

Equalizing in Life

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The theme that I plan to weave for you here began for me at the very threshold of my professional career, some fifty-nine years ago. As if reflected in a prism, the polarity of equalizing as contrasted with dominating and submitting has shown through in the diverse endeavors of my work throughout those years. In short, the theme is this: social forms such as families, political systems, religious groupings and economic institutions that promote relations of equalizing actions counter those that foster tyranny and are experienced as life-affirming in contrast to life-limiting and life-deadening. Because the social systems of our historical period are, in my view, more tied to authoritarianism than to democracy, despite dramatic instances of democratic theory and practice, teasing out this truth about equalizing has been challenging and its public proclamation commonly shunt aside. However futilely, I keep on sending it forth, as I am doing here.

1. Harvard

I began my career as a Research Fellow in Clinical Psychology in the Department of Social Relations at Harvard University in 1951. Fellow Gestalt therapists will recognize that as the year the founding text by Perls, Hefferline and Goodman appeared, and some of us remember it was the first year after publication of *The Authoritarian Personality* by T. W. Adorno and his colleagues in California. My master's thesis in 1950, done under Dan Levinson one of the authors of that book, was on "Religious Conventionalism and the Authoritarian Personality."

I was a new Ph.D. working in the Psychological Clinic Annex headed by the psychoanalyst and Jungian psychiatrist Henry A. Murray, who had previously brought together leading thinkers in psychology to produce the book *Explorations in Personality* and who was the co-creator with Christiana Morgan of the Thematic Apperception Test, the then-famous TAT. One of the persons who influenced me at the time was Tamara Dembo who had been a senior member of Kurt Lewin's circle in Germany and the United States and was spending a year in the Annex.

Although Murray was averse to psychological experiments and preferred exploratory interviews and tests on a limited number of persons to articulate individual personality characteristics, he had hanging around an unexamined experiment which he hope to have applied to a small number of Harvard men whom he had been studying closely. This experiment had been designed in collaboration with the physicist Percy Bridgman who was a major figure in operationism. The experiment became the focus of my work during my time at Harvard though I also studied alongside Tamara Dembo comparative and intrinsic values, which I later saw had been an interest of Paul Goodman.

The experiment involved giving pairs of students two contrasting instructions. First, the students were taken into separate rooms and instructed to pursue an individual goal. Each of these men had previously written a sermon to the world to be given on the last day of their lives, a sermon which was to be widely disseminated. From these sermons I had extracted four seminal points and the students were told in this first instruction that they were to persuade another person of their vital contribution to humankind. They were praised highly for the quality of their sermon and told we had

selected the best parts of what they intended to say. This was an individualist goal given privately to each participant.

Then the members of each pair were brought into another room set up to take movies of their interaction with bright lights and microphones prominently around, and they were given a second instruction. Now they were to develop in the next 11 minutes five important ideas to broadcast to the listening world. This was a communal goal, and the essence of the experiment was to learn how these men reconciled the two contrasting goals, how they incorporated individual purposes and collective aims into a final product.

There was one final component of this experiment. The students had been rank ordered from previous work according to estimates of their emotional maturity. The pairs were then ranked according to the average emotional maturity that typified them from the more emotionally mature down to the less mature.

I was specifically looking to see how the men equalized in this experiment. Earlier, I had run a pilot study with my wife and my mother-in-law who had privately created a plot for a story and then were to develop a single story plot together. A close analysis had suggested that while they appeared to give one-sided preference to my mother-in-law in their joint product, they actually contributed equally to the final plot.

In the experiment with the Harvard students I found that indeed the partners contributed equally to the final five points. However, they differed dramatically in how they reconciled the individual and communal requirements. For the more emotionally mature pairs of students, the eight individual points were integrated into the five final ones so that both the individual goals and the communal ones were achieved. The mature partner usually said: “You tell me your points, I’ll tell you mine, and we will find a way

to put them together.” And they did just that in the brief allotted time. The five final points contained all eight points developed by the two students.

The less emotionally mature pairs proceeded differently. They gave primacy to their individual purposes and gave a secondary role to the communal goal. At best they achieved five points by trade-offs: ‘I’ll accept one of your points if you will accept one of mine.’ Thus, one person might have three ideas in the final five and the other would have two. On occasion, they had an overlap so each would have three ideas included. And sometimes they did not reach five points in the time given because their negotiations took too long.

In brief the pairs equalized differently along inclusive and exclusive lines. The products of their joint efforts were qualitatively different as well and their attitudes after the encounter were also unlike. Those who were more collaborative did better and those who were more individualistic did more poorly, and their sense of satisfaction differed accordingly.

When I presented these results to Murray, he became excited and sent me to the writings of the Scottish philosopher John Macmurray who had argued that relations of people are in fact always relations of equals. When persons act to dominate, they must convince others to submit and in doing so, they restrict their own accomplishments in this persuading process. Egalitarianism is more adequate in human relations. In this book, *The Clue to History*, Macmurray asserted that Christ was an exquisite psychologist and the egalitarian thesis Christ seemed to put forward was a pragmatic, not a moralistic, assessment. So I adopted the view that it is not a moral issue but rather it is a practical one: to strive for equality is the natural version of human relations, and those who try to

manipulate others by dominating or by submitting still end up in equalizing encounters. These latter are simply inferior forms of relationship.

At lunch one day, Gordon Allport, the famous social psychologist, urged me to present my ideas to the United Nations. For personal reasons both current and long standing, I did not do this for which I continue to feel some shame.

2. New York University

After my time at Harvard, I worked at New York University in a project headed by Morton Deutsch, once a student of Kurt Lewin, who had studied cooperation and competition and the influence of housing on race relations. Deutsch was located in the Department of Human Relations at that time and later became a psychoanalyst and peace activist. My experiment there concerned time perspective and cooperation and involved two forms of cooperation and one of individual effort on a time-limited, spy-like activity. (This was early in the cold war and fit with those awful times.) One form of cooperation gave equal responsibility to a subject and his or her confederate and the other form kept major authority in the hands of the subject of the experiment.

In this experiment, I anticipated that the equal partnership would be most efficient and successful, and this was confirmed in the results. What I did not expect was that subjects who chose the individual path and failed to achieve the goal would come back to me to tell me they had later become depressed. This phenomenon disturbed me and led me a few years later to one of my most creative writings, a piece on the definition and analysis of depression. My belief that individual goal-striving when divorced from a communal intention is limited was further cemented – and it pushed me further from an individualist perspective.

3. Michael Reese Hospital.

My next research efforts took me to Chicago and the Michael Reese Hospital. I was heading a research into motivation for child psychiatry treatment in the psychoanalytically-oriented outpatient unit of the Institute for Psychosomatic and Psychiatric Research and Training – the Mandel Clinic. From my experiences with Tamara Dembo and Morton Deutsch, as well as my commitment to psychoanalysis, I steered the research into combining Lewinian and Freudian theory. The results of that research are published in my first book, *Motivation for Child Psychiatry Treatment*, co-authored with Robert Kohrman, a child analyst, and Helen Macgregor, a social worker.

One important component of that study concerned parent-child relations across a wide variety of activities from weaning and toilet-training to the child's hobbies, friendships and school life. For each family we analyzed the typical place at which the parents and the child came into conflict over the child's expression and satisfaction of his or her needs and the parents' similar ownership and attention to his or her own needs. At that time much attention was also being paid to whether the parents were overprotective, thus inducing needs in the child, neglectful, thus attentive to their own needs but not the child's, or ready to meet the child's needs and their own needs at the same time. Our view, an egalitarian stance regarding parent –child relations, was influenced by a nuanced idea of permissiveness derived from progressive education: the adult is open to the child's wants and interests and is responsive also to his or her own purposes. The degraded view of permissiveness, put forward in the service of authoritarian control, was that permissiveness empowers the child at the expense of the adult, not in equal rights for both.

Prominent psychoanalytic examples which guided us at the time were weaning and toilet-training. We believed that infants wean themselves and toilet-train themselves when they have been supported in attending to their bodies and have become ready bodily as well as socially for these developments. Infants who were weaned early or late according to their mother's needs consistently showed problems in these areas. Following this line of thought and studying many areas of child-parent relations, we found we could make sense of the unique problems that brought the family to the child psychiatry clinic. How early in the expression of want that conflict typically appeared (a modal response across many activities) and in which special areas conflict appeared early and in which the child's autonomy as well as the parents' was respected provided a guide to understanding the unique personality configurations of the child. Erv Polster's study of the selves of clients would later parallel our assessment.

In short, relationships of equality between parents and child, notwithstanding different functional capacities, were critical to the psychological growth and well-being of the child. For all its history of authoritarian treatments, psychoanalysis in our view, unlike behaviorism, was deeply egalitarian. Small wonder, then, that it attracted a powerful set of democratic socialists to its tent, including the founders of Gestalt therapy. Similarly, it explains why psychoanalysis and progressive education flourished early in the Soviet Union before the authoritarianism of Stalinism took over.

4. The Mental Health Research Unit

My next place of employment and my last work as primarily a research psychologist was the Mental Health Research Unit in Syracuse, New York. This was a unit within the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene and was formed as an

epidemiological research center in the field of mental health. When I went there, I worked first under Jack Downing, who left after a couple of years to go to California and to become also a Gestalt therapist.

With my colleagues, Jack Scanlon, a sociologist, and Rhondda Cassetta, a statistician, I prepared to do a study of the mental health – mental illness issues in the wider community. Unlike the Mid-town Manhattan study, which also focused on community mental health issues using DSM categories, we proposed to create a clinical record form that encompassed a series of everyday events in the lives of our subjects. Much as my colleagues and I had analyzed many events in the relations of parents and children in our Chicago study, we now were aiming to look at diverse social relations in everyday life to get a perspective on level of mental health and illness.

At that time in Syracuse, in the Psychiatry Department of the Upstate Medical Center where I also had an adjunct position, Thomas Szasz was promoting his idea that there is no such thing as mental illness, only violations of social norms. For those who were seen to be crossing these norms, they should be put in prisons, not mental hospitals which were snake pits while pretending to be humane institutions. With our present prison system now burdened by large numbers of mentally ill persons, we see the results of his influence and that of the pharmaceutical companies.

Our view was that there can be constructed a continuum from maximum mental health – which no one ever reaches because all cultures are limited – down to a maximum of mental illness, never so deep as to result in the death of individuals. In recent years, America has explored this depth in the prisons in which we have tortured so-called “terrorists” and driven many of them insane.

While we never conducted the research in the community in its epidemiological form since our team left the Research Unit prematurely, we did create a theory of the continuum of mental health and mental illness and a form to examine that theory. We also tested the theory against two other estimates along the continuum including DSM categories, and we did additional studies of features of this theory, including a study of types of treatment provided to types of patients. We developed this record form at the Syracuse Psychiatric Hospital where persons were brought for diagnosis before being referred to long-term hospitalization or returned to the community for outpatient care.

Key to this theory was what we called “intentions in transactions.” Over many events, we asked whether the persons we studied intended equality with others in the transaction or whether they intended either to aggrandize or to sacrifice with respect to these others. With some specified exceptions, intending equality was considered more mentally healthy than aggrandizing or sacrificing. We evaluated transactions by how inclusive or exclusive they were. At the highest level, persons were tentatively oriented to the goals they had in mind, but were open to redefinitions of these in the transactions with others and thus ready to be inclusive of the purposes of others. At the lowest level, persons were in a mode of aggrandizing or sacrificing and the transactions involved much discord between the participants as they pursued their individual goals. We called this continuum “Mutual Achievement Strivings” to incorporate attention to both the achievement of purposes and efforts to agree with others. We had a version of faulty confluence covered by seeking mutuality with others at the expense of vital achievement of goals, though we did not know of the concept of confluence at the time.

To intend equality with others is never enough. One must act to promote the realization of equal distribution of satisfactions. Actions speak louder than words. While a person is fully responsible for the intentions he or she brings to an interaction, that person is only partially responsible for the nature of the transactions that unfold in his or her relationships; others are also determining the qualities of the transaction. While I may intend equality, for example, others may act to submit to me, thus creating a degree of inequality which foils my intention and leads to lower levels of gratification for them and for me. Utopian Socialists such as Robert Owen learned this only too well, and we now know that authoritarian systems are created and maintained as much by the oppressed as by oppressors. And when Mao Tse-Tung tried to coerce equality among people from above, the Red Guards and others acted to dominate in their communities and usually, though not always, brought his ideals to disaster. The Red Guards did not understand equalizing very well given the Chinese history of oppression of the peasants.

Because our mental health is importantly created in our transactions, our well-being is significantly a function of others in our lives. We cannot rise too highly above the mental health levels in communities, levels that Kurt Lewin would have named quasi-stationery processes. This is a further aspect of equalizing in human relations. I once wrote an essay, still unpublished, on “The Cure of Psychosis is for Us All” to illustrate this position.

5. Bryn Mawr College

After Syracuse, I came to Bryn Mawr College to invigorate the doctoral program in what was to become the Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research having been a Department of Social Economy and Social Research. Rather quickly, because I

was a good teacher and a senior one, I spread out to teach in the master's program as well. Here my focus was on teaching and scholarship as well as research and to a lesser extent clinical work. My egalitarian stance was manifested over the next 36 years in 1) the content of what I taught; 2) the methods of teaching I used; 3) student-faculty relationships I influenced; 4) the governance of the College; 5) the research I did; and 6) the small clinical practice of psychotherapy that I maintained. I can here provide only a sampling of each of these endeavors to show how pervasive in what I did during those years was the egalitarian stance I am now describing.

a. Content

I taught psychoanalysis in several forms as well as personality theory, Gestalt therapy among the many and diverse courses I presented. In one semester-length course I gave many times we read and discussed in seminar style Freud's writings from early in his career to its ending. I had done that in a seminar in graduate school led by Calvin Hall. This was a doctoral course and was followed by Psychoanalysis after Freud as well as Comparative Personality Theory. I also taught psychoanalysis at the master's degree level using Fenichel's complex text *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*. In all of these courses the angle I used was the egalitarian one my colleagues and I used in Chicago.

I have already asserted that parent-child relations are relations of equals, and I regularly taught that in respect to psychoanalysis. I also presented in this teaching that sexual relations between adults, whether heterosexual or homosexual, were in fact relations of equals. What was critical in the transactions was the level of satisfaction achieved. Some feminists, insisting that psychoanalysis is only patriarchal, disagreed

with that perspective and we had useful arguments on this score. I wrote *Psychoanalysis: Radical and Conservative* while I was on a sabbatical leave to show students and then a larger public that I was really teaching psychoanalysis not some peculiar theory that I had dreamed up. Later I put my lectures in book form, in *Lectures in Psychoanalysis for Social Workers* to give to the students in these courses and the book contained the same theme. Related ideas appeared in a publication for NIMH that Dolores Norton and I published under the title *Cognitive and Mental Development in the First Five Years of Life*.

Students who were challenging my perspective had been reading the conservative version of psychoanalysis which predominated in the United States for many years. Since that time, with the rise of relational psychoanalysis and inter-subjective theory, my viewpoint is seemingly more respectable, though the conservative view of psychoanalysis still persists.

It was this radical, egalitarian psychoanalysis that the founders of Gestalt therapy knew and incorporated into their new psychotherapy and its theory, just as it was radical psychoanalysis that attracted revolutionaries in Germany and in the first years of the Soviet Union.

For a number of years I also taught a course called “Change and Resistance to Change.” A fundamental text in this course was Paolo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a book influenced by the left-wing side of Erich Fromm, and a pedagogy opposed to authoritarian forms of education. I will say more about that course when I discuss teaching methods that I adopted in order to live an egalitarian life.

I also taught various courses in which my egalitarian stance was always present. In some I used my book of essays contrasting egalitarianism and authoritarianism directly. The book, derived both from my research studies and scholarly efforts, is called *Getting Even: The Equalizing Law of Relationship*. The essays ranged from: 1) creating a “flicker of life” in Syracuse Psychiatric Hospital; through 2) an egalitarian versus authoritarian conception of responsibility, which hints at why capitalism inherently moves toward authoritarianism by dividing initiative for those in superior positions from accountability for those in inferior positions; to 3) how to strive in authoritarian systems toward equality while surviving in the system. I began these essays while also working on the psychoanalytic book in 1967 and completed them in 1988, two decades later.

Some of the motivation for thinking about egalitarianism in organizations came from my experiences in authoritarian institutions, some from accounts given by students of their troubles, and some from my family telling me their stories. My colleague, Jeanne Pollock and I consulted in a public assistance agency where caseworkers were having difficult encounters with their clients who seemed to irresponsibly fail to carry out tasks that they were required to do in order to receive public welfare. We discovered that the caseworkers had the initiative in assigning things to be done, which we called “primacy” in the relationship. The clients had to be accountable for carrying out the tasks. So responsibility has two dimensions: *responsibility for* the tasks, which the caseworkers possessed; and *responsibility to* the caseworkers for doing these tasks. Responsibility was sharply divided between initiative and accountability. When we facilitated the caseworkers in sharing initiative with the clients, we found that the clients readily and responsibly did the tasks, and both clients and caseworkers were significantly more

satisfied. The egalitarian view of responsibility where primacy and accountability are balanced, where those who have initiative are also accountable to those affected by the initiative, is superior and more democratic as hierarchy. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, whose concern with how persons were affected by laws, codified as “empathy,” showed her egalitarian stance in contrast to the conservative justices who cared less about those influenced by their decisions.

Incidentally, while feminists and other radicals were decrying all hierarchy, we were arguing that large scale efforts cannot proceed without hierarchy, and egalitarian hierarchy is not only possible but is also a superior way for organizing social life.

One other idea in the *Getting Even* book merits comment. Following on my analysis of depression and ideas in the *Motivation for Child Psychiatry Treatment* book, I articulated a continuum concerning a generalized orientation to being in the world. At the ideal positive end of the continuum is what I called “confident expectation,” an expectancy of success in realizing one’s purposes while uniting with others in transactions. At the negative end is an “essential ambivalent anticipation,” the general preconception that every gain is matched by significant costs. I discovered several years ago that Paul Goodman in the basic text presented the idea of “faith” as the belief that the means are available to achieve one’s purposes and thus there is a readiness to engage in the present on its terms for persons with that faith. Confident expectation or faith leads to egalitarian actions and essential ambivalent anticipation to authoritarian ones.

b. Teaching methods

I tried to make my teaching methods accord with my theory of egalitarianism, using a form of progressive education at the graduate student level. In my master’s

degree psychoanalytic course, for example, I asked class members to read two hundred and some of Fenichel's almost 600 page book, and to choose what in that book they preferred to read. They were to be held accountable for what they chose to read there. They were often surprised that I learned about who they were from their interests in that book and in the field of personality theory more generally which they were to sample for annotated bibliographies. In all the courses that I taught, I made space for students to pursue one way or another, their special interests.

In the doctoral seminar on Freud, we each presented our own sense of what Freud was asserting, the students doing their presentations first before I did mine. I paid particular attention to encouraging the students to see for themselves Freud's failings and the points of view of his critics. In Comparative Personality Theory, students chose which theorist they wished to study more deeply than the minimum associated with other thinkers. In Change and Resistance to Change, I assigned a few required readings and then left open to the class the content they wished to pursue, including criticism of the School, for which I was berated by faculty when a student inadvertently broke our confidentiality agreement. With my book of lectures, I hoped to lead discussions in class time rather than to lecture. Sad to say, students evoked lectures from me when they asked me to explain what I meant in any given chapter. In social psychological courses, we engaged small group work to use experience as the basis for studying theory. In Racial and Ethnic Perspectives in Social Work, we again used our own experience. Two dramatic moments in this course were our exploration of Black and White person's responses to O. J. Simpson's acquittal regarding the murder of his wife; and an African-American woman remembered with dismay that she led a group of elderly

persons in singing “Old Black Joe” and “Carry Me Back to Old Verginny.” A gay man came out in class and got support and advice on how to proceed with his field placement and his family. All members in these classes took on leadership roles.

e. Student-Faculty Relations More Generally

The 1960s provided several opportunities for unfolding egalitarian relations between students and faculty. For example, two students took me to lunch and insisted that I give up wearing three-piece Brooks Brothers suits and that we meet on a first-name basis. More importantly, students demanded to sit on Faculty committees, which we implemented with great and lasting results. With faculty participation, students proposed and facilitated the development of a course that attended primarily to racial and ethnic issues as they appeared in social work practice. One student-faculty task force addressed what became a system of mutual accountability. Faculty members were to give each student an analysis of his or her strengths and limitations as these appeared in the student’s work. On the basis of such analyses, grades (evaluations) were assigned. No longer could faculty members give grades without justifications. Also, faculty members were asked to respond to written work demanded from students in a timely way and with appropriate commentary and reflections.

On the other side, students were to present analyses of the strengths and limitations of the teaching by the faculty member. This was to be done regularly in class discussion and at the end of the semester in written form. Neither the faculty member nor the student saw the views of the other until their responses were independently given to the administration.

Terry Lane, at that time a student, and I published the ideas underlying this process under the title “Toward Negating Authoritarianism in Appraisals of Performance in Social Work Education.” That publication was the positive side of the work of the student-faculty task force. The negative side appeared in practice: the aims were undermined by both faculty members and students in the School. The faculty members found it onerous to develop analyses and fell back into giving grades alone. Analysis took time and exposed the faculty member to criticisms by the students which many preferred to avoid. Students also undermined the process, reminding me that the oppressed maintain forms of oppression as much as do the oppressors. Students projected that they would be hurt by various forms of retaliation in the near or distant future by the faculty member whom they wished to criticize. Ironically, students were more honest with respect to those faculty members they trusted and avoided being critical of those they disliked the most. (I remembered this in writing on undoing the clinch of oppression.)

d. Governance of the College

As Chair of the Doctoral Committee in the School, I promoted egalitarianism by soliciting input from students who sat on the Committee and from junior faculty members. As a member of the Appointments Committee of the College for many years, I promoted egalitarian practices in searches for new faculty members, in reappointments, including reappointments to tenure, and in holding senior faculty members accountable in such areas as applications for sabbatical leave and periodic reviews of performance. In the School I led a teaching seminar along with a colleague who became a psychoanalyst. In this group we explored common problems faced by teachers such as difficult students, giving reasonable assignments, carrying out mutual accountability tasks, and negotiating

the processes leading to reviews for reappointment and tenure. Senior professors who needed these discussions the most usually avoided joining our voluntary group.

e. Research

I have already mentioned the research we did in a public welfare setting. I also studied enrollments in social work education. I reviewed research for the federal government in respect to police handling of juveniles, studied honesty and trust in the treatment of schizophrenic patients, worked on social economy, focused on radicalism in psychotherapy practice, looked at social workers in unions in the 1930s, and wrote on psychological and social issues concerning men. Further scholarly pursuits involved psychological contributions to social struggle and early years in child development. I also wrote a series of theoretical articles to continue my career as a scholar.

f. Clinical Practice

Through the years I maintained a small clinical practice doing psychoanalytic therapy in an egalitarian framework and then emphasizing Gestalt therapy. I worked with anywhere from five to seventeen persons.

I was originally called to Bryn Mawr and its social work program to serve as a bridge connecting those planning to work at the personal level and those preparing to work at the social level. The program was psychoanalytic in orientation and social activist as well – it ranged from casework through community organization to social policy. Thus, while I could free up students to pursue their own interests, I could also allow myself to put forth who I was and what I believed. I was not trying to indoctrinate students while I was also being forthright about my own democratic and egalitarian perspective as can be seen by the courses I taught and the views I espoused.

For example, I favored, among others, Otto Fenichel, Kurt Lewin, Paolo Freire and Thorstein Veblen. Fenichel was a Marxist psychoanalyst, and a sometime colleague of Wilhelm Reich in their left-wing activities prior to coming to the United States. While in his master work, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*, one can detect his socialist orientation, by the time Paul Goodman reached out to him, he was shielding his political beliefs in the anti-communist climate of America at that time, which reminded him of Nazi Germany which he had to leave. Accordingly, he did not tie up with Goodman who was approaching him.

Kurt Lewin, as we well know, was interested not only in personality theory and small group understanding, but he also wrote about larger social practices like dealing with anti-Semitism and changing American food habits during World War II. His colleagues analyzed democratic, authoritarian and laissez-faire practices and race relations in America. He, too, was a leftist, though not a Marxist.

Paolo Freire, a Brazilian educator, was active in Northeast Brazil working with oppressed peasants and was driven from his native country by dictators, as he was later to be pushed out of Chile when Pinochet came to power. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was stimulated in part by the psychological contributions of Erich Fromm, a moderately left psychoanalyst.

Veblen, the great American economist and social thinker, was a non-Marxist anti-capitalist. His theories, presented in his own unique language, encompassed profound psychological insights which are vitally pertinent today, a century later.

These are but a sampling of the figures I leaned upon in teaching and writing as a bridge between those centered upon the micro environment and those attending to the

macro environment. There were many others who acted as my guides and who prepared me to enter Gestalt therapy, too many to list here, but who similarly looked at the interlocking of the psychological and the social. My background as both a clinical psychologist and a social psychologist made Bryn Mawr's social work program a natural and deeply satisfying and supportive base.

6. Gestalt Therapy

I began using Gestalt therapy in the 1970s in a group that Joyce Lewis, several junior colleagues and I had started to serve people active in the progressive movement. While I had taught and practiced psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic therapy for many years, I had picked up the rudiments of Gestalt therapy in my readings and teaching. In the early 1980s I studied Gestalt therapy formally with Erv and Miriam Polster, Isadore From, and Mary Lou Schack. As I have said, a major theme I had been pursuing during the previous thirty years was the tendency to equalize in human relationships. That quality of relations stood out during my studies in Gestalt therapy and my subsequent work in the field reflects this.

At a conference organized by the New York Institute for Gestalt Therapy in 2006 whose purpose was to compare contacting and withdrawing as delineated in the founding text with the cycle of experience used by the Cleveland group and their followers, Sonia Nevis and I differed on whether the therapist and client are equals or the therapist holds more power than does the client. Sonia stated that because the clients paid the therapists, they were unequal. I might better have said that they invariably equalize and therefore are equals. I have been unfinished about that encounter and want now to show the basis for my statement.

When I studied with Isadore, I learned early on that he considered orienting the client to how he did therapy to be significant and he lamented that too few Gestalt therapists did such orienting. He started by telling us that he uses the term “customer” for persons who come to consult with him rather than “patient” or “client.” He argued that these persons could easily decide not to work with him, were indeed his employers, and that emphasis upon choice was important. Moreover, he usually told them that the two of them would work together for five or six sessions so that each could determine whether they want to continue to work together over time. He put that choice before each customer: did they want to go on with him; but, as importantly, did he choose to go on with them. He put himself and the other on an equal plane.

Further, in orienting, he asked the individual what he or she envisioned in the therapy and shared how he did his therapy. He thus elicited the person’s projections about psychotherapy and started the process of comparing what they expected with how he would proceed with the therapy. He not only laid out his orientation, but he set the ground for future comparisons when he thought he could identify the person as projecting upon him. In such instances, he would ask “What have I said or done that gave you that idea?” He would next speak of his own experience concerning that which was the base of the projection, and together they would explore the truth and distortions attributable to each of them. He opened himself to the customer’s views as well as his own.

In orienting there was more that fostered equality. He announced that the therapy depended upon the person referring to what he or she was experiencing presently in the therapy room, his or her thoughts, feelings, bodily states, anticipations, etc., what I now call interocepts. I do not remember if he told the person he would pay attention to his

own experience as well, but this was his practice as I noted above and it was the foundation for what I was later to describe as the “four corners at the intersection of contacting.”

When the customers typically told him about the wonderful things they had heard about him, they were asked to tell him as well what they had heard or imagined that was not so praiseworthy. Throughout the therapy, from beginning to ending, he sought for the negative as well as the positive, and never more so than when the praise seemed idealizing.

When he oriented us to his teaching, in addition, he cautioned that he wished we would not introject him. Because all learning involves taking in from the outside, which I consider to be healthy introjecting, I presume he meant that we should not take in his ideas without discriminating and assimilating to our own understandings, much as Paolo Freire described in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I was amused at the memorial gathering for Isadore that most of us who commented remembered that caution and thus showed how we had in fact introjected from him – in an egalitarian way.

I concluded from his instruction that orientation is itself a central component of psychotherapy and it represents a commitment to equality between therapist and client. Cathy Gray and I carried forward this perspective in our tribute to Malcolm Parlett when we did a relational analysis of contacting and withdrawing, now in the *British Gestalt Journal* under the title “Awareness, Contacting and the Promotion of Democratic-Egalitarian Social Life.”

I believe I followed Isadore’s practice more than his full theoretical articulation when I wrote the paper “Creating a Distinct ‘I’ and a Distinct ‘You’ in Contacting.” I

must add that Isadore did stress that persons must develop a concern for the other, the “you” as well as the self in his critique of egotism as the outcome of therapy. In this paper I wrote about the “four corners at the intersection of contacting.” There I specified that each party to a dialogue can beneficially describe his or her own experience and can encourage the other to do likewise. More than that, however, each person gains by asking the other how that other is reacting to him or to her, and also gains by disclosing how he or she is reacting to what has been said or done by that other. At a workshop in Buenos Aires I once asked a young woman who was telling me how she had been molested on the street when she was a child and who was not looking at me while telling her story how she thought I was reacting to her. She was surprised and had no idea. When I encouraged her to ask me and then, when she did ask me, told her of my sadness at how alone she seemed to be, she said she felt heard for the first time and lamented that her mother didn’t do that simple thing. We now well know that Gestalt therapists monitor and use their own experience in the process of meeting the client (customer) in the therapy room.

In using the four corners schema in my work I came across what I originally labeled as a “pseudo-I” and that I now call an “incomplete I.” For many years, Mary Lou Schack and I have referred to anger as a secondary emotion, meaning that there is more going on than the overt angry feeling. What is commonly diminished or missing when a person feels angry is what has been touched or stimulated within the person by the other’s actions that have aroused that anger. We remember that awareness includes the interocepts as well as percepts for the person. When the perceiving of the other who has angered one looms large, it happens often that the bodily states, memories, thoughts or

anticipations are obscured, and in that degree the “I” of the individual is incomplete. If the focus upon the other is strong and attention to one’s inner world is limited, being angry puts an accent on controlling the other and lessens the chance of meeting that other. If, instead, a person discloses what has been stimulated internally by the other’s actions or words, the chances of coming to a positive meeting are enhanced because the person is putting himself or herself on an equal plane with the other.

So, too, when persons say they are frustrated or upset, we need to ask what is being frustrated or disturbed. When I refer here to the “internal,” I do not mean anything separate from the relational. I am pointing to a more complex “I” in what is an I-You transaction.

The obverse of the “Incomplete I” is an “Incomplete You.” Here we are dealing with an egotist, a narcissist, and sometimes a con man. We have known since Freud that depression is a narcissistic disorder, for example. When people tell us how sad, depleted or unworthy they feel, they often do not expect much from us. Accordingly, we do well to find a way so that they consider us a distinct “You” in their lives. They may have told their story to many others in the same way. What now do they want from us that we can realistically provide for them? How do they think we are reacting to them? Can they tell their story to us as particular others, using what they know or believe about us as unique in their lives?

In short, I believe that facility in creating a fulsome “I” and a fulsome “You” in contacting is basic to creating a “We” in dialogue and is a central ingredient of psychotherapy.

Pursuing these lines of thought in respect to equalizing in human relationships led me inevitably to the ties of oppressor and oppressed, abuser and abused, which I spelled out in the book now commonly known as *Community and Confluence: Undoing the Clinch of Oppression*. Whereas Isadore had cautioned us against using Gestalt therapy in a political way, he came to my aid when I was ready to give up on that book after many rejections by publishers. The book is for Gestalt therapists and social activists to use and is built around how oppressors and oppressed handle emotional issues in their relationships. Without going into detail, I can tell you that oppression involves projections and introjections on the way to unwholesome confluences, and the main emotions are anxiety, anger, guilt and self-hatred handled differently by oppressors and oppressed in a relational context.

That book was followed by a Gestalt therapy attempt to show how to encounter bigots in everyday life. I did that with Janneke van Beusekom and Dorothy Gibbons, both graduates of the Gestalt Therapy Institute of Philadelphia.

A series of chapters and articles have followed which were mainly centered on variations of meeting projecting others and fostering healthy rather than unhealthy introjecting. Two examples are “Shame and the Making of a Social Class System” in Lee and Wheeler’s book *The Voice of Shame* and “On Treating Agents of Oppression” in Lee’s book *The Values of Connection*. The chapter on shame combines my work in the book on oppression with the ideas of Silvan Tomkins on shame and Thorstein Veblen on the theory of the leisure class. Class systems are usually exploitative and authoritarian, and they involve the shaming of those below and shamelessness for those above in hierarchies. Emulation as articulated by Veblen parallels our view of faulty introjecting.

Treating persons who tend to be on the upper side in oppression entails introjecting their projections and then disentangling what is one's own stuff from what has been introjected while staying in contact with that other. This is no easy feat, but in a world rife with projections, we have lessons to present to our fellow citizens.

When we created the Gestalt Therapy Institute of Philadelphia in 1984, Mary Lou Schack, Joyce Lewis, David Henrich and I dedicated ourselves to running the Institute according to the principles of Gestalt therapy, and I think we have done that well. Now that the Institute is being handled by a larger group, I hope we have developed the ideas and people to carry that ambition forward. And, beyond the Institute, in the retirement community in which I live, I am teaching and promoting egalitarianism in everyday life.

As I look at Gestalt therapy in the world today, I am encouraged to see the field moving back to its origins as one that integrates the personal and the political. As Gestalt therapy grew from reactions to authoritarian societies, so today, with authoritarianism all around us, new works are coming out that affirm our central point of view. Erv Polster's perspective on communities that implement out sensibility and the book edited by Joe Melnick and Edwin Nevis on Gestalt therapy and social change reflect this perspective as does Malcolm Parlett's call for a socially-committed Gestalt therapy. When people tell me at workshops that I am more political than many presenters they have known, they may soon find that I am not so singular in this regard. I sincerely hope so.

In concluding, I want to thank the Gestalt therapy community for giving me a home, for being supportive and open to my point of view, and for being the kind of community that I hope we can promote for all humankind. We are the source of sanity, of hope, and, importantly, of great wisdom.

12/30/09