away with it. And that's because whatever for you is the real world, for you is the real world. It takes somebody else to say, for him it's the real world. But you can't afford to say that because you can only say that in the context of a real world, in which for you that's the real world.

Audience: So what you are saying, if you don't have all the facts yet and you know that, then your world is one in which you don't have all of the facts.

Ossorio: Something like that, you see there's...

Audience: I can still have the concept of a reality check that I am going to make, and I can say what is the real world for me at the moment won't be tomorrow.

Ossorio: There is a social version of that and it's called "us and them". If I am speaking to one of us then I say, "This is a can of Dr. Pepper." If I am speaking to one of them, I say, "This is what we call a can of Dr. Pepper." So depending on whether you are speaking to one of us, or one of them, you're going to disclaim or not. But, among us, it's pure and simple fact and it has to be that way.

Personal Characteristics

Ossorio: Let me go on to a related question. How do we gain or develop significance appreciation? And the related one, how are person characteristics developed in general?

Now, the systematic answer to how person characteristics are developed in general is given by the Developmental Schema. [See Appendix C, Volume III of *The Collected Works of Peter G. Ossorio*] There is a formula that says capacity plus history gives you Person Characteristics. [draws Schema on board]

Now as psychologists we are primarily interested in a certain kind of history, namely the history of behavior, the history of learning. Now this is recursive because if you ask, "What gives you this capacity at this time?" (This is a time line by the way.) "What gives you the capacity here to acquire this PC by virtue of the system?" The answer is that you have this capacity by virtue of the PC's that you have. How come you have these? Because you had the prior capacity and the relevant intervening history. You just carry that back to original capacity. Now, that's the systematic answer.

There is a more 'folksy' version of that, and it's known as the Poker Player Principle. And it hinges on one of the images called "The Poker Player", and it goes like this. Think about poker and think about the many, many facts that one might learn about poker. Now imagine two guys who are going to learn facts about poker and just to keep it clean let us stipulate that they are going to learn exactly the same set of facts about poker so that whatever differences there are between them, it's not because they learn something different. They learn exactly the same facts about poker.

Now the first guy is an experimental psychologist. He's studying how people play poker, so he joins the local poker club and gets into poker games and loses his money and picks up these facts. And as he picks up these facts he makes use of them in the way he has for them, namely in doing his experiment. So that by the time he has gone through all of this and learned all of these facts, he's gotten to be a better experimental psychologist.

Now, take the second guy. The second guy is somebody who just wants to play poker. He's just beginning. He goes out there, joins the club, gets into the games, loses his money. As he loses his money he acquires knowledge and as he acquires this knowledge, he makes use of it in the ways that he has for it, namely in playing poker. So, by the time he has lost all of his money and acquired all of these facts, he has gotten to be a pretty good poker player.

The moral of the story is "If you want to be a better poker player, you've got to be a poker player." The change principle is you become more the way you are already being. Something brings it out in you and gives you the opportunity to be that way, and the more you be that way the more you become that way. Now, that's what's at work with change in psychotherapy. You have to bring it out and then nurture it. As the Skinnerians used to say, you've got to get the behavior to occur first before you can reinforce it. So the principle is you become more the way that you are already being.

Audience: We have original capacity. My inclination is to refer to PC's at the point of original capacity as temperament. Can I get away with it?

Ossorio: Yeah, except that it depends on what you count as the point of origin. If you start with the fertilization of the egg it's awfully hard to find temperament there. If you wait till after the kid is born yeah, you can find things.

Audience: I came recently to the notion that individual difference and original capacity are what people are referring to as temperament.

Ossorio: Well, there's a gray area there. It's hard to separate out what's there from the beginning versus what gets there real quick.

Audience: Yeah, well, but I'm saying if it's capacity... I mean part of it is the capacity to, and some of the capacity unfolds. You have the capacity but, nothing can happen until a certain developmental point, then it kicks in but you had the capacity originally.

Ossorio: There is an interesting logic there. If you push it to the limit and ask "What's the absolute minimum that you have to have by way of original capacity?" it isn't going to be things like temperament. The absolute minimum that you have to have is peculiar. It's the *absence* of anything that will prevent the acquisition of PC's. As long as you have the capacity to acquire PC's you don't have to have anything more than that at the beginning.

Audience: There are differences in deficits with that.

Ossorio: If you look at theories of development you find that they exploit that. For the behavior modifier you don't need to have any responses. You just need to be able to be conditioned. If you look at it psychoanalytically, you don't have to produce realistic images. You just have to have images that are displaceable.

Audience: Of course I don't buy the story.

Ossorio: But it's the logic that I'm pointing to.

Audience: But there are some different embodiments. There are radical differences in from that point of origin what can happen. Some of it is behavioral and dispositions, but it ends up putting some limits on our dispositions and powers.

Ossorio: Well, yes and no. It primarily opens up possibilities. The notion of capacity is primarily a notion of potential, of possibility, not limits. However, there are limits that go with it. It sets limits to how you can acquire. Remember you need the right kind of history. But, as I say, basically the logic is that all you need is a condition in which you can acquire characteristics and it's not pure accident. That's all you need to get the whole process started.

Now, there is also a sort of ancestral relation between original capacity and any later capacity. Any later capacity that you have, you have by virtue of your original capacity plus the intervening history. So you have the capacity to acquire the capacity, to acquire the capacity, to acquire the Person Characteristics. And what that means is that at no time in your life is original capacity guaranteed to be missing.

Audience: That is to come off with a new set of experiences.

Ossorio: You can make a difference at any time in your life because there is no way to exclude it. And guess what? That means that there is an in principle mystery about people because we don't have any way of establishing what a person's capacity is. We only know that you have the capacity for something after you have actually acquired it. Then we know that you must have had the capacity previously, but we don't know what other capacities you have for PC's that you didn't acquire. There is no way to set limits to that.

Audience: No absolute way. There are some statistical probabilities kind of ways but no absolute.

Ossorio: Right. That's one of the interesting things to look out for. In the Person concept there are points like that where there is an essential mystery, where there are facts that we have no way of establishing that we know we have no way of establishing. It's not just that we don't happen to know. There is no way. Are we significanced out?

Formulation on Language

Ossorio: "Could you review your formulation on language and address your current thinking on it?" This one is easy. I don't have any. It's been a number of years since I have done any work on the linguistic portion [of Descriptive], so I don't have anything new to report on that. [Laughter]

Audience: That should have been the first one.

Love

Ossorio: There's a rule of thumb, a purely empirical generalization, that the person you fall in love with, is the person with whom you can be the way you really want to be. Now, the question is, given this, isn't love inherently self-interest?

That's tricky because the simplest answer is "No." It doesn't even seem to follow. There's too much of a gap to draw that kind of conclusion. What you might say is you need to be approaching this in a fairly cynical way to draw that conclusion. So, given the analysis of love that we got this afternoon, to think that it would be used purely in your narrow self-interest, is a pretty cynical approach. And without that cynicism there is no reason to draw any such conclusion.

Audience: Well, it's the premise that's troublesome here, I believe.

Ossorio: What?

Audience: That first part of that statement that you read off.

Ossorio: Well it says "If as I think you have said, you fall in love with the person with whom you can be the way you really want to be..."

Audience: Who said that?

Ossorio: I did.

Audience: You said it?

Ossorio: Yeah. [Laughter] And all I can say is literature is full of examples in prose, drama, and poetry where it opens up with the woman saying "The man I love must be A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H..." and in the end she is riding off in the sunset with somebody who has none of these characteristics. [Laughter] And if you ask why, this is the answer. The notion that you fall in love with somebody because they have a long list of virtues is nonsense.

Audience: Last year I heard you say that, you also pointed out [?] surprised or even horrified if... [Laughter]

Ossorio: Yeah. One of the subsidiary arguments against drawing the conclusion that it's self-interest, is that often you don't know who you really want to be until you meet this person. If you don't know ahead of time, how could have you selected them for that?

Audience: Well, you could realize. You get involved and you say, "Wow, when I'm with her I am who I really want to be. I am going to grab a hold of her and with her I can be who I want to be."

Ossorio: No. That's love. [Laughter]

Audience: What's the value of self-interest in formulation? That concept has been very sticky.

Ossorio: Well, yeah. Remember the four perspectives of hedonic, potential, ethical and esthetic. One of the things you can do with each one of those is to say that the other three are simply variations on it. Everything is a form of pleasure. Everything is a form of self-interest. Everything is a form of fittingness. Everything is a form of how things ought to be. And the fact is that you can do it with each of the four and make the other three apparently subsidiary, except that you find that you need to carry the distinctions. If you think that it's all different kinds of pleasure, you still have to carry the distinctions between these different kinds of pleasure. If you think it is all self-interest, you still have to carry the distinctions between these different kinds of self-interest because they work very differently. And the same for fittingness and the same for how it ought to be.

Audience: I didn't think you could do that with a negation sort of idea. If you want to show somebody why it isn't all self-interest, try a flip statement which is people are never generous. And if you don't buy that one, then you don't buy the idea it's all self-interest.

Ossorio: I would expect that somebody who takes this seriously would say "Yeah, people are never really generous." That's a tame example compared to this.

Audience: Yeah, but that isn't the real example.

Ossorio: Yeah. That's the point.

Problems

Ossorio: "Please identify the most important problems from any field that are amenable to being cracked by Descriptive Psychology." You tell me.

Audience: It would be nice to have the answer.

Ossorio: The answer is *not* foreordained. If people address a problem and solve it, then that was an important problem that got cracked by DP. Before who's to say it would have been.

Audience: Kind of like this original capacity.

Audience: The question is amongst the kinds of problems that we are aware of, that people are stuck with, and given the nature of Descriptive, which ones do we have

something special to offer? Where might we be able to make some money in order to go forward with our activities by solving?

Audience: Search engines.

Ossorio: I really don't have a feel for this. I can sort of imagine a number of different sorts of applications but nothing stands out. What I think of is "What's the nature of the resource that we are bringing to bear? What it is is a system and our experience, confidence.

Audience: There is so much conceptual confusion in psychology yet there's clearly a subject matter that warrants clarifying and creating the grammar for. Wherever you see something important where you damn well know there's conceptual confusion, or as one of my friends would say, there must be a pony in there somewhere, there is so much horse shit around. [Laughter] There is your target.

Ossorio: Yeah, but that's where I say that nothing stands out. If you have a system and it's a good system, then yes, it will bring order to a field that has been missing it and there are lots of them around. But it's not directed at a special topic where you can say "Search engines".

My original version of this was therapeutic. The thrust of Descriptive is to keep you from doing it wrong, whatever it is you are doing. By keeping things straight, by having a good bookkeeping system, by allowing the world to be as complicated as it really is or might be, you're not handicapping yourself. You can face actual problems eyeball to eyeball and not create extra problems by how you approach it. That's simply a therapeutic approach. So it doesn't select out any field of application, as you'll succeed more here.

Audience: This is creating social practice, which is different.

Ossorio: No, there's more to it. Like I said, this was my general attitude that what we needed was something to keep us from going wrong.

Audience: But, the alternative, what you can do is create social practices that have nothing to do with solving a problem so to speak.

Ossorio: Yeah, that's what I was going to say. If I think of the work of CJ and Richard, it's not just problem solving. It's creating something of value. As I said before, the sky's the limit when you are on that side of it. I wouldn't restrict myself to solving problems. See, back then I was thinking in those terms but these days, no. These days it's more "What can we accomplish, what can we invent, what can we create?" And even way back in '67 I was arguing that the essential thing about science was not the discovery of truth but the invention of new forms of behavior. And I would still say the same thing for the same reason.

Audience: Sometimes you do both. If Descriptive Psychology could turn all of the approaches theoretically in psychology and redescribe the relatively common language of terms such that one could show the connections of all of them, and could talk about all of them and everyone of them could talk with every other one of them in the same language. That would solve at some levels but it would really create a different world, more than problem solving.

Ossorio: I started to do that in *Persons*. Most of you never saw Volume II of *Persons*. You only saw Volume I. I never got beyond Volume I when I was teaching undergraduate courses. In the last chapter I argued pretty much as you did that the Person concept as I had formulated it then had all of the features of all of the different schools and theories of psychology and pointed out one by one. That was an interesting exercise but like I say very few people have ever seen that. I also developed a slightly different way of talking about research and doing it. There just was not enough time to do everything that could have been done.

Audience: Is there something that we could all take some part in?

Ossorio: Yeah, I don't think you could make money at it.

Audience: I would vote for C Space for money. But for possibilities, for opening up real possibilities.

Ossorio: I don't know how we would play in academia these days. It might fair even worse than it did originally. For applications what we're doing is Judgment Space stuff and Process Representation stuff and State of Affairs stuff, in that order, in that the Judgment Space is ready to go. We've all had experience with it. It's just a matter of doing it. Some of the Process Representation stuff is almost to that point and with a little work, you could turn out things like schedulers, simulations and so forth. Pat [Aucoin] here has done a lot of work on simulations as a planning tool. So there are some clear applications of Process Representations. State of Affairs stuff is the most speculative, most difficult and the least saleable, you might say. But, if it could be done right, it would be the most powerful, and that's what I am working on now.

Audience: Is there enough money coming in from those things to support off-shoots?

Ossorio: No. We're living on the profits of showing businessmen how to make more money. None of our products has reached market yet, so we're not self supporting.

Audience: So have you rescinded the second part of the comment that "Descriptive Psychology is neither true nor useful"? [Laughter]

Ossorio: No. That's true.

Audience: So you're still hanging with that.

Ossorio: It's nothing exceptional. Number one, it's a concept and concepts can't be true or false.

Audience: It's the useful that I am having trouble with.

Ossorio: The concept is so fundamental that you need to presuppose it in order to make sense of the notion of useful. Only for instrumental agents is anything useful.

Audience: Like saying is a grammar useful? That's a nonsensical question almost.

Ossorio: Right. Asking if a grammar is useful for saying something.

Audience: Say you have a person, a professor, who's into theories who very well understands what the idea of useful means and what it's all about. And he's doing this theory, in which the concept of useful is omitted and he's using theories to understand people and you introduce the Person concept with this concept of useful. And you say hey, if he uses the Person concept to further understand these people, it is useful.

Ossorio: The way I finessed it, and I deliberately finessed it, was that the concept can't be either true or useful but the formulation of the concept can be useful. It still can't be true, but it can be useful. That's a pretty good finesse and it's correct.

Audience: What's the point in making that distinction?

Ossorio: What?

Audience: That the formulation of the concept can be useful.

Ossorio: Well the formulation is primarily what I've written down about it. Anybody else could have written their own formulation. It's the same concept. So there is a big difference between the concept and the formulation.

Audience: Until you have a formulation you have nothing to use.

Ossorio: The concept is there. We all use it.

Audience: It's the shared concept about which different people have formulations.

Ossorio: Yeah, or could have. Again it's like the grammar. Different people could write different grammars. But it's the same language and the language is already there and it already has the grammar it does. So there's no question there is a difference between the thing that you are formulating and the formulation.

Audience: So it's really the concept about which Descriptive Psychology is the formulation?

Ossorio: Yeah.

Audience: So what's...

Ossorio: Remember the two pieces. One is the formulation of the Person concept. The other is application. And the application is because the formulation can be useful.

Audience: So it's not the concept of DP. It's the concept of persons, the concept of behavior about which the Descriptive Psychology formulates?

Ossorio: Say that again.

Audience: In other words, the concepts that are shared are about persons, behavior, and so forth. That's what is neither true nor useful. But Descriptive Psychology is the formulation of those which can be at least useful.

Ossorio: Right.

Audience: Another take on useful. Say the canonical stuff is not useful, but what is useful in my experience is when you translate that and make that part of some other communities' world. Like the adaptation of the community concept to work in an organization such that it becomes *their* concept. That's really useful, but the canonical thing itself is not doing anything until it's out there doing something.

Ossorio: But remember they already have the concept. What you are carrying over is the formulation. If you recall the actual text in *Persons*, why I said that. I said what you are about to encounter is neither true nor useful and couldn't be possibly be either one, and this fact should serve as a *warning* to you, as a measure of how different this stuff is from whatever you've encountered before.

Audience: We got the formula; we just didn't get it.

Ossorio: Nobody believes it. [Laughter]

Audience: I don't try to make that distinction with the people outside of this community. Because we wouldn't get very far and they wouldn't want to hear of it and they would say we are quibbling, that we're messing around with words.

Audience: I prefer people to think it's useful.

Ossorio: See I'm not trying to sell this to them.

Audience: Well we are. [Laughter]

Ossorio: I am just trying to lay it out the way it is. I agree that selling it to them is a different problem entirely.

Audience: But you don't have to sell it to them.

Ossorio: Generating products is a way of selling it to them.

Audience: If someone has gone far enough to want to be a member beyond wanting to make use of certain things, then they're ready for that distinction.

Ossorio: Oh, let me say something here. Let me make a polemic comment here. There are no subtleties in the Descriptive formulation. All of these distinctions are clear and obvious.

Audience: Easy for you to say. [Laughter]

Ossorio: Treat them accordingly. There are no subtleties.

Audience: When you get it, it's clear, as is $E=MC^2$.

Ossorio: No, it's more than that.

Audience: No, it goes back to the grammar and that really helps to get what you are saying. Because everybody's got it at age two or three and that's all there is to it or we wouldn't be the people that we are. It's the formulation that perhaps that's not obvious to everybody or why it's useful or why you do that. The fundamental distinctions everybody has, or they're not persons.

Ossorio: Right.

Audience: There are levels of acquisition of concept. I mean you can be at a beginner level and therefore you have a certain degree of confidence. And the confidence rose with the right experience. When you have a formulation of a concept it appears to me that it really accelerates your competence with the concept. That's one of the things about having a formulation.

Ossorio: See one of the reasons why I react to this notion of subtlety is that that makes it hard. And if you think it's hard, you're going to have a hard time. If you think it's easy you may make mistakes, but you'll have a far easier time and I think you'll learn more. The mark of success is finding it easy. By the way, back in the good ol' days, I used to have a very yearly and foolproof test of when somebody had learned the stuff I had been teaching. Namely they'd walk into my office and say, "You know it's all very simple," and lay it out. [Laughter]

Audience: I am still stuck on this it's not useful and maybe try another angle on it. If you think of grammar as useful, I would suppose, and the concept of persons somewhere in that like a grammar; because then if you look back and make some speculation about the evolution of the history of the human race, so there is a certain point far enough back and Jared Diamond puts it back a hundred-thousand years, where mankind has language but

not grammar. And lower forms of animals have language but they don't have grammar. Because the word, it can't be used in these complex multiple ways that mean changing according to positions.

Ossorio: I would simply say you're welcome to your ideas. But, anything that doesn't have a grammar I would not call a language, period.

Audience: If they don't have language then in the sense of a grammar.

Ossorio: No, they don't have a language.

Audience: But they have signals.

Ossorio: Signal use is not language.

Audience: Ok, so go with that then. I'm making the case that greatly before in our history around a hundred or 80,000 years was because of the acquisition of language with grammar and that probably before that wasn't there. Now, when it was acquired it gained advantage to human communities and therefore it was useful.

Ossorio: No. When it was acquired it changed humanity forever. It wasn't useful. It changed them. It didn't satisfy some end that humanity already had. It wasn't useful that way. It changed humanity in such a way that now everything was different, including being able to talk about things being useful. [Laughter] It is that fundamental.

All right! Thank you! [Clapping]

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