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# THREE-MINUTE LECTURES ON EMOTION

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First let me review for you what a three-minute lecture is. You may recall, in *Clinical Topics* {Ossorio, 1976}, one of the sections connected with the elements that go into psychotherapy is called “conversational formats,” and some of the items under “conversational formats” are (1) ordinary conversation, (2) soliloquy, (3) provocation elicits perplexity, (4) pantomime or gesture, and (5) three-minute lectures.

Now a three-minute lecture is simply any part of Descriptive Psychology that you want a client to understand and use, and you take a didactic approach to it because that’s about the only way you can present stuff like that and get it across. However, in conversation one does not give lectures. So you shift the format in any way you need to, to indicate that you are now going to do this strange thing, namely, a three-minute lecture. Usually I just say, “Let me give you a three-minute lecture on such-and-such,” and it’s presented not as “There is the truth,” but “There’s some ideas that I’d like to have you try or that you might want to try, but they are certainly something you can try out.”

I picked emotion, because emotion is probably *the* most common subject of three-minute lectures. There’s more misunderstanding about emotions and how they work, particularly among clients although I think among the general population, than just about anything else.

It also happens that you can’t give half-hour lectures. You can give three-minute lectures; you can give five-minute lectures; sometimes you can get away with a ten-minute lecture; but you cannot do a half-hour lecture. That means that if you’ve got something that takes more than the three minutes, you’ve got to break it up into some number of them, and usually I will not do more than two in one session, and if I have to go more than that, I’ll wait till the next session, review, and then present another piece.

It turns out that there are a fair number of these, because the emotions are a fairly complex topic. You can see, I’ve listed sixteen, but some of those have several things associated with them. So even if it did only take three minutes each, you can bet I’m not going to

cover them all this morning. And some of them do take longer than three minutes.

**[Handout on emotions]**

1. Paradigm case: Lion in room, behavior is primary case; reality basis; rational; no contrast with intellect.
2. Other cases: reality basis and behaviors for other emotions
3. Emotion and irrationality; kitten in room; no exit; preemptive emotions.
4. Emotional Person Characteristics: Trait, Attitude, State.
5. Emotional States as problems: Happy pill.
6. Displacement.
7. Hip pocket argument:
  - Emotion as feeling: (a) unconscious; (b) street slogan
  - Emotion as physiology; ethnocentrism; thought experiment.
  - Emotion as experience: (a) itch; (b) Pleasure to announce; (c) busy; (d) combination.
8. Emotional behavior as intrinsic social practice.
9. Many negative emotions vs. one or few positive.
10. Emotion in explanation.
11. Emotions vs. motive; patterns vs. relationship.
12. Connected emotions: e.g. love/hate; fear/anger.
13. Unconscious emotions / potential emotions.
14. Telling you my feelings: promise vs. observation report.
15. Recognizing emotions from bodily sensations.
16. Experience/Expression of emotions from bodily manipulation.

## Paradigm Case: Lion in Room

It turns out that the most basic one, the paradigm case, is a very familiar example. I'm usually in a room with at least one door, and either a window or another door. So I say: Imagine that we left the door slightly ajar, and all of a sudden a lion pushes it open, sticks his head in the room, makes the kind of sound that we all know lions make, and I run out the other door, or if there's no other door, I run out the window. And you're off at a distance watching me, and you can see it happen, and you say: "Why did you run out?." And I say: "Because I was afraid of the lion."

If ever there was a case of emotional behavior, there it is: a clear-cut case of fear behavior, no ifs, ands, or buts, no questions, everything fits, you have no reason to doubt it. You saw it. You saw what I did. You heard what I said about it. And it all fits. So again, if ever there was a case of emotional behavior, there it is. That's why it's the fundamental paradigm. It's not that there's anything special about that kind of case. It's not that there's something special about fear. But it's nice to start out with a case of which you can say, "If there ever was a case of emotional behavior, there it is." Because from there on, you can then examine, in great detail, the features of this case to illustrate various aspects of emotional phenomena. It's nice to always come back to the same case — pretty much you're able to.

So the first piece is simply the lion walking in the room and my going out. That, all by itself, has several uses. One is to get across the point that emotional behavior is the primary emotional phenomenon. But that doesn't really come across until you show that by deriving all other emotional phenomena from emotional behavior.

Secondly, and probably the most important thing to get across to clients is that emotional behavior has a reality basis. Emotional behavior is a reaction to something.

Thirdly, emotional behavior is about the most rational behavior there is. What could be more rational than to be afraid of that lion and try to get away from him? You might say it would be irrational if I didn't. That, too, is one of the very widespread misconceptions about emotion, that emotion is somehow irrational, that emotional behavior is *per se* irrational. You have that codified in all kinds of different ways of talking, including our famous "I know it isn't so but that's the way I feel." Including "I know it intellectually but not emotionally."

Those are not contrasts between intellect and emotion; they're contrasts between real and true. But it's sort of ingrained in the folklore that there is something inherently irrational about emotion, that there's some inherent contrast between intellect and emotion, and this example, all by itself, without any of the elaborations, is a good vehicle for getting across that no, it isn't so, that that's not how it works.

Remember, I have to discriminate that lion. I have to discriminate that lion as dangerous. I have to discriminate the doors, the various locations in the room. I have to discriminate being safe versus being in danger. I have to discriminate inside the room and outside the room. All of those discriminations go into that emotional behavior. Without those discriminations, I could not engage in the emotional behavior. I could not even be afraid. But discriminations are intellectual.

So again, the simple example illustrates that there is no inherent dichotomy between intellect and emotion. There may be some contexts where there's a point in making a contrast of the sort, but not that there is an inherent contrast.

Okay, so there's a lot of uses just for the simple "lion walks into the room."

Once you have the lion example, it's fairly easy to make the point that the same sort of thing holds for any other emotion, and you go through the list. Once you get the notion of a reality basis, say, "Every emotional behavior has a reality basis, and a

corresponding type of behavior that you're motivated to engage in when you detect that reality basis."

You start out with the same example: when you detect that you're in danger, you're motivated to escape. Then you go into: the reality basis for anger is provocation, and the behavior is hostility, any form of hostile behavior. The reality basis for guilt is wrongdoing, and the motivated behavior is penance, including the special case of restitution. For joy, the reality basis is good fortune, anything good happening to you, and the behavior is to celebrate. The reality basis for despair is hopelessness: when there is no hope, you despair. That one, there is no behavior. Guess why? If you're in a hopeless situation, there's nothing for you to do.

So you run down a list of the emotions, that way, and indicate that each one has a reality basis, each one has a corresponding behavior that is motivated. You make the general point that all emotional behavior works the same way, and what distinguishes one from the other is the discrimination, the reality basis. The behaviors are different also, but they follow from the reality basis.

## **Emotion and Irrationality**

The third one I have on the list: there are some connections between emotion and irrationality, and they're not of the kind that people generally take for granted. But pointing out some of these connections legitimizes the general notion that people are not just being foolish in making some connection between emotion and irrationality.

The first one of these — just go back to the original setting. You say: Now imagine that instead of a lion, it's a kitten that walks in the room. And I look at the kitten, and yell, and run out, do the same thing I did with the lion. and you ask me, "Why did you run away?" And I say: "Because I was afraid of the kitten." In this case, you don't say, "Yes, I understand," the way you did with the lion.

You say: “Why the hell would you be afraid of a kitten?” I say: “It’s dangerous.”

Now at that point, you say “irrational.” You say: It makes sense for him to run away if he thinks the kitten is dangerous, but he’s distorting reality in thinking the kitten is dangerous. Then you think about that, and you say: Well, yeah, that’s a distortion of reality, okay, and that behavior was then irrational, okay, but that’s garden-variety irrationality. It has no special connection to emotion. It works just like any other distortion of reality that doesn’t elicit emotional behavior. So indeed, people can distort reality and thereby act irrationally on it, but there’s no special connection between doing that and emotion. It’s just that you can do that with the reality basis for emotion just like you can do it with anything else.

Q. Aren’t you saying from that that it’s not actually the behavior that’s irrational; it’s the discrimination?

PGO. No, the discrimination is the distortion. The behavior based on it is irrational.

It’s not nonsensical; it’s just irrational. [laughter]

Q. But if you’re using “irrational” as meaning “without reason,” then you do have a reason, and the reason is your faulty discrimination.

PGO. Yeah, but the distortion is the *faulty* discrimination.

Q. But the behavior is not without reason.

PGO. No. Irrational behavior is not “without reason.”

Q. I think that is the common use of the word.

PGO. Right. That’s why I say that part of the point of this is to indicate that it’s not just foolish to make some connection, and at the same time that there is no inherent connection. That’s why the point is: this is just ordinary distortions that you could engage in with respect to anything, including things that have no connection with emotion. What I was saying is that one of the purposes is to



undermine this inherent connection between irrational and emotional. When the client has that, then I address it in various ways, including this one. But indeed there's other uses for it.

There are various sorts of connections, and this is one of them. As we go down, I'll point out some other ones. I think it's because there are various connections that you get this aura of irrationality connected with emotions.

## **Emotional States**

The next one is usually a bridge to something else. It doesn't stand by itself. I haven't particularly found any use just for laying out the contrast between emotional behavior and emotional person-characteristics.

You say: Look, when people talk about emotion, they can mean all kinds of different things, because "emotion" is really an umbrella term covering a bunch of different phenomena. For example, we've talked about emotional behavior, and we used the word "fear." But we also talked about a kind of person: a fearful person, a limited person, a cowardly person, all of which involve the notion of fear also. And these are not behavior; they're person characteristics, and so they're very different from any kind of behavior. But notice: we use the same word, "fear." So we're using that same word to cover a variety of phenomena. Then the major person characteristics that involve emotional concepts are Trait and Attitude and State. In principle they all do, but these are the most commonly used ones.

In fact, the usual reason for introducing this is to introduce the notion of State, because emotional states are probably the next most important emotional phenomena other than emotional behavior. And sometimes I skip this middle step, and just say, "You know, there's a difference between emotional behavior and being in an emotional state," and then just go on to talk about emotional states.

Depending on the context, I may introduce it with examples. I say: Think of the kind of emotional states you're familiar with. You're being in a bad mood, being in an overpowering rage, being apprehensive or uneasy, feeling guilty, irritated, being overjoyed, being exuberant, being euphoric you go through some number of familiar states just to evoke the general idea. Then the characterization. You say: Emotional states have some distinctive features. They're distinctive in what causes them, and they're distinctive in how they show.

The main thing that causes an emotional state is the discrimination of the reality basis for emotional behavior, and the absence of the successful emotional behavior. Then examples: for example, I'm in a state of panic or in a state of fear if I detect that I'm in danger and don't successfully escape. Then I'm in a state of fear. I'm in a state of anger if I've been provoked and haven't successfully countered that. I'm in a state of guilt if I've done wrong and haven't made it good yet.

What characterizes emotional states — the distinctive thing is the increased tendency to engage in the corresponding emotional behavior. So if I'm in a state of fear, I have an increased tendency to engage in fear behavior. If I'm in a state of anger, I have an increased tendency to engage in anger behavior. And so on. And saying I have an increased tendency to engage in fear or anger behavior doesn't mean performances, it means I will be looking for the reality basis. If I'm in an angry state, I will be looking for provocations and treating them accordingly. It's not just that I go through some motions generally associated with anger. If I'm in a state of fear, I will look for things to be afraid of, and then treat them accordingly. In fact, I'm hypersensitized to those things. Remember what Carl was describing: the guy who's hypersensitized to dangers. That's the kind of thing you find in emotional states: you're hypersensitized to the reality basis for the corresponding behavior.

Q. Would that work across the board for looking for wrong-doing if you're in a guilty state? Guilty about acts, would you look for other wrong-doing?

PGO. Yeah, you look for other wrong-doings that you can correct, just like when you're in a state of fear, you look for dangers that you can escape. This will connect to displacement. When we get to displacement, there's some connections between them. Remember, this is one feature of having to do it in three-minute packages, and that's one reason why you have to often put several together. It's because it's a large topic. The area you may want to cover may be larger, and yet you don't want to talk so long that the person loses the thread and doesn't remember, doesn't understand. It's an exercise in doing it in bite-size pieces, and picking the right pieces to cover the area that you want to cover.

## Emotional Conflict

There's another version of rationality: Now, back to the lion: imagine that when that lion sticks his head in the room, there is no window and there is no door. Remember, usually I'm in a small room, not a room this big, so there's nowhere to run. Now suppose that under those conditions, I just tilt the table on its side and get behind it. If you were watching that, and if you were judging that by ordinary standards, you would say that's stupid. You're not going to get away from the lion that way! Instead of "that's stupid," you might well say, "that's irrational," because by ordinary standards that is foolish, stupid, unreasonable behavior. But then maybe it hits you: by ordinary standards, it is, but look - that's the best he can do in that situation. At that point it stops looking real foolish and starts looking desperate.

Now instead of just the single case of the lion, think of all of the cases where you're strongly motivated to engage in some emotional behavior, but you can't. And in fact, think of those classic situations where you're strongly motivated to engage in an

emotional behavior but you can't because doing that would violate another strong inclination to engage in a different emotional behavior — our old friend “emotional conflict.” For example, think of being in an overpowering rage but also having a strong conscience, and everything that you're inclined to do by virtue of your anger is ruled out by virtue of your conscience, your guilt.

Conversely, nothing other than acting angry has any appeal to you, because this motivation so far exceeds any other motivation that you're not about to act on those. That's a prescription for just being immobilized. On the one hand you have overpowering motivation and zero opportunity. On the other hand you have all kinds of opportunity but essentially zero motivation. That leaves you with essentially zero behavior potential.

Now loosen up the constraints a little, and you'll have the same situation as my getting behind the table. If instead of leaving you with zero behavior potential, it may leave you with a few options that by ordinary standards are foolish and irrational — like starving yourself to death. There's a case where irrational behavior connects to emotion again. And again, it's not inherently connected. It's just a function of the nature of conflict and how conflict can reduce your behavior potential, so that all you have left are behaviors that by ordinary standards are irrational. And emotional conflicts are just one way to be in that kind of bind, and there's no special connection. But you might guess that those kinds of binds occur often enough in people's lives, to generate an association between “emotional” and “irrational.”

Q. That makes me think that we might get some mileage out of a set of behaviors you developed when you were a whole lot younger, and having to restrict yourself to this kind of thing — what a little kid would do.

PGO. What a big kid would do, too. [laughter] Clearly, anything you can do to evoke the behavior potential that the person has, but hasn't tapped, would probably be number one on your list of things to do.

## Happy Pill

Okay, let's talk about the Happy Pill, because that too is a major paradigm.

Come back to the original lion situation, and think of a standard psychological explanation for it. The explanation goes like this: 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 heard that kind of explanation practically all your lives, because that is a standard psychological explanation.

Now to a little thought experiment. Imagine that one of the drug companies has come out with a new wonder drug, and it's called a Happy Pill. A Happy Pill looks just like an aspirin, but it has a very special characteristic, namely, that all you've got to do is put it on the tip of your tongue, and just like that [he snaps his fingers] you have no anxiety. Now suppose that when that lion walks in the room, I've got a Happy Pill sitting there on the table. Would you advise me, then, to deal with my anxiety by taking the Happy Pill, since that's quicker and more effective? You probably wouldn't, because I might not be anxious, but I would be eaten up by the lion.

This is a very important point, and one that I often need to make with clients, namely, that paradigmatically it's not your feelings that are the problem. The problem is the lion. The problem is whatever situation you're reacting to in having those feelings. That's what you have to deal with, to deal with your emotional problems. So the slogan is: Deal with emotional problems by dealing with their reality basis. And in the polemic form, you add: Instead of just talking about the emotions.

Q. And that corresponds, I would say, with something like alcoholism.

PGO. Yeah. The alcohol is essentially a Happy Pill. Stress management is essentially a Happy Pill. Medication is a Happy Pill. All of these are.

Q. What options do you have for checking the emotional state for which you do not discriminate?

PGO. Then you need to discriminate what it's about, and it's the therapist's job to help you figure out what it's about.

But there's another wrinkle to this. Come back to this lion situation, with the Happy Pill in front of you. Imagine that I'm so panic-stricken that I can't get up out of my chair to run out the door. I'm just sitting there trembling, pale. If I have a Happy Pill, I'd better take it, because by reducing my anxiety, then I can run out the door. So there are situations where your emotional state is a problem in its own right. In this case, it's a problem because it prevents me from doing what I damn well need to do, namely, run out the door. Under those conditions, any form of Happy Pill that you may have access to is indicated.

So with your client, if you can't locate it and he's really suffering from it, any form of Happy Pill is what's needed. But that's only a delaying tactic until you can figure it out. You don't want him on that medication the rest of his life.

## Displacement

The next one is displacement, and displacement is peculiar because it has some features of a Happy Pill, but it also has some features of dealing with the lion.

Displacement itself has several features. One is the background explanatory schema. The background schema is this: there is a general principle — in fact, it's one of the 95 maxims — that says that if a person values a particular something, he will also value anything else that gets him the same thing, to the extent that this other thing is similar to the thing he values. Oftentimes I use an

example. Suppose that I've really got it for a Mercedes 450, but I can't have it. "But," you say: "would you take a Mercedes 300?" I say: "Sure!" [laughter] "Would you take a Cadillac?" I pause for a minute and I say "Yeah." "Would you take a Ford?" I say: "Well, sure, yeah." "Would you take a motorcycle?" Maybe I say "No." Now depending on what I wanted, what I would be getting out of that Mercedes 450, you'll have a different series. If I liked the prestige, I'll stop when you offer me a Ford and go for the other high-priced cars. If I liked good machinery, I'll go down through Porsche and some of the cheaper cars that are good machinery. And I will also go for precision cameras and other precision machinery. And by the way, from that series you can reconstruct what it is I would be getting out of the Mercedes if I had it.

Notice that there's no mechanism involved. You don't have to invoke a mechanism for translating my desire or my value for the Mercedes 450 into a desire or a value for a Mercedes 300. There's no mechanism that needs to make any transitions. Nothing needs to be transformed into anything. It's simply the nature of the case that whatever I value this thing for, I will value anything else that gets me the same thing.

When it comes to behaviors, the primary way we have of valuing them is to be motivated to engage in them. So you can paraphrase the principle in terms of behavior. If I am motivated to engage in a behavior, I will thereby also be motivated to engage in any other behavior that gets me the same thing. "It gets me the same thing": you can paraphrase that as "it has the same significance."

The classic case of displacement is where you get chewed out at work, and you stand there and take it, and you come home and you kick your dog. You can see that fits this formula, that you're strongly motivated to engage in hostile behavior toward the boss. You can't, but you engage in some other behavior that gets you a fair amount of the same thing, namely, you engage in hostile behavior with your dog.

Notice, by the way, that the conditions for that classic case are the same as the conditions for an emotional state, namely, the discrimination of the reality basis for anger, and the absence of a successful expression of hostility. And you recall that I said that when you're in a state, you go around looking for the provocations or the dangers, etc. Well, when you come home, you don't kick your dog as he comes up eagerly to greet you. You wait until he barks too loud or spills something; then you cream him.

Empirically, there are a small number of things that people do in this kind of situation, that work. That's the empirical part — what works, what is successful in situations like this. Stay with the same example of your getting chewed out by your boss, and now what options do you have?

The first one we already know: you engage in a behavior that is hostile. That's the kicking-your-dog example. But it also includes driving aggressively on the way home, cussing out the other motorists who do things that you don't like, honking your horn at them, cutting them off. Any hostile behavior will have that kind of value to you, will have that kind of significance to you. To that extent your anger will be reduced.

Now think of the other things that work, and we'll come across a surprising finding. There's about three of them that are simple headwork. As I leave, I am thinking to myself what I would like to have told him. I fantasize about what I would like to have told him. I daydream about what I would like to have told him, or what I would like to have done. I dream about it. All of these have a common thread, namely, I'm doing in my head what I would like to have been doing out there. And doing it in my head also gets me some of the same significance, and so it too has some value in reducing my anger, and allowing me to control the expression of the anger, in reducing the discomfort associated with the anger.

Q. Isn't it sometimes the case that brooding on thing like that, and dreaming and daydreaming, actually feeds the anger.



PGO. It might. I didn't say these always work. I said these are the kinds of things that do work.

Then consider the fact that you can also call up your friend and say, "Let's go have a beer," and as you're sitting there, you're complaining to him about this stupid boss, and he agrees with you that the guy doesn't know what he's doing. That helps.

Or you compensate. You take your lumps there, but you do good things for yourself over here, and that helps.

Or you tell yourself flatly that you're not the kind of guy that people can just walk all over and get away with it.

Or you remind yourself that it was your choice, that you had your reasons for not talking back, that in that sense you were in control there. And that helps.

Finally, there's disqualification. In disqualification, you discredit or disqualify the person in the relevant respects, so that whatever he did or said is not to be taken seriously. In this case, you might walk away saying, "Heh, what the hell does he know about a good job? He wouldn't know doing a good job if he saw one." If he's that kind of guy, then you don't need to take his judgments seriously about whether you were doing a good job or not.

I always worry about whether I've left one out, but I think that is the list of things that commonly work for people. I said we come across something surprising, and if you review these seven or eight things that I've mentioned, you'll find that only about half of them are hostile. The other half are not. For example, compensation is not hostile. Confiding in your friend may or may not be. Reminding yourself that it was your reasons certainly is not. Telling yourself that you're not that kind of guy is not.

## Displacement: Questions and Answers

Q. The possibility might be that you might go out and say, “I think I misinterpreted what he said. It seemed to me like an insult, but now that I think about it, I think it was something else.”

PGO. That’s not displacement, though. Remember, we’re talking about displacement.

Q. Could you subsume the sort of common notion of catharsis under these versions of displacement?

PGO. That reminds me — I left one out. You run five miles, or you chop wood four hours. That’s what you would call “catharsis.” Either that, or you take the hostile behavior of kicking your dog, and call that “catharsis.”

Q. Couldn’t it also be a Happy Pill notion, there?

PGO. Yeah, one reason why it works. But the other is the kind of activity it is.

Q. If you did not determine that the boss was right, and a third party intervened and said the boss was correct, would his reaction then have been irrational?

PGO. It all depends on what the basis was, what evidence he had, etc. The boss might have been correct; if I know about it, I won’t be angry unless there’s something else in the picture like “I don’t like the way he told me,” or something else where he wasn’t correct. If somebody assures me that “No, he was correct,” or “No, he didn’t really mean to put me down,” then I might stop being angry if I believe it.

Q. Can the psychoanalytic notion of turning anger against oneself be found in this

PGO. Yeah. It’s simply another hostile action. You don’t have to talk about turning the aggression against yourself. It’s just any hostile action will do the job. And if you happen to be the victim of it, that’s just another case of hostile action. Again, remember we’re

just talking about displacement, not about the various ways that people can deal with provocation. We're only talking about displacement.

Q. What do you do with someone who says, "I just want to get rid of my anger?"

PGO. It depends on whether I believe him or not. If I believe him, I just steer him to the various ways of getting rid of your anger, because it's that urgent. If I don't believe it's that urgent, then I make some of these moves first.

Q. You mean you encourage these moves?

PGO. Sometimes. What I mainly do is let people know. If you're angry and can't do anything about it, and that's a problem, here's the kind of things that work for people. I'm telling them also not just about these things, but about what they're good for. You might say, implicitly that's encouragement, and I don't have any strong stand about whether I'm encouraging or not. Because usually I don't to this unless there is some point in their doing it.

Q. But these moves don't deal with the reality base.

PGO. Remember, I said that displacement has some aspects of Happy Pill.

Q. I'm worried about that.

PGO. Well, look: the Happy Pill says, If the emotional state by itself is a problem, separate from the lion, then you deal with that problem in those ways that are effective for that problem, and that's some form of Happy Pill. Now all of these forms of displacement have the feature of the Happy Pill that if you do them, you probably feel better. You probably feel less angry, less uncomfortable, less upset. In that respect they're like stress management, a Happy Pill.

Q. I think some clinicians would say, if you suggest to your patient that they do something that is not hostile, I think that some would say that, well, perhaps the hostility will still be there and will creep out in some other way.

PGO. Well, one of my maxims is, “Don’t make anything up.” [laughter]. If you see the hostility’s still there, then you see it. If you don’t see it, don’t make it up. and what I tell them is usually, if you’re trying to get rid of that angry feeling, you’ve got to do more than one of these, because none of them are as effective as telling off the boss, and people will generally do more than one. So if you’ve got somebody who’s still angry who’s doing three, you say “You’ve still got five.”

Q. What if you help him see the point of *not* confronting the boss. . . .

PGO. That’s a special case of the general issue of whether you deal with the lion or whether you take the Happy Pill. What you’re raising is the issue, do you deal with the boss on the hostility part, or can you deal with your anger and let it go at that. And that’s up for grabs.

Q. I don’t hear people talking about displacement, it seems like, with other emotions. You don’t talk about displacing joy. [laughter]

PGO. I had a two-hour conversation with Carl a couple of days ago, when I made the same comment. I said, “You know, how come anger is what mostly gets displaced, and not things like fear and guilt or joy?” We finally wound up with the conclusion that that may be wrong. It may be that the displacements of these others are harder to detect, and we went through some examples of displacing guilt and displacing fear. And some of the fear displacement discussion touched on the topic that he talked about. We said, “Well, maybe that’s just plain wrong. Maybe it’s just less visible.” Another hypothesis was, “Well, it seems plausible that expressions of anger are more prohibited in our society, and that’s why you need the displacement.” So there’s a variety of possibilities around, but I agree, just at face value, it seems like anger is the main thing that gets displaced, far more than anything else.

Q. It occurs to me that I've seen people that have something go real well in one part of their lives, and they're celebrating or whatever, in other parts of their life also.

Q. Would successful behaviors be a displacement of guilt?

PGO. Quite possibly. The one obvious example that we could think of for displacement of guilt is washing the hands. [at blackboard] I mentioned that only about half of those things are hostile, and the other half are not. So that raises the question of how come they work. Even with the value explanation of the background, it's easy to see why hostile behavior works, because it's easy to see why that gets you some of the same thing. But what about confiding in a friend who agrees with you? Why does that get you some of the same thing? What does it get you that's the same?

As it happens, the hostility formula — “Provocation elicits hostility unless,” — is a special case of a more fundamental formula: “Threatened degradation elicits self-affirmation unless. . . .” Provocation is threatened degradation. That's why you get hooked on it so much. That's why it's so hard to just let it go. That's why you feel small if you just let him get away with it.

Q. Does that mean we have part of the answer to why we mostly displace anger — there's no threatened degradation in joy, and not so much in fear as far as I can tell.

PGO. Fear, yeah, because danger is always a threat, but it's not like provocation.

Q. I don't understand that, because if it was true, or you saw it was true, that still could be a degradation which would be a provocation.

PGO. No. If I thought that the degradation was justified, I'd have nothing to be angry at. I might still self-affirm and try to do better — that would be self-affirming. But I wouldn't be angry at him.

Now if you think back to all of the examples, what they all have in common, including the hostility one, is that they are self-affirming, and that's what does the job.

Q. What about the unconscious-motivation interpretation where the perception of yourself as someone who has performed that badly is so powerful and therefore —

PGO. That's a different problem altogether. That's a distortion-of-reality problem.

Q. Perhaps provocation and degradation, they're really two issues. One is self-affirmation, and one is getting back. It's worth it separating them out and sorting them out. Some people want to get back where they should be, reaffirming themselves. Other people, it doesn't matter what happens to them. They want to get back.

PGO. Yeah, but that's why there is a separation. This [provocation elicits hostility] is a special case of this [threatened degradation elicits self-affirmation]. That's the separation. And sometimes somebody will act on the special characteristic and sometimes on the general.

Q. Why do we see the second as a special case rather than —

PGO. There are other forms of degradation than provocation. It's in a simple logical sense like that that it's a special case.

Q. But what I mean is the vindictiveness issue. I'm not seeing that as a special case of self-affirmation.

PGO. Why, yes. If you are going to get back at him at all costs, you preserve your honor.

Q. By getting back at him. That's what counts.

PGO. In effect, that one counted more for you than anything else. It's like the Demon Businessman who — one thing counts for more than everything else. But it's still an expression of hostility.

Q. Wouldn't it be true also to say that there are other forms of provocation?

PGO. No. Could you give me any examples?

Q. Yeah. I could say something like "I challenge you to get out there and to better than you did before." That's provocation.

PGO. No. In ordinary language, I'd say: Yeah. As we use it in Descriptive: No. In Descriptive, provocation is defined by this formula. It's defined by its connection to hostility. If you say "That's a provoking idea," that's equivalent to saying that's an interesting idea, or an evocative one, and that's okay in ordinary English, but not in this context.

Q. It seems like this provides a connection for why you get some people who come in and they need a different way to affirm their status.

PGO. Again, that's displacement. Now think about this, and then think about that maxim that when you have a choice, choose anger interpretations over fear interpretations. You can see why. You want the person to be in a self-affirming position rather than in a victim position. You want the client to be in a position of strength that he can exercise rather than in a position of weakness where you're going to have to do it for him.

## **Negative and Positive Emotions**

Okay, let me skip a couple, because we're by no means going to get through. Let me skip to the "many negative emotions versus one or only a few positive."

One of those famous 95 maxims says, "A person values some states of affairs over other, and acts accordingly." That's the basic principle behind these emotion formulas. That's the basic principle behind the emotion formulas, because the reality basis for emotional behavior is simply a state of affairs that is valued relative to

something else, and people then act accordingly; and it's because they act accordingly that the reality basis is connected to a characteristic type of behavior.

Negative emotions involve states of affairs that are disvalued, that you're therefore motivated to change in the direction of something you value more. Or to put it more colloquially, when you're in the presence, the reality basis for a negative emotion, you're in a bad spot and you're motivated to get out of it. You're motivated to change either by you getting out, or by changing the circumstances, so then you're no longer in a bad spot.

This holds for the negative emotions only. In effect, being in a bad spot calls for you to diagnose what kind of bad spot is it, because you're going to have to fix it. And reacting to a provocation the way you would react to a danger would leave you in a worse spot. Reacting to danger in the way you react to a provocation would leave you in a worse spot. So you need to make the discriminations because you're going to need to do something effective about it. You're going to need to change that.

In contrast, good fortune does not need to be fixed. You don't have to do something about it. When you celebrate your good fortune, you're not fixing the situation. So you don't need to discriminate various kinds of good fortune, the way you need to discriminate various kinds of bad situations. That's at least a beginning of an explanation of why we have many negative emotions and only one or only a small number of positive emotions.

## Connected Emotions

Let's go on to connected emotions. One of my standard example is, suppose I say: "Hey, what about bringing me the book that's on my desk in my office next door." You say: "Okay," go next door, open the door, and go in. And we hear all kinds of loud and mysterious sounds. You come running out, slam the door behind you — without the book in your hand. You come out and you sock me,



and you say: “Why the hell didn’t you tell me you had a lion in there?” There’s a case where you have a connection of fear and anger. You say: “Why would you be angry at me?” Intuitively you know damn well why you would be angry at me, but analytically, in sending you over there when I knew there was a lion, I’m putting you in a position of danger, and that’s a provocation. You’re not only afraid, but you’re angry at me for putting you in a position where you were afraid.

Some of those connections are part of the Hip-Pocket Argument that says that emotions can’t be any such thing as feelings or physiological things or experience, because if they were any of these, these kinds of connections would be totally mysterious. And they’re not. In fact, they wouldn’t be mysterious; they’d be impossible; and they’re not.

The other one is famous in folklore, namely, the phenomenon of love turning into hate.

Q. Pete, would you elaborate the last point you made?

PGO. If you look at #7 on your handout, it says “Hip-Pocket Arguments,” and these Hip-Pocket Arguments are quick arguments against the notion that emotion is a feeling, that emotion is something physiological, that emotion is some kind of experience. And one of the arguments is, if it were any of those, you couldn’t have connections like this. You couldn’t have logical relations among them — not this kind.

Now think of love as a certain kind of relation, and two features of it — rather than going through the full analysis: it’s an intimate relation and it’s a trust relation. You trust the other person. Remember, that’s one of the five conditions. All of these emotion formulas are what you might call paradigmatic, because there’s all kinds of varieties of hostility, there’s all kinds of varieties of fear, etc. In hostility, you can go from minor irritation to anger, to fury, to blind rage, to hatred. When you get more specific than this, you often have something more specific here, and in particular the reality basis for hatred is not just any old provocation. It’s betrayal.

The number of people who can betray you is limited, and it's limited to those people you have a trust relationship with. A perfect stranger can't betray you. Oddly somebody that you have a trust relationship with can betray you. Now consider a betrayal that occurs at the most intimate personal level. What stronger case of betrayal could there possibly be? When somebody you love betrays you, that's when love turns into hate. And only somebody you love can betray you as much as you can possibly be betrayed. Other people can betray you to some extent. Someone you love can betray you maximally. So when other people betray you, you get angry. When someone you love betrays you, you hate them.

Q. What if you don't?

PGO. Then it shows that those conditions were not met. Either it wasn't that intimate, you didn't love them that much, you didn't trust them that much, or something. Or you don't take it as betrayal.

The business of love turning into hate is another one of these connections to irrationality. The fact that a person can flip-flop like that, unless you know what goes on, looks irrational, doesn't it? How can you flip from one extreme to the other? Isn't that irrational? Well, it isn't. And it happens.

## **Feelings as Promises**

Okay, we do one last thing, "Telling you my feelings is like making you a promise." Let me just mention, without going into it: there is some argument to the effect that telling you my feelings is the primary emotional phenomenon, and just having feelings is derivative. If you think of making promises, you can sort of see why. A promise that you don't tell anybody is derivative of promises that you do tell somebody. The paradigm case of promise is when you say it to somebody, not when you just keep it in your head.

Look: the way that people generally talk, and a way that is fostered by psychologists, is that when I say: “Hey, Joe, I’m pissed off at you,” you understand that on the model of my looking over to the wall and saying, “Hey, Joe, the wall is made of brick.” Our name for this is, it’s an observation report. The difference is that when I say: “Hey, Joe, I’m pissed off at you,” I am looking inward and telling you what I observe there, in contrast to over there where I look outward and tell you what I observe there. But the model is the same, an observation report, a report of what I observe.

This is popular partly because it’s nice, simple, and quite useful. It does a good job on the vast range of emotional phenomena. But there are places where it’s definitely embarrassing, and where you begin to get a sense that however convenient it may be, this can’t be a proper account of emotions.

One of them is that people are often uncertain about how they feel. It’s a very common thing for somebody to say, “I’m not sure how I feel about you. I’m not sure how I feel about that.” Consider the conditions under which, in an observation framework, you might be uncertain. I look over there and say, “I’m not sure what I’m seeing there.” You say: “Well, maybe the light is bad. Maybe there’s smoke or mist or something in between. Maybe the thing is too far away to see clearly.” There are some small set of conditions under which it’s quite understandable that I might say, “I’m not sure what I’m seeing.” When it comes to looking inward, none of those conditions could possibly apply. When it comes to looking inward, it can’t be too far away; the light can’t be bad; there can’t be smoke, mist, or anything else between me and it. So there is no possible reason why I would ever be uncertain how I was feeling. That becomes a mystery.

Contrast that to the promise paradigm where if I say: “Hey, Joe, I’m pissed off at you,” this amounts to promising Joe that I’m going to act that way unless I have a good enough reason not to. That’s what the unless-clauses do, so I’m going to act that way unless. . . . If I don’t, I’m going to owe him an explanation.

Under what conditions might somebody say, “I’m not sure I want to promise that,” or “I don’t know if I want to promise that?” When it comes to being reluctant to make promises, number 1, I might not be sure enough that I could do what I promised. Number 2, if I think I might change my mind when the time comes to do it, or by the time the time comes to do it, I’m going to be reluctant to promise. If doing what I say is going to let me in for something unpleasant, that I don’t like, I will be reluctant to promise. If I even suspect that it might and don’t really know what I would be in for if I did that, I will be reluctant to promise.

So in this Model 2, there are certain conditions under which it makes perfectly good sense to say “I don’t know if I want to promise you.” Unlike the other model, all of these hold without exception for “I don’t know how I feel.” If I don’t want to commit myself to being angry at Joe, it will be for exactly the kind of reasons I’ve just mentioned. Number 1, I may not think I can get away with an expression of anger. Or I may have stronger reasons not to, because he’s my friend. Or I don’t know what he would do if I expressed anger at him, but I’m pretty sure I wouldn’t like it. Under those conditions, you’re darn right I’d be reluctant to promise, and I will say, “I don’t know how I feel about that, Joe.”

One of the reasons for going here [indicates blackboard] — partly it’s one of the Hip-Pocket Arguments. If all I was reporting was something that I found here, why would anybody care? It’s like reporting that I have an itch right here. But people do care, and why? It’s clear that if I’m making a promise to Joe that I’m going to behave this way, it’s clear why he would care. It’s clear why I would care.

One of the most common uses for this, however, is to relate to clients some empirical male–female differences. Standardly, the promise model is how males operate. Women generally do it differently. With men, it’s “I promise you this.” With women, it’s more “here’s how I vote: I don’t like it.” It’s not a promise to do something. It’s just “here’s where I stand.” This is why you hear so much about women that “once I’ve got it out, it’s over with,” and men

can't understand that because they're taking it as a promise. So there's a lot of misunderstandings in couples on "telling you my feelings," because routinely, men see it differently from women, and they misunderstand each other and that creates problems. So educating people to these two different models, and to be sensitive to the fact that people, when they talk about their feelings, sometimes operate with one model and sometimes with another, helps them to get their talk and understanding straight.

## **Emotions: Questions and Answers**

Q. This might explain the current prestige for I statements.

PGO. Is that the same as eye-contact? [laughter]

Q. The implication is that if you say to somebody, "I feel angry when your room is dirty," you are not making the kind of promise that you make when you say to somebody, "You have not cleaned your room and you are making me angry."

PGO. Guess what? You probably are making him the same kind of promise, and all the pussy-footing won't change that.

Q. Do you see any reason why I-statements are popular right now?

PGO. Yeah. Disclaimers generally are popular, and I-statements are a form of disclaimer. In academic circles, it amounts to "here's what I think; this is only my opinion; I'm not claiming to really know anything, mind you, but here's what I think."

Q. I think it appeals to the other person's concern. In dealing with the youngster, you stop being angry and say, "When it isn't cleaned up, I feel uncomfortable with it." If he is concerned, and is responsible — big "if-then" that's an appeal to it and ordinarily if he can do something it works. If he's not concerned and he's not responsible, you're out of luck.

PGO. No.

Q. But the popularity of them, I think, relates with uncomfortableness. So many people in a whole generation are uncomfortable with anger.

PGO. It's guilt-tripping them instead.

Q. I think also it's a way to try to avoid a degradation ceremony in some cases.

PGO. Yeah. See, nobody wants to be right partly because he's going to have to defend that, because he knows everybody's going to attack him, but also because he doesn't want them to be wrong there. There are various motivations for why one disclaims, and that's one of them.

Q. Would you say a little more — just take the sentence “Joe, I'm pissed at you.” It's a promise to the effect — what?

PGO. That I'm going to act that way, and there is such a thing as acting that way. Because look, if I immediately then say, “Hey, come on, Joe, let's go have a drink,” he's going to look at me and say, “Hey, I thought you said you were mad at me.”

Q. And the contrast for a woman would be — ? She said, “Joe, I'm pissed at you,” would be — ?

PGO. “Here's where I stand. I don't like what you did.” It's not a promise to act. It's just “here's where I stand.”

Q. These things are really confusing. A lot seems to turn around on whether they're promises or not. For instance, you say: “I love you” as a promise, although sometimes it's merely a statement of where you stand. Now to say “I'm angry at you” is not a promise to get you. Ordinarily if you want to get somebody, you do not let them in on it.

PGO. You do if you think you can get away with it.

Q. But ordinarily, when somebody says “I'm angry at you about this,” what that is is an offer to negotiate and not an expression of hostility. An expression of hostility would be to not say and to act on it.

Q. Different people have different ways.

PGO. Consider the formula, "I'm going to act accordingly, unless." You could use that as a negotiating move. You're inviting a counter-offer.

Q. But giving your position as being angry is ordinarily what you're angry about — is ordinarily a negotiating move, where sitting on it, not giving it, is ordinarily a hostile move. That's where it switches.

PGO. I'm not sure about the statistics, but certainly you can handle it either way.

Q. Could you say a little about the psychoanalytic notion of affect and feelings, because I — [laughter]

PGO. Those are used so slippery that it's hard to say anything about it. It's just impossible to pin down when they use it in all kinds of contradictory ways, without ever pinning anything down about it. It seems to be a general emotion term without anything specific that you can do anything with. It's the kind of term I call a Magic Grab-Bag. If you don't pin down the term, then you can use it for anything that needs to be done. It's like a magic grab-bag: you just pick out whatever you need for a solution to your theoretical problem, and you make it do that. Probably the closest thing would be a state — an emotional state, but I think that's very approximate.

Q. I was wondering — we're running out of time, here, and we only have time for one more and Pete looked at me, so — [laughter]

PGO. How's that for a Move 2?

Q. I was wondering, when a woman says "This is my vote, here's where I stand," I wonder if that could also be taken as a self-affirmation or telling you "I'm not the kind of person who's going to take this, or who is going to accept that."

PGO. Yeah.

Q. And I wonder whether —

PGO. It's both that and, as Rich says, an appeal to concern. In effect, it's a Well-Poisoning move. Remember, one of my earliest heuristic examples of Well-Poisoning is when somebody says, "You're hurting me." And if the person didn't know they were hurting you, that touches on a strong motivation that they already have not to hurt you. If you say: "I don't like what you just said," that works exactly the same way.

Q. You may not need to do anything about it. It may be enough to affirm the self, just like saying, "I just want you to know that that's not okay with me."

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