



MORE THREE – MINUTE LECTURES ON EMOTION

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The idea of three-minute lectures comes from a formulation of what we call “conversational formats” in psychotherapy.

Conversational formats are simply different sorts of conventions, you might say, about what’s going on in a conversation. In psychotherapy, you do it primarily in an ordinary conversational format, and you would be surprised how many norms there are associated with ordinary conversation. Because there are, if you want to violate that and go to something else for some special reason, then you generally need to set the stage and somehow announce or demonstrate or introduce the idea that you are now in a different mode.

Among the conversational formats are things like ordinary conversation, soliloquy, confessions, pantomime, and three-minute lectures. Three-minute lectures you have recourse to when the client has some misconception about something that is important to be straight about, and since the client is merely missing or has the wrong idea, you go to a didactic mode, and since you go to a didactic mode, you announce it, in effect or literally. Sometimes I say: “Let me give you a three-minute lecture on such and such.” So you introduce the notion that you’re going to do something didactic, and then you can do it and get away with it, but you’ve got to keep it short. And that’s why I give three-minute lectures and not fifteen-minute lectures or ten minute lectures, etc. Actually, they vary in length. [laughter] Have you ever heard a ten-minute three-minute lecture?. Anyhow, the idea is that you really can’t get by giving long lectures in therapy. They’ve got to be kept short, but you can do that.

So these are three-minute lectures, and they are about emotions because emotions are one of the primary things that clients have misconceptions about, that their ideas about emotions create problems for them. Even if they didn’t have enough already, the way they understand emotions and how they work create extra problems. So emotions are probably the single topic that I most commonly find myself giving three-minute lectures on.

As you can see from the hand-out, there’s a lot of different angles, a lot of different three-minute lectures that you might give.

And these are not quite all. You might add the next one, which is that emotions are not irrational.

Handout for More Three Minute Lectures on Emotion

- A. Lion walks in the room — emotional behavior
- B. Anxiety explanation
- C. Emotional states — Happy Pill
- D. Being angry (etc.,) vs. feeling angry
- E. Displacement of emotions
- F. Asymmetry — Pleasant vs. Unpleasant
- G. Logically connected emotions
- H. Telling you my feelings
- I. Knowing my feelings
- J. Being in touch with my feelings
- K. Not acting on my feelings
- L. The value of expressing your feelings
- M. Emotions are not experiences
- N. Emotions are not bodily states
- O. Body sensations/manipulations and emotional states
- P. Not knowing my feelings
- R. Emotions are not irrational

The first two of these are in heuristic order. You almost can't do any of the others without doing the first ones.

Lion in Room

The first one is simply the basic schema or paradigm for emotions, which is *emotional behavior*. That's the first point to get across, is that what's fundamental about emotions is not emotional experiences or feelings or something like that; it's emotional behavior. So you introduce the paradigm case of emotional behavior, and

it goes like this: imagine a lion walks in the room here. I take one look at him and go running out that door and slam it behind me. You happen to be in a position where you can see all of this, so once I'm out, you ask me "Why did you run out of the room?." And I say: "Because I was afraid of the lion."

Now there, as the saying goes, if there ever was a case of emotion, that's it. I was afraid of the lion. And you have no grounds for doubting me, because everything you saw and what I did and what I said fits. So if you ever had grounds for saying "There's emotional behavior," there it is.

One other point that that one carries is that emotions have reality bases. There is a lion to be afraid of. My fear is not just a feeling. It's not just an experience. It's not just a state of mind. There is a lion there. And were there no lion there, there'd be no point to the whole thing. So that one, then, serves as a vehicle potentially for directing clients' attention to the lions in their lives, as against their feelings. And there is a slogan that goes with that, namely, you deal with emotional problems by dealing with the reality basis of those problems. And there's a polemic addition that says, ". . . instead of talking about feelings."

In effect, you can deal thoroughly with emotional problems without ever talking about feelings, without ever using emotional language at all. All you've got to do is identify what the lions are, and work on dealing with those, and if that goes satisfactorily, the emotional problems will be gone. Okay, so that's the first one, and as I say: since it's hard to do any of the other ones without having done that first, that's the most commonly used one.

Anxiety and the Happy Pill

For the second one — the second and third usually go together — consider now the original episode of the lion walking in the room and my running out the door. Consider a standard psychological explanation for the same behavior, namely, that the sight of

the lion causes me to become anxious, and I run out the door to reduce my anxiety. I'm sure you've all heard that.

There is a thought experiment that we can do here. Imagine that the drug companies have invented a new wonder drug, and it's called a *Happy Pill*. The specific feature of the Happy Pill is that it looks like an aspirin and you just put it on the tip of your tongue, and just like that, no anxiety. Suppose when that lion walks in the room, I've got a Happy Pill here: wouldn't I be better advised to deal with my anxiety by taking a Happy Pill, since it's faster and less work? I could do that, and it would take care of my anxiety. There's a little problem: I'd still get eaten up by the lion.

That's a different way of illustrating that the main problem is out there, and not my feelings. I can do things to take care of my feelings, but it won't solve my emotional problems — unless my feelings themselves are a problem. For this one you've got a variation. Imagine when that lion walks in the room, I'm so panicked that I can't move, but I've got a Happy Pill here that I can reach. Under those conditions, I'd better take the Happy Pill so I can get un-panicked enough to run. That's a situation that you encounter often—times in therapy, where the client is so upset that just being that upset prevents him from doing the kind of things that need to be done, and so it presents an immediate problem that pretty much has to be dealt with before anything else gets dealt with. Under those conditions, you use any form of Happy Pill that you have available. The Happy Pill may be a tranquilizer, it may be meditation, it may be jogging, anything that you know of that affects a person's state of mind will serve.

So the Happy Pill, then, is used to distinguish between emotional states and emotional behavior. It's used to direct attention to the fact that emotional problems are primarily out there but they may be your state of mind, and if so, then you address that. It also helps to distinguish very clearly the two different kinds of emotional problems. I will say that the second kind is much less frequent than the first kind. It's not that often that a client is so upset that you have to deal with that first. But it may happen, and I think

it happens just as often that it's not true but the client thinks it's true. Under those conditions, you might just as well go along with him.

I said first that it's not that often that you have this situation where a client is really so upset that you have to deal with it first. I said, however, it also happens about as often that it's not so, but the client thinks it's so. That is, the client thinks that he's so upset that that's got to be taken care of first. And I said, in that case, you might as well go along with it.

Being vs. Feeling

Being angry versus feeling angry, and it doesn't matter what emotion you plug in there. Oftentimes, there is a deficiency in how people understand themselves, because they say, "Gee, how could I be angry? I don't feel angry." I go back to the original example of the lion walking in the room and I run out, and you say: "Why did you do that?" and I say: "Because I was afraid of the lion." You say: "Did you feel afraid?" And I say: "Hell, no, I was too busy running!" That's about the quickest way of puncturing this idea that feeling it is the same as being it, that feeling afraid is the same as being afraid.

Actually, it's really up for grabs what my feelings were when I was running, but it's the kind of statement that people often make. "No, I didn't feel afraid at the time. It wasn't until afterwards that I felt afraid" — things of that sort. So there is enough anecdotal stuff the people are familiar with to carry the argument that being afraid is not the same as feeling afraid, that being angry is not the same as feeling angry, etc. And you can invent or create your own set of examples to have available if you need them, to illustrate that you don't have to feel that way in order to be that way. Usually that involves coming back to pointing out the reality basis and the fact that that's primary, and you're back to emotional behavior versus

emotional states of mind. Feeling angry is a state of mind. Being angry is a response to a reality basis.

Incidentally, if you look down the list quick, you'll see that there is a number of those items having to do with what emotions aren't. Each one of those represents a significant misconception that lots of people think that emotions are these things.

Displacement

Okay, *displacement* is the next one. This arises, I think, in two main contexts. One is where the client is either displacing or encountering displacement from somebody else. The other is where the client says, "I'm mad as hell and there's nothing I can do about it, but I feel bad. What can I do?" Under those conditions, to displace successfully works like a Happy Pill. You feel better about it, it eases the pressure on you, it eases the pain, even if it doesn't do anything about the provocation.

The main thing where this arises is anger. You don't often get issues of displacing fear, although sometimes. You almost never get issues of displacing guilt or other emotions. What gets displaced overwhelmingly commonly is anger. So let's do it in terms of anger.

There's a number of things that will succeed in displacing anger, and you can either simply give those directly, like prescribing a Happy Pill. You say: "Do any one of these seven things, and you'll find which of them help, and try those." Or you can go through an explanation from which you derive those kinds of things, and it's simply a question of which is *à propos*. Let me go through at least some of the explanation, because it illustrates how you can explain how things happen, why certain things happen and others don't, without making use of the language of forces and pulls and mechanisms.

Basic to the explanation is the notion of value. People value things. One of the maxims says, "A person values some states of

affairs over others, and acts accordingly.” That’s one of those fundamental, familiar things. People value some things over others. One of the key ideas is that you don’t value particular things in and of themselves. You value them for something that you’re getting out of them. They do something for you, and that’s how come you value them. That’s what you value them for, that’s what you value about them, that’s what you value in them.

The principle says that if you value something, a particular something, you will also value anything else that gets you the same thing. And you’ll value it to the extent that it does get you the same thing. That’s the first half of the explanation, this value notion that if you value something, you’re going to value anything else that gets you the same thing. The second half has to do with behaviors. The main way that you value a behavior is to be motivated to engage in it. There are other ways of valuing behaviors but that’s the primary one. You can then apply this principle in that form to behavior, namely, that if you’re motivated to engage in a behavior, you will also be motivated to engage in any other behavior to the extent that the second behavior resembles the first, i.e., to the extent that it gets you the same thing — more technically, to the extent that it has the same significance.

Recall yesterday, when we were talking about that sequence of that guy standing outside the farmhouse, and I said the production of behavior goes downward. The only reason the more concrete ones are there is because they are ways of engaging in the top one. The same holds for the value principle. The reason that you value this particular thing is because of what you’re getting out of it, and of course you would value anything else that got you the same thing, since the reason you value the thing in question is that it gets you that.

The interesting thing is that when it comes to anger, what sort of things sufficiently resemble it, so that they’re effective when you’re angry and can’t do what you feel like doing, you can’t engage in the behavior that you value, namely, getting back at the person. What other behaviors can you engage in that are sufficiently similar

in relevant ways so that they will do some of the job of taking the pressure of the anger off? Here it's interesting to do it empirically first, and just ask, of all of the ways that we're familiar with that people deal with their anger, which of them work? What sorts of things work for people? There's a familiar list of about seven different things. Shirley called them "the Seven Angry Acts."

The first one is the old familiar one of you go home and you kick your dog. More generally, you engage in hostile behavior, but the other individual who's involved is not the one that you'd really like. So you honk at the other motorist, you cut him off, you yell at him, you curse him under your breath, you do all kinds of things. And you come home — you don't just come home and kick your dog. You wait till he barks and then you kick him. So any kind of hostile behavior will pretty much have that effect. As I say: that's the classic one; that's the one that's used as the paradigm of displacement.

Then there's about three that involve doing it in your head as against out in the world. So for example, you think about what you'd like to have done to the guy, or what you'd like to have told him. And you not only think about it, you fantasy about it, you daydream about it, dream about. In all those cases, the main transition is that you're doing it in your head, not for real. But it's the right kind of thing, so it serves to displace.

Another one is compensation. You're loser over here, so you make yourself a winner somewhere else. You do a favor for yourself, you treat yourself to something, and that makes up for it at least partially.

Or you confide in a friend about what happened and what a son of a bitch this guy is, and your friend agrees with you: yeah, he is.

Then there's a pair that generally go together. The first one is, you just flatly affirm that you're not the kind of person that somebody can walk all over and get away with it. That's backed up by the second, which is that you remind yourself that you could have

done it, and it was your choice not to, that you had your reasons and in so far as you had your reasons, you were in control and it was your thing. And that helps.

Finally, you can disqualify. In disqualification, you change the person's status to a new status in which what he says about this is not to be taken seriously. You walk out saying, "Oh shit, what the hell does he know about doing a good job?" So if his word is not to be taken seriously, then he hasn't succeeded in degrading you, so there's nothing to get mad at. You commonly experience this with kids. If a kid is young enough, he can be screaming a tantrum at you and you just throw it off. That's disqualification.

Okay, we stop with those eight, and that is pretty much the list — I think you'd have a hard time finding examples that don't fit one or the other of these examples — when you reflect back on them, one interesting thing stands out above all, namely, that only about half of them involve anger. Several of them don't involve anything angry at all. If so, how come they work, and how come they count as displacements of anger? It accomplishes — it resembles the angry behavior that you would like to have engaged in, in that it accomplishes some of what the angry behavior would have accomplished by undoing the guy. Instead of socking him, you wipe him out some other way. And the way you wipe him out is not really hostile but it does wipe him out. That's close enough where if you do it for the situation and say, "Well, it wasn't a big deal," that's a little too far away. It wouldn't count as displacement. Even disqualification is borderline. That one is not quite like all the others.

Q. — a public disqualification. [laughter]

PGO. A public disqualification may be — [laughter] No, it's more effective if you do it with pity. Otherwise you get suspected of ulterior motives.

Q. So you're really talking about covert behavior.

PGO. Not especially. If you complain to a friend, that's not covert. I wasn't really thinking along that dimension at all, but

simply what works when you're angry and can't do what you feel like doing out of the anger.

Okay, how come these things work and they're not angry? How come confiding to a friend works? How come reminding yourself that you were in control there, works. In more familiar language, they're all self-affirming, and the hostility in response to provocation — its primary feature is that it is self-affirming. It's a recovery of the status that you were in danger of losing. Had the provocation been allowed to proceed without the hostility, you accepted that, you would be accepting degradation. So the anger formula of "provocation elicits hostility" is a special case of "degradation elicits self-affirmation." It's because these things are affirming that they succeed in displacing the hostility, because they are effective against the destructive effects of the provocation.

To anticipate one of the later arguments, notice that none of this would make sense at all if emotions were experiences. If emotions were experiences, displacement as a phenomenon would be absurd, it would be nonsense. How could you displace an experience? But we'll get to that one.

Q. Don't get mad, get even.

PGO. Just change one word: Don't get mad, break even.
[laughter]

Pleasant vs. Unpleasant

Another topic that sometimes arises — I think it arises more in the classroom than with clients, because this is a general phenomenon. That is that we have a lot of unpleasant emotions, and basically only one pleasant one. How come? Is the world so inimical that unpleasant things are five times as common — something like that? There is a certain kind of answer that you can generate on that, that makes sense of it. The reality basis for the unpleasant emotions is always that you're in a bad situation. Having a lion

right here is a bad situation for me to be in. Being degraded by somebody is a bad situation for me to be in. Not having anything that I can do that's going to get anything for me is a bad situation to be in. Having somebody else have something that I should have, and don't, is a bad situation to be in. Having violated community norms and being degraded is a bad situation to be in. So all of our unpleasant emotions start with being in some kind of bad situation, and the behavior that logically goes with that amounts to trying to change that situation, or my relation to it, so that I'm no longer in a bad situation.

So when I'm in danger, what goes with that is getting out of danger. If I get out of danger, I'm no longer in that bad situation. If somebody provokes me, that's an attempted degradation; if I can break even on it, I'm no longer in that bad situation. If I violated the community norms, then if I do penance successfully, I'm no longer a second-class citizen but once more fully "one of us." So the emotional behaviors in these bad situations consist logically of an effort to undo the situation, to get out of that situation so that I am then not in a bad situation.

That means, then, that I have to be tuned in to the nature of that situation because I'm going to have to do something about it. What I do about a provocation is very different from what I do about a danger, and both of those are very different from what I do about a transgression. So because I'm going to have to do something about it, I need a well-differentiated set of distinctions for marking what kind of bad situation this is. So we do distinguish provocation from danger, from wrong-doing, from jealousy, and despair, and all of these unpleasant things, because to do something about it requires those distinctions.

In contrast, the reality basis for positive emotions is a good situation, and you don't have to do anything about it. Since you don't have to do anything about it, it doesn't really matter all that much what kind of good situation it is. A good situation is a good situation, and you do the same thing, namely, you celebrate. How you celebrate depends on you, not on what kind of good thing it

was. So you don't need to have a well-differentiated set of distinctions for marking what kind of good situation it is, and that's why we don't have — we don't distinguish — a lot of different kinds of pleasant emotions.

So the message is: the world isn't really five times as bad as it is good. It does make sense that we would have lots of negative emotions and essentially only one positive one.

Connected Feelings

The next one goes back to what kind of things emotions are, and one of the kind of things they are, are that they can be logically connected. A standard example there is, I say: "Bruce, how about going in my office next door and bringing me the book that's on the desk?." And you pull over and go in the office, and we hear all kinds of loud, strange noises. Suddenly you come flying out, slam the door behind you, come up and sock me, and say, "Why the hell didn't you tell me there was a lion in there?"

There's two emotions involved there. One is fear — afraid of the lion. The other is anger at me. Those are not just two separate experiences or two separate somethings; they are logically connected because he's angry at me for putting him in danger. Putting him in danger is a provocation. To do something like that to somebody is a provocation, so it makes sense for him to be angry at me for making him afraid. And that's a conceptual or logical connection; it isn't a causal one, it isn't that the two feelings happen to occur in him at the same time. There is a logical connection.

One of the main places where something like that is *à propos* is where you're tracing out complex patterns of motivations with clients. People tend to think of emotion as a single thing, one thing at a time, and so when you get patterns of emotions that are logically connected like this, then you have to work to lay it out and draw the connections, and get them to rehearse and review and say, "Yeah, that's it," just in order to understand what's going on.

Knowing Feelings

Let's skip one, and go to knowing my feelings. That one is deceptive. It's much more complex than it sounds. But try taking it seriously for a minute: how do you know how you feel, emotionally speaking? How do you know that you're angry, how do you know that you're afraid, that you're jealous, how do you know any of these things? We might even escalate it a little: how could you possibly know these things?

The impasse that you quickly reach, if you just push like that, was one of the reasons why it's tempting to answer, "It's an experience." But if you try saying "it's an experience," you have an even worse question of saying, "How do you know?"

Q. I don't understand the question. How come I can't say I recognize that I'm angry like I recognize that cup?

PGO. If you look at the cup, what do you look at to recognize you're angry? Again, there's classic language: you look inward, the saying goes; you introspect, introspect your experience — that's how you tell. It's not a very satisfactory answer.

You can say that it's not going to be easy, and making some of the obvious moves is going to reach an impasse. Let me introduce an interesting notion here. There is a heuristic, and it's called "Winston Churchill." It goes like this. Imagine I hold up a photograph here, a nice glossy 8 x 10, and I say: "Who is this a picture of?" You all take one look, and you say: "Ha, it's Winston Churchill." I give you a gimlet eye and I say: "Now wait a while. How do you know this is a picture of Winston Churchill and not somebody who looks just like him?" You think that over for a minute, and you say: "By God, you're right. It could be a picture of somebody who looks just like him. I'm not sure it's a picture of Winston Churchill." And I say: "How about drawing me a picture of Winston Churchill?" You take out your pencil and do your thing, and in five minutes you say: "Okay, I've got it." And I say: "How do you know that's a picture of Winston Churchill, and not of somebody

else who looks just like what you've drawn?" You think that one over for a minute, and brighten up and say, "No, no problem. This is a picture of Winston Churchill and there's absolutely no question about it." When we push, how come you can be so sure there when you can't be sure about the photograph?

The discussion will go round and round, but eventually we'll come to the point that why it's a picture of Winston Churchill is that that's what you drew it as, and that makes it a picture of Winston Churchill. And because of that, there is no question that it's a picture of Winston Churchill. Particularly, nothing depends on how much that resembles Winston. That just goes to the issue of how good a picture of Winston Churchill it is, but no matter what it looks like, Winston Churchill is who it's a picture of, because that's what you produced it as.

Then I say: "Close your eyes and create a mental image of Winston Churchill." You close your eyes, and sit around, and after a couple of minutes you say: "Okay, I've got it." Then I hit you with the same question, "How do you know that that's an image of Winston and not of somebody else who's just like your image?" This time it doesn't take you much time to wind up in the same place, namely, that there's no question it's an image of Winston because that's what you produced it as. That makes it an image of Winston.

Transfer that idea to your own behavior. What makes your behavior the behavior it is, is that that's what you produced it as, and that makes it that. So if what I'm doing here is taking a drink of coffee, what makes my behavior that is that's what I produced it as. I produced it as taking a drink of coffee, and that makes it that. If it succeeds, that's what it succeeds at; if it fails, that's what it fails at. In either case, my behavior is taking a drink of coffee.

That brings home something, namely, that I cannot possibly find out about my behavior the way I find out about your behavior. I've got to know about my behavior in advance in order to produce it. But your behavior, I can wait — in fact I have to wait — until you've produced it, and then it's there to be seen, and that's how I

find out about it. But I don't wait for my behavior to find out about it. I have to know it in advance, in a different way, in order to produce it. So you could say, my knowledge of my behavior is not primarily from observation. My knowledge of my behavior is an author's knowledge, not an observer's knowledge. And an author's knowledge is ahead of time, not after the fact. Observer's knowledge is after the fact.

Knowing Feelings: Questions and Answers

Q. What about the incident of an individual who reflects back on what he did, and then says, "I guess that wasn't what I created."

PGO. He's changing his mind. What he produced it as is exactly what he's changing his mind about. Notice the problem of not knowing what you produced it as is very different from the problem of not knowing what it is you're observing over here.

Q. The reason for changing your mind about what you produced it as is as a result of some observation you've made about what you did.

PGO. Not particularly. The explanation for why he doesn't see it the way it is, is that it's unthinkable, and why he's now about to see it as it is, is that it's no longer unthinkable. How it got to be no longer unthinkable may depend on what he's observed, or who he's talked to, etc., but those do not stand in a logical relation to his seeing it now. What stands in a logical relation is now it's no longer unthinkable. You can afford to slough off the details of how it became no longer unthinkable. That's the key move. It's no longer unthinkable; now he can see it as anger.

Q. You're using this language "what I produced it as," in a place where I would have thought language like "what I intended. . . ."

PGO. I was going to comment on that. That's a more common way of talking about it. Connected to the picture in that example,

“what I produced it as” is the right locution, and it brings out something about behavior that you don’t get if you say “that’s what I intended.” Because if you say: “That’s what I intended,” suddenly you start talking about these weird things called “intentions.” Whereas if you say: “That’s what I produced it as,” it doesn’t create that problem.

Now consider knowing your own feelings, not because you’ve observed something, but because you know what you’ve produced them as, in the same way that you know what you produced your other behavior as. You can see, if you’re thinking along those lines, you don’t have a problem with how you know your behavior; you do have a problem with how could you possibly not know your behavior. It becomes much less difficult to see how you could not know it, but there are explanations for it.

Q. How is knowing your feelings different from knowing what you’re doing?

PGO. What I’m suggesting is that it isn’t, that that’s the answer to “How do you know what you’re feeling?” is the same answer as “How do you know what you’re doing?” Namely, you have an author’s knowledge of it. You don’t have some peculiar observation.

Q. What about another possible answer to this, “How do I know what I’m feeling?,” in terms of you discriminate what relation you stand in the world. You’re provoked, you’re guilty of wrongdoing, whatever it is. Does that work or not work?

PGO. Yes and no. There’s a slogan that says the experience of anger is whatever experience you have when you are angry, and I think that’s what you’re suggesting, isn’t it — something along that line? What happens is, under those condition you don’t even talk about the experience. Once you know you’re angry, that’s the important information, and you’re not generally inclined then to talk about your feelings. Why would you? You’re already talking about the anger. When you talk about your feelings is where you don’t have a clear-cut reality basis, but you have something, and

that's where you pursue the issue of "what are my feelings," or "how am I really feeling?"

Q. Why, in this case, would you say "knowing your feelings" rather than "knowing your emotions," because in the case of I do something and it's passive-aggressive, and I still —

PGO. That's just staying with the way people talk, and people more often talk about their feelings than about their emotions, particularly "being in touch with their feelings," "knowing how they feel." They don't often talk about "being in touch with their emotions"; they talk about "being in touch with their feelings."

Q. But technically, here there might be no feelings, either. You just burn the toast or something.

PGO. Yeah. That's why I say that the slogan is, "The feeling of anger is whatever feeling you have when you are angry." You can dismiss it, usually, because usually the feeling is not really the point. The point of talking about feelings is to arrive at the answer that you are angry. If you're already there, you don't need to talk about the feelings of anger.

Q. It occurs to me that possibly this could be related to — logically connected notion that we say, "I'm not sure how I feel." but you zero in on something that could produce it. Can that, then, set off another thing, another feeling, that's not related to the event per se but registers with the person?

PGO. Yeah. That's related to some of the later items of the relation between body sensations and manipulations, and experiencing feelings. If somebody presses tightly on your solar plexus and all of a sudden you feel very afraid and you start reliving your experiences, that's a dramatic sort of happening. And in understanding emotions, you need to understand how something like that could happen. That's a piece of the picture, is how things get set off.

Q. A lot of people who talk about feelings think that a feeling is not something I produce but something that happens to me. It might happen to me because of the change in my world, but I don't

think of myself as an author of it. How does this formulation answer that?

PGO. If you look at the wall, there you don't feel like you've produced how it looks, but you did. You know what you're seeing, and you don't know that by observing what you're doing. You know it because you know what you're seeing. The experience of seeing the wall comes to you, experientially. You don't have the experience of producing it. That doesn't mean you don't.

Q. But if the response is automatic . . .

PGO. The fact that it's automatic in no way implies that you're not doing it. Lots of things that you do, automatically, there's simply no presumption that if it's automatic, you're not doing it.

Q. Ellis and Matthews suggest that people create their own emotions and there's no reality basis, that you make yourself angry, you allow yourself to be angry. Can you clarify the difference between producing your feelings and creating them?

PGO. We're anticipating some later ones, and I get a mish-mash, but let me answer that directly. Think of behavior as starting and including more than muscle movements, that it includes all of your internal and neurological and other such goings-on, and it includes your sensations, your feelings, your experiences. All of that is part of the package that you're producing. When I see that lion, I am already starting to produce that, and eventually I start moving, but I'm already producing that behavior before I ever move. Now some of those initial components are already there if I decide not to run. The feeling is already there; some of the sensations are already there. I may not run at all; I may instead go fight the lion. Now if they're there, and you say: "What were you feeling?," I can say I was feeling fear. Why? Because I know what I was producing those things as. It's not that I've targeted particular sensations to produce, any more than I produce muscle movements, but I know what I'm doing. Since I do, when you ask me about them, I answer in terms of what I know I was doing, what I was about. And those, by and

large, are automatic. I don't sit there and start choosing which things are going on. I simply start running from the lion.

Remember, doing that does involve all of these things going on, so when I started, it's already going on by the time I visibly move.

Q. Talking about knowing your feelings, seem equivalent to talking about knowing what state you're in. It's just an systematic set of your powers, as a result of being in a particular state.

PGO. Yeah. Usually states are not in question. You can almost always paraphrase the question "How do you feel?" or "What are your feelings?" — you can almost always paraphrase it adequately with "What do you feel like doing?" So it's the behavioral emotional response that's usually in question and is of primary interest, rather than the state. State only becomes important when there's something you've got to do about it. Am I depressed or am I just discouraged? If I'm depressed, I'll take this medication, I'll go see a psychiatrist, but if I'm just discouraged, I won't. I'll take an aspirin, I'll go jogging. Why else would somebody want to know what their state of mind was? Particularly when the state of mind is not obvious, why would somebody want to pursue the question of what is really my state of mind?

Q. A basis for psychoanalysis? [laughter] When does it arise that you have to give this kind of a three-minute lecture? When I have to have my feelings explained to me, or how do I know my feelings?

PGO. When somebody comes in talking like an observer, "I don't know how I feel, maybe I should pay more attention to what's happening in my chest," and that's not phony, because sometimes paying attention to what's happening in your chest leads you to say, "My God, I'm really angry." But when somebody's approaching it as though it was an observer-task, and as if all they had to do was to pay closer attention to this thing and then they would know, usually that's serious enough that it's holding things up, and then you get into this set of issues.

Q. Back to what we were talking about before, it sounds to me like if there's something automatic, then you have a choice of saying you produced it — sometimes you have a choice of saying you produced it as something, and sometimes you don't. You don't count reflex as behavior. Sometimes with some things automatic, it's simply reflex behavior, and sometimes as with feelings, sometimes you're in a border area where you can count this as behavior or not.

PGO. What kind of reflexes are you thinking of, there?

Q. Any reflex — a knee-reflex.

PGO. I don't need a knee-reflex when I see a lion, or when I run off.

Q. Well, you might need other reflexes. Seeing that as a wall, for example. We could argue about whether that's a behavior or not, whether I'm doing anything by doing that, or whether that just happens. It seems like you have a choice of talking about it either way.

PGO. You have a choice of talking about them either way, but talking about them as things that happen leads to nothing but trouble. That's why my approach is therapeutic, not philosophical. You get into trouble thinking about them that way, except in very protected circumstances, and even if it's not false to talk about them that way, you get into trouble.

Q. So there's a point to avoiding that, anyhow.

PGO. Yeah. My guess is that if you worked hard at it, you could show it was false. That's for somebody else to do.

In Touch with Feelings

One of the places where knowing your feelings comes in is this whole classic issue of being in touch with your feelings. Ironically, the issue of being in touch with your feelings doesn't particularly involve feelings. Somebody who's not in touch with his feelings, by

and large is somebody who doesn't know what he wants, not specifically somebody who doesn't know what his emotional states are and what his emotional reactions are. Those are simply a special case. In general, somebody who's not in touch with his feelings doesn't know what he wants, doesn't have impulses, doesn't have spontaneous inclinations. Or if he has, he doesn't act on them, doesn't recognize them.

In terms of Actor–Observer–Critic, that's an actor dysfunction, because all of those things are primarily Actor functions. As an Actor, you act spontaneously, impulsively, creatively, do your own thing, etc., etc. So if you can't do those things, if when you get a chance to do your things you sit around saying, "Gee, I don't know what I want to do, I don't know what I really want," and if your normal choices of behavior are always externally oriented, you're always doing it because of some reason out there, and never because you feel like doing it, or you want to do it, or you just have the impulse, again those are marks of somebody who's not in touch with his own feelings. Then, as I say: emotional reactions are simply special cases of this more pervasive phenomenon.

One way to stay out of touch with your feelings is to approach them as an Observer. You say: "Gee, I'm out of touch with my feelings: I need to observe them more closely. I need to observe myself more closely to see what they are." As an Author, that's going to ruin you. Anybody who's ever authored anything, just try that kind of approach to what you're producing, and you'll see how quickly it dries you up. So not being in touch with your feelings is simply a particular pathology or deficiency in Actor–functioning, and there's a set of exercises that routinely are designed to help that.

The exercises, one way or another, amount to getting you to do it under some special circumstances that you get used to doing it. For example, the exercise of "three times a day do something just because you feel like doing it" — the content is trivial, but it gets you into the mood of operating on what you feel like doing. Since external reasons are specifically excluded, it ensures that you get

some of the right kind of practice. That's one of about three or four exercises that have that general effect.

Emotional Control

One of the features of emotional behavior, called “there is a learned tendency to act on the discrimination without stopping to think,” that may approach reflexivity. You have a tendency to act — you remember, I said as soon as I see the lion, I am running. I don't have to stop and think about it, once I see that lion.

To act on the discrimination without deliberation. Now it's only a learned tendency. It doesn't mean that I always act impulsively. It just means that I don't have to stop and think in order to act. There's another case where the fact that I do it automatically does not at all mean I'm not doing it.

One of the consequences is that emotions go with control problems. Because of this learned tendency to act without deliberation, you might say emotions are something you're going to act on impulsively unless there's something else in the picture that keeps you from doing it. Generally speaking, what keeps you from acting impulsively, emotionally, is that you have other reasons that are stronger. It's that simple.

Where you run into problems in therapy is with clients who say, “But I can't help it. I can't help doing these things. I can't help acting emotionally.” And indeed there is a problem. It's easy to get carried away in an emotional situation. It's easy to get carried away, it's easy to just go with the flow and act emotionally. And one of the reason it's easy is that often you don't have time to think about it. It doesn't occur to you. You just do it, and by the time you've thought about maybe I shouldn't have, it's too late; you've already done it. Or you say: “Well, I know now that I shouldn't do it, but when I get angry I can know it, and I'll still act on it. Because when I feel angry, I just don't care.”

There's an interesting device that sometimes helps in that kind of situation. It's called "disqualifying your experience." There are two primary examples for getting the idea across. The first one is being moderately drunk. When you get drunk, you start seeing double, and start experiencing the room wavering, and things like that. Generally when that happens, when you start seeing double, you don't go into a fit and frenzy and say, "My God, what's happening to the world? It's multiplying by two." You say, "I'm drunk; I'm seeing double." In fact, you know that under those conditions, your experience is not veridical and that things are not the way you experience them, and if you can remember that, you can act on what you know instead of what you're experiencing. In fact, you can even control what you're experiencing by closing one eye. Likewise, when you're experiencing sort of tilting this way and that way, you don't say, "My God, this is an earthquake." You say: "I'm drunk. I'd better be careful how I walk," and you take care how you walk and you manage. By knowing that these experiential effects are expected effects of being drunk, you can compensate for them, and you can manage a hell of a lot more drunkenness than if you didn't know this and experienced and thought that everything really was dividing by two, if you thought the room really was wavering. You can handle a lot more irregularity if you're in a position to disqualify the experience by saying, "I know it's not that way even though I am experiencing, and so I can act on what I know is so instead of how I'm experiencing."

The reason that's exceptional is that ordinarily you just automatically act on your experiences. When you walk in the room, you look around, you see things, you don't stop and think and ask, "Is my experience veridical? Should I trust my sight as to whether that's a chair or not?" You just come in and you sit down. So not to do that requires some special preparation and effort.

The other example is that famous reversing-lens experience. You put people in a house with these lenses that reverse your visual field left to right. When you see something over there, you know it's over here, and when you reach over there, you see your hand reaching out over here. Even though it's just one single change, and

you know what it is, you go stumbling all over the place anyhow. After a while, though, you stop stumbling, and then the dramatic thing is that after about two weeks, you start seeing things where they are again. So things now look to be where they are. But then if they take the lenses off, you get the reversal again, and it takes another two weeks before you're once more seeing things where they are.

The moral to that is that if you act in terms of what you know, your experience will follow. Your experience does change, and eventually it's fitting what you know, and that's because you've acted successfully on what you know, namely, that things are opposite to where they look.

So the general principle is that sometimes you want to be able to act on what you know instead of acting on your experience. You have to be able to disqualify your experience and not just automatically go with it. You have to disqualify it and act instead on what you know. And emotional states are like being drunk, namely, that's one of the kinds of states where you're likely to do things, you know you're doing it, but you don't care, and you're going to do it anyhow. If you can get some kind of handle on it, like assimilating it to being drunk and seeing double, so that you can say, "The way I'm experiencing it is not the way things are." that can pull you back to being able to act on what you know instead, and that's the kind of thing you need if you're somebody who gets carried away and then regrets it.

I've used that about — oh, maybe about half a dozen times in therapy, and if I had to create a fictitious statistic, I'd say it worked four out of six times. My experience is that it works more often than not but it doesn't always work. So it's one of the things that may work for this kind of problem.

Q. Where have you used it?

PGO. In couples, where they get angry at each other, and once they get angry that blows the whole thing, that's one of the places.

The slogan I give them is to say “I’m drunk,” just to recapture the image and serve as the reminder.

Prevention is better than trying to handle it after it arises, but sometimes you have to try to handle it after it arises. Of the two, I would recommend trying prevention by all means. But when you’ve got somebody who isn’t doing that successfully, then you try some of these others.

One of the key things is that something has to intervene. You need some kind of tag that you remember at the time when you wouldn’t normally think of it, so something like that helps. That’s why I give people slogans. Anything that you can peg it to will serve as the red flag that then gets you do to what you can do.

Q. There’s also the issue where people are buying into the fact that they have been carried away in that way. Sometimes people don’t recognize it, and you’ve got to start with getting that straight.

PGO. That’s why I use the drunk example. Almost everybody has had the experience, and even the ones who don’t, know of it. And that’s a demonstration to them that you can disqualify your experience, that you are not bound to your experience the way that they are in effect telling you they are.

Q. Yeah, but I’m thinking that sometimes people get carried away, but they wouldn’t say they’re being carried away. They wouldn’t agree with you. You might think “You’re over-reacting, you’re being carried away.”

PGO. Then you don’t do this kind of thing. Then you work on their judgement and do judgement-monitoring, because if a person doesn’t think he’s being carried away, he’s not going to use any of these techniques.

Expressing Feelings

It's one of our modern truisms that you ought to express your feelings, and that you're better off expressing your feelings. It only takes a moment's reflection to recognize that that isn't true. If it were, you'd have no use for displacement. You're not always better off expressing your feelings. However, one can say that in general, there is some value in expressing your feelings. That's very different from saying "always do it," because often you have stronger reasons not to. But what is the value of expressing your feelings? Stay with the lion: remember, just expressing your feelings doesn't deal with the lion. Then how come it does some good? What is the value of expressing your feelings?

It might work that, if you're immobilized by the feelings, then expressing them may un-immobilize you and help you act. But think of an encounter group where people are encouraged to express their feelings: what's the value of it?

Q. For your and other people's information . . .

PGO. But that's not the primary value of expressing your feelings, because if that were, then if you as a therapist introduced those facts, that would do just as well. It's the same information, whereas the wisdom is that there is some value in the expression.

Q. Sometimes I think it could be a message to the other person about how you would like them to act with you, or to do something about those feelings, the relational kind of move.

PGO. I'm thinking of the common phrase, "Getting it off your chest." That is a common phrase, isn't it? It was in my day. But it helps to get it off your chest. What is this notion of "getting it off your chest?"

Q. How about putting things in their place — getting it off your chest and putting it where it belongs.

PGO. That has some charm, but you need to elaborate. [laughter]

Q. If you were to protest when someone had injured you, and you did not show anger, it may not quite treat what happened as if you saw the seriousness of the offense, how much it injured you. Your putting things in their place actually is showing there is a value, and how much value there is in not being injured.

PGO. Think of our double-entry bookkeeping. Instead of talking about the world and value and his place, think of: by doing this, you're taking a stand, you're taking a place. You're taking a stand on the matter, you're taking a position on it. And taking a position is already self-affirming. It is like behavior in that sense, that when you take a position on things, it's like having acted, and in fact it's more or less a commitment either that you're going to, or that this is what you would do if you didn't have good reasons not to.

Q. When you say "expressing your feelings," are you talking about behaving emotionally in that situation, or merely addressing

PGO. Either way. If I'm mad at the guy that chewed me out, I can come and rant and rave and just lose it, or I can come and tell you what a son of a bitch he is. Either way I'm getting it off my chest.

Q. Sometimes people don't say them because it's not okay, it's silly, there's no reason, they do a lot of disqualifying, that's why they won't accept their feelings.

PGO. That's a feature of taking a stand, making a promise. Taking a stand is a commitment either to act on it, to follow through, or that although you're not going to follow through, it took some good reasons to the contrary. The commitment to follow through is very close to that notion of owning. This is what you're committed to; you own. With that commitment, you can then negotiate it, you can talk about it, you can delimit it. It does become more thing-like. Because the commitment is finite, it specifies certain things: here's where I stand.

Q. This move seems to work well for people who say they don't want to say how they feel, because it really doesn't make any

difference anyway — to anybody else. They don't listen, so why should I say it? This is a move counter to that: at least you can say where you stand, so they can know clearly from you what you'll do, as opposed to "I'll just say it so they'll do me right."

Q. The expression "get it off your chest," though, suggests another thing that this does, namely, if you don't express your feelings, sometimes what you're actually arguing is trying to express them and at the same time trying not to. And while you're busy doing that, which you can carry on for any length of time, it's the contrast between getting it off your chest, that is following through with something rather than with that kind of struggle, spending energy on that, being committed to that struggle. It's one of the things that's expressed by "getting it off your chest."

PGO. One of the things about getting it off your chest: it has a strong connotation of catharsis. Once you get it off your chest, you can go on to other things. That holds for taking a stand. Once you've taken a stand, you've resolved any ambiguities or uncertainties and you can go on to other things.

Q. Do you think that's enough to discuss grief rituals with, mourning, stuff like that?

PGO. No.

Q. They're usually making it real. It seems like getting it off your chest is an important example of expressing your feelings.

PGO. In situations where it's uncertain, yeah, where it's unclear. In other situations, you're quite clear to begin with. You don't need to make it. It's true — one of the background maxims is that acting out something will tend to make it real. Whatever you act on becomes more real. Whatever you already take as real is what you're prepared to act on. So taking a stand is to that extent acting on it, and therefore to that extent making it real. One of the things with loss and grief is that you have to make the loss real and not merely true. So acting on it, even to the extent of taking a position on it, helps to make it real.

Q. So expressing your feelings might involve a loss, too, that you have to accept the degradation of that —

PGO. It might. As I say: it is not the case that you ought to always express them. There are very often good reasons not to. You get a number of possible values out of expressing your feelings. It's not that there is some one value that you always get. There's a number of possibilities, including that you can go on to other things, including that it's sort of like behavior in that it resolves things, and that it's self-affirming because you have taken a stand, you've rejected — for example — the degradation when you express your anger at the provocation. By simply expressing anger, you're taking a position that you don't accept that. That's one reason why you can then go on to other things. You've resolved that issue.

Q. But in a fear-type case, like the lion case, do you find value in expressing your feelings in a case like that?

PGO. Consider if I tell you that last night I was very nervous as I was standing up there talking. Now the thing is all over with; why would I tell you that?

Q. There seems to be something good there. After a fear, you seem to want to tell somebody else. I'm not clear on just what.

PGO. What would I get out of telling you, after it's all over, that I was really nervous then? What difference does it make to you to hear that? It gives you a different picture of what was happening, if you didn't know it already. In part it says, if I didn't show it, then my reasons for not showing or my ability to not show it was stronger than the fear, but the fear was there and had to be overcome. And so it gives you a different picture of what I was doing.

Q. What's the point of doing that?

PGO. Well, what's the point generally of having people understand you? You presume that that's going to make a difference in the nature of your interaction. It may not show up in any really obvious, overt way, but generally you prefer that the person understands — unless you have reason not to.

Body Manipulation and Emotional Release

Q. Can you take a shot on doing that lecture on body position, manipulation, emotional release you started on last year. [laughter]

Okay. Remember what I was saying about when you start to run away, you've already started by the time you move. Lots of things have already happened along that line by the time anybody sees you literally move. Think of being in a chronic state of fear. For example, it's not a lion but you stand in substantial danger of losing your job. You may get laid off, so you're always afraid, you're chronically afraid. There are postural, conventional expressions of fear. You crouch. Now if you're chronically in a state of fear, you are likely to adopt some of the postures that express it, and that's going to affect your muscular development. It's going to affect the body sensations at certain places more than others — for example, in your chest, a tightness in your chest. All of that can go on more or less subliminally in that you don't realize that all of this is happening. If somebody asks you, you say: "Yeah, I'm in danger of losing my job," but you don't make a big deal about it. You don't realize that you're afraid. But you have all of this development down here that is different. And some day you're lying on the massage table and the guy pushes you here, and all of a sudden that activates all of that stuff that's been there all along, that connects to your posture of being afraid. And suddenly you experience fear.

If you had to summarize how that works, I would say Priming the Pump. In effect, the activation of this artificially induces the early stages of the action, and you know what you produced those things as, and you start experiencing. It doesn't matter if it's chronic or — it has to be chronic enough to have some muscular development. Otherwise it's pure memory. If you have just one traumatic incident, it would work along a different line of evoking the memory. The key notion is that the action of running, or whatever it is you're doing, involves all of your physiology. It doesn't just involve skeletal muscles and visible movements. So you can get a reactivation there.

You can also control the expression at any level. You can control the expression at the level of everything but the overt movement. You can control expression at the level of not recognizing that you're afraid. You can control it at the level of disqualifying the danger as being a danger. So you can control expressions. You can interrupt that process at different points.

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