

# **Your Becoming Self**

## **The Existential Search:**

### **Unconditional Positive Regard, Compassion, Forgiveness, and Acceptance**

#### **Meaning, Being, and the Transformative**

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Please Note

Each of the entries is relatively short, 500-750 words or so. You can read them in order or jump to a specific entry that strikes you as interesting or intriguing. You may find, however, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. That whole emerges because as you read, we become co-authors.

If you have any questions, suggestions, and gentle constructive comments, please feel free to write:  
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Laurence Robert Cohen

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Your Becoming Self—the Existential Search:  
Meaning, Being, and the Transformative

***Introductory: There's Nothing Wrong With Us***

Once upon a short time ago, many people traveled the world in search of themselves. Interestingly, they seem to have left themselves in some foreign and very exotic places like Paris and Rome, Algiers and Katmandu, and the Himalayas and the Indian subcontinent. No one seemed to think they might find themselves in Jersey City, New Jersey, Brownsville, Texas, or Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. For many, they found something of value in all that sort of journey, and for others, they found a wonderful distraction from the seemingly endless and predictable pattern of their lives to which they eventually returned and to which they adjusted. Others entered into a dead end from which they may never have returned. It seems a little like the man who looked for the keys to his home under the street lamp rather than in front of the door where he lost them because, "There's more light here."

Our search for the self begins and ends within us. At the same time, the search takes us a long, long way because it encompasses all of our lives, all of the elements of our being, and the ways in which we make meaning and form out of the world and about of ourselves and our lives.

*Your Becoming Self—the Existential Search: Meaning, Being, and the Transformative* helps that search make sense and become natural and doable. This book offers a belief in the inherent ability for each of us to make successfully make this journey as an individual. It's our self after all. We don't need all kinds of regimented exercises to do so. Some thoughts and ideas about the self, its development, and its repression can open a world of choice to us in terms of how we choose to live our lives every day and through those choices and actions, find our search in progress. Not only we will find our search productively in progress, but we may well find that other choices we wanted to make in our lives also happen as a natural outgrowth of the choices we make in our search toward the self each day.

If we feel concerned with making changes in our lives and in ourselves, we needn't worry or feel overwhelmed with the idea. There's nothing wrong with us. We just need to know that our selves can make choices that make all the differences we need in life, one choice at a time.

*Your Becoming Self—the Existential Search:* invites us into awareness, transformation, and liberation where we find we no need for changing ourselves. Instead, we can make choices which search for and fulfill our becoming self. We can deeply enjoy the result along with all the others in our lives. We search to find the self not to lose it. In finding the self, we become who we have always been—ourselves.

***What would happen if you found out that every negative thought and feeling you ever had about yourself were unfounded, unfair, and untrue?***



## ***Child's Play—July 18, 2011***

Imagine a game someone might have gifted to us as a child. We open the box and turn it upside down. Hundreds of pieces fall out all higgledy-piggledy on to the floor. We feel quite excited at first. The sight of all those pieces seems to offer limitless possibilities. All of a sudden, we might feel something else: fear. Limitless possibilities can mean limitless confusion, indecision, and failure. We don't know if we should shout or cry, jump into, or run away. Children, frankly, live through some very hard moments like this.

It probably happened that something else fell out of the box but demanded our attention less than the pieces. It came as writing on paper. Its form could vary from a single sheet with just pictures to go by all the way to a rather long booklet full of writing. When we finally get to that document, we find that it gives us instructions, patterns by which the seemingly random pieces take form.

We try to fit the pieces to the patterns. We may struggle mightily to do so, but we mostly persevere (a word we would not know but would enact every day). After many a spurt and stop, we arrive at something that looks exactly, or very close to, what we saw in the instructions. Oh frabjous day. We made something take shape, to take on a form, to have some meaning. As children, we desire the power to do, to make, to change, and we receive precious little of such things. No matter how loving others mean it, we get ordered and pushed about a good deal. All of a sudden, in playing with this toy, we sense our own power to manipulate other things into a form that we choose. We don't consciously say to ourselves, "Wow, power like this really does something for me" and flex our muscles. We just feel the power within us and our minds and our hands, and then we flex our muscles. It just feels good to do the dominating rather than always being on the dominated side of things.

Then the "Oh boy!" sense of things turned up, or maybe the "Oho!" or even the "Oh no!" moment turned up. We, all of a sudden, sense that the instructions we followed helped us in one way, but also dominated us in another. We made form out of the chaos of all those liberated pieces on the floor, but the order belonged to the instructions. The instructions told us what to do in its terms, and we learned it and executed it. It did not give us the slightest idea about how to make order out of the chaos we find around us for ourselves. When we really wanted power within self and within the world around us, we needed to know how to make form for ourselves.

We need to know how to make such form out of chaos for the rest of our lives. We need to know now. It is in us to know. It's our gift. It's our essential power. Like language, we enter the world with the potential. It isn't a technique. We still need a right environment to make it fully happen.

### ***Interlude with a pronoun—July 19, 2011***

Anytime someone writes an essay, that person has to choose a pronoun or other noun to represent and refer to the writer and the reader. That just happened ("someone" as a choice). Above, the writer becomes "that person." The writer (another choice) can become an "I" and the reader a "you" or "they." Readers and writers can appear as "she" or "he." "One" may refer to both writer and reader. The choice comes harder than we might think (another choice, "we") because as with all choice, it takes on a signification and a result, a consequence. Generally, in this writing, I (the writer) choose "we" to represent both the writer and the reader. The reader (you) can also read this as the "authorial we," simply a way of staying away from writing "I" which someone told someone who told us that we have to avoid using "I" in our essay writing. One problem with that choice comes in the distance and abstraction of the "we" and its possible resonance with the royal rather superior sounding "we" (as in the Victorian cliché "we are not amused").

Choosing "we" and "us" in writing also risks sounding as if the writer and the reader are the same sort of person. Actually, it can sound like the writer thinks of the reader as an extension of the writer, as if the writer defined the reader in most if not all particulars. This comes as a kind of modified solipsism. In a full solipsism, the only sure entity in existence is the self. Everything else serves as a projection of that self. Why anyone would bother writing to all those projections of self becomes another question. A modified solipsism allows that others exist, but all those others think and feel exactly as the self, the writer thinks and feels. That sort of writing seems to endlessly suggest that the reader already knows what is being said, but the writer simply brings the thoughts and feelings a clarity the reader doesn't have, but immediately upon reading, the reader will think and feel the same way only better informed about the reader's own thoughts. That certainly can strike the reader as egotistical and intrusive. The reader has the right to think her/his (choice) own thoughts and feel her/his own feelings.

The use of "we" in this writing doesn't seek to deny that independence of thought and feeling, the essential individuation of each of us. The use of "we" and "us" in this writing wants to suggest that in all of our individuation and separation, we share certain experiences and desires, certain needs and wants, drives and realities although we perceive them and respond to them differently. In all our differences as human beings, we share certain similarities because we are, simply stated, human and a being. This commonality supports us and makes for connection even in our inevitable isolation as individuals. These connections keep isolation from becoming alienation from one another. In alienation, we become Others to each other, and we can slip into suspicion and even fear of one another. We can despair of our individuality as an isolation that leaves us each and only suffering alone with no one to hear our cries of loneliness and sorrow—certainly no one to care. The "we" here suggests that your individual self and my individual self exist with unifying and connecting understandings of each other and our shared experiences when we can get to them through our shared isolation. Even when we only share our isolation we can find ourselves less isolated. So here we go.

## ***How we perceive our now and the perception of form —July 20, 2011***

We often ask this question about our lives: "Where do we go from here?" That answer often feels essential to getting out of bed and out the door each morning. Another way of posing that question may reach for something even more essential: "In what way, in what form, do we see the here we're in?"

Like the child with the toy in random pieces, we feel uncomfortable with formlessness. Formlessness brings us to the face of chaos. The face of chaos brings us to face the unacceptable, if not the untenable. It brings us close to an existential nothingness, a vacuum in which our sense of identity cannot come into being, as with the child, or cannot maintain its integrity, as we can feel we face each day, can experience every day.

Until we reach an almost unimaginable state of internal stability or surety of self, we sense our existence as a self against the background of the world and the others in that world. We arrive at our sense of self because the rest of the world, the world in which our identity exists, exists in itself. We experience the world as a relatively stable place on which our self counts for its reference points. We need such points of contact which allow for and support the existence, the growth, and maintenance of that self, our sense of self.

In some very substantial way, we endlessly take our measure from the world around us. The child playing with the new toy and all its many pieces, measures her/him self and her/his ability to act productively and effectively in the world by doing something with those pieces, bringing them into some form. When that child cannot make anything out of those pieces, she/he may accept that fact and simply play with them as pieces to be grabbed, hoarded, thrown about, and generally abused. Paradoxically, that child just made some form out of those pieces by assigning them the function of pieces-to-be-thrown-about-and-abused. Even frustration can lead us into form because we need to perceive the existence of form so deeply that we find or make it happen in spite of all appearances. Making a mess may come to some as making form.<sup>1</sup>

The child may feel temporarily satisfied with assigning pieces-to-be-thrown-about-and-abused as a form for the new toy. However, we really strive to make not only form out of the world. We strive to find or make meaning out of that form. That sense of meaning about form links directly to our sense of our meaning, our self, through participating with and in that form. When making a mess out of seemingly random parts satisfies the child permanently, it might mean that child will live quite chaotically as she/he grows into adulthood if emotionally that child ever reaches adulthood. Most of us know someone who lives seemingly comfortably in a state of seeming formlessness with apparent ease and satisfaction. Living with such a person can prove difficult because that person cannot or will not see what we see as disorder as disorder. That person feels a rightness about such disorder in our terms because that person may feel no essential confidence in getting beyond the pieces-to-be-thrown-about-and-abused stage of her/his identity. The child with the formless toy prevails. That meaning perspective, early formed, has become part of the self of that person, part of the vision of the person, and has become an essential way of seeing and experiencing the world—a meaning perspective.

That's quite a perspective to live with. We all have them—meaning perspectives—just not that same one.

## ***Meaning perspectives defined and formed—July 21, 2011***

Our perspective refers to the manner in which we see something, anything, everything. Our meaning perspective refers to how we interpret what our perspective allows us to see. Our meaning perspective offers us a way of taking the apparent chaos that surrounds us from time to time and giving it some form which we have predetermined before we see what we see. Oddly, we operate in this way, generally, while remaining remarkably unaware of the existence of that meaning perspective. Our friend who lives in what we see as a mess doesn't say to her/him self, "Oh, this is really a mess, but I see it through a meaning perspective that tells me it's the best kind of order I can have being the unorganized kind of person I am." Our limited awareness of meaning perspectives often comes in the form of "I am" statements:

"I am lazy."

"I am a procrastinator."

"I am angry."

"I am stupid."

"I am wonderful."

"I am lousy."

"I am smart."

"I am a liar."

"I am always late."

When we speak the "I am" phrase, we refer to something that we believe forms an essential, definable part of us—what we present to ourselves and the world as our identity. When one of the being statements feels threatened or defensive, the person who holds it will say, "Don't try to change me. That's just the kind of person I am." Or "Don't try to change me. You have to accept me that way I am."

All this refers to a state of being. It's a very existential grammatical form that speaks of the reality of existence our self and our role in that reality. When someone says in the jargon form, "It just be's that way, bro" that person refers to something that person believes and recognizes as an unchangeable part of the universal structure of reality. That's a truly existential statement although the speaker may well see it more simply, clearly, and directly than that. However the speaker perceives these statements, it doesn't change their startling, revelatory quality. We must leave whatever is under discussion alone, it says, because it represents an unchangeable, immutable, and incorrigible reality.

When we use the "to be" statement, we limit the way we see ourselves and the world. That limits how we act in the world. That limitation of action often supports and validates the meaning perspective that determined the action, so we feel validated in our belief. It works in this neat way with its own self-generating justification mechanism always part of the process. That does a lot to keep the problem and the profound benefit of cognitive dissonance<sup>2</sup> at bay. Statements of being simply seem to settle all questions about our self and the world in which that self operates.

Meaning perspectives often if not always, operate in this powerful, existential, and unquestioned manner, but are all these statements even true? Not when we examine them, reflect on them critically. Meaning perspectives using the "To be" form makes for a surety about how everything works in us and around us. We can find something very comforting in such form making. However, meaning perspectives come from our past or from someone else's past. If they come from the past and determine what we see in the present, then we live to a greater or lesser degree in the past, inside the meaning perspective produced in the past. In that way, meaning perspectives limit or determine the choices that we can and do make, or they eliminate choices we might wish to make from even the remotely possible. That's why we often talk about how we have to "change," so we can make a new choice. That always sounds very daunting if not frightening and self-hurtful. Meaning perspectives can keep us from realizing that we can make choices that will change outcomes but not necessarily ourselves. We may not need to change ourselves at all to make such choices which feel a great deal less frightening and nearly impossible than "change."

What do we "be"?

## ***On what we be or what we choose to be—July 22, 2011***

In our lives there exist certain immutable elements which, in honesty and reality, simply "be" part of us. When we critically reflect on such "to be" or "I am" statements, they settle out as a very precious few.

We "be" born in a certain place. Whatever we say, if we were born in a nameless place of no interest to anyone, that's where we were born. Our birthplace offers no choice, so we be born where we were born. "I am (be) from . . ." somewhere inescapably and unchangeably.

We live within the physical constraints of our biological sex. Whatever we may do to alter our gender performance, or surgically and hormonally our physical appearance, we remain unchoosing with the same biological sex. We can choose a great deal that surrounds it, but biological sex offers no real choices. We "be" male or female.

We reach a certain age, and aside from getting older, that's how far in time we are away from our birth. No matter what we do to improve our life or extend our life, we cannot choose our age. It just "be's".

If we find no choice about something that forms an inescapable part of our being, we "be" it, and that's done.

No equivalency exists between those forms of personal being and "I am a liar." Whatever number of times we may have lied, we can still tell the truth. We never "be" a liar. Even if we have lied countless times beyond all reckoning, so that we have no memory of ever telling the truth, each lie we tell still operates as a choice we make. It doesn't matter how unconscious that choice may seem, the choice remains ready to become part of our awareness. At any point, we can recognize the dangers and problems with lying and choose to speak the truth. Paradoxically the one statement that we might want to make as a statement of truth about our self, "I am a liar," would still form part of the cluster of our lies. We do not "be" a liar. We choose to lie. The wonderful thing about such a realization comes in recognizing that we can choose to stop lying anytime we want. Knowing we can always make new choices can liberate us from past choices and habits better left in the past. Such a realization<sup>3</sup> offers us empowerment of the personal kind.

We may not stop lying, however, until we critically reflect on the meaning perspective represented by the phrase, "I am a liar" that we feel forms part of our self and our identity. However we feel about our lying, we will not make a new choice until we question the validity of that meaning perspective.

When we speak even more self-defining and self-defaming statements such as "I am stupid," we do even more damage to our self by making "I am stupid" an essential part of our identity, our self, part of our very being. As a teacher, I have found that many if not almost all of my students felt that they were stupid or, at least, feared that if the truth were known they could say "I am

stupid" quite truthfully. It didn't cheer them up much, but there it was—deeply and painfully inside them.<sup>4</sup>



## ***Meaning perspectives and their influence—July 23, 2011***

It can feel quite natural for us to question the above in this way: "How does that 'I am stupid' meaning perspective get inside those students and inside us?" As with much if not almost all in life, we learn it. We aren't born with any idea of our dumbness or inadequacy. It's not genetic. We get taught it. Our teachers are everywhere in our lives, and they teach what countless others have taught them over and over, time out of mind. If we return to our child on the floor with all these pieces around her/him, we can see how such a feeling can start. It starts from "I am right and you are wrong" statements which amount to "I am smart and you are dumb" statements.

Our child decides to make some sort of form out of the chaotic pieces spread around and risks it. She/he puts one piece into another, and it works. She/he follows with another piece, and it works—sort of—but good enough for starters. The child begins to feel some confidence in the process, and she/he is mostly interested in the process rather than the result. It might even begin to feel powerful, and power in terms of making form out of chaos can feel just like smart. Along comes a caring but result oriented adult. The adult has lived long enough and been taught enough to feel and believe in results as the primary if not only real concern (another meaning perspective—ends rather than means are important). This adult sees the child at work and lovingly and caringly corrects what the child has done explaining all the while how this is the way it's really done, and when you do it this way, you get this result. The adult means no punishment, and the child may show no hurt, but the child has learned or begun to learn. There is a right way to do things, inherently the smart way, and a wrong way to do things, inherently the dumb way.

At some very real level, the child may learn that she/he is inherently dumb because she/he did not know how to get the right result. The fun and power she/he felt in the other process probably came from the same dumbness. That makes the child all the more dumb and incompetent. The child may have also learned that she/he has enough smart to pretend to know what to do by pretending to the skill and smart the adult has shown, but that would begin as a pretence and end as a pretence. The original dumbness that our child feels can swiftly become an incorrigible meaning perspective which will grow over her/his lifetime. Most if not all of her/his learning experiences will validate that original experience and make of that meaning perspective a truth of the very nature of the child, of the identity of that child, and operate as the essential part of the identity of that child well into adulthood and to the end of life itself.

When we enter the educational system, if not before, the essential question the system asks us sounds, like this even not if actually spoken: "How smart are you?" Words don't just make sounds. They make feelings. After discussing this question and the resulting feelings with many students, I know how much these words hurt. I have felt it myself. "How smart are you" works as the first learning and part of a growing meaning perspective.

## ***Essential smart over essential dumb—July 24, 2001***

In my teaching career, whenever I posed the question, "How smart are you?" baldly. Most students reacted in a negative way even though I introduced the discussion fully as a point of discussion not as an actual question for which I required an answer. Frankly, most of them told me unequivocally they hated the question and feared the question partly because it answers itself. Students reported that the question made them feel defensive and judged even before they answered. They felt that the question showed the questioner assumed a certain level of dumb rather than assumed smart. Besides, the person asking the question clearly is going to make the judgment about the level of the other's smart, and that level will inevitably fall below the level of the questioner. The questioner holds all the power to decide the answer, makes all the judgments about the answer. For many students, the question immediately converted into, "How dumb are you?" Even as that question reaffirmed what students feared, it offered them a cause to feel worse. Most took the offer. Every time I asked the question, "How smart are you?" they heard "How dumb are you?" Inevitably, their level of self-doubt increased, and their belief in self-smart decreased.

The "I am dumb" meaning perspective grows under such subtle nurturing. The meaning perspective of essential dumbness haunts many if not almost all students as it does many if not all of us before and after our student time. "How dumb are you" as a meaning perspective puts out its weed runners to all kinds of places within the garden of our hearts and minds. It can choke off the growth of our healthiest and most productive elements of self. It can take the life enhancing part of our selves and make it life denying. How can anyone escape from the deadening effect of such feelings, such a meaning perspective?

That's quite a punch for a single, four-word question. But it's not about the number of words spoken. It's about the feelings those words engender. It's about how words cause us to feel.

If we take the same number of words and the same words themselves and place them in a transformed order, the feelings it produces shifts radically to the good—if challenging. We can ask, "How are you smart?"<sup>5</sup>

In the first version, we feel that question assumes our dumb. In the second version, the question assumes our smart. It just doesn't know how. In that way, students felt that the "smart" question in the second form gave them the power to decide for themselves about their level of smart. It assumed they were smart, and the questioner simply didn't know in what ways, only the students did. The students then felt they had the power to determine their smart level based on all the smart they had shown in their lives thus far. Everyone in every class I taught had a great deal of smart just because they were sitting there. They had survived, and they still wanted more out of life and themselves.

One thing that life can show us, whatever positive and negative things have happened to us, whatever the quality of choices we have made, it takes a good deal of smart to survive, to live, and to continue to aspire in life. As battered by life and circumstance as many of my students were, they came to me with aspirations. Otherwise they would not have walked in the door. In

our shared search for their smartness, we knew for a fact that they were smart enough and strong enough to keep trying to learn. That's was just for starters.

Still, for many students and others, discovering the smart within took some doing and discussing.

## ***Discovering smart—July 25, 2011***

While working with students who came to me through vocational rehabilitation, I began the practice of discussing the "How smart are you?" (or even worse, "How smart do you think you are?") question. Many of them, if not all, felt damaged by an educational system which treated them as damaged. At some point, these students had also become literally damaged in some way. That's why they came to me for employment skills. The more immediate and obvious recent damage was exacerbated by the damage they felt most of their lives from the way they were treated and used by the systems they encountered. They had internalized the damage they felt by the system endlessly perceiving them and treating them as damaged. They felt, and reported themselves as, dumb and doomed to remain so. We agreed that feeling dumb, thus failed, did not auger well for their attitude toward their ability to learn and use their learning in the workplace or in their lives.

When we discussed "How are you smart," many felt uneasy about making that claim at all, any real claim about intelligence. They thought it belonged to other people. They just reported to just having "got on with their lives."

Getting on with life is intelligence. Those who don't—don't get on with life at all. We brought in Howard Gardiner's ideas of multiple intelligences<sup>6</sup>, and we shared stories about ways every student had shown one or more of these intelligences. Often, we would add an intelligence that better defined what these students had done in their lives. For many, "Street smart" held a very high sway in this regard. That particular form of intelligence demands any number of subsets in order to succeed. Still, we struggled. The old meaning perspective of inner dumb got started in childhood and got built on by the educational system. It still held a great deal of power inside their minds and spirits. It may be the case that unless the child learns that perspective well and deeply early, the later assaults might have a much more limited effect. The idea of their own inherent dumb had become part of their self-image, part of their identity early and grew. No matter how we might dislike some part of our self-image or identity, it feels like an essential element of our life and living, and we can fear giving it up even when that liberates.

One man, in his fifties, Carlos called Carl, thought about "How are you smart" for a while and finally said, "I'm not." We talked on and got to know each other a little, what getting on with life had been defined for him and within him.

As with many, many of my folks, the educational system saw him as flawed and placed him in special education. All of us know as children what that means: inadequate and dumb—the "slow class." As children, we point out the "specials" to each other to feel better about our own fears of our own dumb. If we didn't wind up in special ed., so we aren't as dumb as they are, as dumb as we fear we are, so we were better off than they were—small comfort in a cold educational universe but better than no comfort all.

Carl confessed that they put him in special ed. Because he was "slow." He still felt he was "slow." Slow, it turns out, means to be very, essentially, dumb. Where does anyone go from there marked like Cain if not externally certainly internally—marked as dumb?

## ***The cultural and educational meaning perspective of smart and dumb—July 26, 2011***

If we critically reflect on the idea of "dumb," we can rightfully ask from where this judgment comes. It comes as a perspective and judgment, surely, because "dumb" isn't an inherent part of anyone's whole being. No child of two wakes up and says, "Well, here comes another day where I am dumb." Coming to hold our dumbness as a meaning perspective works contextually and culturally and in many ways that have little or nothing to do with our whole being. Dumbness often relates to the person originally labeled as "slow." Slow isn't always a negative way to behave or learn.

Slow works relatively. If we hear about some surgeon who spent 12 hours on a delicate operation, and in the end, when all comes out well, we sigh admiringly at such determination, knowledge, and achievement. Even when it doesn't come out well, we might still admire the attempt. If we go back to our floor bound child with all the scattered toy pieces and demand that the pieces be put away in ten minutes, we will complain about how slow the child is when the task remains unfinished in fifteen minutes. We might sigh and ask (perhaps rhetorically), "Oh, why are you such a slowpoke?" (Why do we not know what is a "poke" in this regard and why is a poke so annoying when it's slow?) What wrong with "slow" in this regard as well?

Slow can mean careful and thoughtful, but not in the educational and other systems as currently constituted. Inside the belly of the educational system, we find that intelligence and ability are subdivided by time and thus pressure and stress. We can't just be smart. We have to be smart—fast. Very young children and later adults feel they have to deal with the pressure of the inherent demands of time and the inevitable threat of failure—no speed, no smart.

We can imagine two children on the floor with the same number of toy pieces scattered about each. We instruct both children to construct something out of the pieces that fulfills a certain criteria. Child A looks carefully over the pieces, examines the function of each, tries out a few combinations, and two hours later comes up with something absolutely brilliant and original, something that fulfills and exceeds the given criteria. Child B looks around with little interest, picks up a few pieces, puts them together with little enthusiasm, and comes up with something that barely satisfies the given criteria in forty-five minutes. If we just look at the result, at the structures completed, which child looks smarter, more capable?<sup>7</sup> Most of us would choose child A's work as the better of the two by most even objective standards. However, what if this was an intelligence test with a time limit of forty-five minutes? Who gets the higher score, that is, who appears the more intelligent than the other when divided and degraded by time? Child B's work becomes the artifact of intelligence and ability. That shows how dumb Child A really is. In forty-five minutes, child A is just getting comfortable with the pieces and their possible forms, and has not completed anything. Besides Child A feels very bad, very uneasy about the time problem and the feeling of failure that looms, so Child A, confused and pressed for time, moves a little more slowly than normal. According to the systemic structures and rules that govern official intelligence and ability subdivided by time and stress, Child A is slow and therefore a perfect candidate for special education classes. Everyone knows what "special" means in this context—dumb. Slow equals dumb.

People rarely escape the external and internal stigma of that judgment, of that condemnation. It's how school works. It's how all testing works. It's how people can feel dumb for life or fear having dumbness thrust upon them.

## ***We are the story we tell ourselves—July 27, 2011***

Carl spent his school years unhappily ensconced in special ed. classes. In late middle age, he reported that he still felt dumb. He also reported much time and little attention he sat through in special education classes where they taught little of use or value, but he certainly learned the lesson about how dumb he was. Now in his fifties, he held to that identity and image of himself as if it did him some good. In a sense it did because any image of himself, no matter how badly distorted, offered some sense of tangible identity. No matter how limited and limiting, some identity feels better than none.

He also told me something about his life as part of our conversation, and through that discussion, I discovered generally how dumb he wasn't. Carl had shown and practiced his intelligence, his smart of one kind or another all his adult life. When we listen to anyone's life story, even when we tell our own it to ourselves, we can always reflect on how much smart it takes to accomplish any of the things we did in our lives—even the mistakes. That inner story matters. In some very real ways, we are, after all, the story we tell ourselves.

Carl finished high school while working nearly full time. He married young, and his marriage stayed intact, affectionate, and continuing strong. He spoke about his Lupe, the woman he married, happily with affection and respect. They raised three children all of whom were still in town and relating well to each other and to their parents. He spoke of family exchanges that also sounded filled with mutual affection and respect. He even told stories about how they helped one another without any self-consciousness about the nature of the story—just stories about what happened to them. Carl told the stories out of fun and friendship not trying to prove something about him or them.

He began his very young adult work as a laborer in a copper mine to support his family. In the many years he worked at the mine, he learned to operate heavy equipment and handle very exacting tasks with those enormous and powerful machines. He did so without any major incident or accident. Eventually, as with many others, the copper market faltered and, along with most of the workers, he got laid off. He and Lupe started their first business together which went well, and he trained and went to work as a corrections officer which he did successfully for many more years. He experienced an injury and could no longer continue as an officer. Vocational rehabilitation sent him to me to assist him in gaining the knowledge and ability needed to write a business plan so Vocational Rehabilitation would give him money to start a business he had in mind. During his work with me, he approached another lending source and secured some support from them anticipating a greater economic need than Vocational Rehabilitation could serve. He had already attended a community college course in writing a business plan, received an A for the course, and now he wanted to make a number of changes and revisions so he could expand and manipulate some of his original ideas. He also felt the need to expand his computer knowledge. We did all that together. Eventually, he expanded his idea into another field altogether. In the meantime, he continued working with Lupe in keeping their long successful cleaning business operating well.

Carl may have felt dumb through all of his life, but his life story, when we see it clearly and simply without a negative meaning perspective, expresses his excellence, his determination, and his smart.



## ***We are the story we tell ourselves continued—July 28, 2011***

Whatever happens to us—well—happens. We may feel we have caused some of these happenings or some of them have simply happened to us without much of our influence. In both cases, they happen and the single most important question we can ask at that point, many of us miss: "How will we choose to respond to what happens? What story will we choose to tell about what has happened?" Whatever we choose, we become that story to ourselves and to others. Thinking about it a little, we can probably see that how we see and tell the story about our past will influence if not determine how we experience the present and the future. If we listen to and see through our limited and limiting meaning perspectives from the past, our choice is made, and the present and future become determined by that past. If we can choose our response freely, we choose what we make out of our past, will do with our present in the present, and that choice can make for a very different future.

Meaning perspectives can seamlessly become the determinant factor in how we tell our story. That happens because meaning perspectives show a powerful influence over the way we see an experience and then, later, tell a story about something that has happened that justifies the meaning perspective. How do I respond when I trip, look awkward, but not fall and or do myself or anything else harm? If I hold no meaning perspective about my physical conduct, I might say "Oops" or not say anything and just get on with what I was about. I could also look at what happened, without any sense of blame, to see how I would avoid it happening again, and then get on with what I was about. That would be my choice. In the face of the same happening, and I do hold a meaning perspective about my physical conduct, "I am a clumsy person, a slob," I will choose to do and say many other things determined by that meaning perspective. I would apologize, sometime over and over again, to those who saw me. They may not have noticed the first time, but they can see it now that I complain about myself and my constant clumsiness. Then I might choose to berate myself, "Why am I always so clumsy? Every time I get a chance, I screw things up. What a klutz. What a jerk. What a slob." Indeed, I would speak to myself using completely condemnatory language, language I would never use on anyone else, not even people I didn't like.

That's the story I tell about myself at the time. When I get home, I may well to choose to tell the story of the clumsy klutz to further justify my meaning perspective to myself and those closest to me. Then I know, and they know, and anyone else who comes into earshot knows my story—I am a clumsy fool. I have heard people tell that sort of story in an interview when asked what weaknesses they found in themselves. It did little good to themselves personally or professionally.

That meaning perspective and the story it produces limits the speaker, the believer of "I am clumsy" in the same way as the meaning perspective "I am dumb" limits some other believer. The limitations may vary in scope and degree, but they still limit the believer, the holder of the meaning perspective. No meaning perspective, in that way, is superficial. The very idea of the meaning perspective tends to live in the deepest and most unquestioned part of us, our core belief in what is real and what is not—our belief in who we are.

## ***Retelling our story in new terms—July 29, 2011***

When Carl speaks to himself and to the world about himself, he will choose what he says based on how he perceives what has happened to him. Retelling the story of our lives in new ways means that we stay with the facts of what happened as best we can. How we read those facts, how we give them form and thus meaning, remain part of our right and power to choose how we respond to the world. To choose what attitude we take toward what has happened in our lives. That response and that attitude will go a long way to determining how life will go for us now and in the future. When Carl sees through his "I am dumb" meaning perspective, he will see and tell his story in one way, and when he critically reflects on that meaning perspective and frees himself from it, he will tell quite a different story.

I was always in special ed classes, so we went real slow. That meant we didn't cover much that way, and I guess that was okay for us because we couldn't learn all that well. Nobody expected very much of us, and I guess that was just as well so we didn't feel too bad. We didn't learn too much but that seems pretty fair after all.

They gave us all our diploma in high school, but that was just because they wanted to be nice and get us out of there. I mean I'm glad I got the diploma, but I don't know that it means much about what I learned. I just like to say I got it on a job application.

I had a job when I was in school. People felt sorry for me because they knew my Mom and Dad, so they would show me how to do things so I could learn them. I did okay when they took lots of time to show me how.

They really needed people at the mine when I applied, and I felt lucky when they let me work as a laborer. I was around long enough so that when they had other openings, they let me try things out. It took a long time, but I finally learned some new things and got better jobs at the mine.

When they had to lay off workers, they chose me, and I felt really bad about that. I know it was because I just wasn't as good as other

I don't remember how they tested me or anything, but one day there I was in special ed. It was hard to learn much because we went so slow, and they didn't ask for much, but I worked as hard as I could and learned to read and write really well, and I even learned how to do math. Not everybody did, so I feel really good about that.

When it came time to graduate, I know that some people thought they just gave us a diploma. I know that I earned my diploma because I worked harder than my friends to get what I could out of those special ed classes, and I use what I learned every day.

People gave me a job in high school because they knew my family. They weren't sorry because even if I took longer to learn, I learned and did my best, more than what anybody asked or expected.

The mine paid real good, and I took my laborer job seriously always doing my best and a little more. It was that that made them let me try the heavy equipment. It was a lot to learn, but I kept at it, and I learned it. I got very good, and I never had an accident or damaged the equipment. I was very good.

The price of copper fell, and they just had to lay off a lot of people. They did it by seniority, and it got to be my turn. We all felt really bad,

drivers. That's the story of my life.

but it wasn't our fault.

Carl told this story to me in these two ways from when I first met him until we finished out time together. The one on the left came when I spoke to him at first, and he told me that story so I would get to know him. The one on the right came out as we worked together, and he experienced how well he had learned and could learn things he never thought he could learn and do things he never thought he could do. He changed his story, recognized his intelligence, accepted how he worked best, and that made for a change in how he learned and how he felt about himself and what he could do.

## ***Self-awareness as process—July 30, 2011***

Self-awareness can come to us in many ways, and when we pay attention to what's happening to us, we may well find that such a moment has occurred even if we didn't notice at the time. These moments may not come as on the road to Damascus where Saul of Tarsus has a flash of insight, quite literally a light, which knocks him off his horse and turns him into Paul later a Christian saint. That's exciting, and it looks that way in the movies and television. A person with complex and confusing relationships with self and others along with all kinds of other problems gets a flash of insight, and she/he has changed for the better. Everything changes for the better, the music rises, and everything is resolved by the end of the movie or show: "God bless us everyone," as Dickens would have it.

Our lives don't resolve so easily, and they shouldn't. We live our lives out, and the meanings in our lives develop with our lives. It's in the development of our lives where self-awareness begins and where it opens more and more fully. Our lives and the meanings contained within them exhibit the wonders of an ever foliate flower which endlessly blossoms without withering. Self-awareness can open us to our own beauty, to the best of ourselves which lives within us whatever we have done with our lives so far and whatever we have thought about ourselves until now.

Carl came to training to learn more about using a computer and for help with writing a business plan. And that's what we did. What also happened to him, what awareness he discovered happened, in part, because he succeeded in ways he had not expected. All of a sudden, he felt he could choose to see himself as smart. That didn't mean to him that he changed at all. He didn't think he wanted change, and no change was required. He simply found that he could make a choice about how he saw himself and thus how he could re-tell his story. We all live with those choices within us even as we live with our ability to make form out of the seeming chaos of the world and of our lives. Making story is making form. The greater our self-awareness, the greater our relationship to our power to make choices that make sense to us in the moment and make new choices when we experience how any choice works itself out. Self-awareness empowers us. It's even quite good fun.

So why don't most of us spend much time searching for and experiencing self-awareness? The answer I have found when I asked is simple. We don't think we want to. There's a story to how that awareness came to me.

My formal studies came in Interdisciplinary Humanities with an English concentration. That led me to teach many different things and in many different ways. I got a call one day from someone who asked if I would teach a short course on interviewing and another on résumé writing. I replied honestly that I had never done so before, but I thought I could make them up. She gave me the weekend.

### ***Interview class and the self—July 31, 2011***

The next week was exiting and crammed full of learning for everyone—especially me. In order to help students engage successfully at an interview and write powerful résumés, they wanted to see the value of all the work they had done in the past. They needed to retell the story of their employment history, so they gave it the respect it deserved and made the skills they had shown in those jobs transferable to their new careers. We worked on all of that and many other elements of the working and personal self. Part of our discussions centered on the idea that the subject of the interview was the person interviewing. The job was the object of the interview, and the interviewee was the subject. All this meant to offer students an environment where they could experience a personal empowerment from within. When they discovered how they had acted powerfully in the past, they could see how they would act powerfully in new jobs and new roles.

Everything seemed to go well. Students showed insights into their past work and conduct. We laughed a good deal, and they spoke with growing respect and confidence about their employment history. Everything they said seemed to augur well.

The mock interviews said otherwise.

The students still knew what they had learned about themselves, but they could barely get any of it said. After all the confidence they showed in class discussions, they lapsed into the clichéd interview performance that came directly from fear. I conducted the interviews, and they knew me, but the fear still dominated. Clearly, the intellectual, conscious approach toward the successful interview didn't work by itself. That perspective had only limited success. It did well for the mental attitude of the students, but it hadn't touched the emotional part of their understanding and performance. The intellectual helped, but the emotional apparently dominated.

When the interviewing course started the next time, I went at the question of interviewing and fear quite directly. We discussed the idea of the subject of the interview, and we came to the same conclusion. The subject of the interview was the interviewee. Then I posed this question, "If the subject of the interview is you, and you are afraid of the interview, what do you have to fear about yourself? What's wrong with you?"

That question stunned us all. I explained that in my first try at the interviewing course all had gone well in terms of the external self, understanding consciously our individual excellence in the workplace. That didn't seem to do much if anything for the internal self, the one that makes emotional judgments about the self. The external discussions did not touch on the meaning perspectives that drove the emotional response to the interview situation, the most immediate part of the interview.

If they and I feared there was something was wrong with our self, maybe what we needed to do was examine how the self came to be, came into form, and why we felt such fear about that self.

## ***The importance and avoidance of self-awareness—August 1, 2011***

Aside from the problem of the interview, I realized, we show our fear of the self in other ways. These ways seemed linked to the limitations imposed by meaning perspectives. When I looked carefully at the curricular description of the interviewing class, I found that it said that it was a class about "self-awareness." What followed in the syllabus had nothing to do with self-awareness that I could see, but I felt I could take that original description and make it the center, the focal point of the entire class. So I brought that idea to the class.

I asked my students if they thought that self-awareness was something worth thinking about, something worth learning about, something worth our time and effort. They answered "Yes." I agreed. Then I asked, "How many people do you know who actually thought about or spent any time or effort on self-awareness.<sup>8</sup> After a pause, they answered, "None." I pursued the point, and asked why, if self-awareness held such value for us, why didn't people think about it, try to work on it? Students came up with many answers for that. Most people didn't have any time for that. Some worked, and went to school, and had kids, and they had no time for self-awareness stuff. Some people, they said, just didn't know there was such a thing as self-awareness. They just kind of lived out every day, and they never think about stuff like that. Some people, they said, just didn't care. Still I asked if self-awareness were that important, wouldn't everyone find or make time for that. If we are so essential to our selves, why not work at self-awareness even if you never heard the phrase? Why not?

In the first group to whom I addressed the question, one voice stood out. She said, "Because they don't want to find out."

That stopped the world. I asked, "You mean that they don't want to look for self-awareness because they don't want to learn more about themselves?" She agreed. "But why would they not want to find out more about themselves." To that, I got a long silence. "Are we saying that people don't want to find some self-awareness because they don't want to know about their self? Are people afraid of that they will find, and they would rather not know?" The student who brought up the idea answered. She said, "Yes." And it was very quiet for a while.

Then I thought out loud:

"Where do any of us get to if we don't want to know ourselves? Does that mean that in some very essential part of what we feel about ourselves, we don't like ourselves very much? Does that make any sense? Have you ever seen a two year old act as if she doesn't like herself? How do we learn such a thing?"

We decided then that we needed to look at how the self came to be.

## ***The genesis of self—August 2, 2011***

In order to look for the genesis of self, we wanted to know what we were looking for. We wanted to start with a working definition of the self.

Our first attempts reflected a very familiar pattern when we come to writing in general and when constructing a definition in particular. As students say it, "I know what I want to say. I just don't know how to say it." When we examine that statement more fully, generally we find that the true expression of this confusion sounds more like this: "I know how I feel. I just can't find the words to say it." This phrase can enlighten us a little in understanding how a meaning perspective can work.

We feel something very powerfully, and the very power and intuitive sense of that feeling causes us to act on that feeling. Such feelings do not encourage, actually rather discourage, any reflection on the feeling, any attempt to take the feeling and turn it into coherent thought or language. Even to try to do that would expose the feeling to reflection and examination. Turning a feeling into language often does that. We all believed almost instinctively we knew what a self meant, but we didn't think it. We felt it. Our meaning perspectives got in the way and tried to keep us from seeing beyond that perspective's limits of the self.

Our first attempts at definition tended toward the circular: "My self is who I am." Then the question becomes, "What is who you are?" The answer to that says, "I am my self." Another try worked like this: "My self is my identity." When we ask the next question, "What is your identity?" we answer, "My identity is my self." Such definitional attempts work well enough in algebra: if  $A = B$  then  $B = A$ . It doesn't help us understand the nature of the self or any other word. Our answers remain about our individual and isolated feelings alone.

When searching for or constructing a definition, we asked what we needed to say. Generally, we can see what something is by what that thing does. We need verbs. The self exists. We all agreed to that. If it didn't exist, it wouldn't need defining. It must exist independently, as a separate entity, so our definition had to make that independent nature of the self clear otherwise we would define something other than an individual being which was what we sought. The self exists: What does this entity do, we asked. It eats and sleeps and goes to work. It loves. It hates. It has fun. It gets angry. It laughs. It cries. So the self as a definable, independent entity exists to act. In order to act, it must perceive the world around it, take information from that world, use that information to choose how to act in the world, and act on that choice. After some other discussion, we added that the self must do all these things freely. If not freely, it loses independence and instead of an independent entity we have an instrument used by some other force; an object of manipulation not an independent being. In that sense coercion of any kind stands in direct opposition to the self.

In the end, we came up with this:

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and

acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility of those choices and results, and the process begins again.

However, the self doesn't spring into existence all by itself. It comes from a process of growing and interacting with the world around it. That process we wanted to look at next. In some sense, we found simply continued our question about ourselves. Why do we choose fear when we go to an interview which is all about our self? What's wrong with us, and when did we learn it?



## ***Where the self begins and a meditation—August 4, 2011***

We looked for the moment where the self begins, starts becoming. Many students placed that at a rather late point, somewhere after early childhood because they felt the early child didn't have the consciousness to work at the becoming self. Others argued that the development of that same consciousness is just as much a part of the becoming self as any other, maybe even more. They set the beginning of self much earlier. Of those, most finally settled at birth as the beginning of the self.

Many of the women who had lived through pregnancy and birth told stories about how the later fetus behaves. They said that they felt the self began becoming even then. The ones who had lived through the process more than once told stories about how one child carried way more differently than another. Even when the developing fetus comes from the same father, the patterns of development and behavior were radically different. Others spoke about how the way the development felt, how much movement, how much kicking and the like, predicted how the child would behave when born. Others told stories about how the child behaved completely differently than the behavior during the carry. Still others told a very different story. They centered on the responsibility of the mother and the people around her. They believed that all kinds of things influenced healthy development of the fetus in the child. They thought they needed to eat well, drink lots of water, listen to music that made for calm, keep inner and outer anger out of their feelings, avoid arguments, sleep well, as well as stay away from smoking (second-hand as well), drinking, and any other recreational substances. They believed that the external environment as well as the internal environment of the developing child had a powerful influence on the physical and emotional growth and well being of the fetus and the child to be born.

Writing about these ideas now, I see how admirable they are. It defines a very healthy way to live in many if not all aspects. Some of these mothers also spoke about their own spiritual health as well during pregnancy. Indeed, it strikes me that we all might conduct ourselves as if we are carrying a child, and the internal and external environment in which we choose to engage will have an influence on that being and our own.

Maybe that seeming metaphor holds more truth than I imagined. Without entering into a mind/body duality, we may well be carrying a developing whole being within our being. How beautiful that could feel. When we take care of our physical selves in terms of what we eat and ingest altogether, we foster a healthy inner environment. When we critically reflect on our meaning perspectives, we nurture our intellectual and emotional self. As we consider the nature of our being, we offer our spiritual self a chance to strengthen and grow. Even as the mother of a child ages as the fetus grows, so do we all age as the being within continues to grow and mature all of our lives. That our own becoming of a whole being can continue to become if we feed it, nurture it, and honor it as we age in our lives. As we grow older, which most of us see and feel as a diminishment of our physical selves, we can act in such a way that the being within, of the self within the being, continues to grow and mature but does not age in the sense that age equals illness and diminishment. That would seem like a remarkable if not miraculous idea and eventuality. We grow old and move toward our mortality while we grow as a youthful entity

becoming more and more our self as if that life of maturation and explication will continue to open eternally.

Where ever and whenever the self begins, it may serve as the start of a never ending becoming.

Finally, we settled on birth as the only beginning of self that we could make full sense out of for the purposes of our class.

## ***Early forces and the becoming self—August 5, 2011***

We settled on the moment of birth as the start of the becoming of a self because we had direct experience of that process. That came partly because most of us had heard that we learn more between zero and three years old than in any other time of life. It came partly because others factors that happen before birth were beyond our current ability to do much about in any way. Our genetic structure and our prenatal life were just set. We might be able to do something with what happened after.

We begin to learn about the world at birth. I am old enough to know my first experience of life came with cold, intensely bright lights, and a sudden whack on my buttocks. It was standard operating procedure into those days, and I can't remember or imagine how terrifying that must have felt to an entity that had existed in a kind of muted, sensory paradise. It's probably just as well that I don't remember.

What a way to come into the world. What a way to go out of the other life. What a way to begin for the becoming self.

That moment and the coming discussion about our earliest years brought me to remember a book I read in a very different context for a very different reason: *Smart Love: The Compassionate Alternative to Discipline That Will Make You a Better Parent and Your Child a Better Person*, by Martha Heineman Pieper and William J. Pieper. I decided to use it to center this early discussion of the becoming self. It fit.<sup>9</sup>

A baby is born, and we asked what it does for a living. Whatever we may assume about a baby's life, that person works as hard as or harder than any child or adult. When we consider all the brain work and confusion and discovery that baby must make to become a self, an active person, our minds recoil from the effort needed. Other than that endless learning and making sense out of the chaos of the world, giving the world form, it sleeps, it eats, it defecates, and it cries. Crying often makes for the most unhappy of times for the baby and for the caretaker.

Why does the baby cry? It feels a need, and it has no other way to communicate. Communication through crying certainly communicates need and, often, anxiety about that need. Actually, when we look at the whole idea of communication, it must start with need. Our needs may grow more complex as we age, so does our communication, but they remain needs.

What needs to does this baby feel? It needs food. It needs shelter. It needs physical care. It also feels another need which may not drive in the same way as the physical demands it feels, but in the long run, when it doesn't get this need satisfied, all the rest of the needs may come to little or nothing. When the baby does not receive what Carl Rogers calls "unconditional positive regard," what most of us call unconditional love, the child/baby's becoming self and developing person will falter to one degree or another. Such children fail to grow normally or develop generally. They may die. This was strikingly noticed in institutions that took care of all the physical needs of babies, but did not have the staff to take care of the emotional needs of these

babies. They "failed to thrive" as the technical phrase goes. This need for the unconditional care, emotional warmth feels as vital as or more vital than all the others. So babies cried even when they felt no physical needs. That cry is often very hard to answer.

The students and I decided that this phenomenon does not end with babyhood. That need remains within each of us always. We may not cry to get it met, but we find ways to try to express our need to others. Knowing that felt helpful in seeing how the self becomes and continues becoming. Becoming, we decided, never ends, nor does the need and desire for unconditional positive regard.

## ***Smart Love and the development of the becoming self—August 6, 2011***

In *Smart Love* we find the following observation. All babies are born optimists. They naturally expect the best will happen for them. In fact, whatever happens for them, they feel that experience is the best the world has to offer. It is the way things are meant to be. In other words, the baby arrives set to begin becoming a self by creating a spontaneous, unconscious, and permanently unquestioned meaning perspective about how the world is meant to work and how the self works with it.

A baby cries. If the child lives in a fortunate world, the cry will find a response, and the baby's needs will be met by her/his caregiver. The baby understands that the first cry worked, so when the need arises once again, the baby cries again. Once again the cry finds an answer, a need fulfilling response. This is really great stuff. Eventually, as many mothers told me, and I experienced some myself, babies express different cries for different needs. The main point here is that the baby's needs get fulfilled as much as humanly possible by the caregiver or caregivers. According to *Smart Love* that consistent fulfillment allows the baby to develop *inner happiness*.

When a baby holds the feeling and notion of inner happiness, it carries a very special meaning. It gives the universe around that child a very special form. The universe becomes a place where feeling good, feeling happy, is how the world works. It's simply built that way. When things don't go well, the child assumes that things will get back in order soon, and the child can deal with the temporary dislocation of needs and their response. The child feels it's natural when things go well and accepts with some equanimity when they don't knowing that a positive change will come. According to the authors, this attitude, meaning perspective in our terms, will last for a lifetime. Some students wondered if that sort of meaning perspective would make such a child, and adult, far too vulnerable to the bad things that are bound to come in life. When things get tough, these folks might crumble under the weight of hard times. The authors suggest the contrary. In their experience, sixty years between them, and in studies they cite, those with inner happiness show greater resiliency than others. They show strength in the face of adversity. They get through bad news because their orientation, their meaning perspective tells them that good news is coming, no matter how delayed. They can and do endure. They feel that others feel unconditional positive regard for them, unconditional love. They feel the warmth of the caregiver, and that makes the world a warmer place.

Those babies who do not get their needs consistently met develop *inner unhappiness*. That comes as a mirror image of inner happiness. Everything stays in the same place but reversed and still mirrored. These babies and children feel that happiness is feeling bad, deprived, a place where needs are often not met. The child feels uncomfortable when things go well because it means the world, in the form of their meaning perspective, is out of shape. They feel that feeling bad is their happiest state. Feeling good is temporary and dangerous. The attitude, this meaning perspective also lasts a lifetime. They feel that others offer, at best, conditional positive regard, conditional love. The world is cold and remains cold for a lifetime.<sup>10</sup>

## ***Middle school and inner happiness or not—August 7, 2011***

That realization asked me a question: How could I make it warmer for those I taught, or anyone for that matter, who live with a sense of inner unhappiness?

I came to *Smart Love* and these discoveries while teaching in a charter middle/high school. Most if not all of my students came to the school because the mainstream system didn't want them. The system failed these students, so the students failed the system. While working with them, I experienced a behavior that baffled me until I encountered *Smart Love*. I found them wonderful if troubled folks, and I would often comment on some intelligent comment or helpful behavior they contributed to class. Very soon after that positive recognition with praise, that person would breach in some way that encouraged me to respond negatively to them. Baffled about what to do, I came upon *Smart Love* in my search for something that would help them to allow me to openly like them, show them an authentic positive response, and avoid their negative response to my positive efforts.

I decided to simply talk to these middle school students about what I learned in *Smart Love* about inner unhappiness and leave it to them to choose how they would respond. I explained the way in which the idea of inner happiness and unhappiness worked. That drew questions and discussion especially whether that meant caregivers were to blame. I read that part about not blaming aloud, and said that thinking about this idea could help them become better parents if they wanted to do that. If they could overcome this meaning perspective for themselves, they could offer a new meaning perspective to their own children.

We also discussed what, if anything, someone can do about inner unhappiness. Could it be shifted from unhappiness to happiness? *Smart Love* asserts that people with inner unhappiness can make that shift. It happens when the person who feels inner unhappiness discovers that she/he can receive unconditional positive regard, is worthy of unconditional positive regard. Once aware of their need, they could do something themselves. They could make a choice. They could choose to offer such regard to others and, in the process, might feel it grow within them for themselves.

I said that I would make it a point to offer all of them unconditional positive regard. Frankly, I felt I had been working at that all along, but their new awareness and my current promise might have more meaning than what had happened before. Some students asked if that meant they could do anything that they wanted. That was a good question. Does unconditional positive regard mean open season on conduct? I answered that they always had that choice. They could do anything they wanted anytime—when they didn't care about the response to those actions. They could get punished, so that was meant to deter those sorts of decisions. However, they were right. Punishment doesn't argue for unconditional positive regard. If I say one thing, what can I do about the other?

I said that unconditional positive regard allows my expectations for each of them to rise quite high and keep rising. It also allowed me to accept their best as they went along. It also

encouraged me to express my disagreement with choices in conduct they made that did them or our class what I perceived as harm. In that spirit, I would take note of such negative choice so they could think about them. Unconditional positive regard includes offering awareness. It also says that I want to keep the action separated from the actor. If student A makes a bad choice, I see it as a bad choice not as a demonstration of student A as a bad person. If I see A as a bad person who does bad things, I probably will choose to punish A. If I see the choice as a mistake from a good person, then I reach for awareness. My perception told me, as I told them, that many people had confused them with their mistakes which made it very difficult to learn from those mistakes and make better choices in the future. In older people, inner happiness comes as a reciprocal process of regard, and we could engage in that together.

We did, and in many ways, life got better for us all. Did we still share problems in class? We did, but we also found ways of resolving them and making new choices after previous mistakes. By the end of the second semester, many remarkably fine things happened.

## ***Interactions with the world, caregivers and the becoming self—August 9, 2011***

All of those discoveries went into the adult interviewing class discussion about when the self begins and how the self is formed. We base this search for the self, the existential search for the self on the following working definition:

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, and the process begins again.

From the discussion in class at the middle school and our mental observation of the child at play, we realize that the becoming self learns and develops through interactions. Some of these interactions happen between the person and the material, the physical world. Many if not most of the most important and formative interactions occur with other human beings, other people who influence the way in which we see the world, the way we perceive the world in the first place. The first definable action of the self comes in the self's perception of the world. Everything follows from that perception and what the self chooses to do with it. Those personal interactions and influences go a long way in forming the perceptions we form of the world. These perspectives may result in meaning perspectives that can limit our relationship with our becoming self. Given their importance, we thought we needed to look at who those people were and are and how they affected our becoming self.

The interview students named anyone of a number of categories of those with whom we deal during our formative lives. The first and most powerful come with parents and/or caregivers. Other relatives came after that including and especially brothers and sisters. After that lots of other categories appeared: peers and friends, school (including daycare/preschool) and teachers, religious figures, police, role models of all kinds, and they often brought up the media as a powerful influence on them during formative and the current times of their lives.

No class had any trouble pointing to their parents and/or caregivers as the most important of all those categories, at least to their own minds and memories. Whether they felt appreciative of or aggrieved by those parents and/or caregivers, they all saw them as essential elements in the becoming of self. After we discussed the *Smart Love* notion of inner happiness and inner unhappiness, that importance loomed even larger. We all realized that even before the entity of the self becomes fully conscious of its self, our perceptions become formed even as we began our forming of the world through our perceptions.

Some asked what would happen to someone who held an inner unhappiness meaning perspective in an interview. Generally, we thought, it would seem harder for that person to present her/himself as well as possible given her/his comfort in the negative. On the other hand, it might make that person more relaxed because that person didn't have any high expectation. Other students discussed people they knew in their lives who seemed to show manifestations of inner unhappiness. Every time something good came up, those people would make something bad



happen—every time. The idea of inner happiness and inner unhappiness generally seemed very compelling to those students, as compelling as to the middle school students, and as it was for me. Whether we think about our self or not, we stake a great deal on our sense of self, and the idea that some part of that self is unknown to us can feel unnerving. Interestingly, that matched with the fearful way people approached interviews.

## ***Parents and/or caregivers and what we learn from them—August 10, 2011***

Still faced with the question and the burden of inner fear, of some essential unease with our self, we looked again at the forms of perception, the meaning perspectives that we can derive from our early life with our caregivers.

We asked, "What did our parents and/or caregivers do for a living? What did they do for us and our becoming self?" Many answered that such people offered love, support, nurturance, and guidance. We all agreed that sounded wonderful, but not everyone felt sure that's what happened to them, that these descriptors represented who and what they faced as they began to become a self.

We, as a becoming self, learn from our environment and especially from our interactions with others. Our parents and/or caregivers serve as the primary actors and focal points of such interactions and such learning. They teach us about the world and about ourselves. Many of us said they did that teaching mainly through language, but many also questioned that. Many said that whatever their parents said, they did something else. English even expresses that thought in a very old cliché: "Do as I say, not as I do." We all looked at that phrase which we all knew, and we realized how often the phrase pertains to parent/child relationships. Indeed, how it relates to the relationship between authority figures in general in their relationships with others.

My father told me, for example, in no uncertain terms not to smoke while he was smoking. He told me that even when the house we lived in reeked from smoke, and I accepted smoking and its smell as the norm from him and the world around me, even on television, in magazines, and in the movies. That made for very a confusing double bind. The voice and words of my father said, "Don't smoke." That came as a truth from my father. He smoked himself at the time, and that also came as an instructive truth about good behavior from that same source. As a child, what could I do with that? In my case, I followed the actions and not the words. Actually, most of us in the interview class agreed that as children we heard what they said, but we saw what they did. Most agreed they acted at some point on what they saw. One student said she knew just what we were talking about. She remembered that her mother came up to her at some point, grabbed her by the arm to turn her around, and said, "I'll show you what you get for hitting your brother." Her mother hit her—hard she remembered. She also remembered her confusion. She heard that hitting her brother was bad. She felt her mother hit her to show her the error of her actions. But the actions were the same. Her mother hit her, so what did she do with that? She said that she learned that hitting was good when you had the power to do so, and you felt you had right on your side. Of course, when she hit her brother, she had the power and felt she had right on her side. The question seemed to involve who had more power and when and in what sequence. Ultimately, she learned hitting was justified in some circumstances which the hitter got to define when the hitter held sufficient power.

Blaming children for exhibiting our behaviors might make very little sense when we take a careful look at our own behaviors. To paraphrase Gandhi, we can choose to act in the ways we want our children to act.

She thought it was a powerful lesson, and she felt very embarrassed because she still hit her children—not enough to really hurt them, she said, just to make her point clear. She also admitted that every time she hit a child, the child felt bad and she felt bad. We wondered why when everyone in a situation went away feeling worse for some interaction, they would also feel the interaction justified and worth doing again. Even though it didn't make sense as we looked critically reflected on it from a distance, it still formed part of that student's, and most students', meaning perspectives about relationships with children and others as well. That perspective came by way of thinking that we all have to learn to face up to the consequences of our actions. That's not just a meaning perspective. That's just true.

That's the nature of meaning perspectives—they go unquestioned and therefore feel true. They are always "just true."

## ***Distorted consequence as meaning perspectives—August 11, 2011***

The meaning perspectives our parents and/or caretakers enact and teach us imposes a form on the world and our relationship with it. They call it "consequences." When we accept "consequences" as a meaning perspective, it establishes a definitional power to that perspective and its demands. That power can dominate our becoming self and our relationship to the world to one degree or another.

The idea of consequences served as a usual and prevailing meaning perspective for what my students also called "discipline." It means that when we do something our parental figure doesn't like, when we violate something that the parental figure feels we should not violate, that figure imposes a negative response to that action. If we don't clean our room to the satisfaction of this figure, the figure denies us something we want. No clean room, no desert for dinner, and it's our favorite, too. That parental response serves as a meaning perspective about conduct and responses to conduct, but it doesn't necessarily make for a consequence as the word defines itself.

The word "consequence" defines itself quite well as language goes. Language can be very slippery stuff, but not quite so here. The prefix "con" generally works the same way as the word "with." The second part of the part of the word, "sequence" generally means things that happen or follow in order, one thing after another. When I say the word "consequence," I imply a natural order of things that follow one after another automatically and inevitably. If that's the case, no one need supply another person with a consequence because the consequence will come of its own accord, naturally as the way we see the sun appearing at the horizon at dawn as a consequence of the Earth's rotation.

As a very young child, we might experiment with stacking drinking glasses one on another to see if we can make a tower out of them as we can out of blocks. The experiment seems successful for a while until we stack one too high and the entire construction comes tumbling, crashing, and loudly breaking down. All that noise and broken glass come as a consequence of our adding one too many or misjudging the glass tower's stability, using glasses in the first place, and the splintered result serves as a consequence of our actions. The dread we feel when we see this consequence, our sense of responsibility and shear shock might also come as a consequence. Our parental figure appears, sees the mess, and begins to do whatever that figure sees as appropriate. The figure may shout. The figure may hit. The figure can demand we clean it up. The figure can forbid us the kitchen for a week. The figure can send us to our room. The figure can do anything the figure wishes, and it will mean the same thing, a denial of what we want most: unconditional positive regard.

The stacked, fallen, and broken glasses serve as a consequence. One thing follows the other as results that come from the natural forces at work. What the parental figure does is not a natural force. It's a choice. It's a decision the figure makes in order to prove a point to us about our actions. Our parental figure could choose understanding our need to experiment as a response. A child in such a position might even need comfort and an explanation of what happened.

One student began to cry as we discussed this. Bessie reported that her young son had broken his favorite toy, a fire truck, by standing on it. He wanted to ride it. Instead of a ride as a consequence of the standing, he wound up with a broken truck as the consequence. She said that she got furious. It was a very expensive toy. She shouted and told him to get to bed and stay there until she told him otherwise. She realized that she did not have to do that. Her action was no consequence. It was her choice. Consequences are not choices; they happen all by themselves. Her son had experienced the actual consequence, and he felt terrible already. His truck was broken and he broke it. She just made it worse. Through her actions, she told him that she didn't like him, as a result withdrew her unconditional positive regard, and that made things worse and more confused for him. She realized that she could have comforted him and explained to him the nature of what had happened, so he might make a different choice about how he treats some objects in the future. The point comes not in punishing over a past mistake but turning that mistake into a learning opportunity, so that he and we can make a new choice the next time around.<sup>11</sup> We get told we are supposed to learn from our mistakes. That's what we say. What do we do?

***The nature and mechanism of teaching and learning meaning perspectives —August 12, 2011***

Bessie's intuition brought her to the place where, as a parent, she knew how much she taught through her actions. Parental figures teach. They do. We do. From this discussion, we found that the kind of teaching differed and the message taught differed greatly depending on the type of teaching being done.

Most parental figures tell themselves that they teach primarily through language. That may well appear to be the manifest way they teach. They do use language. The latent way they teach and the latent message they communicate and teach may well be at great variance with what they think they are doing manifestly and want to do at all.

When our child does something we consider wrong, we act in a negative way to stop that action and prevent its reoccurrence at some other time. We think we do that with language in the same way we believe the consequences we make up as a preventative measure, "no desert," "go to your room," a swat with some force, and all that arsenal, actually communicates in a positive way to the child. It's a consequence after all, and children must know about the consequences of their acts to make sure they don't repeat those mistakes. However, the students and I discovered from the discussion above whatever we make up and choose to use as a consequence has no actual link to the action that motivates us as parental figures to make that choice. What then are we teaching if not consequence?

Before we can tell that, we need to see what we actually choose when we call something a consequence when it doesn't really work that way. It certainly doesn't feel that way to a child.<sup>12</sup> Many of my students remembered their childhood confusions in this regard. When we make that choice, no matter how gentle or non-violent we may think it is, it works as a punishment in the eyes and heart of our child. Whatever we choose as a consequence will always feel to a child as a withdrawal of or, even worse, the removal of unconditional positive regard. That removal, be it with the most gentle of punishments like time out or far more violent punishments, like a spanking, the child will always feel the terrifying sting of rejection. If any of us feel rejection, we certainly also feel a loss of unconditional positive regard. Once we see and feel that loss on the child's part clearly, we know that what we offer as teaching is not primarily through language; children don't hear much intellectually when they feel rejected. Our manifest choices for consequences actually and inevitably serve as punishments. If we punish in order to get obedience, because we certainly don't get understanding from a child who hurts, what can we understand as the latent but quite tangible point of this form of teaching?

Fear. When we teach with a method that we feel our child will not like, "to teach the child a lesson," we do so because we intuitively feel, and also remember from our past, that the child will remember the consequence and not do that disobedient thing again. When they fear the punishment, they won't do the thing that calls for punishment. That might work to some extent. Fear may produce a quality of obedience, but it may well produce many other effects that as the loving parental figures we actually feel we would never wish on our child.

### ***What makes for punishment—August 13, 2011***

If we know that effects of our consequences-cum—punishments cause harm to our children, why do we do it? We must have a higher cause of some kind that encourages us to do so. It's in our language in many ways: "This hurts me more than it hurts you—I am doing this to you for your own good" and the like. We feel the tension created by our acts toward our child, and yet we go ahead against not only our best judgment but our best instinct and intuition. Generally, people tell me they feel terrible after punishing their child. Of course, they often exclude the word "punishing" and use the word "disciplining." They also say it as an internal imperative, a demand to the self: "I had to discipline Frances this morning." They say it with a combination of determination, sadness, and regret. We might even sense some little resentment toward the child because if we *had to* punish little Frances; it happened because she made it happen through her conduct. All this gets very complex because we actually know intuitively that what we do in punishing hurts the child, and it hurts us as well.

We do it anyway—because we must. The unquestioned "must" has to come from somewhere. If it speaks to us as a "must," an incorrigible truth and demand, it speaks as a meaning perspective. We have not questioned or critically reflected on that essential form of truth even though empirically it makes everyone involved feel terrible. It comes from learning from our own parental figures. We learned it from them even when we were on the wrong end, when we were the child in question, the child on trial.

Many of us can remember our parental figure finding fault in us in some way. We might not have really understood the way in which we were at fault or why that thing was bad enough for what happens as a result. When the parental figure looms over us and does the discipline dance of one kind or another, we say to ourselves, "When I grow up, I will never do this to my child." Given how we feel at the moment, we really mean it.

Time moves forward, and we become the parental figure looming over our child whom we see as having breached in some way. What are we doing? The same thing as was done to us. Why do it now when we didn't like it then? As a child we often hear, "you'll understand this when you grow up." Do we? We repeat the pat phrases that try to explain the thing away. We act but don't know. That's why we act. We become our parental and punish. As an adult we feel we *have to* do something, and when we look into our ways of seeing the world and acting in the world, the only image we have is our parental figure. We act as a parental figure in the way that we have seen and experienced from our own parental figure because it's the only way we know how to act. And we *have to* do something. It's a meaning perspective that drives us to do what we do and punish even when we feel deeply troubled by it. Many people have told me that the child goes away crying after a punishment or part of the punishment, and they go away crying as well. Whatever else we learned from our parents punishing us, we learned how to punish our own children and that we *have to* do so.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Punishment as a means to a higher purpose—August 14, 2011***

Although many if not all of us find ourselves distorted by the idea and the act of punishing the child in our intimate care, we do it anyway. Our emotional sense of well being feels violated when we remove our unconditional positive regard from the child who trusts us to offer that care. When we remove that emotional tie from this needy young being, we must do something emotionally to ourselves as well. By changing our natural desire to offer unconditional positive regard, we distort some natural emotional response we feel to the vulnerable child and thus to ourselves. We need to change our self and our way of perceiving in order to act in a way contrary to our essential feelings.<sup>14</sup>

In that sense, we allow our intellectual self, driven by a parental meaning perspective, to dominate our natural emotional self. When we do that, we become driven by what this meaning perspective tells us to see as a higher, rationalist cause. Once we reach this rationalist state, we can overcome any negative emotional response we feel about inflicting pain on the young person in our care who trusts us to offer them the best the world has to offer. We can violate that child's desire for a fulfilled optimism and violate our own desire to offer them that fulfillment. We make ourselves feel justified in punishing the child in our care in order to discipline that child. Whatever name we want to use to rationalize our treatment of this vulnerable being, when we remove unconditional positive regard, we punish.

The parental meaning perspective tells us that we must teach our child discipline. In order to teach discipline to our child, we *have to* discipline the child for anything we feel violates our standard of conduct—even when we violate that standard ourselves on a regular basis. We do so even when that standard may appear and feel quite arbitrary and impossible to decode for the child because the standard can feel extremely erratic and uncertain.

Most of my students could remember a shift in parental standards that resulted in punishment. It can work like this. As a very young child, we develop a trick that delights everyone around, especially a parental figure. Whenever we want to get some happy attention, positive regard, we do the trick and it works. It maybe a funny face or a funny noise or both simultaneously, but it never fails to get a laugh and some regard. We get older and older, and one day we walk into the kitchen seeking some regard, and we do the trick. Our parental figure turns to us as says, "When are you going to grow up and stop making those stupid faces and making that stupid noise? Why can't you act your age?" As a child, we have no idea what happened, what motivated this incredible shift from positive regard to negative regard, but we feel it down to our shoes.

My niece grew very early, and at twelve, she was taller than I was at 5'10". She was also built quite heavily. She also felt like a very playful twelve year old. When she manifested this playfulness, she often heard some say, "Please act your age." She was acting her age. She wasn't acting her size. The instruction felt like rejection. It hurt. She and I talked it over, and she understood, but the understanding did not heal the pain. It explained it, but it still hurt.

Rejection hurts no matter the intention.



## ***The dominator model<sup>15</sup> and discipline—August 15, 2011***

All this hurt, all this pain, and what do we want the child, the becoming self to learn out of all this. According to the above, we want the innocent child to learn discipline. When we say "discipline," we do so confidently, but we may not think about what it may mean, especially in this context. If we act on something as seemingly vital as this, something that takes effort and denies our natural, emotional revulsion, we might consider whether we act out of an unconscious meaning perspective and not from an idea we hold after some reasonable critical reflection.<sup>16</sup>

My students had trouble finding what they meant by discipline although they used the word with confidence at first. That sort of thing happens quite a lot when we someone has the courage to ask us what we mean by a certain word. We feel that we know the content and meaning of a word we use, but we also find that we struggle to give our felt or emotional meaning a clear linguistic expression.

One expression of the idea about discipline comes straight out of a dominator model meaning perspective. Our internalized sense of the dominator model of seeing the world and responding to it speaks very loudly about how we treat our children and each other even when it does everyone involved a good deal of harm.

Silvia, she and I are married, had a roommate in college called Farzaneh (which means "wise" in Farsi). Farzaneh had a boyfriend. When she made a statement about the world, or asked a question about the world, the boyfriend would answer: "This is the way it is, Farzaneh." That settled it. The dominator model serves as the boyfriend, and all the rest of us exist as Farzaneh. The dominator defines the world, and we just listen and believe even when the dominator changes "the way it is" to another "way it is" as soon as the very next day. George Orwell fiercely depicts the utopian extent of the dominator model in *1984*. Newspapers in this world print news that contradicts the reality of experience or even of yesterday's news. The dominator maintains a "memory hole" to dispose of any real information that disproves the dominator reality of the immediate time. One way the dominator expresses its complete domination comes in getting the protagonist, Winston Smith, to not only agree that two and two equal five but to deeply and completely believe, even see that imposed reality as absolutely undeniable, that two plus two equals five. In the end, the dominator creates an environment wherein Smith feels he has no choice but to love the dominator—Big Brother.

When we find ourselves acting in ways that we know to serve some higher purpose that we cannot fully express, we might look for the dominator model working unquestioned inside us to see if the higher purpose is not higher at all.

Teaching and learning discipline may well represent such an internalized dominator meaning perspective. Discipline, in the dominator context, means to teach us to follow orders, to obey a higher authority without question. For some, that might seem an acceptable definition of discipline toward children. We just want them to do what we say. At their age and development, we feel we know so much more, know so much better how life is lived, we just want them to

learn to follow our orders until they can make orders of their own. After all, that makes for a peaceful home and well behaved children, something most people admire, at least from the outside. Parental expression of dominator discipline may well have served as a primary meaning perspective for a very long time. Indeed, people often use one of our most well known and repeated myths about the beginning of human life, the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Man, to validate dominator discipline and punishment. From this way of forming reality, we learn a meaning perspective about obedience. We must all obey the higher authority, the parental figure, or suffer punishment as determined by that higher authority.

This dominator way of seeing reality and relationships has generally held much sway for endless years, time out of mind, but it doesn't fit the definition of the self we constructed:

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility for those choices and results, and the process begins again.

The dominator/hierarchical/patriarchal model denies the essence of this definition and thus the essence of the becoming self. It denies the entity its independence, its freedom of perception, of choice, and of action. Without that independence, the becoming self has limited or no access to a direct perception of the world, and all the processes that follow are denied. The self is not a self but a kind of simulacrum, an extension and continuation of the dominating force. That's what many claim the Edenic myth tells us about the nature of existence and of human life. The original sin is disobedience to the divine parental figure who has punished humanity ever since. We can use our definition of the becoming self to choose to make an independent perhaps individuating interpretation of that myth that better supports the construction, the form of reality and self in which we choose to believe and which also feels proper and liberating. In such an interpretation we can find some of the essence of independence, autonomy, and individuation. That's our choice.

## ***The myth of the Fall and Eve as hero—August 16, 2011***

In the Garden of Eden myth, in the King James Version from which most of us hear the story, God creates Adam as child to the divinity.

God creates a woman as a "help meet" for him: Eve. She too serves as the child of the parental God. In the time after their creation, as with our own babies, they have little true sense of self. As does a baby at the breast, they exist as extensions of God the parental figure not as independent and conscious beings. The biblical God establishes the structure of paradise and the human place within it in the following:

"2:16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: 17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

The parental figure, God, denies Adam and Eve, the totally dependent children, access to the possession and power of the parental figure, the knowledge of good and evil which is an essential element in awareness and consciousness. When we read, "2:25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed," we read a definition of a quality of innocence, the quality of unawareness, a lack of self-consciousness. The parental quality of the knowledge of good and evil feels desirable to the growing children because they feel within themselves, as we all do, the desire to become a self. A self and exists as an entity because it attains a state of awareness and consciousness. Even though the parental figure denies we have or perhaps will ever have the maturity to deal with such knowledge, we feel the desire to know the fullness of reality and thus ourselves by becoming a conscious and aware self. Inevitably, Eve and Adam reach out as we all reach out of the paradise of the innocent being into the knowledge that will allow our self to begin to form the becoming self. "3:6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat."

The children experience two emblematic moments they had not experienced before: "2:7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons." If their eyes were opened we can reasonably derive that their eyes were closed before. Assuming the use of metaphor, we generally understand the "eyes closed" metaphor as unawareness. Their eyes closed to awareness may serve as a form of innocence, but it also serves as a barrier to the becoming self. Adam and Eve become aware of the world external to themselves even as they become aware of themselves. At that moment, they are not God the parental figure but separate beings, entities with an identity and a story that will exceed the limitations of their life of complete and utter, unaware innocence. They also know that they will die which had always been their eventual fate. It is at this point, they feel the alienation of such a state, and cover themselves from eyes outside their own.

Of course, the God knows, as all parental figures seem to know, that the children have violated the parental figure's dictum. Frankly, all dressed up in fig leaves and nowhere to hide is a very strong clue as to what has gone on. The rest comes naturally. From the achievement of consciousness comes an awareness of human alienation and suffering. They become excluded from the dubious paradise of unconsciousness in which all humans begin, and they enter the adventure and painful work of living their own lives. They have separated from the parental paradise and moved into the living world in which they make conscious choices and acts. Their lives and their selves have begun to come into being. They have realized their becoming selves.

This story of the shift from innocence into awareness replicates in the lives of almost all parents and children. The story of Adam and Eve, in which she embodies the heroic desire for consciousness, serves as a call to all parental figures for understanding and acceptance instead of the justification for parental judgment and rejection "for the good of the child." This myth of original parenting can show us that we have no need to punish. We might choose instead to offer comfort to the newly becoming and alienated children who suffer the actual consequences of awareness. They will find joy, and they will, most assuredly, find sorrow. We can serve as co-celebrants for the former and consolers for the latter. As parental figures, we can offer as much joy as possible to the child or children in our care and support them through the pain they experience, as do we, when they make choices that make for painful consequences. We can do that for them through our unconditional positive regard. In that way, they may well learn from their mistakes.

## ***The Garden myth and its renewal in us all—August 17, 2011***

The Garden of Eden renews with the birth of every child. These innocent entities enter the world from a relatively perfected place, the womb, and when they enter, they still feel bound inextricably to the person of that paradise, the mother. Indeed, each child enters the world as an extension of the mother, a parental figure as all encompassing as God to the baby. This closeness finds expression in the often expressed beauty of simply holding and cherishing the baby to the even more intimate and unity produced and experienced by breast feeding. There exists a kind of melodious hum, a mutual resonance between mother and baby which makes for a kind of paradise of absolute oneness.<sup>17</sup> Such an oneness holds its beauties, but it also denies the baby the possibility of entering into the process of the becoming self. The paradise of the newborn and the mother must come to an end for the newborn to begin to express itself as an independent entity.

The end comes naturally and, for most, shockingly at an age the many people call "the terrible twos." Somewhere around two years old, the sweet innocent child looks toward the parental figure, often the mother, and says, "No." The exact situation doesn't matter as much as the word matters, word itself in its fully extended meaning. When this sweet, cute, adorable child says the word, "No," she/he says it by way of expressing separation. This reenacts the "No" spoken by Eve. Eve and Adam disobey the edict of the parental figure and eat of the tree. In that "No" to God, they say "yes" to the self, so they can enter into the process of becoming a self. When they say, "No, I am not you," they move beyond a negation of the previous intimate relationship into an assertion of individuation which will open them to a new relationship with the parental figure when that figure will open to that relationship. Adam and Eve said and almost every child says "No" not in denial but in needed separation. In doing so, they all say "Yes" to the affirmation of the becoming self and a possibly renewed, now conscious, loving relation with the parental figure and the world. In that way, they open themselves to the exchange of unconditional positive regard that can only come with consciousness and some degree of independence.

When a child in our lives says her/his Edenic equivalent of, "No," we will want to make a very conscious choice about how we respond. If we ascribe to the well known cliché of the "terrible twos," we will choose to see this "No" as a kind of shocking insubordination, a betrayal of the previous child/parent relationship and a violation of the authority of that parent. We can choose to hear this as a rejection of everything we felt worthwhile and loving thus far, and such a choice, to feel rejection, will result in hurt and a sense of diminished power which will trigger defensiveness, anger, and a need to reestablish hierarchical rectitude through some immediate and often upsetting action. We withdraw our unconditional positive regard through some form of "consequence," and "discipline," which come to just plain punishment.

In that we teach the child in our care with every action in which we engage, we can always ask ourselves about what we teach in any given action. When we punish a child for expressing the self through saying, "No," we teach this beginning, becoming being that any real expression of self, of difference from the parental figure is, in some very essential way, just plain wrong. When the child internalizes this sense of wrong, it can become a meaning perspective which will limit

the vision of that child permanently until they question that perspective and transform it. That seemed to my interview class students part of their shared fear of self-awareness and the interview. They knew themselves to be essentially "wrong" in their independent selves, and they feared exposure of that wrongness.

That first real "No" is formative." Do we really want to deny the right to difference and to the becoming self at such a moment? Is that what we really want to teach?

### ***When "No" becomes an affirmation of self—August 18, 2011***

That first and formative, "No," comes from a child who must tell us, "I am not you." The child does so, and must do so, in order to begin to tell her/his own story of becoming self based on her/his own story out of experience and awareness. At this point, the child enters into the description and process of the becoming self.

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility of those choices and results, and the process begins again.

The child entrusted to us looks to us to help make this definition come to life. The child expresses her/his need to attain an independent status. This eventual independence serves as the supposed goal that we, as caregivers, want the child to realize. This is what we say we mean to teach them, yet at the moment this teaching really can begin, we may deny the right of that child to make her/his entrance into individuation and the becoming self.

This tiny, highly dependent being speaks the "I am not you" to us in a simple "No." In this brief and significant utterance, we can hear what we choose to hear. That "No" can and often does offend us because as an adult we can and often do feel we deserve some quality of respect the child's "No" seems to violate. The word "insubordinate" comes to mind. We can also choose to hear it as a simple yet complex statement of independence: "I am not you." We can also hear and see the unspoken yet tangible need of the child: "And now that I am not you, I need you all the more to support and guide me and offer me even more unconditional positive regard." It is at this moment we are first challenged to offer unconditional positive regard completely because this is the first moment in which we feel the child has separated from us. Before such a separation, we felt it perfectly natural to offer all the positive regard we wanted because we experienced the child as very much of an extension of ourselves. When the child makes us acutely aware of its separateness as a being, we must now become aware of the actual meaning of unconditional positive regard.

If we wish to achieve such a consistent practice, we must accept the child, the becoming self, in the face of what can appear as resistance to us as parental figures and choices on the child's part that seem like unacceptable divergences from what we feel as the right and proper structure to the world and in our adult lives specifically. Simply and clearly stated, the child speaks: "No! No, No!" and, "Love me! Love me! Love me!" simultaneously. As parental figures offering unconditional positive regard, we accept both.

In the mainstream interpretations of Eden, God sees Eve's act and Adam's complicity in that act as insubordination, and the punishment follows. From a less dominator meaning perspective, we can see the Fall quite differently and compassionately. The wondrous gift and power of consciousness secured by Eve and then Adam comes with its consequences. When they become

aware of themselves, they become aware of their not-being everything else in the Garden, and their not being at one with the Divine. They experience alienation. They become aware of the reality of life circumscribed by the inevitability of death. When they ate of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, they did indeed discover their own deaths. Eve and Adam leave Eden because they have demanded that they leave when they spoke the "No" of affirmation toward their becoming selves. The Divine does not abandon them as the rest of the Bible tells the mythic tale. In that way we must continue our support of the children who speak the "No" of affirmation to us. When out of the Eden of their infant time, they deeply need our support. Children don't mean insubordination any more than Eve and Adam. They mean to actively participate in making order and form of the world as did the child with the many faceted toy. They intuitively if not instinctively seek some measure of individuation. They do not mean to deny respect to their parental figures and caregivers even when what they choose to do can feel insubordinate.

When we question a word, "insubordinate" in this case, we may find in that questioning brings us to the meaning perspective that such a word may represent. The core of the word, "ordinate" specifies a linear idea of order. Everything comes in a line and each point in such a line has its designated place in that line. "Sub" assigns a point in such a line that is below, less, dominated by another point in that "ordinate" (easy to think of the word "order" here in many manifestations). "Subordinate" dictates what position someone or something takes in a linear, seemingly orderly line of progression of power in relationships. The word "subordinate" typifies the hierarchal and deadening structure of the dominator model. Our adult meaning perspective about familial relationships defines those relationships as linear, and in that line of power relationships, children are sub-ordinate to us as the adult or parental figure. If we hold to that perspective, and a child speaks the alienating "No," we will see or feel such a statement as "in (not) -sub-ordinate." The child takes her/himself out of the appropriate line of familial power relationships: not-below-our point-in the proper linear progression of family power. Once we identify what the child has said or done as insubordinate, we may choose to feel we *have to* punish that child to restore order which is certainly for our good as the parental figure, and the child must remain in the proper place in the line of family power for her/his own good. We will punish for the good of the child first and our sense of order as well. As the expression goes, we have to "keep that child in line."

That brings us back to the examination of what we teach when we punish to keep children and others in line. We teach fear.



## ***Punishment and teaching right from wrong—August 20, 2011***

When most of the interview classes arrived at this point, many voices of protest spoke passionately against the idea of teaching from and through fear. They stressed that any parental figure felt and had the responsibility to teach children the difference between right and wrong. We all agreed that teaching such a thing would seem of the highest importance, and if children understood the difference between right and wrong, it would help them immeasurably to live better lives. Parents would do whatever they needed to do to make that happen, and this really was for the child's own good—the higher good at whatever the cost.

General assent followed, so I asked the question that followed naturally. We had established that parental figures taught the children in their care the difference between right and wrong, and we were all grown children. In that case, we would all know the difference between right and wrong. So I asked, "What is the difference between right and wrong?" Silence followed. Sometimes we would hear about specific instances of what was right and wrong: "It's wrong to hit people" for example. However, we had already seen that parents who punish make exceptions to that absolute whenever the parental figure felt the need. Besides, the idea of knowing the difference between right and wrong generally made it possible to always have a standard on which to base conduct, something to fall back on in any situation. Specific instances of right or wrong don't do that for us because something new will always come up. Besides, specifics don't make for understanding and for independent action. Generally when we discussed the idea further, we arrived at relativistic or situational definitions of the difference. It's something people decide for themselves based on cultural or societal circumstances. In other words, we all just make it up pretty much as we choose.

That being the case, what in the world do we teach children when we teach them right from wrong and why go through all that stress when it's ultimately rather arbitrary? Whatever else was true, we began without any working definition of such ideas. Mostly students seemed sort of unnerved by a lack of standard. If they didn't know, why did they feel they did? If they didn't know, what were they teaching the children entrusted to them?

We discussed the idea, and we came to some general if difficult ideas. The difference between right and wrong comes in the results of the thinking and the actions that come from that thinking. Right and wrong comes from intentions and results. This rather fit our working definition of the self:

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility of those choices and results, and the process begins again.

That brought us back to the idea of consequences. Right and wrong show in their results. When things turn out well for all those involved, we have something shown to be right in intention and action. If it does not turn out well for all involved, although our intention was positive, our

action shows it as wrong.<sup>18</sup> If we could intend to do the right thing and accurately anticipate the consequences of our actions, we might have a chance at choosing the right from the wrong. We see our intentions work causally on our actions and possible or inevitable results. If we understand that much, we might feel we can teach something to our children that they would find useful, think about our actions in terms of their outcomes on ourselves and others. We can say that this idea relates to the Golden Rule and Silver Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you, or do not do unto others what you would not have them to do to you.<sup>19</sup>

If we wish to teach the idea of the difference in right and wrong to the children in our mindful care, we all agreed that we would want to practice it. If we were to think about the Golden Rule with children, before we act in punishment, we would ask ourselves if we would welcome the action about to be taken. What would we feel about such an action? What would we learn from such an action?<sup>20</sup> We might find that such internal reflection and questioning suggests we find another way of responding to a child's mistakes. If we know we would not learn through punishment and the fear it produces, why would we believe that the children who trust us to offer unconditional positive regard would learn through punishment and fear? If we did not feel punishment and fear served our own good, a child would not as well.<sup>21</sup>

What influence would this unwanted punishment have on a developing, becoming self? What results would come from such a fear based and fear producing process?

## ***On the nature of behaving—August 21, 2011***

These questions always stimulated a good deal of energy of one kind or another during interview class discussion. Often that energy continued to deny that we parental figures teach through fear to create fear. "I love my little Charlie, and I don't want him to feel fear. I just want him to learn how to behave." That's an interesting phrase. We all know how to behave, every living being behaves. Plants behave in a certain way in response to the environment. Animals behave in certain more complex ways in response to their environment. When we are born, we behave as a new born behaves. Parental figures seek a specific kind of behavior which they believe, according to meaning perspectives they developed growing up and living in the dominator model, manifests the right sort of behavior, one that satisfies the parental sense of right behavior. Such demands for behavior express a need to impose a forceful introduction onto the becoming self of the child to the dominator model by which we all generally live.

This model forms a structure in which people within it display only two forms of essential behavior. We either dominate others, make them a means to our end, or we obey that domination; we submit to a subordinate status become a means to some else's end. In such a system, almost everyone operates in both roles, both meaning perspectives. As a parental figure, I get dominated by many forces, especially the meaning perspectives I have internalized, and I also get to dominate others, generally the children that have become part of my life. As we noted before, we subordinate ourselves to the dominating order as we find it, or we attempt some form of insubordination, a punishable crime. When we in-sub-ordinate, we place ourselves outside the law of domination. We become an out-law. Such a person threatens the dominator model in many ways and exposes weaknesses of that model by simply existing. Outlaws must be controlled. Given that we are all born free of the idea of domination, we are all born as *de facto* outlaws whom parental figures must control until we internalize that control. That begins with our obedience, our submitting ourselves as completely as possible to our subordination to another, our parental figures and caregivers.

Meaning perspectives form an internal structure of right and wrong. We do not question them. We are scarcely aware of them. And we believe in down to the ground with the kind of passion that comes only from something deeply felt and which dominates the way we see and form reality. If we form reality in such a way, and someone else does not, that other becomes an outlaw to our passionately held meaning perspective, our form of reality. When we feel the presence of an outlaw, we can feel very threatened because we have no real answer to the outlaw perspective. We feel what we feel is right and if the other, the outlaw, doesn't feel what we feel, the other is wrong in some essential way and feels dangerous to our deeply held meaning perspective of reality.

Every child enters the world as a potential if not actual outlaw.

We come into the world without knowledge of any meaning perspective about behavior. In that sense, we do enter the world innocent, untainted by any specific meaning perspective, any construction of reality. We enter as someone unaware of dominator models and any meaning

perspectives that restrict our behavior. We cry and expect the world to respond. It will, but it may not respond in ways that help us in becoming a full expression of our becoming self.

The world tells us that we must behave. As with outlaws, when we don't behave, show the discipline that keeps us within the meaning perspective the world defines, we get punished. Punishment comes as the raw form of domination. Such raw domination through punishment asks us to learn nothing but submission by endless and internalized obedience. The dominator model does not care if we learn that through understanding. It doesn't explain itself much anyway. Those who answer to an unquestioned meaning perspective generally don't understand that perspective. They feel it and see through its lens, but they don't understand. They don't have to. It's just true. Dominators don't explain; they dominate. If the first level of domination doesn't work, they dominate in the same way—harder.

Domination takes the form of punishment. Punishment is not consequence. It doesn't follow from an action logically or as a matter of course. It is arbitrary. It happens one day and may or may not happen the next. Punishment comes down on the punished, on the outlaw, in unpredictable and often seemingly irrational ways. Its purpose is not to educate about the nature of the punished act. Its purpose is to promote fear in the punished. The dominator seeks obedience through a fear of punishment. If we fear punishment because of the pain it caused us, we may not act in the same way again to avoid that punishment. We obey because we fear. What punishment teaches is fear, and if we learn, that's what we learn. If we learn irrationally, our obedience is also irrational. We can irrationally respond to fear in many ways. Indeed, we have no way to respond to fear rationally. Fear by its nature is not rational. In that very irrationality, it makes a powerful instrument in creating meaning perspectives. If that meaning perspective always takes the form of obedience, the dominator might feel satisfied, at least to some degree. However, once we have entered into the irrational, and punishment and the fear it produces are irrational, the product of this irrationality happens outside of domination. No matter how powerful, the dominator may find it impossible to dominate the irrational response to its own acts of irrationality. Once we fear, an irrational state, anything can happen.

When we learn through fear, we may learn things, meaning perspectives that are at variance from the dominator's intention. Oddly that still may not encourage us or allow us access to becoming a full expression of self. We almost inevitably find the freedom of choice we need to become fully our becoming self denied to us even when we do not obey.

## ***Responses to fear and rejection—August 22, 2011***

As parental figures, we choose to punish the child in our care because we feel that it will teach the child a valuable lesson about life and how to live it. This may not come as a fully developed, entirely conscious choice because of the prevalence of meaning perspectives that motivate or drive our actions. If a choice and action stems from a meaning perspective, we feel but not decide that choice, or we feel a compulsion to make that choice without any questioning or critically reflecting on that choice. Given the severity of such a choice, we might think that we would give it full consideration when we make it. That happens rarely if ever. Very few students and others have told me that they could hit their child, "in cold blood." Indeed, most people have told me, "If I didn't feel angry, I would *never* hit my child." That being the case, I wonder how many choices we think it wise to make when angry. Our choices made in anger tend to work badly in terms of consequences. When what we do to any person who trusts us and needs us holds the utmost importance, we might stop to think about the consequences of the choices we make in anger. This holds true especially for children in our care. Except that we feel angry. When we choose when angry, we don't think. That's a central part of the anger deal. We feel a rush of justification for an act we might otherwise not do, but we also feel quite stupid and choice-less at the same time.

In any case, we want or need obedience. We choose to act. We choose to punish. We choose to teach from fear and through fear. What happens? What does the child, the becoming self do in response?

Whatever else the child chooses, obeys or not, the child will feel fear and will feel rejection. That will happen. Her/his choices will find a powerful basis from those two very real, very tangible emotional realities in that child's being. Given that a child feels trust and wants to feel unconditional positive regard, feelings of fear and rejection create an incalculable impact on that child whatever the choice that follows.

The child may choose to obey.

As parental actors, that's what we think we want or, better, what we feel we want. Does the child agree with the submission she/he has displayed? Did this obedience bring with it a joyful learning about life and how it's lived? My students reported that the children they had known did not show any agreement or acceptance of some lesson. They obeyed and sulked in the process. They offered half-hearted (although students tended to exemplify this with another part of the body) efforts that generally satisfied no one.

One student ordered her child to clean up his room, or she/he would feel the wrath of the parent as a result. How that wrath demonstrated itself doesn't matter so much as the child will feel that wrath, that anger as rejection and a very powerful if not, at least momentarily, a complete withdrawal of unconditional positive regard.<sup>22</sup> In the throes of coerced acceptance, the child worked incredibly hard at getting as little done as possible.

Her/his room was littered with many, many wooden blocks. The child also used a box to keep them in. The blocks were a major part of any clean-up. The child choose to leave the block box in the closet, walk over to one block, pick up that one block, slowly walk back to the block box, and very deliberately and loudly throw the block in the box. At no point did the child overtly disobey, get at all insubordinate, but she/he came as a close as possible. The student reported that when she complained, and the child responded by saying that she/he was cleaning her/his room just like she/he was told. This agonizing foot-dragging procedure could go on for a very extended period. That slow pace could produce something like, "Alright, I will help you," from the parental figure, or it could produce another threat of punishment or an immediate punishment which might get faster obedience but would exacerbate every other aspect of the situation.

## ***Self-blame and doubt as a response to fear and rejection—August 24, 2011***

Whenever any of us live through a traumatic experience, any experience that involves fear and a sense of rejection and powerlessness, we can respond by forming a meaning perspective or meaning perspectives derived from that experience. Fear and powerlessness can make a demand on us to make sense or form out of the chaos those feelings make of the world around us. We feel we must find a cause for this disruption of our lives. This happens most especially in children. In a fearful and powerless moment, a child might feel that that the fault for the situation belongs with her/him. That explains things without blaming a beloved parental figure. She/he can come to believe that she/he has little value as a self and only finds personal value in following the will, the domination of others. In this way, the child hopes for some level of approval, at least something akin to unconditional positive regard even if highly conditional. The same child could also follow demands but do so with an uneasy feeling of resentment and denial of the self she/he would like to feel valued but does not when dominated.

Both responses stem from the same source and both show the same inner turmoil although the external behavior may differ. Both responses feel like a lessening of their sense of their becoming self. It may be that the becoming self finds limitations inherent in a meaning perspective that speaks of personal failure and/or general incompetence. The child in question may not know such words, but that child can certainly feel those feelings and feel them as deeply and globally as only a child can. Doubting ourselves in our first steps in our immediate community of personhood, feeling any sense of failure will exacerbate any other negative situation that child faces as that child grows older. She/he may feel the blame always belongs to her/him. She/he can feel essentially failed and even more fearful of exposure to others. This was not something my students thought wise to bring to an interview or to life in general.

As our interview class discussed the possible consequences of punishment, a withdrawal of unconditional positive regard, our class realized that whatever we desire from an action, however powerfully we want that outcome, we could not control the consequences. The less we understood about why and how we acted, the less and less influence we had on consequences. Most of us recognized that we punished out of a meaning perspective we were taught. We learned it from our parental figures.

Most of my students can remember a time in her/his life when their parental figure loomed over them to perform some familial version of punishment. No one who remembered enjoyed remembering. They all felt really bad about that moment, and it had stayed with them all. Often, they asserted, they didn't really know what caused them to get punished. All they knew, remembered knowing, was their parental figure, the person they most trusted, showed anger at them and dislike for them.

In that spirit of rejection and pain, they all decided that when they grew up, they would *never* do such a thing to the child or children that came into their life. Everyone meant it down to the ground and back up again. They meant it until, they confessed, they were the parental figure facing the child in a breach of conduct. All of a sudden, they became their mother, or father, or

caregiver. They disliked the child. They punished the child, and the child felt as they had felt—rejected, disliked, and bereft of unconditional positive regard. All these children felt the loss of love. The students asked each other and me why they did what they did to that child. Why did they betray their own promise, their own memory of injustice and hurt? We discovered the answer. They found themselves in a situation with a child where they felt a powerful responsibility to act like an adult, a parental figure. Each felt the need to act, to do something. Each looked into themselves for the response to that need to act, and they found—mother, father, caregiver. Every parent feels the need to do something at such times. In lieu of anything else to do, they acted as they had learned to act. Each had said, "I will not do the thing done to me." The problem came in trying to "not do" something when we feel we must do something. So when the time came, they felt that had to act, and they took the only action they knew. They became the punishing parent, and it felt terrible.

That feeling could serve as a critical moment of cognitive dissonance. All of a sudden, we realize that we feel and believe one way and act another. Sometimes we recognize at such a moment, that we hold one belief, "I want to give my child unconditional love," and at the same time, feel and believe, "I must punish this child for what she/he did," and at the same time think, "I hate to do this. I feel terrible at the way my child reacts to this." Out of such conflict, we might even get angrier at the child making the spiral of dissonance go up on notch. When we recognize this cognitive dissonance as a signal for critical reflection, we can question the act in which we have engaged. That leads us to the meaning perspective behind that act, and we get to question that meaning perspective for the first time. Once we understand the nature of that perspective, we can form a conscious perspective of our own. We can make a new choice about how we feel, how we respond, and how we act. This empowers us to see any situation from a new perspective, and that perspective leads us to feel the power of our ability to choose how we respond to this or any situation.

When we make a choice about our action, we will also find ourselves operating in the way we saw and defined a self operating.

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility of those choices and results, and the process begins again.

Once we critically reflect on that meaning perspective, we can invent a new choice to the situation and practice that as a mental event until it actually occurs. Instead of trying *not to* respond and act in some habitual way, we will have chosen to use a new a conscious way to respond and act. We may not get it completely right when the event actually happens, but we will then experience the freedom of our choice and action and will feel empowered to make a new choice and invent a new action depending on the result of our freely chosen action and our learning from it. Actions from meaning perspectives offer no choice and always repeat.

When we free ourselves from a meaning perspective, we learn from the first choice we make and act to make that choice better the next time. Actions from free choice can always be improved. Actions from meaning perspectives never change unless they get worse.



Acting out of a parental meaning perspective disallows any real sense of the consequence of our actions. As a meaning perspective, punishment breeds many consequences, unwanted like the so-called side effects of medicine and drugs. These consequences happen and do damage.

## ***The meaning perspective influence of internalized fear—August 25, 2011***

Many classes commented on what they saw and felt were the unwanted effects or consequences of acting from the punishment meaning perspective and when we teach from and through the power of fear. It's the meaning perspective and the power that as a society we see as beneficial when it comes to dealing with those who have breached against it. We put people into prisons. These institutions function as places of punishment and of learning, no doubt, and the skills learned only augment the perspectives already held by those how go to prison and what got them in prison in the first place. As a society, we seem to expect that threatening everyone with prison acts as a deterrent to people committing crimes. If people fear prison, they will not breach the law. They will obey. The recidivism rate in the United States argues against that as a reliable premise. Fear doesn't keep people from committing acts that bring them to prison for many reasons, and if it changes behaviors, it often does so for the worse. Fear works in similar ways in the children who depend on us for reasonable and responsible actions.

Most of my classes established learning how to feel afraid, internalizing fear, came as the first of the lessons, the meaning perspectives, learned through fear that punishment produces. We might consider that a two edged result. On one edge, we find a child who feels saddened by life generally, the sheer joy that we wish them (and all of us for that matter) to find in life disappears. It becomes replaced by a wariness about life and about the acceptance of the self in the world and within themselves as well. On the other edge, another punishment engendered common meaning perspective speaks. The child will accept that newly implanted state of attention through submission as regrettable but acceptable. After all, as that perspective tells us, people gain only through loss. In this case, the child may lose a certain kind of childish joy, but the child has learned the power of good behavior and will keep away from inappropriate acts. The second edge supports the meaning perspective of the first edge and justifies the consequence of that perspective in action. Although it has an unwanted consequence, a repression of the becoming self in the child, we accept that consequence as part of the greater good of the child. We are doing it for the child's good.

However, the sense of fear does not strike the child only when the child plans on some questionably nefarious behavior. The fear may come when the child takes almost any action. This sense of generalized fear will feel at a lower level sometime and a higher level at others, but the fear will form a part of nearly every, if not all, new actions. Every action that the parental figure has not specifically approved will cause fear and apprehension in child as a child and, perhaps, for all the years to come.

One student in an English class came to my office and told me that she couldn't be creative. She explained that her father taught her not to do anything unless he specifically approved of it. If she acted creatively, did something for the first time, she couldn't know what he would think, so she couldn't act in such a way. If I just gave her workbook of things to do, something with a right answer and a wrong answer, she would do just fine with that. She could, she said, deal very well with criticism. Many others have reported an inability to deal with or even an outright fear of creative work, work where the factor of the unexplored and unknown came into play. I

promised to make what accommodations I could, but she dropped the class. She felt threatened by the unknown nature of the effort involved. Like it or not, writing involved her creative self, a self she had the right to know and enjoy.

Fear in the right places has its purpose and makes us aware of dangers that may arise. A meaning perspective that motivates a generalized fear of conduct that can come from punishment for conduct (adult students reported not remembering the reason for the punishment, just the punishment itself) will hamper our ability to recognize that the vast majority of life offers no reason for fear. We will miss the joyful nature of the creativity our daily lives offer us, and many of us will stick to the rules and procedures of everyday life so we feel safe inside our bubble of fear even when those rules don't really work anymore. We feel safe, but we do so by remaining inside the fear-inducing meaning perspective that asserts continuous authority over our lives.

Fear may have taught us as children many things not dreamed of in that dominator philosophy.

## ***Lying as a response to fear and rejection—August 27, 2011***

Fear teaches children to lie.

Children fear rejection through punishment, so they lie to avoid that punishment. This lie represents their abandonment of responsibility for the act committed or any understanding of the relationship between the act and the actual consequence of the act. If the child escapes punishment, the child feels freed of responsibility.<sup>23</sup> It doesn't matter that something is broken, needs to be shopped for and paid for. It doesn't matter why the child broke the object. It doesn't matter if it was an accident or not. The only thing that matters is that the child keeps the unconditional positive regard of the parental figure, sort of, so the child lies. The paradox in that comes in understanding that the child has already assumed that parental rejection will happen by lying. When the child lies, she/he pretends to be someone else, someone other than the person who actually did the action in question. When the child pretends to such a state, the child has already enacted the rejection of the self she/he fears so deeply.

This lying to avoid rejection can itself become a meaning perspective and a pattern of thought and conduct in life. We learn to pretend to be someone other than ourselves in order for someone else to like us, to offer some level of positive regard. The idea of unconditional positive regard disappears because we have already placed a condition on that regard; we pretend to a different self in order to gain regard for the self we pretend not to be. That seems a very profound condition for regard. Actually, who does receive that regard, the person we feel we are, our self, or someone else entirely, someone we just lied to invent?

This activity does not imply the basic dishonesty of human beings. However, in this case, the child feels a greater need than telling the truth. The fear of loss, the fear of rejection makes a demand that suppresses the desire to simply speak the truth. The truth, when spoken freely, feels life enhancing and self enhancing. When we can speak happily and truly about ourselves, we know that we accept ourselves and our conduct. Children don't lie happily. They so dislike lying that they feel their language to work performatively. What they say becomes the fact actually changing the nature of reality. If the lie becomes true, then it's not a lie. This performative language exists in the everyday. When an employer looks at an applicant and says: "You're hired," reality has changed and the language made it happen. When the right authority says, "I now pronounce you man and wife," that happens. Even when we make a promise, that has actually changed the nature of reality and our relationship to it.

Within the child, a lie does the same thing. It changes the world. When little Harry says, "It broke," or "He broke it," or "I don't know what happened," it can take on the form of a performative reality. At least the child can feel that way. This can also work to establish a meaning perspective about the viability of lying as a practice. If a lie can work wonders in the world and make things as you want them, then it would serve us well to get very good at lying. Of course the better we lie, the less we feel our self. We may even lose our sense of our becoming self and settle instead for endlessly creating a highly compromised construction of an imaginary and highly variable self. Our self becomes negotiable. This meaning perspective

violates our essential nature of honesty within and without. Inner honesty may well serve as an essential part of our personal development in our becoming a fully realized, continuously becoming self. The loss of that comes at a very high price. It's the true consequence of lying and the fear produced meaning perspective that drives the lying.

### ***Blaming others as a response to fear and rejection—August 28, 2011***

The next step after lying comes easily, said students many times. They called it "ratting out," "snitching," "telling," and even the very old fashioned, "framed." It comes when a frightened child, deeply desiring to avoid punishment and rejection, blames someone else for whatever violation of parental regard that child has committed. "He did it," "She did it," simply means, "I didn't do it," which really means, "Please don't hurt me. Please don't punish me. Please don't reject me." It's a lie, but lying doesn't matter. Only avoidance matters. Just as with lying, when we pretend to be a different self to hide from punishment, it alienates the self from the self. It also alienates us from others. We no longer see them with the natural feeling of compassion. We see others as objects for our use, shields against our fear, and we use them in whatever way we can.

The child has been brought into a meaning perspective that can limit if not distort any relationship that child might ever experience. He she/he has learned to use objects, to use another person not as an end in themselves but only as a means to the child's end. The child has moved outside the moral sphere. The consequence of lying isn't punishment. The consequence of lying doesn't need discovery. To lie simply and inevitably diminishes the self. That's a very real and very powerful consequence which can be repaired to some extent and can be avoided absolutely once the child understands the nature of the consequence. Real experience and knowledge of real consequences to others and to self can do far more for self-discipline than punishment and fear.

When I asked, my students said they thought that self-discipline served better than any discipline derived from punishment from fear.

In the case of lying and framing, we encounter a very real and very damaging consequence beyond the damage within the child. When a child avoids punishment by deflecting blame, the other person blamed will know about the nature of that lie. That person will feel its sting, the very rejection the original child wished so desperately to avoid. That damage happens even if the lie and the frame didn't really get believed and nothing else happens to the person framed. That person may remember that lie, that blame, for the rest of that person's life. It may taint that life and taint the relationship between the one who lied and the one lied about. If the lie sticks, and the other feels the powerful sting of the rejection of punishment based on another's lie, what happens to the one who lied? That child may feel very bad for what she/he has done, but the chances are very low that the child will escape that feeling by confessing to the lie and the original deed and now the lie. The exacerbation of the issue also confuses what is actually happening and creates a kind of cognitive dissonance. The child knows about the wrong in lying, and can see the damage to the other, but the original fear of rejection through punishment still pertains, has indeed increased. The child will find some way of putting the dissonance to rest. If that doesn't come with learning to speak the truth at any cost, it may resolve in a sense of self-justification about the original lie and the framing lie. Such a self-justification can also form into a meaning perspective and become a motivator for future harmful lies and denials of the

truth. It can become a permanent motivator to avoid blame at all costs whatever it may cost others.

A lie feels even more serious when directed at another because it causes considerably more harm than whatever the original lie meant to avoid. It's like using too much bug spray. We can make yourself quite ill by trying to protect ourselves from a rather unpleasant but minor annoyance.

## ***More unwanted consequences of punishment and fear—August 29, 2011***

At some point, students ask for real life, more tangible examples of consequences. The very fact that they needed to ask implied that they generally felt a limited if any real sense of actual consequences of our actions as opposed to punishment.

We settled on one conduct which affects most of us every day: bad, aggressive, and angry driving. "What is the consequence of such behavior?" we asked. Inevitably, the spontaneous answer from almost everyone announced, "You can get a ticket."

When we looked at that, we found that a ticket does not come as a consequence but as a punishment which is context bound and generally quite arbitrary. If there is no police officer to see our conduct and write that ticket, the punishment never happens. As we previously discussed, a true consequence happens as automatically as sure as a dropped object will fall. It just happens. Consequences happen without observance. Actions need to be seen to provoke punishment. Even if seen, the negative driving behavior may not provoke a ticket. Like all punishment, tickets show an arbitrary nature. If stopped, an officer may decide to give us a warning. If the officer knows the one stopped, a ticket may not happen. The driver may hold some attraction for the officer, and the ticket goes away. The officer may decide the conduct doesn't deserve her/his attention that day, just not going fast enough to bother chasing down. Alternatively, the month may be ending, and the officer looks at all infractions very intently to write a few more tickets, and the same conduct will get a ticket. Tickets show all the qualities of punishment and none of those of consequence.

We continued to look for the real consequences of bad driving. Someone generally offered that bad driving could cause an accident. That possibility does always exist. An accident can happen even if the bad driver is not involved directly. Still, that it might happen seemed a weaker form of consequence than they originally asked for. Reckless driving can cause wrecks as a potential but not an actual consequence.

An actual consequence that happens directly from aggressive and reckless driving comes in how every other driver affected by that driving feels when impacted by such driving. All the anger that can happen (and the violent language that may arise from that anger), the fear that almost always happens, the wasted energy, and the general insecurity on the road, all that happens and more to the individuals affected by that negative driving. The police don't have to see. No ticket need be written. It just happens.

Another set of consequences that arise from negative conduct in a car happen to the driver and that car. Drivers who drive aggressively and thus badly do so under stresses they inflict on themselves by their conduct, a consequence of conduct. They teeter on the brink, if not fall off most of the time, of road rage against other drivers, stop lights, even themselves. When they drive aggressively, they transfer high levels of stress onto the vehicle they drive and its tires. They wear brakes and tires down, jackrabbit and stop frequently which will lower gas mileage, and put extra strain on the transmission. No matter the awareness of the driver, these consequences happen. Indeed, the lack of awareness may stem from an original confusion about



punishment, which can be avoided if not caught, and consequence, which follows actions logically and inevitably. The arbitrary nature of punishment makes an awareness of consequence difficult to attain because of the confusion between the two. The dominator model redefines punishments as consequences, so it's easy for us to get confused.

Punishment happens so arbitrarily sometimes, it serves as the only response to an action which actually has no or very limited real consequence. Nothing happened except in the variable eye of the beholder. That makes for an even higher level of child and adult confusion in this regard.

### ***The arbitrary nature of adult response and the confusion it brings —August 31, 2011***

Many students reported incidents they recognized or knew from personal experience which illustrated the stunningly arbitrary nature of punishment. When students told these stories, they did so with vehemence and emotion. The vividness of their informal presentations felt informed by the present nature of the past experience. The past lived each day even if below any level of direct awareness. The following illustrates the kind of common experiences they reported.

A young child stands in the living room of her home. Stella quietly bounces a ball as if she has just learned how to do that with any ability at all. She feels a real pride of accomplishment in being able to handle the ball so well. She feels like an expert and would like some recognition for her efforts and her success. As with most of us, our own pride in accomplishment matters, but we would still like to hear someone else offer us recognition. We want to be seen—as a success worthy of praise.

The door opens, and in comes her parental figure. His day has gone well. Perhaps he has done something well and been recognized for his accomplishment. Whatever the causes, he feels very good, and he feels even better when he sees Stella in the living room waiting for him, or so it would appear. She bounces the ball to show off her skill, and out of his good feeling from the day, he feels real delight at what he sees: his loving child doing a very cute thing for him at his arrival. "Look at me bounce the ball, Daddy," she might say with hope and expectation. With all that good feeling slopping around, he can act very effusively about her presence and her newly acquired expertise in ball handling. He comes over and hugs her and tells her that she is wonderful, he loves her, and he feels very happy at her ability to handle a ball. They both feel wonderful as he continues on into the kitchen.

The next day comes, and Stella stands in the same spot bouncing the same ball for all the same reasons as the day before. This time, of course she has even higher expectations than she did the day before. After all, the day before, her daddy expressed his feelings, and she felt recognition and love for her presence in the living room and her newly minted ability. However, each day brings its own burden. Things did not go very well for the parental figure, the daddy. Something is stuck in his craw, and he drank a few beers on the way home to see if could get the thing swallowed, but it still stuck. The irritation of the thing in his craw speaks very loudly and demands energy and attention. Anger always makes such demands. He opens the door, and he sees Stella bouncing her ball. He says, "What the hell are you doing here? Don't you know you shouldn't play ball in the house? What's wrong with you? Now, get out of here," and leaves the child to figure out the difference from one day to another. Yesterday, she felt recognition and praise for herself and her efforts. Today, she feels rejection and anger toward herself and for her ball bouncing efforts. One day she feels loved, the next she feels punished, and she has no idea why either of them happened at all. She does, however, feel fear and a deep seated sense of insecurity about life and relationships. Unconditional positive regard seems to have nothing do with anything. And if positive regard is conditional, she has no idea how to fulfill the conditions in question.

## ***What obedience really teaches—September 1, 2011***

My students and I arrived at the idea of punishment as a way of adults painfully teaching children for some higher purpose, but after examining the actual process and consequences of punishment, we wondered what, in the greater scheme of things, we were actually teaching when we punished. Nothing we saw in the whole or its parts made any sense in terms of some lofty, higher purpose. If punishment had no footprint in the some higher purpose, where could we find its footprint? We understood that teaching always happens, especially in traumatic situations, and certainly teaching through fear using punishment definably worked in a traumatic moment. What did these parental figures teach even if those figures couldn't tell us the answer if asked?

Of course, we saw that fear through punishment meant to teach obedience.<sup>24</sup> Obedience, we also saw, demands certain behaviors defined by the parental figure. These behaviors need no motivation from the child-self. That child simply needs to obey, to behave. However, we also observed that the behaviors demanded by the parental figure through obedience could appear to be contradictory. In fact, they were contradictory and confusing because they seemed unrelated to the actions that precipitated the punishment. If all of the methods and structures of obedience and behavior training work in such a blur of confusion, it must teach something so obvious that we can't see it because it is in such plain sight.

Obedience teaches to create and continue the very idea of obedience. It teaches to initiate and substantiate the dominator model we had seen earlier when everything and everyone had to fit within the hierarchy of domination—to stay in line. Obedience and good behavior signal the conquest of the becoming self by a dominator model which desires to devour that self and make it a conforming part of that domination. Obedience exists to conform the becoming self and all selves to the model of the self produced by the dominant community meaning perspective. At its fullest extension, the dominator model doesn't simply want the halfhearted or resentful obedience and behavior we see in children and adults. It wants a complete and unconditional submission to the dominator model and all its immediate representations through media and the popular culture.

The dominator model demands from its adherents, its participants, its conformists ,a complete surrender of the becoming self, an abandonment of any hope of individuation of that self, and to submit totally, unquestioningly to the domination under which and within which that lost self will exist. The dominator not only wants obedience, it wants the dominated, once fully dominated, to offer up their unconditional positive regard to the dominator and its manifestations.<sup>25</sup> In return, the dominated feels an escape from the freedom of the becoming self and feels, paradoxically, somehow more alive in the deadness of conformity. They feel more of a self by the surrender of the self. All of this exists for each of us but on a level we never question, on the level of the meaning perspective. Such perspectives provide form for reality, the kind of the form that child with all those toy pieces she/he wanted so desperately to create or find. However, this form is imposed on the child and all of us as much if not more than it is imposed on reality.

### ***On the nature of rebellion—September 3, 2011***

My students would anticipate what came another unwanted response to adult attempts at imposing obedience and thus conformity using fear through punishment. Many voices spoke out of personal experience about that unwanted repose to fear, both as the child and the parent: rebellion. Children rebel.

This undesirable manifestation of the dominator model appears over and over, but when we looked at it, we found it quite remarkable under the circumstances of childhood. A child rebels against the parental figure that holds within its power to deny the child every essential of life. The adult controls food, shelter, clothing, safety in general, and the awe inspiring power of unconditional positive regard. From where would a child derive such unmitigated temerity to rebel? The child rebels and thus rejects the nearly sacred power of the child's universe. What a remarkable thing. When a parental figure responds to such rebellion, the adult does not know how to handle it and often responds as if the rebellion represented, once again, insubordination.

In such a case, the parental figure may well feel the need to crush such a rebellion and then act on that feeling. After all, most of us adults operate on a meaning perspective that demands adherence to the dominator model. As adults we live in and adhere to that model, and our children must learn the way in which this domination works and where their place is in that domination. The myth of the Oracle at Delphi speaks to us in a way that substantiates that idea. The Oracle said, "Know thyself." We may understand that phrase in modern ways in which the instruction tells us to go out and find ourselves, our true selves.<sup>26</sup> What the Oracle meant, historians tell us, was to find our best place within the structure of the hierarchy of domination. The dominator meaning perspective makes form out of reality, and when a child steps outside the line the perspective sets for that child, we see danger in rebellion for the hierarchy and for the child's future. When the child moves out of the structure of the hierarchy, the child steps outside the unwritten but profoundly felt law of domination. The child becomes a very young, but very definite outlaw. As parental figures, we cannot tolerate the idea that our child will live the life of an outlaw. Anything outside the conformity of domination makes for an outlaw, so we demand conformity all the harder to serve a higher purpose. But when the law is a bad and even stifling, the child may intuitively feel that making a stand outside the law serves their higher purpose: their becoming self.

Sadly, most of us, child and adult, who wish to say, "No," to the meaning perspective of domination have yet to develop a "Yes," to a place or an idea, or a new perspective. Using "No" alone makes us, and what we want by way of our becoming self, even more vulnerable to adopting the very thing we wish to reject: a dominated being.

### ***Variations on rebellion as a response to fear and rejection—September 4, 2011***

"No" comes in rebellion, but does the independence or freedom needed for what we defined as a becoming self come with it?

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility of those choices and results, and the process begins again.

My students told many stories about acts of rebellion in families who lived with the constraints of an essentially dominator hierarchy.<sup>27</sup> One of the more subtle forms of defiance toward domination came up from time to time. With some variations, a small child comes to her/his parental figure and asks for that figure to slap her/his hand. The parental figure asks the reason for such a request, and the child answers, "I want a cookie. You said I can't have a cookie. Every time I take a cookie without asking, you slap my hand. So I thought I would get the slap first, and I could enjoy the cookie without worrying about the slap." Other students laughed at such a story, and many of them thought the story "cute." When we get past the seeming cuteness of the story, we discover a subtle but nonetheless powerful form of rebellion. It serves as a rebellion against the form and function of the punishment model and meaning perspective behind domination. In such rebellion, we can also discover a way of critically reflecting on the nature of the punishment, dominator meaning perspective and see through its inadequate rationale.

The most vital element of punishment comes in its evocation of fear in the actor and in those watching the actor receive punishment. This fear arises from the rejection of the actor and not simply the act thus in a denial of unconditional positive regard. In that fear, the act becomes reprehensible to the actor in light of the punishment promised and delivered when the dominator, the parental figure, catches the actor in the act. This serves the higher purpose of making the actor responsible for the act and forces the actor to fear the dominator and the punishment the dominator wields with its coercive authority.

When the child asks for a slap in exchange for a cookie in all conscience, the child violates the structure or, better, exposes the illusory power of domination. Instead of the dominator wielding the power of judgment, the power of surveillance and capture, the dominator becomes the provider of illicit goods so long as the actor openly accepts the cost of taking those goods. It works as an inverted form of the old expression: "If you can't do the time, don't do the crime." The child has changed that dominator judgment, "I have caught you and here comes your dreaded punishment," into, "I want what I want, and I will take what you have to give me so I get what I want, so extract the payment you want from me, so I can get the thing I want now rather than waiting for the silly game to play out." The object of domination becomes a demanding subject in the transaction constructed by the dominator. It's as if I go to the police and tell them to arrest me because I plan on robbing a bank. I describe the theft, and suggest a plea bargain of three to five years. I serve my time, do my parole, and then I do the crime, take the goods I paid for with my time, and go on my merry way. The dominator won't allow that because it has to maintain the fantasy that the actor fears the punishment rather than simply accepting the punishment as part of the perpetrator's career costs.<sup>28</sup>

This child has bypassed insubordination and become a subversive. She/he has said that she/he will stay inside the system insofar as the child will take what's coming to her/him by way of cost. However, the subversion comes in showing that the dominator doesn't really deplore the crime or

the criminal so much as it wishes to exercise its power. The child subverts the system of domination by looking at the system and declaring boldly, "I'm not afraid of what you've got."<sup>29</sup> In this rebellion from domination, we will also find an abandonment of the possibility of unconditional positive regard and a deeply seated voice of inner unhappiness. The becoming self becomes nearly if not completely mute at such moments and hurt and anger flood our identity and our ego.

***Variations on rebellion as a response to fear and rejection—Getting caught—  
September 5, 2011***

Here is where subversion also exposes a core weakness of the punishment/fear model and the domination model in general. Nothing had its own importance, its own value, its own need for attention. Everything had to do with what the dominator saw. Nothing mattered but getting caught—or not.

Rebellions of this seemingly subtle kind and of all kinds motivate us to become aware of the unquestioned meaning perspectives about punishment and behavior. When we do, we discover that punishment works in opposition to what most if not all of us want for children and for adults for that matter.

Speaking reflectively and honestly, many students reported relationships with employers that were marked by the same sort of domination and rebellion: "You can't talk that way to me!", "You can go . . . yourself!", and "You can take this job and shove it!" Some even reported rebelling when there was no particular domination; they just had the feeling of needing to defend themselves against it anyway. When that feeling came up in interviews and got expressed, which it did more times than not, these students recognized that it did them very little good. They saw that their rebellion held sway over their actions for their own good and their responsibility for choices they had made.

When we think about how a becoming self operates freely through perception, learning, and action, we know that to participate fully in that continual process, a child and an adult need to take responsibility for her/his actions and the full scope of consequences of those actions. The more personally responsible we become, the freer we become. If we want freedom, we take responsibility and when we take responsibility, we encounter our freedom.<sup>30</sup>

Punishment and domination separate children and us all from any real relationship with how we choose to act and from the consequences of those acts. When we listen to the lessons taught by domination, punishment, and fear, we don't concern ourselves with what we have done. We only concern ourselves with whether we get caught doing that act, whether we get the blame for the act, whether punishment follows the act. When asked what they did wrong, the classic, if not clichéd response from many of those incarcerated is: "I got caught." This reflects no sense of personal responsibility, of any real relationship to actions or consequences. "I got caught" only concerns to the response of the punishing and dominating authority to an action not to the action itself. In that sense, most if not all crime, every breach of conduct finds in its roots the impulse to rebel against the dominating authority.

Because of the pervasiveness of our feelings about domination and punishment, we work at the avoidance of discovery even as we know we act in a way contrary to law and to a positive living environment. Many people choose to keep a police radar detector in their cars. An Internet search for "radar detector" brought up a company which displays this motto: "We're always helping you 'stick it to the man.'" Someone with a detector knows they commit a crime, do the

wrong thing when they speed. They know that but deflect any personal responsibility for the act by placing the onus of their own action on the discovering agency of "the man," a police officer whose main job comes in hunting down speeders on the highway. As discussed before, aggressive driving at any speed brings real consequences, but our relationship with those consequences break down in face of our overweening relationship with the dominator and the dominator's instruments of control and punishment. By making this meaning perspective a deep part of our consciousness, the dominator separates us from our fully responsible self, takes away our freedom to see the world, learn from what we see, and act freely in response. Everything colored by punishment and fear separates us from our relationship to our acts and our becoming self.



***Variations on rebellion as a response to fear and rejection—Classrooms and testing—  
September 6, 2011***

Because the dominator model of learning felt a lack of control in classrooms, it came up with the idea of accountability through standardized testing. Domination precludes students and teachers experiencing their learning and the benefits of that learning in their own terms, serving as the subjects and agents of their own learning. The dominator structure demanded that learning be conducted in such a way as to make the results objective and transparent through standardized testing. The resulting statistics abandon and deny a sense of personal development among students and teachers. "Objective" and "responsible" serve as a code for the dominator's constant scrutiny and judgment and the threat of punishment for actions outside the scope of domination. Objectified results mean an objectified process and objectified participants. They cease acting as the agents of their own learning. Their sense of agency in learning becomes eliminated, and the agentic<sup>31</sup> person submits obediently to learning in the way the dominator wishes them to learn.<sup>32</sup> The dominator enters the classroom in this way and determines the nature of learning and the nature of thinking as well.

Freedom of thought and of learning becomes beside the point. Development of the becoming self ceases to exist in the classroom. Scores on standardized tests become the only valid and valued commodities that judge the supposedly objective growth of standardized thus predetermined learning. Having their freedom of thought and learning limited, many students respond by simply cheating. If the only value lies in the score of what we learn, then all we need to do is increase the score by whatever means, and we succeed in the terms offered to us. What we do to make that happen doesn't matter to us. The only question comes in making sure we *don't get caught*. When the dominator limits if not eliminates our positive freedom, we can respond by increasing our negative freedom, so long as we *don't get caught*. "Everything is lawful," so long as we *don't get caught*. How far we can degrade ourselves becomes unlimited because only the external observation and action of the dominator has any validity on our lives, and as such, we fall into a state of distracted, personal anomie with no internal sense of right and wrong, so long as we *don't get caught*. We lose our sense of personal freedom, responsibility, and growth in the face of the externalized judgment of our value not as a becoming self but our value as a manipulatable, disposal economic unit.

## ***Rebellion as a loss of freedom—September 7, 2011***

The empty freedom in rebellion comes from that essential law of rebellion: "don't get caught." This phrase represents not a questioning and dismissal of the power of the family or societal meaning perspective but an acceptance and a dependant defiance of that meaning perspective. In that perspective, domination forms the structural force and purpose. When we say, simply, "No," to the exercise of that dominator perspective, we inherently acknowledge its power and certitude. Unless we can articulate a "Yes" to a new and highly conscious meaning perspective we may well never regain our freedom, our autonomy. Otherwise, we only disobey. The system may hate the disobedience and punish the disobedience, but it also accepts it as a part of the domination. Every dominator celebrates its outlaws because when they attack the system in small ways, the system shows its power by identifying them and crushing them at some point. This holds true only so long as the outlaw does not come to represent an alternative meaning perspective that promises an escape from the dominator. The dominator doesn't fear the typical rebellion which really only promises a trade of dominators. It fears a realization of some form of emancipation, of the ascension of the individual into conscious independence: freedom and choice.

Rebellion as practiced by children frustrated and repressed by the conformity of the dominator family depends on the dominator and its conformity in order to feel something to deny. Saying "No" becomes the rebel's motivating force, a constant proving over and over again that the rebellious individual rejects the one thing that the rebel actually needs and desires but can't get: the unconditional positive regard of the dominator, the parental figure. A child may well disobey and defy as a cry for that unconditional positive regard. They don't get that sort of regard, but they do get attention.

Students always had lots of examples of child rebellion. The stories came from their experience of their own acts and the acts of others. Each spoke about the pain and sense of rejection felt children, and eventual adults, felt, who wanted the unconditional positive regard of their parental figure but could not find a way to get anything but negative attention even though the attention came in increasing harsh and punitive forms.<sup>33</sup> For some children the majority of the attention, if not all of the attention, they received from their parental figure came in the form of the negative. In such cases, rebellion always worked because it increased negative attention.

The most touching and needy form of rebellion also feels like a most defiant form of behavior and needing of punishment. Many students remembered times when they heard a child say to a parental figure, or said themselves, at some moment of escalating tension, "Go ahead and hit me. You can't hurt me." We questioned how much hurt, how much rejection, how much sense of loss of unconditional positive regard would a child have felt to get to such a point. When children get to such a point, they also tell the parental figure that they feel there is no love between them, the rejection is complete, and they cannot feel anymore hurt because their constant sense of hurt, or pain, overwhelms any other affective possibility. The original parental dominator meaning perspective stays in place with an overlay of a belief in endless rejection from anyone else in their lives. Every figure that might offer some level of affection will elicit a

feeling of rejection by such children even into their adulthood. These children can remain in a permanent state of rebellion and feel no freedom in their lives at all.

### ***What an interview looks like and feels like—September 9, 2011***

When we spoke of children in our classes, we asked what freedom we wanted for them. All of us felt intuitively that what we do for and with our children serves some higher purpose, some purpose in which the best of life becomes open for those children. This purpose did not inherently involve the child's freedom. Many of us also felt that we missed getting to that purpose ourselves as we grew from children into adults. We wondered what that purpose was and why our own higher purpose still remained unfulfilled. This undiscovered purpose still existed and was somehow still open to us even as it remained obscure. In our discussions about our childhood experiences, we discovered we had learned meaning perspectives, habits of mind and action, which motivated the way we responded to and acted toward children. It also became clear that the way we dealt with children in our care served as an extension and reflection of how we treated and cared for ourselves. The inadequacy of our becoming a self lingered still and left us all with doubts about our own value as a self. We found that, in some very real and hidden way, we still longed for the comforts not afforded us as children. Out of this insecurity of self came our fear of interviews—the fear that motivated our entire discussion.

"If the subject of the interview is us, and we are afraid of the interview, what do we have to fear about our self? What's wrong with us?" Better still we can ask, "What do we think or perceive as wrong with us?"

When I felt the interview class needed another way to get to the essence of the fear that disabled my students, Patricia Cranton, an educator in transformative learning, a person of remarkable care and scope, suggested I ask them to draw. The students took the suggestion to draw what an interview felt like very much to heart. No one ever wanted to show what she/he drew, but they discussed it freely. Many noteworthy elements came from these drawings, and they almost all showed the absolute powerlessness and fear that they felt when entering an interview. We all agreed that such panic did not generally allow for their best presentation of themselves.

When we discussed the elements present in these drawings, one quality stood out time and time again with almost universal if unspoken agreement. When they drew themselves, they drew a very small, nearly insignificant person sitting on a very small chair (occasionally kneeling). The interviewer almost always towered over that little person, almost always appeared angry and incredibly dismissive. They told me what they saw in their pictures, and I drew a representation of what they told me on the white board. They generally seemed quite happy at watching their ideas appear as a drawing to everyone's amusement and edification. The first time I drew what they ordered, I stepped back and looked at what I had drawn. I asked the class if they could see what I saw in terms of the relationship portrayed quite unconsciously. There was a very large person with all the power looming over a very small person who felt powerless and wanted deeply for the giant above them to give them what they wanted. They wanted acceptance.

It showed a child and an adult in relationship—not a happy relationship and not a happy thought. When we entered an interview, we returned to the fears and insecurities of our childhood. We returned to our childhood feelings. We also realized that we must carry these feelings with us all

the time, and they just turned up writ large in moments of personal stress where how others responded to us mattered intensely. That made for some very intense, very fearful, and negative feelings at an interview, feelings which did us no good at all.

## ***Discipline and the idea of a lost child—September 10, 2011***

"If our childhood experiences found their determination in a higher purpose for the child, what would we describe as that higher purpose?" I asked. My students went back to the idea of parental figures teaching children how to live in the world. By then, however, we all recognized in what ways the parental figures did not know how to live in the world themselves. What they taught, they taught out of their own experience as children. Parental figures operated and taught out of and toward a higher purpose but had no direct and clear idea what that purpose might be.

Rather swiftly, we returned to the idea of discipline. People had to have discipline to live in the world, so parental figures felt the powerful need to instill discipline in children. That's why the whole model we discussed had its value even if it looked very flawed in its prosecution and execution. Parental figures must discipline children, punish children if necessary, to instill that discipline or the child would be—lost.

The lost child held a very powerful symbolic value for us all, and we looked at the nature of that loss. If lost, from what lost and to what lost? That would depend on the discipline we wanted to inculcate into the child, or that which the child would learn in some other way. Discipline comes in two varieties at least. We either practice the discipline of the culture in which we live, conform out of fear, or we develop self-discipline. In another way of seeing and saying this, we inculcate the coercive discipline of obedience to some dominator model: "Do what you are told, when told and when observed," We could rather offer the path of self-discipline, the one where the individual acts as we have defined the self as acting. We could better do that for our children when we could do that for ourselves:

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility of those choices and results, and the process begins again.

If we still felt some basic agreement with this definition of self, then the loss we fear for the child must relate to the definition we constructed for the self. We want children to grow into the kind of person described here, the kind of person that Carl Jung and others call *individuated*. If children learn and surrender to the dominator model of life, they will lose that definition of self, the individuating self. That has its charms. In that world of dominator self, or non-self, the individual lives with the seeming comforts of conformity and recognition from the community in which the individual lives in domination. Erich Fromm explores this idea very fully in *Escape From Freedom* and other of his works. The seeming rewards of living the dominated and conformist life do exist, and we can feel that children lose something of value if they don't enter into it. This holds especially true if we live inside that model ourselves.

In the moments of our class discussions, we found ourselves looking into the mirror of our own choices, critically reflecting on the meaning perspectives by which we live ourselves.

When we live within the conformity of the dominator meaning perspective, it will affect every area of our lives, if our lives remain our own at all. Indeed, if they remain our own, we feel our life best when we cheat, when we escape and defy the conformity and the dominator meaning perspective, when we get away with something that violates the very conformity we have chosen. That violation does not free us from that conformity and that domination. It affirms them and their power over us as a self because our violation stems from our surrender of responsibility for our acts to conformist institutions and the domination that its law represents. This relationship to responsibility stems or at least reflects from where we choose to position our *locus of control*.

## ***The question of our locus of control—September 11, 2011***

My students had never heard about the *locus of control*, but they always found it a very accessible idea. In terms of our classes, it worked simply enough. *Locus* sounded a bit odd, but they could see its connection to *location* making the phrase *location of control*. They could easily identify the best place for this location. If it's our control we want to find it within us, to feel we live and act with an internal locus of control. Then our actions and their consequences form a direct part of our life. We take responsibility for what happens either positive or negative. That sense of responsibility works as an integral part of our freedom and our learning and our choices of action. The locus of control speaks very clearly about the nature of our relationship to the self.<sup>34</sup>

I offered the following hypothetical situation to my students.

Imagine that through dint of some accident or good fortune I become recognized by the police and the powers-that-be as a really great guy—truly exemplary. Someone so deserving of respect because of my fulfilling my role of whatever type, that I get awarded a special pass. Because of this pass, I could never receive a traffic ticket again—no matter what I did.

The question I posed next came naturally from the situation. How would I drive?

Students spoke quite enthusiastically about how I would drive all the way from speeding anywhere I liked, to running any and all red lights, even to driving on the sidewalk if it suited me. I could drive like a madman. I could do anything I liked.<sup>35</sup>

When I did that, where would I locate my locus of control when I drove without the pass? Did I control my driving out of my choice to drive carefully because it was the right thing to do, or did I drive that way only because I feared the punishment of receiving a ticket and all the grief that went along with a ticket? My control of my driving, the location of that control, would have been in the hands of the law and the conformist dominator model that validated and substantiated the law. Once I had the pass, I could act out in any way I wanted because the fear of the police and their punishment would have gone. That would mean in turn that my driving found its basis not in my considered acceptance of driving safely within a complex system of interdependence of conduct that we find in traffic. It found its basis in my subordination to the dominator model's conformist enforcement and my fear of that enforcement.

My students recognized that if such a thing could happen, the pass would make no difference to an individuating person who acts from an internal locus of control. She/he would drive based on the idea of personal safety and the general roadway welfare. She/he would take full responsibility for her/his actions with or without the presence and thus threat of the police and the tickets they distribute in aid of forcing and enforcing order. The individuating woman/man needs no force to coerce appropriate actions. That person reflects on the nature of such actions and makes choices accordingly. That person lives with the locus of control within her/him and makes free choices that keep that person within the moral sphere.



## ***Reflecting on awareness and the instrumental—September 12, 2011***

In the end, we asked ourselves, at least in class we asked ourselves, what we wanted for our children. We questioned the idea of "the higher purpose" or "higher good." That abstract concept made sense to everyone who heard it but only as an abstraction. None of us had questioned the nature of that higher purpose or good. As we discovered, something that asserts a powerful influence on us but on which we have never questioned or critically reflected serves as a meaning perspective. We see through that perspective, and we learn through that perspective, and we make choices about our actions motivated by that meaning perspective. It exerts all that influence, yet we had little or no idea of where it came from nor even that it was there at all. In fact, according to our working definition of the self, meaning perspectives form unaware parts of our selves thus preventing our continued opening into the becoming self.

That seemed a very strange paradox. We established that we wished to become more and more of our self. As with children, we wished to live as a fully becoming self. Still, there inside of us existed a meaning perspective that we believed in and acted on, yet we felt no awareness of its actual existence. We knew it as an essential truth of life, on the one hand, and did not know it all on the other hand. That makes for quite an imbalance in our hands.<sup>36</sup> Awareness jumped out of that thought. Perhaps the key to what we wanted to know about self came in more awareness of our becoming self. It seemed suddenly obvious that we had been doing just that, but I and we weren't fully aware of our pursuit of awareness.

We thought again about the purpose of the class which had a distinctly instrumental tone in the institutional syllabus. When we got into the matter we discussed at this point, were we getting away from the point? Was all this talk helping students in the class engage in more positive attitudes toward and actions in interviews and in their professional and personal lives?

We discussed where I thought we had gotten in our class, and I asked them if they thought that self-awareness had become for us a valuable and productive if not absolutely necessary form of study in the pursuit of the course goal, an improvement of the instrumental skills of interviewing. They readily agreed that it would. Many said that they felt it has become obvious by this point, as if the question had become unnecessary. If that was the case, we once again asked how many people did they know who actually pursued self-awareness in any conscious way? That produced quite a few answers which responded to the question but didn't actually answer the question. People didn't have time for that. Life was too busy and demanding. People just didn't know how, and they didn't know they should. Besides, they spend too much time watching television. Once again, we returned to the idea that had come up earlier: "They're afraid of what they will find out. They're afraid they won't like what they find."

## ***Fear of the self and the truth about fear—September 13, 2011***

We arrived back where we had begun: fear. That word, feeling, idea has started us on this question of self, and we had returned to it rather spontaneously. Self-awareness feels threatening to the meaning perspectives we feel about our identity and thus self awareness feels quite threatening to us if not our actual becoming self. Very few of us will admit that we do not like ourselves very much even when that belief or feeling rings quite true. Perhaps we are not willing to identify that we don't like ourselves even or especially if we really don't like ourselves very much. It occurred to me many times in my career that this self-dislike or, at least, a fear of self-awareness forcing us to face our ugly, dislikeable self formed part of almost everyone with whom I worked and whom I had gotten to know. That includes the most confident appearing people I have known. It included me. That dislike drives the fear that makes interviews difficult for most and nearly impossible for some. We feel the fear and the dislike of self-discovery, but it's very hard to make that fear apparent ourselves. We feel it, but we don't know it. As with any other meaning perspective, we find it difficult to become aware enough to critically reflect on that perspective even though the process might help liberate us from the limits such a perspective causes us. We live with it and inside it. Until we question it, we feel there's no escape. We feel the fear and the unspoken dislike are both true and deserved.

Aside from the fear brought on by the interview, another situation occurred to me wherein the fear and self-dislike meaning perspective springs, un-summoned and unwanted to mind. I decided to experiment and find out if my intuition held true.

I wondered aloud in class if what we resolved about self-awareness were true. Did we feel some fear of self-exposure? I asked the class generally about how would someone feel if I told that person I was about to tell them the truth about themselves. Would that person want to hear the next thing I had to say? Most students answered vociferously, "No!" in one form or another. A few answered that they could take constructive criticism, so I could go right ahead. They could take it. I pointed out that I hadn't given them any indication of what I was going to say, so why did they make the assumption about what I would say in such a clearly negatively critical way.<sup>37</sup>

I offered to try it in class with someone, and I asked if Susan would mind the attempt. She agreed, perhaps with some exhibition of nervousness, and I got to it. I looked at Susan and said, "Susan, I have gotten to know you a little while we worked together, and there are some things about yourself, some truths about yourself you may well want to know." I paused and said, "Do you want to hear what I will say," and she laughed and said, "No." We agreed that she felt something negative, indeed, something quite bad was about to happen to her if she heard what I was going to say. It would cause her pain of some sort.

"What if I was about to say something like this? 'Susan, you have shown a great deal of courage for your entire life. You have lived through some very hard times, and you still are in this class and in this school striving to make life better for you and your children. No matter how hard things have gotten, you have cared for your children as best you could. Indeed, you have shown yourself a caring person in general which is part of why you are studying for a medical assistant's

certificate. Altogether, from what I know about you, I find you and what you have done entirely admirable.'"

Susan and most others breathed a sigh of what I took as relief.

"How come that didn't occur to you as the truth about yourself? It certainly is from what I do know about you." Susan seemed quite pleased with this unexpected turn of events, this form of truth. Why do most of us, if not all, of us expect bad news in terms of the truth about ourselves? We just don't feel very confident in ourselves. Even more, we just don't like ourselves all that much or all that securely. We feel that we live with some essential flaw in our self, and that will get exposed. In terms of the class, I would get exposed, to our detriment, in an interview. That's where the fear comes from, from that limiting, restrictive, meaning perspective of self. It's not just that all judgment finds us guilty. We simply feel guilty most if not all of the time. We're just waiting to be found out. We actually think what's wrong with us is what's true about us.

### ***The higher purpose as meaning perspective and judgment—September 15, 2011***

When we attended an interview, we felt judged and afraid as the student drawings depicted graphically. We feared ourselves and our deeply felt inadequacy which we knew the interviewer would find quite apparent. It's not in our interviewer but in ourselves that we are underlings.

This sense of inadequacy and the fear that arose from that feeling, from that meaning perspective, could not have served as the higher purpose parental figures felt and served when creating an environment wherein children grow into and achieve that higher purpose. Parental figures will inevitably report that they want the best for the children in their care. They feel that they strive to achieve that end, that higher purpose of best-for-the-child. The question here comes in defining the idea of "best." Who decides what's best for the child?

No one at one moment generally decides what's best. That feeling of best-ness has arisen over many years and forms an essential part of the meaning perspectives of a culture and a society. It forms the basis of the dominator based conformity into which most of us have been trained to strive to find our place. No matter how much we rebel against that perspective, we will find no more freedom, no more attainment of the free, the autonomous self than the rebellious child finds.

Rebellion speaks the "No," as we have seen. It denies the usual and prevailing domination but does not affirm anything really new. If we speak only a "No," we remain as dependent on what we deny as if we agreed with what we deny. If we didn't have the original statement to rebel against, we would lose our momentum, lose our drive, lose what makes us tick. The rebel who lives in and with the rebellion for its own sake remains a conformist to the thing against which the rebel—rebels. In some ways, the rebel serves the ends of the conformist, dominator structure quite well. The rebel provides a clear target and a clear warning of punishment for such acts. The rebel shows the power of the dominator in fighting it without representing any cause of her/his own. The rebel is lost within the thing rebelled against.

Although we feel the higher purpose toward which we diligently and often painfully work with the children in our care means the best for the child, that feeling may be turned to another not higher but very different purpose, the purpose of the dominator structure of society. We live in a dominator environment and we need to find our way within it to achieve whatever success we can. In that inherent knowledge, in that meaning perspective, we recreate that environment in our homes. We remake that environment for the children in our care. The higher purpose actually functions as a demanding and demeaning purpose for the becoming self of the child and the adult for that matter. The higher purpose, in some utopian way, calls on us as parental figures to enter into an unspoken but palpable agreement to deflect children from their desire to become a fully articulated self and to continue indefinitely with that deflection of the child's development and individuation. As parental figures, we strive to fulfill the higher purpose of the dominator model so that these children can achieve not development of self but a semblance of growth within the dominator model. We teach them to accept that domination is the norm, to negotiate successfully with that domination, and to become a successful dominator themselves.

To this unspoken end, as parental figures, we engage in the practices we have delineated here and more. All of which we feel we do out of love and devotion. That's where the irony lays.

## ***The dissonance of the higher purpose and our love and care—September 16, 2011***

This last point deserves some clarification. One of the meaning perspectives most of us develop comes in wanting to see bad guys and good guys at the center of every situation. That relates quite well to another meaning perspective wherein we find someone to blame for something that has happened or some condition in which we find ourselves. All of what we discussed in those interview classes and in this writing could lead us to such conclusions. They will not serve us very well in our search for the becoming self, and such simplifications and blame will almost always rebound negatively in our faces. It would serve us better to question the meaning perspectives instead and to liberate ourselves from something that could well ultimately weaken us. Blame makes for weakness not strength.

Parental figures act out of love and concern. No matter what it looks like in hindsight, they act out of those motives.<sup>38</sup> This dissonance between the motivation and the actions shows the power of unquestioned meaning perspectives. It can take the best of motivations and intentions filter them through the structure of the meaning perspective, and it comes out with an act which seems completely and utterly oppositional to the original motivation, a complete negation of that original feeling and intention. As a parental figure, we wish to love the child in our care and to make sure she/he grows up in as healthy a way as possible. Indeed, we would go to great lengths to do so, even to our own detriment to some extent. We feel that love, that unconditional positive regard, and it gets immeasurably but absolutely driven through a cliché, often a representation of a meaning perspective, and out comes something else. The efforts of parents often if not inevitably suffer from the depredations of meaning perspectives.

As a loving parent, the essential nature of that being, we want the child in our care to become the best person possible. When that child acts in such a way as to set off some worry in that regard, we feel we have to act.<sup>39</sup> If the exact cliché "Spare the rod and spoil the child" doesn't come to mind word for the word, the meaning perspective that draws its strength from that phrase does.<sup>40</sup> To act lovingly and responsibly toward a child in our care, we must use punishment as our tool. That's where the phrase "This hurts me more than it hurts you" comes from. The phrase has its own grounding in a reality caused by a caring motivation deflected through the twists and distortions of a meaning perspective. It is a terrible thing to do the wrong thing for the right reason. It hurts the actor and the recipient. In that we can all fall into this pattern, and we can see why this pattern can appear in any of us, it does little or no good at all to make the loving and mistaken actor into the bad guy.

That discussion brings up the question of blame itself. It's a habit of mind, a meaning perspective all its own, and it can use some critical reflection just like all the others.<sup>41</sup>

## ***The nature and quality of blame—September 17, 2011***

When we critically examine the provenance and genesis, the source and coming into being, of meaning perspectives, the structures of thought and habits of mind which limit the scope of our lives, of our becoming self, we will inevitably find other people. Environmental circumstances may also have been involved in the beginning and growth of these meaning perspectives, but mostly we find people. That's where the question of blame begins. Blame seems to offer some level of comfort for us in the face of the unhappiness and struggles produced by these meaning perspectives. If someone else did this to us, brainwashed us into these perspectives, then we can feel righteous anger against that person or persons, which might offer some level of satisfaction. It might actually turn out that such satisfaction comes to us in an unpleasant and ultimately unsatisfying form which, in the end, simply begins another meaning perspective that establishes another barrier to our desire to return to the energy and adventure of the becoming self.

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility of those choices and results, and the process begins again.

When we look at this definition, which we can argue in its specific forms, the thing that stands out is the sense of autonomy central to this definition of the self, of the individual living as this becoming self. We might also call this the individuating self. A critical reflection on the idea and existence of the autonomous, individuating self can open us to the idea that such independence of thought and action calls for a highly developed sense of and responsibility for our learning, our intentions, our actions, and the consequences of these actions.

Blame precludes our accepting responsibility. Blame denies us access to the autonomous, individuating self. Blame places responsibility, thus our motivating power, on others. Whatever gratification we take in blame comes at a very high price. It brings us to a cul-de-sac in our becoming. When we blame, we make ourselves the superior to the other person. Indeed, we turn them into an Other, a being alien to ourselves and not as fully human as ourselves. In our judging them for their failures and taking a superior position to them, we fall back into the trap of rebellion. The dominator we believe has caused our meaning perspectives and thus stunted us in many ways, remains in power over us and our lives so long as we assign blame to that dominator. When we blame the dominator, we make the dominator responsible for us and our lives until the present. The dominator continues to dominate. Blaming and rebellion is a "No." When we take full responsibility for our lives, we assume our own power. That becomes part of our "Yes." We can say "Yes" to our responsibility to make choices beyond the limits of our habits of mind derived from our past and the meaning perspectives we learned there.

An examination of our meaning perspectives shows us that they originally come from other sources. That would hold true of those who assisted in the construction and absorption of those meaning perspectives. Our dominators and the culture that influenced them into their meaning perspectives all exist with the same tensions we can now understand within ourselves. They felt,

intended, and acted out of their unquestioned meaning perspectives. They may have exerted power over us as we developed in their care, but they did so under the motivating force of love and the limits of their own meaning perspectives. If we can see and feel our own discomfort and unhappiness because of the dominating force of meaning perspectives, we can easily feel compassion for those who dominated us because we share the same fate, the same conditions, and many of the same mistakes. When we can feel that commonality with them, our parental figures and others, we cease to see them as aliens, as an Other, and we feel forgiveness for them. It is through such forgiveness that we begin to assume our full autonomy and individuation. Compassion and forgiveness bring us back to our own becoming self. That brings us back to what we desire to receive and give: unconditional positive regard. We can then exercise the I/Thou<sup>42</sup> of unconditional positive regard, compassion, forgiveness, and the thread that runs between them, acceptance. We can see and feel the unconditional as primarily the right thing to do, and it liberates us all well.



## ***Beyond blame and living out weaknesses—September 18, 2011***

When my students and I reached this point, they sometimes questioned why we went through the process if we didn't want to discover who was to blame for all our adult weaknesses. That was a question fraught with complexities.

Such a question assumed weaknesses on the part of all of us. It's not that they and we don't live with qualities and choices we might want to rethink and renew, but calling any quality of self a "weakness" presupposed its near if not absolute permanence. Students responded that if they were to change, and many felt they wanted to and needed to change, they would have to know their weaknesses so they could work on them. The way to do that came out of looking at the past and discovering the places where the weaknesses developed. The ones who participated in any recovery program called them their "issues." These "issues" involved a concentration on the negative side of their past uncovering every ill that happened to them so they could find blame. Once they did that, they could learn to deal with what happened and the weakness and problems that arose from those experiences.

In the face of these student stories and concerns, I discovered a response. From what I had seen and heard, this therapeutic process didn't make most people feel any better about themselves. It seemed that when they went to some form of therapy, the process meant a high concentration on the "weaknesses," "problems," and "issues" that had caused their adult failures. When they engaged in sessions that were meant to help, the therapy process centered on gathering together all the rotten stuff that had happened to them and all the rotten stuff they had done, so therapy could examine the patient and the experiences and do some sort of analysis. It seemed like putting a glass or plastic bottle with the fluids of past negativity in front of our eyes and looking through that bottle as "through a glass darkly."

When we bring that bottle up to our face and place it in front of our eyes, all we can see directly is the bottle itself and the liquid in it. It becomes all we see. Because it is directly in front of our eyes, we see it out of proportion; it's enormous and overwhelming. It also distorts everything we see through that bottle. We see the world and all our lives through this monochromatic prism. All is weakness, sorrow, and failure: a one color spectrum. That didn't seem a very strong place to begin the process of returning to the becoming self after years that denied that becoming self, delayed that becoming self, or simply let that becoming self slip from consciousness.

A becoming self sees all the difficulties and the suffering of the past, but if we can get on with our becoming, those things we feel devalue us become part of a larger a more accurate perspective. When we take the bottle away from our eyes and place it on the tabletop, we can see it against the whole story in front of us. The bottle filled with the past was still there, but now it formed a rather small part of the overall. The tabletop or our life contained many other things, all in a clear and undistorted presentation. All of a sudden, the dreaded weaknesses and unhappiness, and mistakes of the past take on a much reduced form in perspective and a very reduced proportion. We can see ourselves more clearly without the mitigation of concentration on the negative. The past offers us a great deal of meaning, but the meaning doesn't come when

all we concentrate on is the past and the selective ugliness and grief it holds if we look for it that way.<sup>43</sup>

Our becoming happens in the present and in the future informed by the past. The past contains a great deal of valuable information that often came at a high cost, so we wouldn't want to just forget it. We want to learn from it and put it to a positive use in our present heading to the future. Blame doesn't do that. It makes for an endless repetition of the story of the past. We become trapped in the story, and the past becomes the present. We cannot move toward the autonomous and individuated, the movement toward the becoming self. We become trapped and dominated by the dominations of the past. Too much and the wrong kind of concentration on the past leaves us enslaved to it rather than liberated into the present. Through such liberation, we may well find our way back into the becoming self, find the transformative learning that can and will come to us when we open ourselves to it. It means that we can work on and concentrate on our strengths and let the weaknesses shrink in significance as a natural function of seeing them in perspective to our past, present, and increasing strengths.

In that way, we can shift our locus of control back into our selves, effectively seek an autonomous and individuating life, and return to the creation and discovery of the becoming self as we had defined it.

Looking clearly at the processes of how we become an identity that fears our self, as we had been doing, is meant to allow us to uncover the unquestioned meaning perspectives that keep us from autonomy and individuation, that keep us from our liberated becoming self. When we gain such information and understanding of these meaning perspectives, we can critically reflect on them and decide on their validity or their dishonesty. This uncovering, questioning and critically reflecting process often brought us to a question that came to me one sleepless moment in the night: "What would happen if you found out that every negative thought and feeling you ever had about yourself were unfounded, unfair, and untrue?" Engaging in transformative learning, a kind of learning that comes naturally when the opportunity arises, can lead us to the joyous answer to that question. It leads us out of the dominator model and conformity. Transformative learning can assist us into individuation and a greater sense of community within and without.

## ***Transformative learning and our search—September 19, 2011***

Engaging in transformative learning, a kind of learning that comes naturally when the opportunity arises, can lead us to the joyous answer to that question: "What would happen if you found out that every negative thought and feeling you ever had about yourself were unfounded, unfair, and untrue?" It can assist in getting us out of the dominator model and conformity. Transformative learning can assist us into individuation and a greater sense of community within and without.

Transformative learning engages us in the questioning of unquestioned meaning perspectives. Many situations can offer an impetus to enter into such a process. One seemingly unrelated activity can lead to another, and that can lead to the transformative. In our course about interviewing, we discovered an essential fear we generally held about the interview. In that in the interview, we serve as the subject of the interview, we found it reasonable to question the genesis and validity of that fear. If the interview is about us, and we fear the interview, of what are we afraid? What do we fear? What's wrong with us? Seeking an answer to that question brought us to seek a kind of self-awareness by defining the self and looking at how the self comes to be and continues into becoming. We discovered something of the nature of the becoming self and how that nature can find itself thwarted by the dominator model in our growing up, and in which we generally find ourselves afterward. We grow up inside an environment largely created by parental figures from whom we desire unconditional positive regard and from whom we often receive punishments that serve a supposedly higher purpose. This higher purpose denies us unconditional positive regard. Parental figures foisted that higher purpose on us, and they do not question or apprehend the meaning perspective from which this higher purpose arises: the maintenance of and our obedience to the dominator model itself. We find ourselves driven to conform to that model for our own good, a good defined by that meaning perspective and enacted through parental figures and others who do not question the motivating meaning perspective for their actions.

None of us in the interview class would have thought that such an occasion would bring us to this critical moment of questioning and reflection. It did. We had to choose to deal with the transformative possibilities of the moment, or use the moment to transfix ourselves all the more on the meaning perspectives that formed a good deal of how we lived our lives.

All of this can offer us an opportunity for anger and blame.

These two emotional responses, these choices may offer some immediate sense of gratification, but they also may interfere with our returning to the natural state of our becoming self. The paradox we find in anger and blame comes in that they thwart our movement toward liberation and autonomy. On one hand, they provide a sense of relief and even justification for our suffering. On the other hand, our anger and blame assign responsibility for our lives and who we are to others, largely to parental figures. When we assign responsibility to others for our lives in the past, we do so in the present as well. That attitude relates to the attitude and action of rebellion, a state wherein we say "No" to the dominator model we blame, but we establish no

clear "Yes" by which we move forward. Without responsibility for our lives, without a "Yes," we find ourselves and feel ourselves powerless in our lives. We unwittingly surrender our own power when we assign responsibility for our choices and actions elsewhere. Real power and responsibility work inextricably together. Such powerlessness forms a substantial barrier to our becoming self, a barrier to the transformative, to liberation, and to autonomy—all part of our working definition of self.

We can engage with such a barrier through compassion for others and for ourselves rather than trying to destroy the barrier itself. Through compassion, we can come to an understanding of the reality of our parental figures and others, the reality that became the environment in which we came to be. In discovering and exploring their reality and our reality, we can avoid blaming and anger. We do not need to destroy the barrier. We do not need to engage in some metaphoric war against meaning perspectives and those who serve them and act out of them. Compassion becomes an integral part of the transformative. In that way, we lose nothing through metaphoric combat, and we can gain everything through compassion and acceptance no matter how sad and painful. It may not feel so at first. Thinking about it now, we may have created a meaning perspective about how blame and anger are our right and how such feelings help us. When we question that meaning perspective, we realize that we take no benefit at all in terms of our whole being, our becoming self, and the life we wish to choose to make for ourselves now.

The dominator model doesn't operate in a way that encourages compassion. It may offer pity and even charity, but it does so on its own terms never in the terms of the person involved. The dominator model never concerns itself with individuals as an end in her/his self. It concerns itself only with the individual as a means to its own end, the end of maintaining itself through the highest levels of conformity possible. When we choose to ignore compassion and choose blame and anger instead, we align ourselves with the dominator model, the very position we wish to avoid and escape.

## ***The unconditional in its many forms—September 20, 2011***

In writing this, I came to discover that compassion exists in concert with unconditional positive regard.<sup>44</sup> Along with unconditional positive regard, I also found that compassion lent itself perfectly well toward forgiveness. The intertwined operation of unconditional positive regard, compassion, and forgiveness work outwardly and inwardly toward returning to and experiencing more of the endlessly becoming self.

Our feelings of compassion toward another finds its basis in our experience of a common link with that other person. That motivates involvement and action. We experience the need for compassion for the other as an immediate or incipient need for compassion for ourselves. The suffering of another rises out of that person's need and desire to find some comfort or support in that suffering. Any honest moment of reflection and consideration of our own lives will show us that we have and we will experience suffering in our own terms, and we will yearn for some form of comfort and support. We humans share the need for refuge from suffering and the kind of understanding that makes suffering bearable. Life inevitably brings us suffering, and compassion makes suffering and thus life itself more meaningful.

Aside from that level of causality and motivation, compassion presents itself to us as simply the right thing to do. When we say "Yes" to compassion, we say "Yes" to a conception of abundance in a world of liberation and individuation. The dominator model calls us to see and feel nothing but scarcity and therefore competition in the world, and this conception of the world fades away in the revealing light that comes with critical reflection and transformative learning.

In that "Yes" to compassion, we spontaneously bring to the other and to ourselves a condition of unconditional positive regard. In that state, we accept the human being with whom we relate on purely human terms, and we abjure our right to make an absolute judgment on who they are as humans only by what they have done. We can't judge an act and feel absolutely no compassion for an act while still offering our regard for the essential human who made it. That's what makes it an unconditional offer. It's the very thing we cry out for as children and even as adults because our acts are often mistaken and punished as if we intended harm. If our mistakes become our self to others, "You are a bad girl," "You are a bad boy," we can feel trapped into an identity and thus actions that we would rather leave behind. Compassion and unconditional positive regard serve as liberational elements for all of us in our shared human, mistake ridden selves.

In that "Yes" to compassion, we speak of our understanding of the human struggle to make the right choices for ourselves and for others. We also accept the sheer happenstance that our fellow humans find themselves in the way of the suffering they experience. Compassion assumes that individuals make the choice that makes sense to them when they make it. They want to do the right thing even though their conception of what they perceive and do differs from our conception. In that way, we can more fully choose acceptance and escape blame.

In that "Yes" to compassion, we accept a certain way of seeing human nature, the way of liberation and individuation, as essentially positive. Generally, when we hear the phrase "human

nature," we know that what follows will say something negative about that nature. When someone steals, many say, "It's just human nature." When someone lies, many say, "It's just human nature." When someone cheats," many say, "That's just human nature." Such remarks work as self-accusatory or self-confessional speech acts. When a speaker asserts that it's human nature to lie and steal, and the speaker exists in human form, then the speaker will steal lie and cheat. After all, it's in the speaker's nature to do so. Such a belief in human nature weakens our belief in ourselves and others and strengthens the dominator model which, in our search for our becoming self, we strive to live beyond and without. The dominator model thrives on endless human competition. Such competition brings rise to greater and greater perceptions and conceptions of scarcity which increases our level of competition. We lose the beauty of knowing how much we need one another, how much we care for one another, and how the unconditional can help maintain our balance of life and living. The only control of such unbridled competition and alienation comes in a Hobbesian imposition and intercession of the dominator model.<sup>45</sup>

Once we critically reflect on the meaning perspective of scarcity and competition, we see that a collaborative system provides more fully for all, so we can reach a state where each individual feels safe, and unnecessary fears disappear. We need no dominator if we can trust one another and live without avoidable fear. When we accept compassion, we ignore the invitation to competition and fear. Without compassion, we can feel rather superior to another's suffering and smug in our self-serving assumption that somehow this other has deserved or earned the suffering she/he experiences. In essence, the other brought this on her/himself. In that way, we find a victory in another's suffering because in our avoidance of suffering, we feel we have won a victory in the implicit or even explicit competition that life provides. In such a conception, we fear others because we know that they feel that same as we, and they will not only deny us compassion, they will act in ways that may well increase our need for compassion. That conception of life creates fear, and fear substantiates the need for the dominator model.

If we wish to continue our search for the self, we can best do that in an environment as free of fear as possible. When we fear others because of their human nature, we will fear ourselves in our shared humanity, our shared human nature. When we offer others compassion, we do so in our belief in an essentially positive human nature which reduces if not eliminates our fear of each other and ourselves. When we experience compassion, we experience our own positive human nature. In that feeling of the positive nature of our shared humanity, we can continue our search for our becoming self.

By engaging fully in a hopeful view of human nature and thus ourselves, in feeling and engaging in the unconditional and thus reducing fear, we may better fulfill our essential needs as human beings, experiencing our becoming self more fully, and entering into the beauty of the I/Thou. We may also allow for and encourage practical achievements in our personal and professional lives. We may find our own real need and goals more attainable.

## ***The problem of the "shoulds"—September 21, 2011***

Our search for the self happens in the present, in the Now as people enjoy saying these days. In fully entering the present, we remain informed by the past, but the past imposes us no burden, no sense of regret for what we should have done. When we do feel such a regret, it seems quite difficult to let go.

My students, and I for that matter, use the phrase, "I should have" with startling regularity. In many if not most cases, students used that expression to berate themselves for their natural need to learn through not knowing, acting out of mistaken knowledge, or simply making a choice that didn't work. Then we say, "I should have known that" and give ourselves a swift kick.

We all know the phrase "We learn from our mistakes," but precious few of us actually take that as a forgiving release from the pressure we feel not to make mistakes or the shameful regret we feel at having made mistakes. In most of our encounters with parental figures and other authorities, they use "learn from our mistakes" as an invitation to punishment, and that sort of learning teaches us to regret every mistake we make but not learn from them. All this regret of past actions puts us into the dominator company of the "tyranny of the shoulds" as the psychologist Karen Horney called it<sup>46</sup>. In this meaning perspective, we set some level of perfection as our unreachable goal. Many students tell me they are "perfectionists," a state nowhere to be seen in the world in the way we generally use the term. When they inevitably come short or fail at this impossible goal, they use the opportunity for self-hatred to one degree or another. The phrase "I should have" serves as one marker for such a feeling.

When I worked with students who wanted to pass the GED and get a high school diploma, I found they showed this very behavior. No matter how well a student did generally in learning new material, she/he would encounter some answer she/he missed. When we discussed it, extraordinarily often, she/he would say, "I should have known that." I would ask why she/he should have known what they didn't know. "It seems so easy now," she/he would answer. Everything is easy once we know. Until then, it's hidden in an unknown language. I asked if using that phrase helped her/his learning, and generally, she/he didn't think it did, but it also seemed a natural phrase to use. Meaning perspectives almost always feel natural even when they hurt—which is often the case. It is in learning from mistakes, the most natural form of learning.

In the phrase "I should have," we find the tyranny of the past used in punishing ways. When I say "should," in this phrase, I speak in the past about the past. I make a demand of myself in the past from what I know in the present and punish myself for not living up to that demand. That doesn't make sense. That never makes sense. How could I know something and do something in the past when I didn't have the knowledge to do that thing in the past? If I leave something at home which I intend to give to a friend, and I meet that friend accidentally when I go out, I can say "I should have taken the book," and I often do. It makes little sense to simply carry the book around arbitrarily in the hopes I will meet that friend. I did not know I would meet that friend, and I still persist in shoulding myself. We burden ourselves with what we *should have* done instead of accepting what we did as what we did which was the best we had at the time.

This acceptance comes to us as one form of forgiveness. When we practice such forgiveness to ourselves and to others, we free ourselves from the burden of the past in our search for the self. We can use our past as a research library into the nature of choices and their consequences. That's valuable and hard won information. The past no longer serves as a burden, a punishment, or a cage. When we accept and forgive ourselves and others, we can release ourselves and others from the past as a trap and transform the past into an informative guide and as compassionate link to others in their mistaken understandings and actions. In this way, this form of forgiveness happens in concert with compassion and unconditional positive regard. Acceptance of ourselves and of others works to join all three in their operation and effect.



## ***The nature of patience and its problems—September 22, 2011***

Students endlessly teach and inform, sometimes indirectly but no less effectively. My own awakening to the idea of acceptance came from a student who told me that I was "the most patient person" she had ever met. All of a sudden (a wonderful phrase when we take a moment to fully hear it), I felt the power of a critical moment, a moment wherein I experienced an instant conception of what my patience meaning perspective as a teacher and as a person meant. Before I responded, I made sure to thank her for telling me something she thought a very positive recognition. Then I told her that I felt there was something about the idea of patience that caused me some discomfort. We talked about it for while as I have done with other students ever since. We examined what latent meaning perspectives lurked behind this seemingly benign expression.

Patience implies a very distinct disparity in power. The patient party generally holds some power over the recipient or victim of patience, as with an adult over a child. As a teacher, I wanted no such disparity. It wasn't true. I might serve as guide to unknown territory in whatever I taught, but students participated as equals in their journey. It was their journey after all. I wanted to serve their need not my own. Patience also makes an inherent demand by expressing its limits: "You are trying my patience," and "I am running out of patience." It can also come as a kind of warning to the recipient, "I have shown a lot of patience with you." As one student finally put it, "Patience is a threat." Whenever we express patience, impatience and punishment hover nearby. I wanted to feel unconditional positive regard and not the patronizing attitude that patience may represent.

If we want to offer unconditional positive regard for ourselves and others, we also want to offer unconditional acceptance for who we or they are. No matter the number of times we need to assist in the same way, answer the same question, or help in the same activity, we accept that need as genuine and always original because the person with whom we work genuinely needs as many iterations as necessary to fully enter into whatever we find at hand. When we feel and show unconditional positive regard, we also feel and show acceptance. Acceptance never limits itself. If we say, "I am running out of acceptance," we belie the very idea of acceptance. Acceptance doesn't hold out an arbitrary standard for accomplishment: "You should do it this way." Acceptance joyfully opens to new ways of approaching an old task. Acceptance happily finds new ways of teaching a task to suit the needs of the learner. Acceptance gladly and authentically acknowledges all the accomplishments a learner achieves on the way to a goal even if the goal has not been reached. Acceptance always assumes the essential good from which and for which we or another person strive. Acceptance sees success in every effort that we make or another makes even when that effort does not work directly in achieving a specific goal. Acceptance comes to us as a "Yes" to life and those who live it, in response to the "No," the negativity of the "tyranny of the shoulds."

When we make acceptance our habit, we can rely on it as our guide to behavior. Many times I have felt some way or acted some way toward myself or another that seemed a bit strained, so I reflected a moment and asked, "Is this acceptance?" Whatever I answer, I just get back to acceptance, and all the tension disappears. When I can experience a "Yes" as gently powerful as

acceptance, I don't need to spend time and effort trying to stop an action I don't like. The energy behind that action simply shifts to working with acceptance, and whatever the difficulty might have been doesn't exist or come into existence. Acceptance can go a very long way to helping me bring my intentions fully into existence through the actions I choose based on my acceptance. Mindfully habitual acceptance allows us to naturally realize the gentle power of unconditional positive regard, compassion, and forgiveness in the problem solving process of becoming the self and in the existential search for that becoming self.

## ***Alienation, identity, and ego—September 23, 2011***

Unquestioned meaning perspectives almost always if not always get in the way of our access to acceptance generally and to unconditional positive regard, compassion, and forgiveness specifically. These meaning perspectives begin early and insidiously. We don't know they form, and we don't they're there. They simply form as a result of our learning in life, wanted or not. They can also form through the learning we get from later traumas as well. Not only do they exist within our thinking, they exert enormous influence on the way we see the world, what we think about the world we see, and how we act in the world. Meaning perspectives function conceptually. They have decided what the world should look like before we even see the things we see each day. In that way these meaning perspectives make endlessly binary judgments about ourselves and the world around us. They tell us what we accept and what we won't accept, what's unequivocally right and what's unequivocally wrong. That makes for a defensive and closed attitude toward anything outside the meaning perspective's conception of how the world should work. Such an exclusionary point of view alienates us from anything and anyone in the world that fails to exist in the manner dictated by our meaning perspectives. It even alienates us from ourselves, our becoming self.

Out of such alienation we build an identity that makes form in the world. Returning to the child we left playing with too many scattered pieces, we find the child feels a powerful need to create form out of the seeming chaos of these pieces. In that meaning perspectives can already define the nature of the pieces and the nature of the form they take, the child looks for a way of making sense out of the defined pieces and form. Instead of becoming the self we seek existentially out of our actual experience in the world, we create an identity based of the externalized definitions and forms that meaning perspective provide. We assume an ego to defend our identity we developed to define ourselves. Our ego denies us our existential search because it closes us off to the openness of the existential search as it makes endless judgments about the world. In such an ego, we soon feel and believe in the empty truth of the scarcity model that the dominator model defines as an essential part of the world. Scarcity encourages an egotism that can function as apparent selfishness and greed. This encourages and increases our alienation from self and others through an inherently judgmental point of view which closes us to the world of possibility and learning. Our identity and ego serve in positive ways in our whole being but not when they dominate through the limiting power of meaning perspectives which close us off from the world and our becoming self.

Unconditional positive regard, compassion, and forgiveness and their associated acceptance come out of openness. Meaning perspectives preclude such openness. When our meaning perspectives put us in the position of making a judgment, weighing things we experience by an arbitrary measure, our regard for anything, positive or negative, is inherently conditional. That eliminates unconditional positive regard. Compassion asks us to open fully to another's need. When we make judgments about the worthiness of another or ourselves for our compassion, what we express ceases to be compassion and becomes, at best, pity and, at worst, contempt. Judgment never forgets, so it never forgives. Judgment inevitably uses past mistakes for current

judgments, and it closes itself to who or what it judges because it judges through a higher purpose of its own. Acceptance observes and makes no judgments at all. It accepts who and what it sees as they present themselves and remains open to them whatever else may occur. These elements of openness, unconditional positive regard, compassion, and forgiveness and their associated acceptance, also work toward ourselves. If we are to search for our becoming self, we will need such openness because the search for our becoming self will inevitably come with mistakes as do all problem solving processes. Judgmental meaning perspectives interfere with that process, but we have learned these judgmental processes instead of what we might have learned about ourselves. As we searched to experience our becoming self, many influences brought judgmental meaning perspectives into our lives and made them definitional to our lives thus deflecting and redefining that search.

## ***Openness, the unconditional, and the search—September 24, 2011***

When we consider those whom we have discussed, parental figures mostly, we can fall into another trap that will deflect our search. As we discussed before, blame will always do others harm and do ourselves harm. As blame traps others into a diminished human role as we have judged that role, it will trap us in our vision of the other and thus trap ourselves in our vision of ourselves in relation to the other. Anything that traps us, anything that closes us, anything that offers us a permanent and frozen identity, will keep us from the process of the becoming self.

Frederick Douglass observed this phenomenon in a very direct and startling way.<sup>47</sup> In his life as a slave, he saw people come to the plantation with a relatively idealistic attitude toward those held in slavery. After some relatively brief time as a slave owner, they took on the meaning perspective of a slave owner thus took on the relationship to the slave as an owner, and that relationship corrupted those originally innocent people. He noted that these former idealists become so embedded in their role as slave owners that they, originally well meaning people, became the worst of that breed of slave owners. They even became demons. They would never saw the danger they faced in absorbing the ambient slave society meaning perspectives, but they did, and the danger turned into a reality that distorted them for life.

Beyond the danger of absorbed meaning perspectives and their resulting identity, we also face the continuing need for us to keep the elements of unconditional positive regard, compassion, forgiveness, and the acceptance that links them ready for use with everyone we have known in our past and will encounter our lives.

Whatever you read here, nothing written here intends to move us away from using those elements no matter how much we feel that some others have done us harm in our lives. If we can shift ourselves into a kind of involved detachment, we might conjure a vision of the nature of meaning perspectives in all the lives around us. If they exist at all, they exist for nearly everyone to one degree or another. A complete vision of the panoply of meaning perspectives affords us a few of a nearly infinitely connected matrix and maze of perspectives received and enforced by all, from all, to each other. This display takes us deeply if not endlessly back in time, for each immediate meaning perspective finds connection to previous meaning perspectives. If our parental figures enforced their meaning perspectives on us, then generally, their parental figures did the same. That would go back as far as when human beings shifted from purely instinctual animals to largely self-conscious ones with a mediated view of the world, themselves, and others. In the face of all those infinite connections going back so far in time, we can surely find a way to use our compassion to keep from judging people we have known whatever problems arose out of those relationships. Every relationship can offer us positive things if we look for them. In that we can learn from all relationships, we can learn in positive ways from the ones that we felt hurt us as much if not more than the ones we felt directly beneficial.

Our conscious use of a compassionate meaning perspective will keep us from developing a new, judgmental meaning perspective based on what we experience through this reading and our possibly aroused memories. Many influences have helped us develop a blaming meaning

perspective about our parental figures and others<sup>48</sup>, but we can choose another, far more conscious and productive perspective. Unconditional positive regard, compassion, forgiveness, and the acceptance they motivate can keep us and our perspectives toward the world and others open and free.

Our freedom to move fully into our becoming self comes partly in how we view our relationship with the parental figures in our lives. Dr. Elisabeth Lukas spoke about this liberation at a conference on Logotherapy in 2000.<sup>49</sup> She offered the image of people constructed like a ship in the middle of a harbor. As these people are constructed, they are anchored to the floor of the harbor for safety until they can sail safely off. At some point, each ship reaches its full construction, fully fueled and ready to go. But the anchor still holds the ship. It is the anchor to their parents. In order to separate ourselves from that anchor, we can do the following three things in immediate action or in memory.

First, we can choose to feel grateful to our parents. Whatever else, we would not have entered the world at all if not for them. Whatever life we live, we live by dint of their actions. In that way, we accept them as they are or were. Second, we can choose to love them, if for no other reason than we feel compassion for them as people and for what they have felt and dealt with the world. In that way, we offer them unconditional positive regard. If we wanted it from them, the least we can do is offer it to them. Third, we can forgive them for all the mistakes we feel they made with us and with themselves. If we can choose to forgive them, we can better forgive ourselves, for we will make as many trespasses in our lives as they did in theirs.

Once we can make those choices, the anchor slips away, and away we can sail. Oddly, in our freedom now achieved, we will also find that we have established a positive bond to those parents whom we have just chosen to give our gratitude and acceptance, unconditional positive regard, and forgiveness. We have separated and found our connection simultaneously. Besides, it may well simply stand as the right thing to do for its own sake.

With all this in mind, we can look at the many influences that brought their judgmental, unquestioned meaning perspectives into our lives and which we examine to become conscious of them and free from them.

## ***Friendship, conditional regard, and conformity—September 26, 2011***

Whatever our experience in our family of origin in terms of unconditional positive regard, all the way from very good to very bad, most if not all of us feel the need to go out into the world and seek more experiences in life and also hope to encounter unconditional positive regard in that unknown but inviting space. Even when we feel fearful to one degree or another, we also feel hopeful to one degree or another. Our intuition tells us that in the broader world we may well find greater opportunities to enhance our search for the self, to continue the becoming self in a new environment.

When I asked students who else influences us as we attempt to grow into a self, aside from parental figures, they always came up with any number of answers. The first often focused on relationships with friends. Many students and others have spoken about the vital importance of friends in their formative years. Many of my students told me that they stayed in high school primarily because of their friends. If their friends graduated before them for some reason, they often dropped out lacking any motivation to stay in the now deadly environment of high school.

Given friendship's central importance for the becoming self, and for many that came only slightly behind parental figures and families of origin, we discussed what we might have hoped from such friends, such relationships in terms of the becoming self. We looked for the possibilities of finding the qualities of unconditional positive regard, compassion, forgiveness, and acceptance that we have found as central to the becoming self. When we looked hard, critically examined the idea of youthful friendships carefully, we found that the picture clouded a good deal. Our nostalgia for these friends became upset if not overturned by many of the realities we discussed.

Friendships in early years often had to do with doing what the friend wanted us to do. Even in preschool, lots of children seemed to make bargains out of their friendship, even make competitions out of friendship. The phrase, "I'll be your best friend if you do this or give that," still seemed to ring true even for younger students. The steadiness we want from regard seemed stunningly lacking for most. Many reported that they had no idea if yesterday's best friend would have become indifferent or even worse, a kind of enemy from one day to the next. If the best friend had wandered off to another best friend, whatever else was true, the abandoned friend felt the loss and felt the sting of being left out of the relationship now formed without her/him. Sometimes, another kind of bargain would get struck and friendships could re-form. The weakness in that friendship came because when friendship becomes commerce and negotiation for position, the friendship has very little relationship to any real sense of the developing or becoming self. These are the relationships of having, of possessing and discarding, not of being, of acceptance and continuity. Such childhood friendships can make the playground a field of competition, recrimination, "best friend," "worst friend," "I don't like you" minefield of emotional turmoil. Whatever lessons we learned in such fields, they taught us to watch what we do and say and to please others so they would like us. Hardly the becoming self when we learn to adopt poses and attitudes we might find at odds with how we feel.

The older these questions of friendship became, the more complex they seemed to become as well. By high school, friendships existed in complex ingroup and outgroup structures which most everyone called "clicks" (I tried to use the spelling "clique" any number of times, but almost always told I got it wrong).<sup>50</sup> Clicks had two essential functions. The click made its own group the ingroup, and it declared any other click or anyone else the outgroup. The click formed an entire set of positive features for the ingroup, itself, and at the same time the click constructed a complete set of negative prejudices for the other groups—everybody else. Such dominator labeling did nothing to assist most people in continuing the search for the self, to continue becoming self. Most students said that if they expressed any real individuality, they could find themselves on the outs, off into outgroup land—a cold, lonely, and exposed place. High schools, in this way, bred a very powerful lesson in "us and them," in the creation of a fully human ingroup as opposed to the Other, an alien and less than fully human outgroup or individual. This created tensions between the ingroup, us, against the Other, them, and it also created a quality of cohesion within the us, the ingroup.



## ***Friendship, conditional regard, and conformity—September 27, 2011***

We talked about what this social and personal construct mean to the self. Nothing very good we decided if we wanted a self that reflected the essentials of our working definition:

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility of those choices and results, and the process begins again.

In terms of the ingroup and outgroup phenomenon, conscious independence has no place whatever except as something to serve as model for general fear when such independence gets someone cast out of the group. Most of my students agreed that the click demanded close to absolute conformity and nearly absolute loyalty. As with the family of origin, this group, a kind of family of choice, also wants a surrender to and adoption of its meaning perspective for the group and about the Other. This family, however, holds a form of power that a family of origin rarely uses, complete and absolute expulsion. The group makes its former members into non-persons, as the original purpose of forming an ingroup demanded.<sup>51</sup>

In a click, we found the essentials of domination and conformity. The dominator always exists in the power of meaning perspectives that express themselves as prejudice. Prejudice functions as a form of reasoning based on a false premise, something that is not evident to any viewer unless seen through the meaning perspective that has constructed it. Externally directed prejudice against the Other, denies that Other, a group of people and all individuals within it, the right to personhood, to be seen directly for who and what she/he says and does in the world. The dominator click denies the Other an identity other than that assigned to it by the dominating click. One that I heard more than once read like this: "All jocks are stupid (all athletes are stupid). Buddy is a jock. Buddy is stupid."<sup>52</sup> The power of such a meaning perspective reaches so far that many of the athletes with whom I have worked believed in their own stupidity. The enforced definitional power of the dominator violates the entire process of the search, the becoming self. That becomes an identity defined by the dominator's prejudice. Everyone in the dominating group strictly adheres to that meaning perspective because of the inherent threat of the inner prejudice that the dominating click uses to control those within it.

At the same moment the ingroup defines the Other, it automatically defines itself as not-the-Other and becomes frozen in the construction of the ingroup. In a sense, it Otherizes because the ingroup has no more freedom for the search and the becoming self than does the outgroup as Other. As Martin Buber asserts in *I and Thou*, if we treat another person as an "it," we become an "it" ourselves (see [I/Thou, I/IT, the Other and having—October 30, 2011](#)). Whatever regard my students felt in those situations, each knew that the regard they received manifested only if they met the conditions of membership in the ingroup, in the Us. That makes for something inherently conditional and most assuredly judgmental.

The ingroup offers protection from the loneliness and exposure that comes from living outside the confines of a group. That can mean a great deal when you feel invested in having relationships with others hoping for some form of regard from someone. If not part of a group, you may join a group-less group which offers some comfort. Some (myself included) become loners, complexly group-less and Other. It's a cold and vulnerable place with nowhere and no one to turn to for comfort.

## ***School and the demeaning power of negative regard—September 28, 2011***

For many students, the whole idea of school loomed large in terms of the becoming self or what now has become the forces that make the process one of the not becoming self in the face of the conformity demanded by the social and cultural forces in which we grew up. Our self reaches for individuation. These forces enforce conformity and the surrender of the independent to the status quo. All of this finds its coercive power in the withdrawal of regard for the individual and the constant threat of rejection. As inherently social beings, as we humans are as Aristotle pointed out, we abhor such rejection. Even as we seek liberation from the arbitrary structures of living and behavior that others have constructed, we still desire a relationship with others based on mutual acceptance, or personal regard.

School, for most, is not the place to look for such unconditional positive regard. It doesn't even come in last. Such regard simply forms no part in the scheme of school. School endlessly demands obedience to some standard of its own, and if you don't come up to that standard, you will find yourself trapped inside what the school perceives as your failure. School may call such failure many things. School never seems to exhaust demeaning labels, but at whatever level you reach in the school's standards, it will never be enough for anything but the most conditional kind of regard.

When we enter school, we face a question perhaps unspoken but tangible in every response school has to every effort we make: "How smart are you?" Almost every one of my students, and most people I have ever encountered, don't like this question. In fact, for many who have responded about this question, it hurts. In any question, if not most any utterance, some quality and location of power resides. In this question's configuration, the speaker, the questioner holds all the determinative power. Even as the question is asked, it is answered by the speaker. In that the speaker makes the demand imbedded in the question, it tells you that it holds power and the decisive power over us and our answer. The speaker defines the answer whatever we say.

Students reported over and over that the question itself made them feel exposed and defensive, a reasonable response to a sense of the inevitably demeaning. The question as formed made them feel that the questioner already knew the answer: "Not as smart as I am, no matter how smart you say you are. I'll be the judge of that." In fact, many of them remembered their sense of the question in a slightly different but highly significant way: "How smart do you think you are?" That version simply demands defensiveness on the part of the one questioned. It asks the respondent to confess her/his delusional sense of personal intelligence which the interlocutor will soon expose for what it is. Whatever else students found true about this question, they understood the assumption behind it. The questioner assumes some level of dumb; the question just wants to ferret out just how dumb that respondent is.

This question in one form or another, one specific context or another, forms the basic interaction between school and student. It speaks of school's unconditional negative regard until proven otherwise.

### ***Condemned to being slow and the denied self—September 29, 2011***

Instead of disproving the demeaning negative regard school holds for most of us, it gets proven over and over again in the very process of rewards and punishments that school uses as its central form of communication with students. Testing is based on the judgmental, and the judgmental, as we have discussed, functions in an inherently conditional fashion.<sup>53</sup> In fact, it remains conditional even for those who appear to succeed because the dread of failure never leaves the majority of students even those with perfect grades. The testing system keeps most if not all students and teachers in another way, running scared and a great number of students feeling they cannot run at all. One of the first things such students learn early, definitively, and painfully is that they are not equipped to run in this contest at all. They cannot compete. They are slow. They are special. They are dumb.<sup>54</sup>

When I talked to students about previous experiences with school, many admitted to or confessed to some degree of special education identification in all or in part of their educational lives. They often told me, with apparent or expressed sadness, "I am slow," as if that defined the entire of their school life and, more importantly, denied their entire ability to learn at all. In many cases they went beyond looking apologetic to actually apologizing before we even formally started our learning exchange. They felt like a very weak link in a very short chain. The idea or the reality of their slowness haunted them, and it interfered with all of their learning in school and, for many, in their lives because they felt permanently damaged and beyond acceptance as a full person. Their previous experience in school taught them they had precious little place in learning in any context at all.

The level of nearly violent injustice of this learning loomed as a very real meaning perspective that would make current learning endlessly insecure and incomplete. No matter how well such people learn in reality, their learned meaning perspective about learning kept judging them as slow and inadequate. It prevented them from becoming the active agent and the essential subject of their own learning. It just plain got in the way.

We talked about it. What made "slow" such a terrible thing? I had a friend who earned a PhD, using her slowness as a strength not as a weakness. She considered "slow" a sign of the desire for a thorough understanding of some subject or task. As a teacher, she saw that pattern in her own students as I saw it in mine. Many students were facile and fast in getting some subject in a way very suitable to testing, especially multiple choice testing. When students thought about my friend and her students, they sensed that this description of two kinds of learning fit them, but it still meant they were slow, and that slowness got them into special education classes. Everybody knew what that meant. Almost every student I ever met believed it meant inadequate and stupid. Almost all of them hated the fact that they were placed in special education classes. A few wound up in special education because they lived with a disability that slowed down their responses physically, but they learned quickly in spite of appearances. Almost everyone felt abused, demeaned, and cheated by the whole process of the education they experienced. They felt they learned every day how inadequate they were then and continued to be in the present. In their search for our working definition of self, we found that the self learned and acted on

learning. If people couldn't learn in some very real way, they would find themselves hampered in their search for that self. In some terrifying ways, through judgment, failure, and rejection, school teaches students that they cannot learn. Education can teach that lie and make it a demeaning and distorting meaning perspective. In truth, everybody learns.

My students and I talked about this meaning perspective and process and came to this story to describe how learning through testing really worked against them. When they could see that the fault lay in the testing and not in themselves, they might start critically reflecting on the meaning perspective that got in the way of so much of their learning. We posited the following learning and testing situation. Student A needs to learn thoroughly to satisfy her form of learning. If she has a specific task to learn and then perform, she can do that in two hours. If she can work the full two hours she will not only learn and perform, she will do so with brilliance and originality. Is she a smart person? A very smart person, we agree. Student B can learn a specific task very quickly if somewhat superficially and feel satisfied to learn something in a short time and can perform a task based on that learning in an adequate way in an hour. He will achieve adequacy but not excellence or creativity. Each shows a kind of intelligence, but if they both take a timed test on the same task, who appears smarter? Student A will get brilliant given two hours, and Student B will get competent in one hour and stay at that level no matter how much more time he can take. The test is only an hour. Student B will appear smarter, and will become officially smarter while student A will get marked slow and stupid not slow and steady. The question of competition aside for now, one student gets accepted and the other rejected for no other reason than time. It seems that in school, however else intelligence is judged, it gets subdivided by time. Testing works best in punishing everybody with the ticking clock as its most salient feature. In doing so, it diverts from our becoming self into an identity formed around how dumb we are.

## ***Dominator form of education and what it teaches—September 30, 2011***

Whatever else timed tests do, especially multiple choice tests, they deny any individuality in students, and they deny any original or creative form of learning, intelligence, or understanding. Testing still does what the original "how smart are you" question does. It makes a judgment of student intelligence based on an assumption of some degree of just, plain dumb. In classrooms based on endlessly cramming for standardized tests, knowledge simply get distributed to the students, in Paulo Freire's words teachers "deposit" in the empty student container. When a class ends, nothing qualitative has been gained, just a quantitative dispersal of data if anything. In a classroom that celebrates and works with the individuality and existing knowledge of students, the class creates knowledge. Everyone sees and learns in new ways, teacher and student. In that way, students feel their own power to create knowledge, create and recreate the world. This innate ability of critically examining the world works perfectly with students and their progress as a becoming self. It also allows these students to critically and maturely reflect on any meaning perspectives which have remained unquestioned until that point. School, learning, education can serve as a wonderful vehicle in the search for self. It brings with it the qualities of transformative learning.

The dominator form of thinking makes school stand as an impediment to such progress for the individual. The search for the becoming self has no place in the dominator's economy. Indeed, in an educational model that enhances our sense of self, transformative learning offers students the idea and experiential reality of the intrinsic value of learning generally and of the value their individuality in such a process specifically. When people learn the nature of the intrinsic, they can feel liberated in their pursuit of knowledge about the world and about the self.

The dominator form of education disallows the idea of the intrinsic in learning and in life. Everything must have a payoff, a price, or it has no value. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, when everything has a price, nothing has any value. When the dominator form of extrinsically driven learning becomes the only form of learning, the intrinsic value of learning in students disappears. Their value becomes invested purely in their extrinsic economic value. All education becomes driven by the workplace. That form of education denies any place for the individual lives of students and the values students can find within themselves and their lives.

Ask any student why school is important. Ask anyone for that matter. They will tell you in the overwhelming majority of cases that the importance of school comes in getting a good job. I have done so with students as young as the first grade and students in graduate programs, and I receive the same answer. It's all about a job. It's all about extrinsic gain just like the tests they take. Standardized tests offer no learning opportunity whatever. A well constructed examination can and does.<sup>55</sup> Standardized tests only offer a payoff if the student has recorded the information wanted and can deliver that information in a form the test recognizes. In such a binary system the intelligence required is one easily mimicked by a computer. Such testing requires no understanding, no critical thinking, and no ability to make something new and exciting out of the old. It asks for nothing like human intelligence at all. Frankly, dominator education denies life itself and in that denial, it denies the value or even the existence of the becoming self. If we strip

education and life of its intrinsic value, we have nothing left but programmable, disposable, economic units. No self need apply.

## ***What extrinsic learning costs—October 1, 2011***

When we take all the intrinsic value out of learning, we leave only the extrinsic contest in its stead. Students feel the need for a high score, and they may not care about how they get that score. People generally believe that cheating has risen because our community attitude toward cheating has become more accepting. In cursory glance on the Internet, I found the following:

80% of the country's best students cheated to get to the top of their class.  
More than half the students surveyed said that they don't think cheating is a big deal.  
95% of cheaters say they were not caught.  
40% cheated on a quiz or a test<sup>56</sup>

When we look at the dominator meaning perspective of the testing and rewards processes as we find them now, and have done for many years, cheating becomes their natural outgrowth. This tells us the only value in education comes in what the dominator gives us to show its approval of our education, of our conformity to that education. It makes for a purely extrinsic model of learning; we learn only for the payoff. Learning has no value in itself. The dominator controls the payoff; therefore the dominator our learning. The extrinsic motivates high levels of dominator dependant identify and ego. The becoming self has little or no place.

When we look at intrinsic model of learning, we find that the value of learning comes in the thing itself and how we feels it add to our ability to make effective form out of our world and voluntary participation in the communities we build and are available to us. We find through learning we become more of individuating, autonomous ourselves and more capable of extending ourselves to other in unconditional positive regard. Our dependence on domination and the dominator decreases and our independence and interdependence of our becoming self and the becoming selves of others increases.<sup>57</sup>

In extrinsically driven learning, the value in education comes only in getting the highest score. How you arrive at the score becomes something of minimal if any importance. The information demanded on such tests calls for little or no personal or intellectual involvement on the student's part. They just have to remember data and how to match the data to the form of the test. Although no one considers test preparation classes a form of cheating, we can look at these programs as a cynical approach to beating the test at its own game.<sup>58</sup> They do not teach subject matter of any kind. They just teach how to get around the test themselves.<sup>59</sup> Students exchange time and money to gain an advantage over the test. It looks and feels like some kind of game, but the result of this game has powerful and fearful, in unwanted, outcomes.<sup>60</sup>

When learning offers intrinsic value to students, they learn in ways that standardized tests cannot measure. If a student responds to a question based on her/his intrinsic understanding of some point, each response takes on a different and highly individualized cast. Indeed, that's why testing itself is not only in question in terms of the becoming self. The entire enterprise of so-called objective grading falls under negative scrutiny. Grading degrades every student and turns learning into a competitive process in which cheating becomes more and more likely depending



on the extrinsic value students place on their learning. However, when a student invests value and a sense of themselves into their learning, the intrinsic value, they scarcely need external grading at all. They can rate the level of their own work quite accurately. When I adopted this form of student grading, everyone's work got better. Entire classes became more active, involved, and even joyful. Students didn't check each others' grades out of competition: "What did you get on the test?" They were excited to hear others students' ideas out of genuine interest not looking for who had the competitive edge. When students value learning intrinsically, cheating makes no sense. It's really becomes moot, a null set. Competition on such material also makes no sense. Extrinsic learning serves as a having way of living. Intrinsic learning enhances our being way of life and our search for and connection with our becoming self. When we take the risk out of our learning exchanges, we take out the need to cheat and the sense of desperate competition we find in the standardized test driven classroom.

Competition itself does little if anything positive in our search for the self. Such competition has become an inextricable part of not only our learning experience but almost every experience we find in our lives. This unquestioned meaning perspective drives a good deal of our conduct and makes all others not companions in life but competitors for life.

## ***Competition, cheating, and their human costs—October 2, 2011***

Even when cheaters don't get caught outright, seemingly get what they think they want, and these competitors beat others and receive accolades for their competition, consequences to the self still happen. They still exist. They still matter. Alienation happens.

When we search for the self through our practice as a becoming self, what we intend affects us as well as what we do. Intentionality counts. When we choose to cheat because we intend to gain something we want but don't wish to experience and gain to actual achievement, we have done something powerful to that becoming self. It becomes a form of self-alienation. We have made ourselves into a conformist identity. We become a means to an end, to a supposedly higher purpose, that might do us some perceived good in the dominator, consumerist, having economy. But that thwarts us as a self.<sup>61</sup>

When we cheat, we know that we cheat. The dominator economy offers any one or another rationale for making this choice, "everyone does it" for one, but such rationalizations don't change the intention or the consequence. When we intend to cheat, we intend to deceive others about who we are in ourselves. In that action, we deny ourselves and our value to ourselves. Whatever we gain externally from such a choice and action, we give away an internal consistency toward our self. We throw out an essential sense of internal trust. When we will cheat in one context, we will cheat in another context. One day we cheat on an exam to gain what we want. The next day, we cheat at work to get what we want. The next day, we cheat a loved one to get what we want. Whatever doubts we may feel about such actions, the fabric of deception that we weave engulfs us until the meaning perspective that dominates our choices holds that the most expedient action, no matter how degrading or degraded, offers the only real value for our identity and ego driven lives.

Our working definition of the becoming self implies autonomy and individuation, perceiving and conceiving the world in the way best our becoming self can muster. We act on our own actual and clear perception of the world based on standards of our own attained through critically observation and reflection. The dominator model and economy motivate the decision to cheat, thereby denying us access to the independence needed for the self for which we search. To paraphrase Matthew 16:26: "For what shall it profit us, if we shall gain the whole world, and lose our own self?" That's an old and powerful question that serves as a directive against alienation from the becoming self for some other material and consumerist purpose.

The becoming self, for which we search, exists in relationship with ourselves and in relationship with others.<sup>62</sup> It will not come to us in alienation from such community whatever the wrinkles we find in that community. We become fully expressed as individuals in community with others. When we search for the self, we search for the relationships in that community and how they work with our becoming self. Competition removes us from community. It removes us from other people and makes of these people Other, our competition, the enemy who must be beaten at all costs.<sup>63</sup> The central cost in that struggle comes with a diminution or loss of our

becoming self. We turn ourselves into what Martin Buber calls an It in the I/It relationship we establish with others and the world.

We can and do strive for excellence as part of our natural desire to become as full an expression of ourselves as possible. That's all to the good. When that turns into competition, we often, if not always, lose our sense of personal achievement and turn to the more degraded desire to beat someone else. In that way, we make ourselves and the other competitor, our immediate enemy, a means to another end, a higher purpose: victory, winning at all costs. These victories can come at very high costs including cheating discussed before. The true cost comes in treating ourselves and others as means to an end. When we see others as a means, we see them as Other, and when we see them as Other, it separates us from them and thus from community. When we separate ourselves from community in that way, we also separate ourselves from the search for self, the becoming self which flourishes best in community if not in conformity. When we compete on a team, we might find a semblance of limited and exclusive community there, but that community still exists for the higher purpose of winning at all costs, and the teammate in community remains judged by that person's relationship to winning. If that person fails in that regard, the competitive community throws them out.<sup>64</sup>

When relationship exists solely through our being judged through our successful conformist attitudes and action, unconditional positive regard finds no place in that community. Everything is conditional. This feels like a very unhappy, if terribly familiar, form of community for the becoming self which wishes to offer and receive unconditional positive regard. The meaning perspective of competition, of winning at all costs, may become the defining motivation in other, seemingly non-competitive areas of our lives, which makes our intention in these others areas confused. Friends compete with friends, lovers with lovers, and trust in shared effort disappears and with it another sense of community.<sup>65</sup> Loss of community links with a loss of connectedness to the becoming self. As a result, we further substantiate, feed, and feel we need a strong, clear, conformist identity and an ego to act for it and defend it from other identities and egos. We construct this kind of meaning perspective in our alienation from the self through needing to beat others in whatever game we create and make out of life.

### ***How our identity and ego work in our whole being—October 3, 2011***

Now that we have encountered our ego and identity again and full in the face, we can see their image forms a very real part of us. Those entities make up parts of our whole being. In our search for the becoming self, we also search for a sense of that whole being in the way we perceive and conceive of ourselves and our lives. Identity and ego have a generally bad press. Many look upon identity as a mask, a *persona*, an inauthentic performance which signals our falsity as people.<sup>66</sup> Identity does not have to make us a fake, nor is identity a fake in itself.

Identity allows us to work within the structures of the material world, the outer world, in a way that the becoming self does not. This element of our whole being offers us the opportunity to learn about the world and to learn about ourselves as part of that learning. The becoming self deals with and enhances the inner world of our being, an essential part of our lives, our inner self. The information that arrives through the good offices of our identity makes such introspection more complex and more aware.

Our identity feels the full force of our vulnerability to the world and because of our well founded, and often unfulfilled desire for unconditional positive regard. In that way, our identity forms through its participation in and acceptance and/or rejection by the world. Through these struggles, our identity forms a sense of itself in such a way as to cause our being to feel alive and whole in the face of the chaos that we may feel surrounds us. Our identity does the classic human thing, as the child with the many pieces toy, makes form out of the world and makes of itself a form it can count on as a way to face the many forms of the world. In all that, our identity may feel at some disconnect from our becoming self. Our identity may feel that it represents the essence of our life and thus our survival. That makes the creation and maintenance of our identity vital to our worldly sense of well being, to our worldly existence itself. Given such a feeling, the identity needs some defense against the slings and arrows of daily life.

Our ego performs that service. It maintains and substantiates our identity, protects it from possible harm and dissolution. That accounts for the negative reputation many have assigned our ego. When any threat to our identity appears, our ego works to make our identity safe. It can do that in many ways. It can become combative. It can work harder to prove something. It can buy more than others. It can also hide our identity behind a belief in its own weakness. No matter what it takes, our ego will do what is necessary to make our identity feel safe even if it weakens our identity to do so. Better a compromised identity, a compromised life than no identity, no life at all. The defensive mechanism easily leads our ego and identity into the seductive nature of the dominator model and conformity. When we conform to the dominator and its structure, we can feel sure of our identity's survival—so long as we don't violate that structure.<sup>67</sup>

I want to declare peace and acceptance for our identity and ego. They are us. They act in a way that gives form to the reality in which we live and gives form to our relationship with that environment. We need that. We need that relationship. Ultimately, we can happily end the endless "No" of the war with our ego that we encounter so often. That can happen because we

discover that these elements of our whole being do not exist in opposition to the becoming self. They can serve the same purpose as the becoming self. We wish to become fully realized in our definition of the becoming self, and that definition involves how we interact with and learn from the world. They do this in ways that may diverge from the becoming self, but they do not do so to deny the becoming self. These elements of our whole being exist in the same way parts of our whole body exist. Each serves the whole being in its own way, and when they reach a balance, all goes well. If one part of the body or the whole being becomes distorted, dominates in some way, it can make disease in the whole. Finding that healthy and productive balance within our becoming self, identity, and ego forms part of what we discover in our search for the becoming self.

## ***How our identity and ego work in our whole being—October 4, 2011***

Our identity and our ego can become distorted because of their vulnerability and in their constant buffeting with the world. Our bodies contract diseases in the same way. This distortion can make for a loss of connection with our becoming self, and with that loss, our ego and our identity take what meaning making they can from the world around them alone. They can lose the authenticity and security of the becoming self, and in that way, our identity and ego can feel quite lost. When we can discover the way to understand and offer compassion to our identity and ego, we can find the "Yes" that makes peace with both and leads them and us back to the becoming self and its unfolding. When we offer the unconditional to ourselves, identity and ego, which the becoming self can always offer, we can find our sense of unity returns. When we feel that unity, we discover an authenticity of our whole being, identity, ego, and becoming self that allows us to experience and live a more authentic life. It can end alienation and establish unification of our becoming self with our identity and our ego. A good deal of our discussion so far has led us to this encounter now that we have established a sense of how our ego and identity have come into being.

Life expects us all to take an essential stance toward the world of the present, past, and future.<sup>68</sup> We can seek to work at domination and seek control of that world and its random seeming occurrences, or we can choose balance as our attitude toward what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen. In balance we can better make form out of our experience, find or make patterns, find or make meaning, out of what we find.

Our becoming self strives for balance. It makes conscious choices about meaning in the world, critically reflects on the process of choice and the meanings found or made, and chooses actions that reflect these choices. Our becoming self holds to an awareness and openness derived from its confidence in dealing with the world as it comes, even the unknown and unwanted. It knows it can always choose how it will respond to the unknown, the unwanted, and the unexpected. In this confidence based in the power of response, even in the work and play of improvisation, our becoming self desires and exhibits balance.

Our ego strives for control. It derives its choices from the meaning perspectives swallowed whole from the dominating forces around it. The actions our ego takes are determined by these unquestioned meaning perspectives. It cannot afford awareness and openness because meaning perspectives cannot survive the scrutiny that comes with awareness. Meaning perspectives, as part of the dominator model that defines much of our ego and its actions, expect obedience through submission. The actions taken in this way find their basis in repetitions of how the past worked out. They repeat the past because the past keeps our ego and its meaning perspectives from facing the necessity of altering meaning perspectives to respond, even in part, to changing circumstances. Our ego desires and exhibits control. It's a losing cause, but it keeps trying.

Our becoming self and our identity and ego create and assume an attitude toward living. In that creation, give form to the world and themselves in the world. Without one or the other, this essential function of our existence and interaction in and with the world would falter and leave us

in an indeterminate state of being. Life would pass us by. When we can join these functions into a whole sense of being, we will find the worldly power and experience of our ego and identity joined with the introspective strength of free choice, autonomy and individuation, from our becoming self, and we can find a balance in life that many of us, me very much included, may feel we have lacked in our lives. In balance, we may find many benefits that we have not known fully before.

## ***On the difference between a life of control or one of balance—October 5, 2011***

When the idea of balance came up in classes, I asked my students to tell me how they thought the differences between control and balance would work out in life.

Students pointed out that control is a non-start. It can't happen given the reality of babies that cry in the night, cars that won't start in the morning, sudden rainstorms, and accidents, illness and death. No matter how obvious the lack of any real control seemed, they knew many people who worked very hard at control.<sup>69</sup> That makes sense. After all, if in reality we can't really achieve control, we would need to work very, very hard to hold on to the delusion that we can have control. Our perceived need for control comes, at least in part, from a having perspective on the world.

When we want control over ourselves and the world, we often first seek it through controlling other people. That makes sense—sort of. The dominator model meaning perspective teaches us that our authority in life exists because we can see its effect on others. However I may feel about myself and my life, if I can see my control in someone else, I can feel in control myself. A parental figure experiences a bad day for one reason or another. Bad days, so called, happen generally because we don't exercise real control over life or even ourselves, and we don't like it. When that person gets home, she/he may attempt to exert control over their partner and any child in her/his care. This control often consists of making demands and creating punishments that show power over the other and thus control over the other. Some in the class would point out that people who abuse others often exhibit little or no control over their own lives while these abusers demand more and more control over others. The deeper into a relationship, the more control they demanded. This is what happened to our young friend Stella and her bouncing ball (see [The arbitrary nature of adult response and the confusion it brings—August 31, 2011](#)).

Students also pointed out that even that sort of control, the control of physical or emotional brute force didn't really work. It stopped at appearances. The others involved with a controlling person may submit to the control out of fear, but they don't have to like it. They could think their own thoughts and feel their own feelings. Many seekers of control (dominators or abusers) intuitively know that and feel the need to strive for obvious control all the more.<sup>70</sup>

Most of us, we admit, attempt to control ourselves in a very similar way. We demand action from ourselves on some sort of immediate schedule, and when we don't live up to the standard of the internal dominator, we punish ourselves for our failure (see [The problem of the "shoulds"—September 21, 2011](#)). That's part of the dominator meaning perspective that has become a determining part of our lives. Paradoxically, when anyone attempts to control an abuser, a dominator, that abuser hates it and hates the person doing it down to the ground. The abuser may submit, but the hatred of the submission burns. External revenge may happen when the opportunity arrives. Internal resentment happens all the time.



## ***On how meaning perspectives form and can limit our lives—October 6, 2011***

We can also say "No" and refuse to submit to something that appears to be abuse or domination. It might also occur, sometimes quite often, that what we perceived as domination could actually intend to make a request for something justified or serve as a reasonable and even helpful suggestion or instruction. It happens because we talk and ask for things to happen in a way that often sounds like a demand. If our perception tells us it's actually domination ("I know what she/he really means"), we can just say "No" and miss whatever possibility is presented. It is presented badly doesn't always mean the thing itself will do us harm. We can also see the presenter of the information as a dominator for us to thwart with as many No's as needed. That perceived domination and "No" response happens within us, and if we stack up enough "No's" against others and ourselves, our lives can become very restricted, and we find it difficult if not impossible to get much positive done in our lives. This comes as another place to seek balance in perception and response.

To establish our domination over something or someone, or to escape a perceived domination by others, we choose to live in and act from a generally negative past that our meaning perceptive recreates and successfully maintains as an illusion of the present. Our immediate, unquestioned negative responses almost always come from the past and our meaning perspectives formed by that past learning or experience. It interferes with our perception and conception of the present and disallows our full participation in the present. Seeking control means seeking the past. It can become a kind of self condemnation or enslavement to the past.

Unquestioned meaning perspectives always hold us in the past.

When a meaning perspective becomes established, it becomes the way we always see certain situations, certain people, certain objects, and simply becomes the filter which imposes form and color to any possible event in our lives.<sup>71</sup> That filter becomes the way we always perceive and conceive of something, therefore becomes determinant on how respond to it. When we perceive through a meaning perspective that something is a danger, we respond to it as a danger even if in some new context, it offers no risk and might even serve as a help. If I see something as a pleasure, I will always see it as a pleasure even if in some new context it might have become detrimental or even an immediate danger.

Experience in living can establish meaning perspectives about how we perceive, conceive, and conduct ourselves in life. Certainly, many if not most of our meaning perspectives happened and became established quite early in life. They just happen to us without us really even knowing they have happened. We have no immediate awareness that they exist. These unquestioned meaning perspectives simply manifest themselves in our minds as obvious and immutable truths about ourselves and our relationships to the world, to others, and to ourselves independent of all reference to present and future contexts, as we discussed, thus making us live in the past and separated from the present, from what many people call the "Now." That's why we have to work at control so vociferously. Keeping the past in place in spite of the steady and inexorable flow of life into the present and future takes enormous effort. It also tends to preclude a great deal of

learning because much real learning opens us to new ways of experiencing the world thus violates the meaning perspective, the visceral truth within us. When we feel that violation, we will feel the very structure of our identity and therefore our world threatened because we use meaning perspectives to give the seeming randomness of the world form. As we have discussed, we all feel the need to find or create forms of pattern and meaning in the world, so that we can navigate the world with some facility. Meaning perspectives satisfy that purpose in their own way, getting us successfully through some experience in our lives, but a meaning perspective that forms in one context of need can become permanent, over generalized, and internally dominating. It may make meeting some other need in some other context nearly impossible.

The child playing with the toy of many pieces faces a life experience which she/he can find confusing and even upsetting. If that confusion and upset continues long and repeatedly enough, they could form a meaning perspective, so the child becomes at peace with formlessness and mess, as we discussed earlier. If someone comes into the scene and says, "Can't you figure this out? This is how you make these pieces work. Try that," and physically shows the child the pattern and makes the child repeat it, "Until you get it right." If the child senses that he gains form and some positive regard, the child may feel relieved and a different meaning perspective can form. The child will insist on obeying the rules as the best and only way of getting things done. In the same situation, the child might feel some resentment about the interference and not like the judgmental nature of the regard, so the child derives a meaning perspective about never taking advice or reading instructions and always reinventing the wheel to get something done. Simultaneously, along with the development of a specific, situational meaning perspective, the child also continues to develop her/his meaning perspective about inner happiness or inner unhappiness.

Twin sisters attended the interviewing class where these discussions developed.<sup>72</sup> One sat in the back, kept her eyes down, said absolutely nothing and looked as if the class offered her nothing of value. Her sister sat in the front of the class and often argued with even very minor points, and I wondered if she too felt the class offered her nothing of value.

After a session of the class, they stayed on and spoke to me. They both assured me that they were really getting a lot out of the class and the discussions. They knew that it could look otherwise, so they wanted to explain. It's just that they behaved in the way they did because, as one said, "That's just the way we are." When we hear that phrase or speak that phrase, we can almost always feel sure that we speak out our defensive ego about our vulnerable and insecure identity. That phrase may also indicate the strong presence of an "I am . . ." meaning perspective.

I thanked them for talking to me because I did have my doubts about what the class held for them. They thanked me for my honesty and said they felt good about getting it cleared up. We chatted on amiably, and I mentioned that I found it remarkable that they were so different in their approach to life. They responded that they became this way when they were placed in an orphanage. They told me that they felt in danger in this institution from the staff and other children. The quiet one said she learned how to seem invisible so no one would notice her, and she would come to less harm than otherwise. The other developed a highly confrontive technique, so others felt a very real reluctance to offer her any harm. Each developed a strategy,

and they both worked in the institutional context. They felt and actually were safer—in that context.

We talked openly, and I said that I admired the survival techniques they had chosen. Any response that made a nightmare bearable seemed well justified. Then I suggested that these techniques might not serve them as well when they shifted into other contexts. Even in an interview, such techniques could work against them. A person who cannot talk and provides little information about herself, might find it difficult to get hired. On the other hand, a person who responded defensively and confrontively to the interview might also find it difficult to get hired. They responded that they knew that, but that was just the way they were. They felt that had no options at all.

Such a surety of limitation serves as the voice of a meaning perspective, one that may well have developed as a strategy for dealing with life even before the orphanage. That strategy proved extremely effective in the orphanage and became a meaning perspective about life and living globally. But as is the case with meaning perspectives generally, it would not adjust to new situations or contexts. These twins felt absolutely committed to their orphanage meaning perspectives even though in another context those perspectives could well do them harm. Whatever else they felt, they knew that they had to keep control through the application of their orphanage meaning perspective. So long as they continued to do that, they were stuck in the past, one that they wanted desperately to escape. They wanted control, to protect the egos and identities they developed in the orphanage, but it left them with no mechanism to find balance in their immediate lives. Meaning perspectives and the control they demand work in ways we feel we need, but they work against us as well. They keep us from the expression of the becoming self which seeks and manifests balance in ever changing and shifting contexts of daily living.<sup>73</sup> Meaning perspectives may also trap our identity and ego into roles that may threaten our whole being. In the case of these sisters, neither might interview well enough to get the jobs they wanted.

## ***The unity of our whole being—October 7, 2011***

Before we look at the achievement of balance on the part of the becoming self and how that works in life and self, we might want to think about the unity of our being that always holds true no matter how we talk about its parts. In an attempt to understand the entire entity or subject at hand, we do tend to look at parts of the whole being. Looking at the parts of something takes us into a reductionist method to understanding and making sense out of complex phenomena. When we choose the reductive method to make sense and form out of some entity, we want remember and to act to restore unity to the entity. It becomes quite simple and easy to get lost in the parts. That does not mean that the whole being ceases to exist or that we take sides with any one part we discover in our process of examination. Appearances might indicate a kind of division between our becoming self, our identity, and our ego, but these elements only appear to be and sometimes even feel divided in a kind of Cartesian separation, the becoming self a separate and higher kind of being from the lower kind of being formed by the manifestation of ego and identity. The apparent separation stems from the divisive forces we all experience in the driving confusion of modern life that make so many demands on us for our attention and action. We get stuck in the pieces and forget the whole. In our confusion, these qualities of our whole being take on the appearance of what some describe as warring camps. In this writing, we seek to find only unity through examination and understanding, making sense out of the way in which we respond to the world and ourselves in the world. Search for, find and use the whole being that the becoming self, identity, and ego comprise.

As children, we come into consciousness as the Eden myth and interpretation tells us, and when we do so, we find the material world of the individual makes endlessly more demands on us than we might have experienced in the womb world where everything existed for our comfort, and we were alone with the only universe anywhere. We were bounded in a nutshell, and counted ourselves a king of infinite space, but we had bad dreams to paraphrase Hamlet. These dreams of awareness became the beginning of consciousness and work when we entered life. Feeding at the breast takes a good deal more effort and complexity than feeding in the womb. Crying takes effort and, as we experience, exhausts everyone including the crying baby. Besides the effort, the motivations for crying make quite a demand on a baby.

We were that baby and are that baby. We cry because we feel threatened as a being in some way. We feel vulnerable. That may come from hunger, isolation, pain, even a general uneasiness about our coming further and further into awareness. Before the baby can consciously say to her/himself, "What does that mean?" the baby works diligently toward achieving meaning out of the world around her/him. As we do so, our vulnerability reappears, and we feel the need to do something to end that feeling, to achieve some sort of power within the world and in ourselves. It is from this need for protection from vulnerability and the achievement of personal power that our need for unconditional positive regard emerges. Unconditional positive regard celebrates us as individuals and also places us optimistically within a supportive community. The state of unconditional positive regard serves the one who gives and the one who receives. They form a community of selves which makes both more whole and unified as individuals even as they establish a loving community. Each wants to the

other to achieve and realize the becoming self as fully as possible. The balance of the I/Thou exists within us as naturally as the oneness that happens when feeding at the breast.

As we soon find out, life does not always provide such an exquisite balance, and when we find that balance disturbed in some way, we experience that primal vulnerability we feel as newborns and beyond. If I look within me right now, even as I write, I can feel that vulnerability. Out of that vulnerability, we develop coping techniques, ways of keeping ourselves as safe as possible, even to the point of defending ourselves against the world that causes us to feel vulnerable. The need and desire to dominate can grow from the sense of essential vulnerability that comes when we exit the womb paradise and enter consciousness. The mechanisms of defense and domination, identity and ego, arise from needs and demands of vulnerability, and they serve their function quite well—from time to time. The problem arises from them when we feel as if that's all that matters: our identity's need to find greater and greater ways of expressing itself because it feels no center within and our ego's sometimes aggressive defensiveness shown in domination and a belief in scarcity.

The becoming self takes information from the world, and we eventually make form and sense of that information in its own terms. The becoming self feels what we have seen as the "locus of control" within our becoming self entirely whatever the external influences. Our whole being learns that we always have the freedom to choose our response to the external and not to surrender to external domination. That's why I prefer to use "locus of balance" for the reasons we are engaged in examining. Our identity and ego depend very much on the externality of control and their response to those external influences. Our ego and identity find no real stability in themselves because the world offers precious little stability in itself, and they exist to exert control over those influences even as they are buffeted by them.

When we find a harmony among these forms of our whole being, our becoming self of balance and our identity and ego of assertion and defense, we can get on with our becoming our whole being quite well. Eventually, we can return to a sense of unity within all of these factors of our whole being, but it takes some time and it takes, most assuredly, awareness of the full expression of our whole being in any and all its manifestations. With such awareness, such a critical reflection on meaning perspectives and our responses to the world, such a metacognitive point of view on our whole being, we can escape from the trap of a unholy trinity of opposition within our being and allow our diversity of being to settle into a multifaceted whole—the diamond faceted whole being of self. At that point, we can even celebrate our identity and ego for affording our whole being a sense of safety as we grew enough in our becoming self to become more at ease with the vagaries and hard edges of life. When we search for the becoming self fully, we will find that self a unified and diverse whole being, including identity and ego, well deserving of our unconditional positive regard, our compassion, our forgiveness, and our acceptance.<sup>74</sup> We are, indeed, us. We are "I am becoming." The "I" always learns and choose how to live, how to respond to life. "I," in this way, is a verb.

### ***Continued discussion of control and balance—October 8, 2011***

The idea and attitude of balance rather than control comes to us, to our "I," as a choice when we know it is a choice. The approach of the becoming self always lives within us no matter if we have ever known or felt it was there or how long it has been since we felt aware of that self. It exists as does Frankl's idea of the defiant human spirit. It forms part of us no matter our awareness level. Once we take on the slightest awareness of the self and the possibilities it presents, we make choices based on those possibilities.

In choosing control, we build bastions against the forces of life. We attempt to command that which cannot be commanded. That act brings us to remember the story of King Canute by the seashore. The king felt so powerful sitting in his throne, he commanded the sea, its waves and tides to stop. The sea may have heard his command, but it came in nonetheless, and the king held to his throne and drowned. Those who choose control will almost inevitably drown as a result of that choice.

Children who grow up by the seashore often build sand castles, so called, structures made from sand on which they can lavish many hours and much sunburn. Like the child who began this writing, the child seeks to make form out of the endless, formless sands at the edge of the sea. The sea will eventually come in its inevitable waves, and the form built returns to the seeming formlessness of the undisturbed sand. At the first instance of this occurrence, a child might even cry at the loss. Salt tears can join the salt sea, but the sea and its waves will not turn back until the tide has fulfilled its rhythm. When the child matures, she/he might build a wall around the structure to preserve it, and it might well do that for a while, but the sea will still come in and inundate the object of the child's sense of form and control. King Canute in his power felt and acted like a child frustrated because the child finds she/he can't control everything. Upset may still come to the controlling child, and each tide brings fresh disaster. At some point, the child may mature and find the balance between itself, the sand, and the sea. Instead of seeing the inevitable as a threat and an eventual loss, a disaster, the child sees the process as one of endless possibility. When the sea returns the sand to its place by the seashore, the child is not left with nothing to show for it. The child contains the knowledge and experience gained in building the structure, and will return to a new structure using the knowledge and wisdom of the past. The child also gains the knowledge of the beauty of the growth of things and their return to elements ready for use again and again. When we seek balance, we seek the everyday newness of life, make use of the past as a vast library of experience and knowledge, and live in the present with all the challenges and achievements that it offers.

Instead of building bastions against the forces of the sea, we can learn to ride the waves in some contexts and in other contexts accept the passing of the old into the past and using memory to strive for more achievement in the present without being drowned in our own tears of regret. We can find and achieve balance. As the child learns that she/he can choose how she/he responds to things and circumstances that she/he cannot change, we can learn that we can always exercise our freedom to choose how we respond to any situation at any age.

## ***The metacognitive and fear of the unknown—October 9, 2011***

Keeping our natural and thus realizable, achievable ability to choose our response to change and the unexpected can give us a rather boundless feeling of confidence in our ability to cope. We can feel resilient, ready to say "Yes" to life whatever happens. In that our interview class discussion arose from the fear that most students reported about facing the interview, we looked at how this confidence would help us face such a situation.

Students reported that they feared interviews because an interview always felt like unknown territory. Part of our study of the interview meant to dispel that unknown quality, but the idea of fear at facing the unknown deserved our attention in any case. Perhaps the fear stemmed from some unquestioned meaning perspective that most of us held about the interview and ourselves. Such perspectives can become clear to us when we critically reflect on them. In that sense, it called for our use of "metacognition," the metacognitive approach that we entered into before. We wanted and needed to think about our own thinking.

Most of my students did not know that word, and when we defined metacognition as thinking about our thinking. Students generally rejected the idea that they did that at first. When we saw it in an everyday light, that rejection changed. When we say to ourselves, "I am thirsty—I need a Coke," we experienced a feeling, thirst, and a thought in response, "need Coke." Simply by looking at the phrase in that way, we achieve a critical reflection and a metacognitive point of view. Thirst, we see, comes to us as a natural response to a direct feeling. Needing a Coke comes to us as a choice of response to that feeling. When we ask, "why a coke?" we critically reflect metacognitively on that question. Why indeed? Coke costs money. It may not really quench thirst but leave us wanting more. It's full of sugar we'd be better off without, and it's a brand name which costs much more than the same thing in a generic form. Water would work better. Why a Coke, indeed. The "Coke" part of this internal response stemmed from an unquestioned meaning perspective about the relationship between a natural function and a widely advertised and normatively accepted product: "It's the real thing" unlike unreal thing water. Our critical reflection on the meaning perspective can free us to make a freer choice in answering such a basic need—no Coke need apply.

We already knew from the images of the interview the students drew or imagined that they felt as powerless as a child in front of an adult in anticipating an interview. They felt vulnerable. They felt afraid. Critical reflection on our fear of the unknown can bring us to a choice about that fear that seemed unnatural to many. Fear is a feeling, they said, and so it just happens: "We can't choose how we feel. Can we?" We could and did. They said that fear of the unknown rose out if the idea of the unknown itself. That settled it for most of them. It did, sort of. It explained a thing was that thing because—it was that thing. Fear of the unknown happened because the unknown is fearful. Such a definition didn't say anything much about how fear works or comes to be in the first place. The unknown could just as easily come to us offering wonderful possibilities and gifts. Indeed, we read a book or go into a movie in hopes that the unknown will do just that. When we enter a new restaurant, we feel excitement in anticipation not fear of the unknown there. The unknown forms an open space of possibility, undefined, yet we make a

choice to fear its possibilities. Like a child in the dark, we fear the unknown because we project something into it as does the child into the dark. Whatever we project, we feel powerfully that we cannot cope with the thing we put into the unknown. That suggested that we generally doubted and therefore feared our ability to cope with the new, the unknown. In a sense our meaning perspective about our ability to cope made the unknown known in that it became something with which we could not cope, something we must fear. Fear of the unknown in reflection emerges as a fear of our own inability to cope with what life can offer, good or bad. Fear of the unknown is fear of our self.

When we find within us our ability to choose how we respond to any situation, we feel confidence in facing the unknown. It's not unknown insofar as we know that we can choose our response to it. We can cope. We can survive. We can even thrive. In that way, we can overcome the limits of this fear producing meaning perspective we have learned over the years: "I cannot face the unknown without fear because I cannot cope with what I do not know. I should live with what I know, live in the past and stay safe."

Knowing that we can choose how we respond to any situation allows us to seek balance in our life rather than control. That liberates. We can enter life far more freely at that point because we feel that we can cope with the new contexts life offers through our power of choice. We can even enjoy choice. Change opens us to life because, as with the sea, life ebbs and flows. Life as life exhibits rhythms and growth, rhythms of shifting possibilities, rhythms of newness, rhythms of joy and sadness. When we enter those rhythms freely, openly, then we don't need to say "No" to fear. "No" is not enough. It serves us better to say "Yes." We can say "Yes" to life in all its variability. We can accept diversity in others and within ourselves. We can choose that freedom anytime. We can find the balance that life allows us in response to its rhythms. As Frankl writes, we can "Say 'Yes' to life in spite of everything."



## ***The "Yes" in spite of diagnoses—October 10, 2011***

When we return to the working definition of the becoming self, we find that it goes along very well with the "Yes" of seeking balance with the rhythms, freedom, and uncertainties of life.

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility of those choices and results, and the process begins again.

The choices for "Yes" and the choice for self show their unity in this definition. Perhaps we might add something about critical reflection of unexamined meaning perspectives: "The self exists as a conscious, self-reflective, independent entity. . ." The self-reflective addition can suggest the need for us to remain aware of our natural tendency to form and re-form meaning perspectives. The result of our newly spawned ability to critically examine unquestioned meaning perspectives and make them into choices of awareness of our prejudices brings us to entering more fully into our human potential to experience transformative learning. Out of the transformative comes a new way of seeing and experiencing the world, in a way liberated from but still helpfully informed by the past.<sup>75</sup>

It will help us to keep to the process of the transformative in our lives, to make the choice for "Yes" to the balance and the rhythm in life, to remain aware of our tendency to make meaning perspectives about our past as we live each moment fully, build our present, and enter our future every day. Our examination so far has kept us in our more distant past, this stable past, but we don't want to stay there and tell ourselves we are done with self-awareness. Transformative learning can come every day even as we live through the present and create a vision, tell our heroic story, of our yesterday. We also want to make sure that our awareness of the past doesn't become a new, unquestioned meaning perspective about ourselves which may produce the very sorts of restrictions about the self from which we wish to become liberated.

Many of the students with whom I worked came to me labeled if not encumbered with some diagnosis of mental or emotional difference. I always assured these students that I had no degree in psychology. I was not shrink and had no shrink wrap on the wall. We did not consider the work we did together as therapy. We could see the work we did together, the learning we did together, as therapeutic and even transformative. Any achievement we realize, can offer us a transformative experience because when we achieve, we see ourselves anew, as successful, capable, and ready for a new form of learning. In that sense, we did not deal with their diagnosis at all directly, but we critically examined and reflected on that diagnosis by way of seeing not what was wrong with them but what was right with them.<sup>76</sup> It could actually happen that through a reinterpretation of the past realities, such a diagnosis became part of the positive and heroic story of the present and future.

We often talked about the fact that we are the story we tell ourselves. When students came with a diagnosis, they often spoke as if they felt burdened if not trapped by such a diagnosis. They

often spoke as if such diagnosis served as the end of their story not as an interpretation of their story. They spoke of themselves as "I am a . . ." and then named their diagnosis. They had become their label in their own minds. The diagnosis served as a meaning perspective which also had become part of their identity, their inner vision of who they were to themselves and in the world. As sad and limiting as their diagnosis felt, their ego defended it and kept it in place as an essential part of their identity. That made the internalized diagnosis very hard to escape like the slammer.

We often spoke at length about the process of this diagnosis, and its result. Many had been involved with recovery programs wherein they discussed the problems they experienced in their lives which seemed to direct them to damaging choices in their lives. They had learned to identify these mistaken choices of their past as "my issues." That they referred to these past occurrences and difficulties in a possessive way and in the present tense disturbed me. That the phrase "my issues" also turned these mistaken choices into an immutable element of their own, and made them definitional to the students who reported them. It sounded to me that every day when they woke up, they would put on these "issues" like a pair of glasses. They would then look in the mirror, and there they were, not the becoming self of them, not their whole being, but their "issues."

## ***Issues and identity in recovery—October 11, 2011***

The students with whom I worked talked as if the issues had become their identity. They identified what they had done in the past as definitional to themselves and to the scope of their lives in the present and the future. In a very powerful sense that ended the idea of balance for them. They felt their lives were overly heavy in one direction or another, weighted down by their past issues so no balance could ever exist. They sought a kind of control over themselves and their lives by endlessly restraining their past issues, controlling the issues of the past so they could function to some degree in the present. This effort became exasperated by the amount of themselves they invested in these issues which they saw as an essential part of their identity. Issues of the past formed a complex meaning perspective which, as such perspectives often do, offered a kind of comfort even as it made for restriction and limits in how they could see themselves and the world, limits in how they could live their lives and simply enjoy them. Such a meaning perspective offers a form of identity which they and we value as part of the structure of our coping with the seeming chaos of the life we live and the world we live in. Even the saddest identity feels better than no identity at all.

Identity exists for us as a way of identifying ourselves to ourselves and to the world. In the midst of the vagaries and shifts and changes of everyday life, identity allows us the security of some sort of anchor, a fixed place from which we can live in the world and with ourselves. It offers continuity and form to our lives in relation to the world around us. Generally, we feel we possess our identity in such a way as it works like a card that allows us admittance into everyday reality even as a driver's license allows us into the official life of the automobile, the road, and the traffic we find there. In the same way, we feel our identity shows that we possess a certain competence in participating in life just as the driver's license does for the road.

However, when we have an identity, it possesses us as much as we possess it. It allows us to feel a sort of competence and ready to enter each day with some sort of purpose and some sort of pattern in ourselves and in our lives. Without an identity, we fear that our lives will have no mooring, no personal structure that will give each day form, each action meaning in that form, and give us direction as to how to move from one place in our day and in our lives to another. When the child sought to make form out of the myriad toy pieces with which we began, she/he wanted to give them form, to give them a kind of identity. In doing that to the toy, the child also works at giving form to her/his life by way of forming an identity. Identity works as a kind of heuristic, a way we have of solving situations in life based on what we have experienced in the past. Identity in all these ways helps us live in a world which presents innumerable problems of one size or another for us to solve every day. Identity can also keep us from living our lives fully, from experiencing the becoming self, because the very factor of its comforting, if illusory, stability makes the transformative that we also seek nearly impossible.

When these students came into the program where I worked, they sought something of the transformative from the low end jobs in which they felt stuck into some other professional possibilities. They saw themselves as failed and inadequate in many ways, and they wished to find some liberation from that sense of inadequacy. The problem in such a desire for the

transformative came in the way they and we seek that transformation. They sought it in the instrumental almost entirely, in learning new mechanical skills, using the computer for work in this instance. They did not see the inadequacy they felt came from their sense of identity and the meaning perspectives that motivates their identity. That could incorporate new work skills with enough instrumental training. That might mean a new kind of job and a better income. It did not mean that they would get to some place that took them out of where they were when they came in. If their sense of their issues-based identity did not find a transformative expression, they would often continue to feel the same way about themselves and their lives no matter what skills they attained or job they secured.

After many discussions about the past, we discovered that typical programs which intended to help their recovery from abusing themselves with some substance or another involved a nearly endless rehearsal of every excruciating thing that had happened to the participants and every rotten thing they had done. A vast body of psychiatric literature may well exist that theoretically demonstrates the benefits of such extreme if not endless self-exposure. My students demonstrated and reported that it also brought with it some profoundly deleterious effects.

## ***We are the story we tell ourselves—October 12, 2011***

Anything that assists in ending our dependency to substances has value, but anything that works in one way may also need some amelioration for its unwanted effects. The unwanted effects of intensive and repetitive group and individual discussions of dependency issues and the factors surrounding that dependency arrive in the form of a possible removal of the act of dependency but a strengthening of the meaning perspectives that made for that dependency. Identification with that dependency as the primary source of personal identity makes the search for our becoming self and critical reflection on the meaning perspectives that support the feelings of the dependency much more difficult. Such examination and reiteration of issues can generate a sense of helplessness, powerlessness in the face of dependency. It can inadvertently make the definitional power of dependency all the stronger even if helping to stop the action of dependency in the present.<sup>77</sup>

Students and I discussed the ritual of diagnosis when working with those involved with psychiatry.<sup>78</sup> In order to uncover the disturbances the person suffers, they expose every rotten thing that has happen to them and what that did to them. They center for the first sessions on that body of the life lived and from the point of view of illness. After a few of those sessions, most people feel quite ill and often far worse than they did when the process began. All that examination might have some necessary purpose, but it can leave the people involved with very negative feelings about themselves, even intensified feelings of negativity toward themselves. It can embed them further into the negativity they experienced and to which they responded with dependency. They just might be able to see beyond the limits of those situations and their responses. They might not. It becomes the only story they tell about themselves because it's the only story they see and rehearse about themselves.

We are the story we tell ourselves. That story comes from how we see and respond to what has happened to us and the choices we made in response. When we rehearse the same negativity over and over, we fill up the lenses with which we see ourselves and the world with that negativity about ourselves and our relationship to the world. It's as if we fill up a clear water bottle with these negative fluids, and we raise the bottle in front of our eyes. We don't see through a glass darkly. We see through a distorted lens seemingly clearly, through the meaning perspective we make out of our past. As the unhappy past fills our vision, we can see nothing about the present that exists outside the distortions of the past. Our becoming self plays little or no active part in this vision. Everything is that past identity, and it's an identity that speaks badly about us. It's an identity that deprives us of our power to act successfully in the present. That's the only story we tell because it's the only story we can see, the only story we can tell.<sup>79</sup>

When we take the bottle away from our eyes and put it on a broader, table top vision of our lives, we can critically reflect on the validity of the bottle, the defining meaning perspective, through which we have seen and made judgments about ourselves. Our eyes freed from the obstruction, we can see a fuller expanse of our lives and ourselves. None of the facts have changed. The water bottle full of our issues is still there but it has taken on a very different perspective and serves as only one element, of ourselves and the life we have lived and the life we can live. We find we are not trapped within that past life. We show strengths and actions that make the

present different from that past and the future filled with possibilities. We can retell our story in a way that strengthens our ability to get on with life as fully as possible.

A friend asked me to meet with a man she was working with in recovery. As was often the case, he immediately went into the issues he had rehearsed so many times. It felt quite devastating to listen to his story. It began with child abuse, sexual abuse, child prostitution, and ended with incarceration and a bottoming out that landed him finally in recovery. This grueling story took quite a while to hear let alone live through. When he finished he looked at me waiting for some response. In a moment of what I now see as inspiration, I said, "Congratulations."

He looked at me with what appeared to be surprise if not shock and some considerable confusion. "What do you mean?" he asked. He hadn't expected such an answer and hadn't heard it before. "You're a hero," I responded. Still he couldn't quite make sense out of what I had said. Clearly no one had spoken to him in this way before. I hadn't said it before either. He knew his story as tragic, as it was, and as evidence of his victimization and failure in his life. I said, "You're here." He knew many people who had gone through less than he, and they had died or still remained buried in their dependency. He had voluntarily signed up for recovery. He had survived the life forced on him as a child and the life he chose after that based on the meaning perspectives created by his early suffering. They taught him to make choices that would continue if not increase his suffering. His inner unhappiness showed itself palpably throughout his life. He had been through most of the hells provided in any life, and he lived to tell the tale.

He stood up in recovery and declared he wanted to make new choices to live a life different from that one he had lived. According to Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, he had gone through the most difficult and dangerous parts of the hero's journey, and he was still on his way. He had become a hero through all of what sounded entirely negative. The positive came in his survival and in his determination to move on. Those choices realized in him the hero he had always been. That immediate heroism could not be taken from him whatever his next choice. The story of the hero was embedded in his life. In all the retelling of the story of his heroic life, we didn't change any of the details. They happened. They existed. He could, however, change how he saw them, how he interpreted them, and how he would respond to them in the present and future. This critical reflection on the meaning perspectives of his past could liberate him to see himself in new ways and realize all the strengths he had shown in his survival in the face of everything that drove him toward despair and destruction.

In that liberation, in that heroism, he felt the beginning of a return to his becoming self and a restoration toward a whole being. Such awareness is not a technique we employ from outside ourselves but an authenticity we realize from within.

We are all heroes. We are all the heroes of our lives. We can all tell the hero's story about ourselves and choose to turn bad mistakes into learning experiences, costly and heroic gifts, from which we can learn and make choices that renew our lives and the lives around us. When we renew and liberate our own world, we renew and liberate a part of the whole world.

## ***Liberation and the meaning perspective—October 13, 2011***

Such liberation can begin for any of us as part of critical moments wherein we come to discover, doubt, and question meaning perspectives. That happens through some sort of experience that brings us into cognitive dissonance with that meaning perspective. We come across something through a direct or learning experience that belies our meaning perspective so blatantly, loudly, and powerfully we feel the dissonance between experience and our meaning perspective. Given that the experience happens to us directly and tangibly, we can feel a spontaneous, if slightly startled, need to question the abstract meaning perspective in dissonance with concrete experience.

Meaning perspectives generally operate like prejudices in the form of a syllogism. All A equals B is the major premise. All C equals B is the minor premise. C equals A is the conclusion. This often works quite well as a heuristic, a way of problem solving based on past experience and knowledge. That's quite helpful. All red traffic lights mean stop. This light is red. The light means stop. All bottles with a skull and crossbones contain poison. This bottle shows a skull and crossbones. This bottle contains poison. We take such a valid syllogism as universally and permanently true thus a meaning perspective. When we see something that fits the syllogism, we immediately know with absolute certainty how that entity fits into the world or at least our world in a particular way. These meaning perspectives represent an unquestioned truth until such time as the question arises from some critical moment in our lives.

All green food is disgusting we often learn as a child. We grow up and deprive ourselves of green food. At some point, we feel a real hunger or a sense of politeness, and we eat some green food that tastes wonderful in spite of our previous perspective. We can say that this green food comes to us as an exception to the meaning perspective, but that doesn't work well because the power of the meaning perspective, of the syllogism, comes in the absolute nature of the premise. If not all of something, the premise, the syllogism has little or nothing to say. It becomes so weak as a rule that we feel we have to make up our response to green food as we go along, respond to it directly and openly. In that way, we may choose to abandon our now questioned meaning perspective for a new conscious perspective, one that will try green food and respond to its own, immediate qualities. Our mind has opened to direct experiences of green food and is no longer limited by the meaning perspective that keeps us from experiencing reality as it actually comes to us.

In such a way, we can feel liberated from a meaning perspective. Such liberation brings us back to the becoming self because it brings us back to as direct a perception of reality as we encounter it. That liberation and newly freed perception reconnects us with the working definition of self:

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility of those choices and results, and the process begins again.

The liberation from a meaning perspective takes us back to our "conscious, independent entity which perceives the world" and away from an entity tied to the unquestioned past and its perceptions.

This liberation may sound quite simple, and it is simple in itself, but it doesn't happen simply in itself. Liberation can have its complications. It depends on our attitude toward the liberation. If we want to keep whatever it is from which we also want to get liberated, things can get very complicated indeed.<sup>80</sup>

We often feel our meaning perspectives form an essential part of our identity, and we feel very uneasy and resistant to any question about our identity. Our sense of identity gives us a sense of our substance in the world. Identity imbues us with a form in ourselves, and we feel that form makes us visible, real, and purposeful. We may not want to get liberated from what feels like such an essential element of our life as an individual. As with our ego, we find in our identity a useful part of our complete being. Both identity and ego work to allow our whole being to function and survive in the world which can constantly threaten our essential vulnerability. This vulnerability stems from our desire for unconditional positive regard which we do not often encounter. Instead, we find what feels like judgment and assault because of that need, so we live with our identity and our ego for substance and protection. Identity makes us feel like somebody, and our ego protects that somebody. We see ourselves in a certain way, identity, and we build bastions to protect that identity, ego.

These entities exist as valid and valuable parts of our overall being. Not to establish any form of trinity, our whole being consists of these three entities: the self, our identity, and our ego. Our ego and our identity may exhibit many disturbing manifestations, but the whole being remains a whole being in any case.

The problem comes when identity identification with a meaning perspective motivates ego to defend that meaning perspective through self-justification. Ego simply denies the validity of the direct experience, "This experience was just a freak thing," or rationalizes it away: "Everybody does it." In that way, our identity can go on with its possession of the meaning perspective that keeps it limited but feeling somehow more secure as an identity. Identity exists through having meaning perspectives rather than living through being and experiencing the becoming self and living our whole being where it forms a valuable and valued part.



## ***Clarifying our whole being, facets of that whole being, and unity—October 14, 2011***

I have come to experience these thoughts about our ego, our identity, and the self as a product of writing these pages and listening to a book by Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*. In writing this as part of this work, I want to demonstrate the process I discuss here continues no matter how far we get along in our understanding of the transformative and our own individuation. The self we discover continues to exist as a becoming self. We are always becoming even as the universe and creation are always becoming.

In order to achieve a more and more fully realized self, even if we can take comfort from knowing that there is no end to becoming, we need to survive as a functioning being. In a life full of the assaults that the world and our fellow beings visit on us, such a survival as a physical, psychological, and even spiritual being doesn't come all that easily. We come into the world with needs on all these levels, and we often don't get these needs met to one degree or another. We begin helpless and needing complete physical care and unconditional positive regard. We remain an always vulnerable being no matter how capable we are at providing for our material welfare. We continue to need other levels of support that comes with unconditional positive regard. We want to thrive not simply survive for the self to come into being and continue into becoming. Mostly we do. Innately as humans, we come into the world equipped with many potentialities. The being with which we begin and continue to become begins with the potentialities of ego, identity, and self. Each one exists for a purpose and operates in a way that enhances our chances for our survival on the three levels of the body, mind, and spirit.

Our ego and identity create for us, in an unstable world, a sense of personal form and structure. Our ego works to keep us safe from the assaults of life, and our identity works to keep us real and visible to ourselves and the world. This visibility makes for an assertion of our existence and importance. It gives us a form which we can relate to every day. Our ego defends that form from the forces that seem bent on attacking it and denying its right to the assertion of the identity. It relates well to the child with the manifold toy pieces. We want to find or make the form of ourselves as much as the child wants to make form out of the pieces. We can feel like pieces as well, and we want to feel some quality of unity to better survive as a being. This unity does not come of its own bidding. We work at it and keep on working at in all our waking moments. Our ego works to allow our identity the space in which it can safely operate. Out of those two elements of beings, we find the self can assert itself into the becoming self when the other two find the right balance within the world and within our being. Such a balance doesn't come easily and often winds up in a distorted state instead.

These distortions happen when our ego and identity assume completion in themselves and simply lose their sense of other purpose, that is for our whole being to continue its becoming fully expressed through the balance of our becoming self, identity, and ego. No matter how distorted this balance becomes, we can always find or construct that balance and go on. Our human resiliency performs in such a way that whatever ill considered choices we make about our life, our life can still go on in a reasonable and absolutely fulfilling way.

Identity and ego operate in a constant interaction with the material world. Just now, I would express the becoming self as an entity which exists in a meta-cognitive fashion, informed by but not dominated or directly involved in the material, so it operates in the spiritual. In that way, for some, that would mean the soul. For others simply the part of our consciousness that is non-material. I don't want to strike a sacred note in this writing that would make some people feel an outsider. The truths about the spiritual will happen to everyone equally however we believe in our lives. We all choose what we believe in accordance with how we want to feel about life, and that helps us celebrate our life to the fullest. That's a good reason to stay away from the post-modern, post-structural choice of meaninglessness, but that's our choice. Frankl writes about this existential choice in *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*: "It is equally conceivable that everything is absolutely meaningful or absolutely meaningless . . . the scales are equally high, we must throw the weight of our own being into one of the scales." That's our choice.

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Just for the record, I offer the notes I made on finding this idea in my thoughts. It felt as if these pieces of thought had been looking for a chance to coalesce and did so. There I go making form out of pieces again.

Ego and identity—exist in action, are defined by that action, by responses, by experience which arise from material stimulus. Self—exists in being wherein the being defines perception and action which arise from the becoming self. Our ego and identity serve the world. The world serves the becoming self through our identity and ego.

This relates to something that Erich Fromm writes in *To Have or to Be*. He says the when we act because we feel impelled to do so by outside forces, we are less truly active than when we do nothing based on a desire and a determination within us. Our identity and ego respond to the impelling nature of the world while the self motivates from within.

Ego interacts with the world by way of building a bastion for the safety of our existence expressed in identity. It protects us from our vulnerability. The more vulnerable our identity feels, the stronger our ego becomes in defense.

Identity makes whole, makes tangible, and visible the actions of our ego.

Self informs and enriches itself with being itself mediated from and through the experiences of our ego and identity. Being thus defines form and resulting actions, responses to the world based on the being of the individuating becoming self.

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***Our whole being as unified and individuating which the dominator resists—October 15, 2011***

It is through constant interaction with the material world that both our identity and ego operate to establish a stance to the world and defending that stance. These tasks represent real and necessary forms of survival for our whole being. Our becoming self constantly interacts with both of the materialistic reactive facets of our whole being and remains continuously aware of what they choose to see and how they choose to react and to act in the world. The becoming self never ceases to learn and to make sense out of the experiences of our being in the world. It performs the function of the self we have defined although material choices and actions are implemented through our identity and ego. It is here that meaning perspectives can interfere with the balance of these facets of our being.

In the eventual awareness of our ego and identity their relationship to the becoming self and their ultimate unity with the becoming self more and more of our being feels the wholeness possible for us as a being. The apparent separations work as useful fictions for a good deal of our lives, but they stay fictions. Our mind, body, and spirit exist as a whole being which lives within the painful and powerful illusion of personal alienation and separation of the elements of that being.<sup>81</sup> Forces within the world can make such demands on our identity and ego that those forces can distract or even prevent us from reaching our unified existence as a whole being. When the demands feel so great, so overwhelming, our ego and identity may make choices about how to see life and respond to that perspective that prevents any realization of that sense of unity even though it exists for us endlessly closely.<sup>82</sup>

These forces within the world happen spontaneously, as we have discussed, through a deprivation of our need for unconditional positive regard. The force exerted by a conformist, dominator society or culture works against the becoming self because that self appears as an individuating being. Such a being, such a person, meets the working definition of the self. An individuating person simply thinks and sees for her/himself and acts with conscience, freedom, and responsibility in the world, a state of mind and being in the world intolerable to a dominator model. Such a person loves others. Such a person finds little or no place in the world that the dominator has defined for them. People do not differentiate freely in such a model. They must find a place defined by the dominator and its conformist culture. Domination brooks no difference, no differentiation from the categories of existence dictated by the dominator.<sup>83</sup> If the individual fails to conform to the dominator model, the model places that individual into an outlier category such as "nonconformist." As we discussed, the rebellion and the "No" of nonconformity poses no threat to the dominator. Reverse conformity remains attached, a part of the general domination and conformity. The dominator model can and does consciously use our needs and vulnerabilities to keep us from attaining individuation and the unification of the elements of our being: ego, identity, and self even as it deals quite happily with the rebellious non-conformist. The individuating, becoming self does not rebel, does not shout "No." The becoming self simply acts out a profound sense of the ends principle and the moral sphere wherein the self speaks the "yes" of affirming meaningful life.

### ***On Eden, love, and the ends principle—October 16, 2011***

When we, as babies and children, originally accept and need to difference ourselves from others, no matter how previously close and intimate, we speak the "No" that begins our separation. We reenact the myth of Eden. We also speak the "Yes" in affirmation of awareness and consciousness. That alienates us from the essential connection we had with the Edenic paradise of the womb and the first days of existence where and when no separation existed between mother and child. We felt at one with the one who created us as did Adam and Eve with the God of creation, of their creation.

Our very early positive adoption of alienation, we say "No" in order to say "Yes," drives us from paradise because we now see ourselves as separate and exposed. We are naked in the face of the entire world and all its complications and dangers, and open to its beauties and nearly infinite possibilities. That reality of the paradoxical nature of existence in the world, independent existence in the world opens us to a need for the unconditional positive regard of the world beginning with mother and others as Eve and Adam began with God. Before the separation of consciousness, such affection held no meaning. Oneness with creation precludes the recognition and affection needed with separation and alienation. It is through unconditional positive regard that we escape from the burden but not necessarily the adventure of our consciousness and alienation. As Erich Fromm writes in *The Art of Loving* and elsewhere, "Love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence."

In the dominator model, unconditional positive regard does not equate with the kind of affection, love, implied by infusing that phrase with compassion, forgiveness, and acceptance. The dominator model cobbles the idea of adult judgment onto unconditional positive regard denying it the privileges of love. If love or unconditional positive regard must be earned by passing through some barrier of judgment, generally a conformist meaning perspective, it is not love nor is it unconditional positive regard. In that sense, unconditional love or unconditional positive regard function as emotional expressions, and they also function as ethical expressions—body and mind.

As ethical expressions, they take us to Robert Kane's understanding of a Kantian Categorical Imperative: the ends principle: "Treat every person as an end in every situation and not as a means (to yours or someone else's end)."<sup>84</sup> This principle helps us resolve the paradoxical condition in which we find ourselves. We want our separateness and independence on one hand, and we want complete recognition and acceptance in that separateness. When we feel seen and treated as an end in ourselves, we no longer feel as vulnerable to the aggressions and impositions of the world and the people within it. In that light, an adult would see the child with the toy-of-many-pieces as an end in her/himself and allow that child the space and time to find, discover, or create an order in the toy. The adult might well show the child a form familiar to the adult or from written instructions but would do so as instructive but not as definitive. The child can feel informed but not dominated. At no point, does the child feel any mitigation in acceptance of affection from such an adult. The child keeps joys of self-discovery and separateness and the security of unconditional positive regard at the same time. The child's ego and identity may feel

strengthened and not become defensive and aggressive. The child can feel very much her/himself about without making the adult into an Other who dominates or whom the child must reject. This condition pertains in forming a basis for this child or any of us to reach toward individuation and self-awareness. Such a condition speaks the "Yes" of a life lived and experienced as fully as possible. It celebrates the becoming self.

The dominator model operating unconsciously or consciously cannot allow such a situation to obtain in that dominator conformity denies the primary right of the individuated, becoming self. Such a force denies the primacy of the ends principle and acts against it as a matter of course.

## ***On the usual and prevailing perception of human nature—October 17, 2011***

Much of our discussion has reflected on the unconscious enforcement of the dominator model which keeps us from attaining our right to our individuated, becoming self. We have found that such unconscious efforts stem from a societal meaning perspective about doing things for someone else's good, especially during our most formative years. This unconscious impulse arises from that same impulse learned in the formative years of those who perpetrate it as adults, those who care for us in our formative years. That impulse persists from a meaning perspective that informs all its believers that the dominator model of the world exists as the sole possibility based on human nature. We can tell how that meaning perspective sees human nature by how we generally use the phrase to describe people: "That's just human nature." That phrase rarely if ever turns up in a positive context. If Gerald does something kind to Carol, we don't call it human nature. If he does something terrible to her, we call that human nature. Human nature in perception and conception appears endlessly negative and out of control if left on its own. That being the case, the dominator model and its attendant conformity must operate successfully to keep all that nasty human nature under some sort of control.

That nasty human nature doesn't just live and drive in others. When we pause and think about it, it's our nature as well. If we critically reflect on the idea that we all suffer from the evils of our uncontrolled human nature, we might find it makes very little sense to us on very personal and even on a public level. Do we really feel our own human nature feels essentially brutish? We all do things that we don't like from time to time. We have brutish capabilities, but do we really feel essentially nasty and brutish?

Generally, we see very little harm committed by people on one another every day. If we read, watch, or listen to the news we might get that impression, but it simply isn't the case in our everyday lives. Most of us find it safe and caring to live with the people with whom we live. Most of us find the people we encounter treat us at least reasonably well, and often they go out of their way to treat us very well. Even in the seemingly extreme situation of driving, very little happens to us that does any real harm, and the overwhelming majority of drivers mean no harm when they drive. People make mistakes when they drive, and in doing so, bad things happen. That doesn't mean that their human nature rose up and turned them into some vehicular, homicidal maniac. Interestingly, we tell endless stories about how people treat us badly, but when we look at a complete day, we find those situations are a rarity. When we look at those stories carefully, we might also find that we tell the same story multiple times with an every heightening sense of outrage. That kind of story telling may also arise from the "human nature is nasty" meaning perspective that the dominator, conformist model of life wishes to promote. We promulgate the feeling about the essentially negative quality of our human nature with every story. It supports that perception and raises our level of that perception. We may even miss seeing the good things that happen to us because we remain ever diligent in looking out for the bad things that happen to us.

It feels as if the dominator model wants us to perceive the world and its people, all chock full of human nature, as a constant threat. We will never encounter any unconditional positive regard,

and we must remain constantly diligent and judgmental to face the threats of human nature. This hyper-diligence and aggressive defensiveness carries its own dangers.

If we remain judgmental toward others, we will lose our own sense of personal unconditional positive regard. If something works unconditionally, we do it without judgment. The unconditional will never happen when we judge. Judgment, by its definable nature, requires preconditions in observation and reception or we won't see or acknowledge it. If we withhold the unconditional until proved to deserve it, it ceases to be the unconditional. If we do that constantly to others, we will undoubtedly do it to ourselves. We know that when we judge others, they must be judging ourselves as well. If that is the case, our ego needs to grow defensively and our identity must look elsewhere than in unconditional positive regard for some form of validation to keep its sense of viability, value, and purpose.

***On our perception of human nature and our expectations of the human —October 18, 2011***

When we stop to think about it, to critically reflect on the standard meaning perspective on our universally shared belief in our negative if not dangerous human nature, we can begin to see how that belief accentuates our vulnerability, increases our need for regard of any kind, and strengthens the defensive and materialistic parts of our being. Quite simply, it just feels bad to live inside this pervasive and very ugly definition of our shared human nature. We live trapped within the extraordinary limits of the expectations that surround if not engulf our human nature, our being, and aggressively ignores our becoming self. We get lonely and isolated.

The usual and prevailing inherently low expectations of human nature and our conduct limits us dramatically and tragically. Viktor Frankl speaks of such expectations in his work. When we lower expectations of the human beings around us, we limit their ability to perform to their fullest, positive extent. Actually, we do more than limit. We distort them in ways that could not happen if we chose to believe in a much higher form of human nature and act on that belief. The distortion comes in many ways as we grow into our lives and then live them out.

Distortions motivated and justified by assumptions about human nature begin early. They come with the assumptions we make about children or others made about us assumptions about us when we were children. Many if not most of us believe in this statement: "Children manipulate." I entered "Children manipulate" into the search engine search line. 17 million plus results appeared. The first site listed made this statement: "Kids manipulate their parents. It's part of their normal routine. They learn to use their charms and strengths to get their way and negotiate more power in the family."<sup>85</sup> The implications in this one sentence bring us to a dramatic realization of the assumptions about human nature and the distorting results of those assumptions. We expect the children for whom we care to operate in a manipulative fashion. They could not have learned this when babies. Most who claim the manipulative in children claim it for babies as well. If we practice such manipulation on them, they might learn it. If we teach it, we have to live with it. That being an unlikely part of the manipulative children meaning perspective, the assumption here assumes manipulation an integral part of human nature, and children come into the world trailing clouds of manipulation rather than those of glory.

Manipulation represents us in a very conscious, very planned, and very ego driven activity. We actively make others do our bidding without asking or respecting them as ends in themselves. Through manipulation, we make others a means to our end. In that case, we are born outside the moral sphere. If caring adults assume such a mental process as an essential part of the child for whom they care, what could possibly become of unconditional positive regard? Such unconditionality disappears in a fog of suspicion and distrust. A child in our care cries or makes some other demonstration of need. Armed with our meaning perspective about human nature and manipulative children, we can resist responding to a manipulative child as we would naturally do, spontaneously and caringly. We would judge the sincerity of the expression and create a plan to act without encouraging manipulation. If a child in our care, expresses a need for



unconditional regard and care, and we ignore that cry, that need because we have been taught to suspect it's just a manipulation.

All of this suspicion seems like a kind of poison that permeates everything. When manipulation forms part of the essence of human nature, which it must if babies and children do it naturally, unconditional positive regard cannot exist in such an environment of suspicion, in such an atmosphere of distrust. It's a poison to our essential trust in others and to a free and joyous sense of mutual caring later in life as well. When we assume the aggressive egocentricity of manipulation, we assume that human nature begins us at a low level of development as decent human beings. In some Western terms, we seem to suffer from some original sin.

According to Frankl, when we make such an assumption, and treat the people in our care in a degraded level, those people may well then become even less than we have shown them we think they are. Low expectations breed even lower levels of conduct and relationships with others and our own being. Such low expectations drive our identity into stronger and stronger defensiveness through the power of ego. Our identity will defend itself against such expectations by rebellion or acceptance thus further solidifying our identity and become a more and more rigid material version of our being, a limited and degraded identity. All that endless insecurity causes even greater levels of vulnerability and an even greater desire to find some semblance of almost any form of regard. Low expectations nurture meaning perspectives that limit the scope and individual nature of our identity in its relationship to and with the becoming self.

Such a situation shifts more and more power to dominator and conformist models of conduct and governance. It makes us desire some form of direction toward attaining regard and escaping from the nasty, brutish, and degraded human nature in which we feel forced to live.

## ***How identity and ego work in regard to expectations — October 19, 2011***

The dominator model of human nature also carries with it another subtle even pernicious quality. Once we have adopted a meaning perspective that makes us part of this sense of human nature generally and in our own nature specifically, we come to believe unhappy things about ourselves that hinder our lives and our learning. When people with such beliefs hear the expression or sense the existence of "high expectations" about them, they may perceive that it sounds and feels like a threat.

Early in my teaching, I discovered that many, if not the overwhelming majority, of my students lived with a meaning perspective that encouraged them to see themselves as inadequate and rather stupid—or just plain dumb. My first response to those feelings caused me to feel that the one thing these folks I saw as trapped inside such a meaning perspective wanted would come in some access to liberation. If I opened that access to them they would enter gladly and regain their freedom as people, as whole beings. They would empower themselves with this freedom through choosing access to that freedom. They would speak the "Yes" to that desirable state. In that the face of that "Yes," the seemingly powerful energy of the "No" meaning perspective would simply fade away.<sup>86</sup>

Using Frankl's idea, I thought I would make my high expectations of these and all my students, of everyone I met, the core of my perception of them and my actions toward them. In responding to those expectations, to the critical moments they would produce, they would critically reflect on their negative meaning perspective. In that examination they would discover that the limitations they felt about themselves, the burdens that held them down, had been taught to them if not driven into them in them but had had always been a lie. They would then feel and express themselves in ways that expressed their inherent human power within. No such luck.

The power of the meaning perspectives we hold about ourselves can feel so essential to our very survival as an identity and as a life that we will reject the idea of other choices that weaken or eliminate the meaning perspectives we feel vital. That can hold true even when those meaning perspectives and that identity cause us to feel very bad about ourselves. It may not make sense on first encounter because of other meaning perspectives we hold about such things, but our ego and our sense of identity can prevent us from entering into empowerment and a return to the essentially healthy and powerful becoming self.

We generally look at identity and ego and as full of pride if not arrogance and superiority. Our identity says, "Because I have this great job and own lots of material goods," and our ego completes the thought "I am better than others." We see ego and identity in inevitably negatively qualitative terms. That's not the case. They have a more very practical function than our sense of their quality allows us to realize. Our identity forms some sense of being in the world which it gives form to our way of seeing ourselves, the world, and it defines our conduct and abilities. Our ego defends us from our vulnerability and fears. Our identity and ego make us feel visible and safe. Those functions do not imply any necessary sense of superiority for any reason. Safety can occur in other ways and a sense of our material being can come in many forms. When we form an identity that says, "I am slow. I am stupid" or anything like that, we do so

because we have been trained to do so. We also do so because we have internalized it. In that way, we feel identified with these meaning perspectives, and they define and give form to our material selves. That form and definition feel essential to survival. Our ego takes up the defense of this identity and tells that world and ourselves, "I am less than others, so don't expect too much from me," which sounds unhappy to an outsider, but it makes our identity feel safe from the fear and vulnerability of failure, of no identity at all.<sup>87</sup>

For a person in this state of mind and being, holding on to the meaning perspective of inadequacy, the idea of "high expectations" comes as a demand and a threat. In a critical moment when cognitive dissonance feels like it assaults our identity, our ego responds by saying, "That's just the way I am. I can't change. Don't ask me to." Our identity fears dissolution and rejects the choice or choices it can actually make to clarify and improve its apprehension of itself. In truth, nothing about us, not identity, not ego, and certainly not our becoming self has anything to prove or has to prove anything. Our whole being always has choices to make to express ourselves in ways that allow us to become more and more fully realized. When we make new choices that might feel opposed to our established identity, we may feel insecure and even threatened. Ultimately, new choices made in the spirit of the becoming self, will always allow us to realize our strengths.

## ***On choosing the unconditional and high expectations—October 20, 2011***

Once we understand that meaning perspectives serve as internalized instruments of domination, we can choose unconditional positive regard, compassion, forgiveness, and their shared quality of acceptance, the power of the unconditional, as our best alternative to the dominator model. Paulo Freire wrote that we cannot teach the new way of learning using the old way of teaching.<sup>88</sup> No one gets dominated into liberation. High expectations can help in liberation or not depending on how we choose to use it. We can celebrate people with high expectations, or we can use expectations to club them.

Many of us have faced high expectations as a threat, a complaint, and a demand. When we hear that we have "great potential," it usually gets followed by something that tells us we are failing to live up to that potential. Potential here reads as high expectations. The judgment inherent in this form of expectation tells us that "high expectations" actually mean a standard some authority has set that we have to live up to. The dominator in this case will patiently explain to us that telling us we have potential should encourage us and feel like a compliment. Many people would respond to that phrase with a sense of judgment and failure. They would feel punished. I know I did.

Judgment and failure have no place in the "Yes" of learning. When we say, "Yes" to true high expectations, we say "Yes" to our openness to and support of the ever growing abilities of someone else. We just leave how fast and how far behind. Learning best operates in a field of unconditional positive regard. That includes our compassion for those with whom we work. No one wants to risk failure, and in learning, failure has no place. This also suggests that we treat all of those with whom we work and live with that very sense and act of compassion. In the dominator model, compassion is given to those who deserve compassion. Compassion thereby comes from a judgment on the part of the bestower of that compassion. That's not compassion. Maybe it's charity or pity, but not compassion. Compassion works as an absolute and a universal, or it doesn't work at all. It becomes something else. Learning asks for a compassionate ground to operate fully.

This compassion nurtures and stimulates acceptance, and from that acceptance, high expectations become a statement of belief in the other, in the learner, and an offer of unconditional support in her/his learning no matter how it happens, how fast it happens, or even where it leads.

When I taught in a middle school, a mother came to see me about the child for whom she cared. She asked if I had high expectations for that child. I agreed quite cheerfully that I did. She wondered if her child were too young for such expectations. I felt quite delighted at the question, and now I see that she spoke her concern out of her own feelings of expectations-as-unreachable-demands. Her concern made sense to me, and I responded to her needs as well as her concern about the child. I told her that if I had low expectations, the child would not break through those low expectations, and even if she did, I might not see it because I had already made up my mind when I set her limits. Low expectations will distort people in their idea of learning and their idea about themselves and their learning. I keep my expectations high to make open all the learning space she wants and needs to grow and express her very best as she defines

that best. When I accept the best she offers and give that best all the recognition it deserves, high expectations will mean possibilities she can reach and not a threat of failure. No one would ever fail so long as I saw that whatever she/he did, she/he did out of the best she had and the best she could give at the time. She would not fail because she would feel successful at every step she took on her way into and beyond expectations.

## ***The quest of aspiration--October 21, 2011***

Reaching our best, or our perception of reaching of our best, comes harder than we might have supposed or I ever supposed. As Frankl says, always keep your expectation higher, as if you felt some cross wind as you fly toward your goal. When we don't keep our expectations high, the cross winds of life will shift us enough so that we may miss our goal or purpose. We have discussed that just now, so keeping our expectations of ourselves and others quite high and open really matters. On the other hand, truly reaching our best exceeds the idea of the goal as an end in itself. Robert Kane expresses an image and creates a resonant metaphor about realizing our best when he evokes the "quest of aspiration."<sup>89</sup>

The quest of aspiration places our desires beyond a specific goal that we know we can accomplish because others have done so. It acts out of our belief in our ability to reach and perhaps attain something beyond the limits of previous experience. Perhaps even something entirely unique to each of us. As our friend Kane writes, "It is something we seek without the assurances of attaining it." The becoming self and the quest of aspiration merge in their quality of being and becoming.

A rather typical metaphor for life is the journey. I have used it many times myself. The quest of aspiration presents a gloss on and shift in that idea. Journey definably takes us from one place to another. The journey takes us to a destination, a destination we know exists, and we know we reach: "the end of the journey." The quest of aspiration makes no such suggestion, makes no such promise. On such a quest, we seek that which we feel, that in which we believe, that which we will get to understand more fully as part of the quest itself. If the universe is unfolding, and our becoming self is unfolding, then our quest of aspiration also unfolds with an ever foliate quality, a flower that comes never ending into blossom and it remains in a never ending blooming. Metaphors aside, this seeming abstraction presents us with something tangible and meaningful.

In my life, I have heard many people talk about "going off to find myself." I reject making fun of people, especially when they want something truly of value quite sincerely. Still in a spirit of fun with language, it occurred to me that with all the self storage outlets in the country, wandering folks could find their self stored neatly away awaiting discovery and release. We might even walk. However, the point still remains. The self does not exist as a thing for us to encounter in some distant and unknown part of the world. Travel may do wonderful things for us in many ways, and through travel, we may experience helpful insights, but nothing can happen to us elsewhere if we couldn't find it here. What travel may do, thinking about it now, is face us with multiple critical moments, what we often call "culture shock," that introduces us to some meaning perspectives with which we have lived, and allows us access to the transformative process that best resolves the critical moment and the cognitive dissonance that it produces. However, even in a dominator/conformist environment, we can encounter critical moments where our meaning perspectives come into conflict with our direct experience of life. In those moments of cognitive dissonance, even if we travel little physically, we can recognize the value of critical reflection to resolve that moment and that dissonance, to take us out of limiting meaning perspectives and into the transformative, the unconditional, and liberation.

We can find such experiences in our desire to reach our best, to keep fulfilling our quest of aspiration. It may seem like a paradox. We can feel fulfilled in our becoming self and always seek an ever greater realization of that self.

## ***On the realization of the becoming self—October 22, 2011***

In writing this work, I suddenly see that the desire to reach the best in ourselves links beautifully with our search for the becoming self. I have also realized that the title of the book, *The Existential Search for Self* limited the purpose of the book and the purpose of the processes of our existence and our being. In the process of writing and thinking about that writing, I have come to use the phrase, "the becoming self." That phrase actually represents what I think and feel about the nature of the self. It doesn't simply be a self, it endlessly becomes self. Only the completely alienated, dominator model insists that anything remains the same. Even it doesn't remain the same however much it wishes to do so, no real control even there. Our best and our self are not permanent states.

Nothing in the universe exists permanently but exists, if exists is the right word, in process. All things persist, perhaps that's better, in transformation. Nothing attains stasis. From one moment to the next, everything transforms in itself and, eventually, into something else. Our bodies undergo constant change or renewal. Every element in the universe undergoes such transformations from one form into another. Even though the mountain seems permanent, it has come into that form and will go out of that form. It does so in a way that we cannot perceive in our limited time frame, and in our limited perception of existence, but it has happened and will happen none the less. The Sun shines as a manifestation of the transformation of energy. When we experience our own transformative nature, on physical, non-material, intellectual and emotional levels, we experience something closer to the nature of our own actual persistence in the world and in time. When I use the expression "Search for Self," I may imply that the self, once found, simply exists in some permanent and absolutely stable state. It can sound like something we can find as our object of desire and possess. That seems now patently not the case. We can, however search for and continue to explore our becoming self. The self exist not as a having and a keeping. It lives as a being and becoming.<sup>90</sup>

Only in the dominator model do we seek to attain permanence, to create the unchanging being that exists in the same way in every moment of all time. Our identity appears to reflect that dominator need, and our ego stands ever vigilant to defend our identity's right to be unchanging and closed to reality and experience. When we search for the becoming self, we don't want to find or create a new form of identity. We seek something that incorporates all manifestations of our whole being and can remain open to the diversity of other manifestations of our being to become part of the becoming self. In that way, we will also find that our ego and identity don't stand in the way of our becoming self, they simply transform into the helpful and necessary manifestations for the becoming self they were always meant to become and to continue becoming.<sup>91</sup>



## ***On higher purpose meaning perspectives — October 24, 2011***

Early in our lives, the dominator/conformist model meaning perspective arrives in the form of a loving but meaning perspective driven parental figure, the caretaker. The child has taken the huge number of pieces and spread them in all kinds of ways all over her/his bedroom. Many things have happened in the mind and imagination of this child; the room has become a place of some wonder if not awe. The child has made the toy, and the space the toy entered came alive in ways unimagined a moment before the child opened the package. Whatever else the child has accomplished in this play, she/he has produced nothing like what the toy is meant to be. There's a picture on the box. There's a set of instructions. The child has diverged from the organized plan of the toy and what she/he is supposed to learn. The child has involved many other objects from the room and the room itself. The child feels power and beauty. The child sees and feels the power of creativity. The adult sees a mess.

The meaning perspective of this adult tends to cancel out many other loving feelings of "how cute" or "how beautiful," or "how creative" or even some admiration. Those rather low emotions or responses don't compete with the higher purpose we discussed earlier. This child has to grow up a responsible adult in the terms of "responsible adult" laid out by the higher purpose meaning perspective. Instead of speaking to the child in the loving tones that might first and primarily occur, this well meaning adult says, even if as gently as possible, that the child just has it wrong. Adults can find lots of ways to do this. The rather thoughtless appearing ways sound something like this: "What's wrong with you, anyways?" or "What a mess," or "Can't you get anything right?" We can imagine, or perhaps remember, how hard that would have come down on the child. It would feel somewhere well beyond a slap in the face. It would set off a tidal wave of pain through the very vulnerable child's desire for unconditional positive regard and even, in the case some little recognition for all the work and effort, for the self the child put into the construction. However, as with much creativity, the child has violated the rules of the game, and the rules of the game must be upheld for the higher purpose meaning perspective of order and the *status quo*.

The dominator voice can speak more gently and still accomplish the same message and the same blow. The adult could say, "I was afraid this toy was too old for you, so let me help you put it away, and I will show you how it works later." That sounds more gentle, but the effect still carries the same punch. The child has no idea that her/his age would interfere with what she/he understands about the world. The child felt and believed that she/he understood the toy perfectly and played with it beautifully. The adult expresses dissatisfaction with the child's performance and offers an excuse for the child's incompetence. When we think about this exchange, we can imagine identity forming and ego coming to its defense. The adult might simply say, "That's nice, honey. Just so long as you get it all put away before bedtime." This dismisses with a phrase what, for the child, represents her/his version of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The child may well feel confusion at why all this effort must be "put away before bedtime." What's so important and different about bedtime? There's plenty of room to sleep, and in the morning the child might continue with this project. At least the child can open her/his eyes and admire the artistry and power of her/his hands.

Order takes all precedence in the higher purpose meaning perspective. Neatness above all must prevail. If the child will grow into a responsible adult, she/he must understand and practice order. She/he must learn to follow the rules and structure as given to understand how the world works. Once the child understands all these disciplines, she/he might be ready to explore creativity.

By the time child learns all that, creativity of self would have probably fallen out of the child's meaning perspective. It would find replacement in an identity that denied such creativity, "I'm just not an art person," and an ego that would defend that position: "That art's okay, but I need to worry about more practical things." From the best of others' intentions, we find ourselves deprived of an unobstructed connection to our becoming self and more and more restricted by identity and ego.

## ***Competition and the dominator model—October 25, 2011***

Any child finds enough distractions and disconnections from the becoming self when she/he lives within the small community of the immediate care giving group. Many of the interactions happen simply between the child and one other. As we can see and remember, such interactions offer many complications, and many meaning perspectives that propel identity and ego to the fore at that point. At a very early age, we have begun to learn to shift attention and concentration from the becoming self to a more conformist being, a conformist identity and ego.

When we consider that human nature yearns for and strives for the becoming self, to search for the individuating self, we can only wonder at the other, very powerful impulse toward conformity and the dominator model. That impulse rises out of our essential vulnerability, another significant part of our shared human nature. Our personal vulnerability connects us to the processes of unconditional positive regard, compassion, forgiveness and acceptance. Without such vulnerability, physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual, our need for connections with others would find limitation in the physical. So long as physical needs are met, we would feel no vulnerability. Because of the Edenic entering into and growth of consciousness, these other vital vulnerabilities arise. In that we feel such things, and we feel a need to make connections with others to allow us to answer needs and avoid violating that vulnerability, we connect with everyone else's vulnerabilities and needs. It may be that one crying baby stimulates others to cry for perfectly understandable physical causes we can materially measure. It may also hold true that the other babies cry because of a human connection through vulnerability which happens on a less material basis and may offer difficulty in measuring.<sup>92</sup> The becoming self finds enhancement in the shared vulnerability with others, our community of vulnerability, yet we learn to shift away from the recognition of shared vulnerability and, therefore, away from the becoming self and individuation.

The dominator model, and all its representatives in our daily lives, teaches us to compete instead of responding to our needs and the needs of others. That's how we gain some, even if limited and conditional, regard. We learn how to compete, and through competition, we learn to withdraw ourselves from the shared community of vulnerability and the becoming self to self exclusive vulnerability which supports and encourages the development of identity, ego, and the reliance on conformity. Indeed, it demands that development. We learn about winning and losing. Many if not most of us find that a very painful and continually painful lesson we learn and relearn in a countless number of ways.

When we win through competition, we beat someone or even something else to some shared and desired goal. There exist many and varied rationalizations for competition that try to take the sting out of this simple and bald representation, but they always remain rationalizations.<sup>93</sup> When beating someone else becomes our aim, we find a powerful need to separate ourselves from that other person, to sever our shared vulnerability because we cannot beat the other if we feel our violation of a shared vulnerability. We feel a desire to win and to avoid a violation of our own vulnerability. The more we desire to beat the other, who has now become an Other, the more we fear to lose. We have learned the lessons of aggression and fear which form an intricate and ultimately harmful interplay.<sup>94</sup> We have learned to compete.

At its core, all competition comes from the demands of the outside world which form part of the demands for conformity. When we compete, we conform. We become part of the competitive model which finds its strength and support from the dominator model. The dominator encourages, if not demands competition in almost all parts of our lives because it makes a concerted joint effort among people nearly impossible. If we all compete, then we do so to defeat others not to work with them. The dominator may occasionally make competition a joint effort, as in warfare, but allows that because the joint effort centers on a common, external enemy, never on the dominator itself.

## ***On competition, hierarchy, and the nature of power—October 26, 2011***

When I refer to a dominator or the dominator model, I mean a societal and personal consciousness not some specific cabal of power hungry persons in direct communication conspiring to control the world and all who live there. No matter how powerful, almost all people in every society participate according to the meaning perspectives received through their lives. They live within their own dominator model at all levels. Often, we can watch people in all conditions being driven by unquestioned meaning perspectives. These meaning perspectives dominate the lives of the powerful as surely as those powerful people may dominate the lives of other people within some large-scale hierarchy. The powerful operate like the character Faust. They gain the illusion of power and authority, but the real power resides in the Mephistophelian meaning perspectives that drive Faust. The drives motivate Faust to use himself as a means to the Mephistophelian end. As a means to a higher purpose, Faust may gain position power for some time, he loses personal power by becoming a means to another end.

Our inner process to find or create a balance of identity, ego, and self as always leaves us with more personal power, and we have always remained free and an end in ourselves not a means to another end. No matter how much we see and believe the dominator model operates outside the moral sphere, compassion and the rest remain universal and absolute for even those who work for and live in the dominator model. As we pursue our own liberation, we do so for everyone else within the dominator/conformist hierarchical model. That's why making sense out of competition, among other ideas and manifestations of the dominator model forms part of the existential search for the becoming self for ourselves and the human community of selves.

Competition reasserts the hierarchy. There is no competition without hierarchy and no hierarchy without competition—thus the word "loser." Whenever we see one side as a winner, we reassert the hierarchy thus we reassert the hierarchy in all things. In essence, everyone other than number one, the winner, perforce become losers. The chance of staying the winner will elude everyone. Ultimately, we cease being in the number one position, so in such a competitive hierarchy, we are all inevitable losers.<sup>95</sup>

Competition operates in the externalized world. Our becoming self has precious little to do with competition. It is the realm of our identity and our ego. Our identity gets established in some competitive arena, an apt sports metaphor of our time, and our ego defends that identity against all comers. The winner or the presumptive winner will do anything necessary to accomplish the win and stay in the number one position or usurp that position and take it for her/himself. We see this in the macrocosm of business and sports world most publically, but we can see it in the microcosm of our own lives as well. Competition for the number one power position does harm at all levels, and it does the most immediate harm in our own intimate lives, in our own homes, the place where we wish to find unconditional positive regard, not a struggle for position and, therefore, power. Competition in a hierarchy is always a competition for power. The higher in the hierarchy, the more external and position power we find.

The struggle for power in our homes and more intimate lives doesn't help us toward the becoming self or operating in a way that helps to make an environment of unconditional positive

regard that we all desire as a natural part of our environment. In our discussion of how we see our children I quoted the following: "(Children) learn to use their charms and strengths to get their way and negotiate more power in the family." In the competitive model, according to this quote, we see the children for whom we care as competitors for power as if we will lose something if they feel their power and use it in the family.

Outside the dominator model, we don't fear the power of others, even children. The power they manifest comes from within them, and it doesn't need to threaten any of our power unless we, as competitors, feel that our power stems from dominating others. If everyone in a family or other situation feels free to manifest their personal power and not establish some sort of positional power, then the power of each adds to the whole and all the individuals in that whole.<sup>96</sup>

### ***Competition, scarcity, fear, and conformity—October 27, 2011***

Competition in the dominator model keeps us from experiencing the empowering joy of individuated, personal power that develops in itself and voluntarily contributes to the community. By its very nature, competition breeds fear. Our personal desire for unconditional positive regard can feel temporarily satisfied by succeeding in competition. For a second there, we feel really admired and regarded well. Of course, whenever I perform for regard, I can only endlessly and breathlessly earn conditional positive regard. In terms of competition, I have to keep on winning or I lose the winner's position and the regard that comes with it. The paradox of earning regard through the effort of identity and ego comes in its inevitable loss. When I win regard, I simultaneously fear its loss.<sup>97</sup>

This tension between conditional success and inevitable failure in loss also encourages us in our feeling the profoundness of the scarcity model of living. In essence, in the scarcity model, I must have more in order to keep anything, and if that means, which it does, that others inevitably have less, so be it. I win. They lose. The scarcity model denies my access to compassion, so I fear the abilities thus the power of all others. If others can freely show their abilities and thereby power, it must all detract from my own. Scarcity consciousness contrasts dramatically with abundance consciousness. Scarcity consciousness depends on what we possess, what we own, what we have. Abundance consciousness finds its basis and strength in our being, our becoming self alone. These contrasting qualities of mind and belief form the difference between a having or being way of perception and life.<sup>98</sup> Competition and scarcity demand we have more and more and not be more. Having takes and being gives. That's a choice.

This holds true for many of us in our personal and professional relationships. Loving partners struggle, or at least jockey, for power between them. Both can deny the power of the children for whom they care. That is the kind of power we feel we can have and lose if others possess theirs. The same sort of thing can happen between business partners. In that way, the fear ridden, scarcity model of family and business life becomes reduced to negotiations and deal making for the best advantage in a world of scarcity which we produce and increase in the process. In those same lives we can experience the feeling and actuality of abundance wherein we create the very abundance in that process. The dominator wishes us to choose competition and scarcity thus fear. Fear links to our essential vulnerability, and once linked becomes a wonderful mechanism to produce conformity and alienation from each other and greater dependence, if the appearance of loyalty, on the dominator model. Competition denies compassion and it denies community. The qualities of compassion and community form part of the becoming self, the part in which we live in a way of being. Competition represents possession, the way of the reduced sense of identity and ego based on the materiality of having.<sup>99</sup>

### ***On having and being and lexical gaps—October 28, 2011***

In the book, *To Have or to Be*, Erick Fromm delineates two ways of perceiving, responding to, and forming ourselves within the reality we find ourselves: the way of having or the way of being. He rather encapsulates this philosophic viewpoint with the following: "If I am what I have and if I lose what I have who then am I?"

This rather bald choice stands at the very center of our conscious being and the place from where we truly start toward the becoming self. Interestingly, it stands at the center of our being along with the very idea that we can make choices, essential and existential choices about what we believe, what we perceive, how we act, and how we learn from those actions. Our recognition of the inherent power of choice and the choice of being rather than having takes us back to our working definition of the self.

I have shifted in my references to the self in this text to the phrase "the becoming self." The writing of this work brought me to understand that we never fully reach the self even as we never achieve complete individuation. We can't, and I find that's just as well. The search for the becoming self really does form a quest of aspiration which we fulfill in the process of the quest and never perfectly or completely fulfill as a goal we reach or, in dominator terms, conquer. The more we engage in the quest, the more we experience and learn. The more we experience and learn, the more we enhance the ever emergent quality of being. The self becomes. Thus I use the phrase "the becoming being." Happily and not paradoxically, this nature of the becoming self, in that it is becoming, precludes our deluding ourselves into believing we can ever possess it. If we possessed it, it would become stable and cease becoming, so if we possess becoming it ceases to exist as becoming. Our working definition of the self fits quite nicely with the idea of the becoming self. I never noticed before, but this definition is one of ongoing process and becoming. It develops at the very core of being. It becomes:

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility of those choices and results, and the process begins again.

We could, therefore, change this slightly and replace the word "self" with the phrase "the developing self." That's longer and can feel more awkward. Language represents meaning perspectives as we have discussed. Most if not all of our words reflect our desire and our belief in the stability of the world. They certainly reflect how we define the world and how that makes us perceive the world. That's why saying something that differs substantially, sometimes even slightly from the dominator/conformist mainstream thought works quite awkwardly.

All languages demonstrate the linguistic idea of the "lexical gap." Such gaps appear in different languages because the meaning perspectives about the world differ and perceptions of the world differ. In English, my parents' siblings are aunts and uncles. These words show gender but they do not indicate to which parent they are a sibling. Their children are my cousins. The word cousin indicates that nature of the overall relationship, the offspring of a male or female sibling of one of my parents. In another language, the word "cousin" would be replaced by a word that signified the daughter of the sister of my father.<sup>100</sup> That's a gap in English. Silvia and I lived together many years without intending to get married. While we lived together, we had no simple word such as "married" to use to describe our state of relationship. "Living in sin" certainly reflects a meaning perspective. A full expression would run something like this: "The person with whom I live in a loving relationship with whom I have pledged and renew that pledge each day to remain together in the face of life's many variations without the encumbrance of a contract." That's quite a mouthful, but it avoids saying something about a relationship that



defines it as an outlier relationship, abnormal in some way from the conformist norm. Even now, we resist calling each other "my husband" or "my wife" to avoid the possessive quality and the restrictive identity roles of those phrases. We say we are married.

The language of conformity represents an essential meaning perspective. How we conceive of language, holds real power over how we think. The use of the right language, conformist language, can save us momentarily from our perceived danger in expressing our being, expressing our becoming self. The daily language of dominator conformity speaks endlessly about competition and having not about the unconditional and being. It's hard to make a change.

## ***The language of having — October 29, 2011***

The language of dominator conformity represents an essential meaning perspective. How we conceive of language, holds real power over how we think.<sup>101</sup> The use of the right language, conformist language, can save us from our perceived danger in expressing our being, expressing our becoming self in the face of dominating conformity. It will not, however, aid our awareness or the search and aspiration for our becoming self.

We feel tempted to escape from the becoming self into conformity because of our continuing vulnerability, or fear of rejection and isolation. Our identity wishes to appear always correct in its choices, and our ego needs to defend the rightness of those choices. When we say "Yes" to conformity, we feel we say "No" to error. When we do what the dominator/conformist structures around us prescribe, we know immediately that what we do is right. We make the right choice because that's the choice every decent person would make within the conformist community. That is we make the same choice as everybody else no matter how fool hearted or confused that choice really shows itself. Conformity thereby ameliorates the fear of error. True, that fear never entirely disappears, but conformity lessens such feelings of exposure to censure, to vulnerability. It also gains us some form of regard—conditional to be sure, but at least we feel it's due us so long as we conform. We can signify our acceptance of and our relationship to the conformist norm by unconsciously using the normative language of that community.

The language of being forms almost no part of our typical, conformist way of speaking and thus thinking.<sup>102</sup> In order to fully say "Yes" to being, it will help enormously when we recognize how much having language of possession we use as a daily part of our speech and thought. When we use such language, we say an implicit "Yes" to the conformist attitude of having. Removing the words of possession comes so hard in English that it will remain nearly impossible. Until some new sets of words arise that denote relationship without possession, we will find ourselves stuck with some very awkward locutions. We would not say, "My car," so we would say, "The car (or the type of car) I drive." That remains ambiguous in that we could rent the car. Clarification might sound like this: "The car I drive for which I can show legal ownership papers." That seems to designate a legal if temporary relationship which rather suits saying "Yes," to being rather than having. This example may seem trivial, but if we want to choose a new relationship to objects, to what we have, what we think we own, we can do so in part through an awareness of the burden of possession and the confusion it creates in our whole being.

When we speak the word "have," we signify that we own that thing. It belongs to us. In such an ownership relationship, we invest ourselves in the object to a greater or lesser degree. It becomes part of our language of personal reference: "I have an arm," "I have a mind," "I have a car," "I have a house." We make that possession a part of our being, as a part of our identity. We even do that to others, independent beings who should not serve as possessions, objects we can have: "This is my wife/husband/son/daughter." Such introductions happen all the time. The speaker may follow such an introduction by a name but often not. The other person's separate being has become consumed into the possession identity of the speaker. If we are what we have, as Fromm says, we will show it in how we speak about ourselves and our immediate and extended worlds.<sup>103</sup>

## ***I/Thou, I/IT, The Other and having—October 30, 2011***

Martin Buber, in his book *I and Thou*, tells us that the most powerful affirmation we can make toward one another comes in the "I and Thou." He calls it a "basic pair" which operates as a single word which indicates a form of philosophy, a way of viewing the nature of the world and our relationship with it. Whenever we encounter a challenging philosophy, one that questions our own previously held meaning perspectives, it can produce a critical moment, a moment in which we might question and critically reflect on the now apparent meaning perspective. The I/It also speaks about relationship and operates as a "basic pair. The I/It turns living beings into an Other. We reify them. We turn into objects, things. The Other does not exist except that we make it happen by believing in the I/It relationship as a meaning perspective. We make of other beings an It. In the I/Thou relationship, we accept other beings as connected fully to our own being and equal to our being in the other's unique way. In that way, we all attain our fullness of humanity and express our becoming self as we embrace the other being's becoming self. In the I/It we reify the other being into an object which in relationship exists primarily if not solely for our use. In that way, we also turn ourselves into an It. We have become an object for our own use. Having leads us out of the moral sphere wherein we violate the ends principle: to treat everyone as an end in her/him self and never as a means to our or anyone else's end. The I/Thou serves as a philosophy of being. The I/It serves as a philosophy of having. We cannot possess what lives; we cannot have or possess the living lest it lose its essential freedom and thus its essential life.

When we own something, we become tied to that something, and it becomes part of our sense of identity. What we have, we defend with our ego. Our ego needs to defend what we have because what we have forms part of our identity. Some people say, "We are what we eat." However that may work or not, many people think and feel, "I am what I own." If we own objects, and we can only own an object or something we have reified, made into an object, then we reify ourselves and shift very far away from the becoming self. All our attention and energy shifts into the things we have and the thing we have made of ourselves. Our identity hardens around the habits of having, and our ego makes sure that we and everyone else around us know that what we do, the having we perform, is the right thing to do. We know that because, at heart, we know that the having way of life conforms to the way of life for most of those who surround us. We conform to having as we conform to many things. In this case, we feel our having things will protect us from our essential vulnerability and answer our need for unconditional positive regard. The act of having doesn't satisfy any real need, and it leaves us feeling as if we need more, so we reach out into the material world and take more from it and from other people only to find ourselves still wanting more. Such actions of having do not and cannot fulfill our need for unconditional positive regard and to return to our awareness of the becoming self. I learned about the need for and the pain of having and needing to have one summer in Phoenix, Arizona.

I drove a taxi to support myself when I went to college. I was thirty-five at the time. It gets hot in Phoenix, but I drove all summer long to keep my budget intact. One summer, a slow time because the tourists and others don't come to Phoenix, I drove for a company that ran the cheapest cabs in town.

## ***The endless need for and useless feeding of having—October 31, 2011***

When you drive in the cheapest cabs, you get a steady flow of business—from the poorest people in town. For twelve hours a day, the walking wounded rode in the cab. Their business paid for my long day of driving and paid for my life at college, but the endlessness of their poverty felt hard to bear. Their poverty didn't simply manifest in their lack of money and insecurity of their material lives, but in the choices they made within the limits of that material life. They came and sat and talked or remained silent and sometimes sleeping in the back of the cab. They came and by their own words or through discussions between passengers, they were more than poor and more than desperate for many other reasons. They were ill and often from the way they lived. Diabetes 2 distorted many lives. Others practiced sexual work, people of both sexes. Others pimped and battered those workers. Broken family remnants showed all the despair of want and need for things beyond their ability to grasp. Single mothers, some with numbers of children with an equal number of fathers, rode often to emergency with one or another child. People who lived dependant of drugs or alcohol or both sought desperately for some relief even in the early hours of the morning. Some people spoke about deaths among their family and friends. Some spoke of causing their own deaths. Almost all expressed desperation, of a feeling of need, of an endless dispossession and deficit. That wanted and needed something in their lives to change the form their lives had taken, to find something beyond the form they had inadvertently chosen. They felt an undifferentiated need for something they couldn't quite name.

The talk and the sense of this suffering became a burden for me. I would get home after the long day and feel quite stunned and confused. By that point in my life, I had chosen to see human nature as positive, essentially good, and hopeful as I do now. I made that choice after realistically seeing the many faces life produced. These people seemed to carry none of that sense of life or of themselves. They weren't bad people, but they seemed bereft of hope, bereft of any choices aside from the ones that repeated the patterns that brought them into such a steady state of grief. I grieved for their grief and worked to understand, to make sense out of the pattern I saw. I did not want to judge them however tempting that felt. Just as the child working with the toy that offered too many pieces for the child to find form, I saw and lived with all these fragments of humanity all day long, and I couldn't find a pattern, a form that made any sense. I felt my compassion stirred, and I worked at opening that compassion to my passengers, yet I felt oddly confused about the suffering in which these folks lived.

A form and meaning came to me quite simply as such things do. I entered a labyrinth of thought, wandered around a good deal in the complexity of my own thinking, and in the end, I came out very close to where I began. In the end is often the beginning. I began by seeing the enormity of their need, and in the end, I saw that the demanding and ever unsatisfying drive and compulsion behind all that conduct was the simple and primary need we have encountered many times before: unconditional positive regard.

All their lives they felt this very personal, non-material need. It works as a spiritual need in that it is not material and cannot come from the material. In their lives as experienced, all needs were hungers and all hungers were fed by the material. Indeed, we often mistake our non-material needs as hungers for the material. The less we know of the spiritual, non-material, answer to

needs, the more we will feel them as material hungers. The more we feel them as material hungers, the more passionately we go after material responses to that hunger. That includes all forms of sensory exploration and exploitation: food, drink, drugs, money, work, distractions of all kinds, and the general abuse of ourselves with emotionless sex. We do it to ourselves. They did it to themselves. I've done it to myself. The rich can adopt such a meaning perspective as much as or more than the poor.

What other answer did they have for their hunger, their need? They had none that they knew about, none but the meaning perspective that told them to feed all their needs with the same material answers. Those answers did work, for a while, but then the need returned unanswered. When these answers did not work, the emptiness within them would grow. Unanswered needs tend to get more and more unanswered and more and more needful. Such seemingly material needs look for answers through our identity and our ego, those elements of our being that interact most fully with the material world. That distorts our view of ourselves, and with that distortion our unanswered needs grow and need more and more feeding, more attention. Our relationship with the becoming self suffers. We suffer as did my friends in the back of the cab. My compassion for them was well founded in our shared dilemma, in our shared need as vulnerable, very human beings.

## ***On the love of living beings and the love of dead things —November 1, 2011***

While I wrote the above, my whole being and becoming self realized something about compassion that now seems obvious but had escaped me before. Compassion comes from our sense of being and becoming. It cannot come fully from our identity or our ego out of their having meaning perspective. The having identity seeks to assert itself and make itself visible and tangible to itself and the world. It bases its attitudes and actions on differences and feels uncomfortable with real connections with others aside from the illusory connections to those who conform to the same dominator societal model. It speaks the I-am-not-you because it would fear a dissolution of the constructed identity itself. The having meaning perspective informs our identity in that expression of the materially constructed existence. The more our identity possesses of the world and its material goods and powers, the more our identity feels its own reality. As I discovered with the people whom I served that long, hot, and poverty stricken summer, the reality of this form of identity remains insubstantial and transitory because it finds its basis and strength in the material and the responses of the world, both very transitory forms of existence. To paraphrase Charles Baudelaire, whether on the stairs of a palace or on the green side of ditch, the material desire to have, to possess, to own ends always in what Fromm calls "necrophily:" the love of the dead as opposed to "biophily," the love of the living. Fromm describes this operation of our identity in *The Heart of Man*: "The necrophilous person can relate to an object --a flower or a person --only if he possesses it; hence a threat to his possession is a threat to himself, if he loses possession he loses contact with the world."

Compassion cannot involve possession. Compassion actually feels the limitations of another being's condition and seeks the liberation of that being from whatever holds that being in its influence. Liberation can come in many external forms, but it will ultimately come from the being and becoming part of our living. The core condition that limits and impoverishes us comes in the denial of unconditional positive regard. Our identity does not offer such regard because it primarily and essentially seeks regard for itself, for its own existence. Identity cannot offer regard to others except in an exchange of regard, where one identity feeds another because the other reciprocates. Certainly, this exchange doesn't come as unconditional in any sense, but it satisfies temporarily if insecurely.

This temporary satisfaction between identities works in a very similar way to the exchanges made by those who find themselves dependant of some substance or action or another. A semblance of the feeling of regard and a semblance of a sense of recognition and thus satisfaction comes with the immediate gratification of the use of the substance or engagement in the action. As with the business model exchange of regard, it is not only conditional but illusory. It feels temporarily as if it exists, but it never really does. As we have discussed, compassion comes into being as one element of a full relationship or engagement with another being, the I/Thou. When we enter fully into a being way of perceiving and conceiving the world and ourselves, we encounter our natural feelings of unconditional positive regard, and compassion, forgiveness, and acceptance. Out of its need to possess, the having identity cannot offer such generosity of mind, heart, and spirit.<sup>104</sup>

Our ego as a defensive agent of protection also cannot offer such generosity. It may accept exchanges of regard, but it cannot act out of altruism, another element of the compassionate feeling and action. Our ego may also perceive compassionate acts as threatening because it might be rejected or ignored, or even simply not noticed in some material way. Whenever we fully encounter another being in the I/Thou fashion, we can risk rejection, a very long way from any form of regard, conditional or unconditional. Our ego can speak before any compassionate act can occur and make it clear that compassion does not fit in the healthy life-style of our identity.

When we consciously form a being based philosophic perspective about life, it acts transformatively in terms of our self, our becoming self as we find it in the working definition we delineated and used in this writing. The nature of the transformative opens us and our becoming self to a true sense and experience of compassion in thought and action. We feel no loss of self in any act of altruism. Although the best of altruism does not act for any exchange, "if I do this, I will gain that," the becoming self continues in its becoming with each of the acts. Expressing the best of this becoming self involves no direct gain, for the generosity for the being based becoming self simply thrives on its place in the rightness of things. When that becoming self contributes to that rightness, everything increases not simply the becoming self as in some form of limited and having based exchange.<sup>105</sup>

### ***On the interaction of giving—November 2, 2011***

A very common, thus unexamined, everyday expression signifies something of what we really think happens between people. Everything is a limited and having based exchange. When I act with care toward another person or directly help another person, the other will often say to me, "I owe you one." The assumption, the meaning perspective reflected in this phrase makes our possible mutual kindness into an agreement and an exchange. It speaks of one ego to another, one identity to another. We act, it says, only in benefit or hope of benefit. When someone says, "I owe you," that person implicitly says that she/he feels a kindness of any type makes for a debt of some kind, and that imbalance puts the receiver of the kindness under an obligation to repay or remain at a disadvantage when dealing with the giver of the act. Again, we see the extreme vulnerability of the conformist identity and the defensive nature of our ego. The becoming self takes what the act offers intrinsically, the rightness of the act itself. The extrinsic value of an act in material, social, or image gain means little in a being way of seeing and experiencing the world. The becoming self does experience something as a result of a compassionate and altruistic act: gratitude. The becoming self wishes to act in the world in a way that enhances that world, so every chance to do so makes for a cause for gratitude. Indeed, many acts of compassion and altruism occur with no obvious exchange at all.<sup>106</sup>

We all long for unconditional positive regard as we have noted many times. Since our birth, we have felt that need strongly. Somewhere along the way, we seem to have lost, given up, our belief that we can ever encounter such an experience. The experience of a compassionate, altruistic exchange offers such an experience every time someone offers it to us. When that happens, we turn it into a bargain of some kind. The unconditional is not bargain. The unconditional comes freely, unconditionally as it says. No matter how unconditional something is meant and offered, when we respond to it as a bargain, we lose the chance for the unconditional even though we still may receive the act. We don't lose that gift. We give it away. More—we shun it with the demand to bargain and not simply receive with gratitude.

Thinking about it now, it may be that we shun that gift of the unconditional because we no longer find it in ourselves. It may happen that our need for identity and ego has grown so strong over the years of the denial of the unconditional, that we fear any association with the becoming self—that place within us wherein the unconditional finds expression.



### ***Suffering, the defiant human spirit, and tragic optimism —November 3, 2011***

When the unconditional finds expression, competition evaporates. When we feel compassion, we will not strive mightily to make someone else lose, to "beat" someone. We can run as fast as we wish, and a score keeper can say we have won, but we ran for the sake of running not for the sake of the winning. When we return to the unconditional within us, we find that our desire to dominate also transforms. It returns to a personal power that we use creatively and extensively, and we do so for the sake of the doing within the moral sphere rather than to violate the moral sphere through domination. Our identity and ego take on a balanced perspective toward themselves and toward the world. We still want and need an identity we present to the world as an agent of discourse and intercourse, and it too, enters into becoming where it never fears a loss through becoming and transformation. It experiences the joy of feeling more that it has ever felt of itself while knowing that it has never been less.<sup>107</sup> In this state, our ego still defends our identity so it can assert itself relatively safely in the world, but it doesn't feel the need to act aggressively against anyone. It knows how to maintain the proper limits with others without acting out of fear, defensiveness, or aggression. This form of transformation leaves our identity intact yet allows us an emancipation into becoming and into being that opens our scope of thought, choice, and action and reduces the power of limitations. Any level of transformative learning in one area of our lives can open us to critically reflecting on other meaning perspectives in our lives. Frankly, it feels very good to think and write about this consummation devoutly to be wished.

T.S. Elliot wondered, if it would have served him better to be "a pair of ragged claws/ Scuttling across the floors of silent seas." It may seem to many of us that the simplest way to avoid suffering comes by abandoning the self-consciousness of our being and becoming self, the consciousness that can seem burdened by our awareness of the weight of time and memory, the pain that we derive from that awareness. In that way, we can hope, we avoid the damaging blows that come to us each day. To live completely in the Now, in some ways, means to live without such awareness, no history to remember, no future to consider, and no trembling before the valley of the shadow of death. In such a state, we hope to keep all suffering at bay.

We can make another choice which continues to ask for a full awareness of our lives and selves and allows us to deal with suffering in another way. We can find or make meaning out of our suffering. Once we have accomplished that, we find we can bear the suffering of life and allow that life to become more meaningful. That's the choice that Frankl made after his years in concentration camps. He made meaning out of the experience, and he chose optimism in response. It's a tragic optimism, but optimism in any case.<sup>108</sup>

Frankl says that our defiant human spirit exists whole, healthy, and complete no matter the bad choices that we have made and have done us harm or what the world has done that has done us harm. That human spirit defies that harm and remains undamaged and healthily even as we experience the harm and its pain. In our terms here, the defiant human spirit forms an integral element of the becoming self.

We don't need to extinguish our conscious self to become free of damage. We can choose to embrace the undamaged self even while experiencing our own slings and arrows and the slings and arrows of others. When we embrace and become whole with the undamaged and undamageable becoming self, we continue to experience suffering, and we continue to learn from the pain that causes, find meaning in it. Immediately and ultimately our essential, becoming self, remains completely whole and healthy, undamaged by the depredations of daily life.

The stronger our relationship to our undamaged and becoming self, our defiant human spirit, the more fully we can feel and show compassion to others and ourselves.

A friend told us a story about moment of transformational learning she experienced. She didn't call it that. She didn't give a name, but it was transformational learning nonetheless. She decided as a child she would never do to her children what her mother did to her. Most of us make such a decision as children because we really feel hurt by what happens to us at the hands of our parents at the service of some higher purpose no one understands. However, like most of us, she found herself acting just like her mother in her role as a mother.<sup>109</sup> She didn't like what she was doing. It motivated very bad feelings, but she still felt she had to do it. Her unquestioned meaning perspective told her so.

On a visit from her mother, the grandson, a "picky eater," would not eat the food in front of him: a hamburger. The grandmother took over, and insisted the boy eat every bite before he left the table. After a very long time, the grandmother got fed up with the boy refusing to eat, and she quit the scene. This became a critical moment of our friend. She spontaneously, critically reflected on this scene, and saw what the grandmother did as sheer acts of cruelty and rejection with no higher purpose in sight. Our friend went beyond "No" at that moment. Freed to think for herself, she went to work on developing actions toward the developing son that communicated her unconditional positive regard for him. That led her to critically examine other areas in her life, including the ones she had with the parental figure that treated her in the way she finally, clearly observed. The meaning perspective imbued in her by the mother disappeared leaving a clear sense of the nature of her own experience as a child. It hurt, but it liberated in many ways. She chose to see her own childhood suffering as meaningful and used that meaning to ameliorate the suffering of the child in her care.

## ***On the natural impulse toward unconditional positive regard —November 4, 2011***

This potential liberation is with us every day, and it offers itself in many ways. As I write now, my recognition of this becomes more and more evident. In our lives, from the very beginning, we need unconditional positive regard for our very survival. It begins even before our first breath as we float within the unconditional womb. At birth, we seek the unconditional as a matter of life and death. Even in that moment, in the true beginning of our being and our becoming self, we seek to reciprocate our own version of unconditional positive regard. We cannot do so with our undeveloped consciousness. We can do so and do so with our entire physical being. We share our bodies in all their sensory complexity with the being of our birth. As we feel it, we are still in absolute unity of the unconditional with that being. That feeling takes us back to the Edenic myth. Adam and Eve exist at one with the divine. They feel the unconditional unity with the divine although the divine offers one condition in which Adam and Eve will violate the unconditional relationship. They must not eat of the fruit of knowledge—the essence of awareness and consciousness. When Eve heroically eats of that fruit and Adam shares, their eyes are open to themselves, and in that self-conscious awareness, they surrender their absolute unity of the unconditional with the divine. The divine still offers unconditional positive regard, and now Eve and Adam can consciously respond to the divine with their own unconditional positive regard in return. It becomes a mutual unconditional relationship no longer mono-directional as it had been.

Until our eventual separation, our response to the unconditional is purely physical as a need and as a gift. From what women have told me, this exchange of the unconditional happens in the relationship during breast feeding. Both mother and child open themselves to the sharing experience and in that sharing, the unconditional flows between them. In a sense, this is a kind of paradise, and in another, it has not become the conscious exchange of the unconditional. That cannot begin, as with Eve and Adam, until we begin to know ourselves. This beginning forms our first critical moment and our entry into the transformative. Our original meaning perspective of absolute unity with the mother and the world ends as we open ourselves to ourselves.

When we make that separation, it signifies a developing consciousness of the becoming self. When that happens, then we have a chance to find and choose the unconditional within us. In this writing, I can see that we eventually need and want to give the unconditional to others. We see this as a desire to love as well as to be loved. We can also see it in the feelings we have of compassion, forgiveness, and acceptance. All of these feelings serve as part of our unconditional giving, unconditional care. They happen to us every day even when we deny them.<sup>110</sup>

In our sexual relationships, we feel that same impulse toward the unconditional. When we speak of our sexual acts as making love, we might consider what this making entails. In such a moment of making, of creating something that wasn't there before the act, we give of ourselves unconditionally to the other and for a moment, we achieve something of the unity we give up in our original separation. This unity begins with two beings, two awarenesses. With that conscious unity, we create a third and loving being born out of our physical, emotional, and even spiritual exchange of the unconditional. All this happens to us when we make love. Other kinds of satisfaction may ensue if we simply take pleasure from a sexual act, but we do not make

anything more than we started with. When we create that third being of our shared making, it also makes of us individually someone who has felt close to and acted out of the becoming self. In this way, and in many other ways, we know the presence and the intimate closeness of the becoming self.<sup>111</sup>

## ***In the hall of meaning and Liberation—why not?—November 5, 2011***

If the becoming self offers us so much of what we naturally and dearly want from and for ourselves and the world, why do we endlessly move away from that becoming self? The very presence of that becoming self makes connections with us and the world that allow us and open us to wonderful possibilities of living, yet we deny these things happen. We deny this connection to the becoming self. The step isn't just close. It's not even a step but a simple recognition and acceptance of the existence of this inwardly motivated and powerful force with us. It's like some story by Kafka. We seek the Hall of Meaning and Liberation, the Hall of the Becoming Self. We ask how to get to that hall. We pray about finding it. We might even follow someone or something else for years to do so. In some cases, we intoxicate ourselves in one way or another to try to find our way and ameliorate the pain of not finding it. At the end of the story we discover we have been inside the Hall all the time. We simply haven't opened ourselves to the truth; we live within the Hall all the time. We haven't opened our thinking, our senses, our feelings to the Hall until, in Kafka-land, it is too late. Happily, it is never too late, and the becoming self, the defiant human spirit, remains by us and in us until we open ourselves to that becoming self.

Why don't we do it? What prevents us from entering into this experience? Forgotten we search? Fear of something else we know not of? What in the world keeps us from this positive and productive state of being and becoming?

I don't ask those questions because I have long known the answer. Whatever I may offer you, I do from a place right next to you, the reader with whom I share the creation of this work. At this writing, I am well on to way to reaching sixty-five years old. Most of what I write here, I have come to know and made sense out of in that last few years. It has taken all my life to do so, but enough clarity to write this has come lately. I spent many years of that life immersed if not swallowed by the very negative self-assessment I chose for myself, in a self-destructive identity and ego.<sup>112</sup> For a very long time, I did not choose to wake up to the becoming self I lived with every day. So when I ask the question, "what keeps us from this," I ask it as much of me as I ask it of you. Why don't we?

We fear chaos and the loss of our existence, to become undefined and nothing. Out of that fear comes the rejection of the becoming self and the transformative learning experiences that will take us there which, after all, is really right here.

## ***On escaping from old forms, the limits of meaning perspectives —November 6, 2011***

When the child experiences the toy with seemingly innumerable pieces, the child seeks to make form of some kind out of the pieces because we as human beings feel drawn to making order out of chaos. We need form. The child seeks form externally and internally as well. Other animals and elements of the universe express their full being in large part from inherited instincts and earlier forces. Even in a quantum universe, a quantum exists as itself and has no discernable doubts about that. An animal comes complete with much of its sense of self in place and intact. This inherent structure also presents limitations. These entities don't exceed their essential qualities. They don't enjoy and suffer from a state in which their individual creation still operates.

We human beings, for good and ill, live within a life of possibly expanding forms of the self, a continuing creation of self, a becoming self. When we think about it, this becoming gift and sometimes curse settles on us as a very daunting if not overwhelming task. Everything else in the universe seems to exist with a complete future, a complete structure determined by its very existence. Every other living thing starts with a very substantial structure of being that makes for a very sure pattern of existence with some limited variations in some species. The idea of a determined being and therefore determined self has such an attraction that an entire school of philosophy has developed around the idea that everything, including us human beings, is determined. We don't need to argue whether determinism, so called, has it right. Suffice it to say that the child with the toy and all the rest of us don't experience our own determinism, so we remain stuck with the experience of free will and the becoming self.

At the same time we need to develop this inner, becoming self, an entity that answers and responds to our inner motivations and needs, we must also deal with the outside world in order to discover language and thought structures that will help us give form to our inner being. Without the outer relationships, the inner cannot fully form. At the same time, the outside relationships present any one of a number of difficulties and hindrances some of which we have discussed. That's a paradox of our becoming fully human and expressing the self within as fully as possible. We need the outside world to develop, and the outside world can make that development very difficult if not impossible feeling at times. Our identity comes into being, already waiting as part of our essential structure of being, to deal and interact with the outside world. Both our identity and the becoming self seek unconditional positive regard to make the world a safe place in which to develop. The unconditional doesn't happen as often or as fully as we want and need, so our ego forms around our identity to establish a kind of defensive barrier to what we feel as dangers to our identity and thus to the becoming self.

All of that makes our identity feel absolutely essential to our personal survival. Our ego treats our identity as essential and reaffirms its essential nature as part of its function. Our identity takes its cues from the outside world as to what the world and the people in it can relate to, can find acceptable. At the same time, our identity wishes to make a claim for itself, become identifiable as an independent being. Between these two impulses, we experience a great deal of tension and struggle. The tension can feel so great that we may feel willing to surrender part or all of our precious independent identity to a larger, dominating and conformist identity. Erich

Fromm calls this unwanted but sometimes desired eventuality as an *Escape from Freedom* in the book of that name.

Part of that struggle comes in living with the meaning perspectives that became part of the form the world takes for us as we grew into our immediate family and the world around us. These meaning perspectives tell us how to see the world and, therefore, how to respond to the world. We do not question these perspectives because they simply formed with us, and we have no awareness of how they manipulate our way of perceiving the world, the basic way we have of making form out of internal and external chaos.<sup>113</sup>

## ***The tension between our perceptions and others' meaning perspectives—November 7, 2011***

When Silvia Rayces (we are married) gave the above a first reading, it reminded her of her perception and conception of her childhood past. She told me the story as she remembers it, and it shows the tension between our original vision and the way the external world sees through meaning perspectives we have not adopted.

When she was very young, her vision kept its freshness and originality. The forms she made from common objects differed from that which others saw. Silvia saw what made sense to her directly, and the others, including parental figures, saw what meaning perspectives they had learned and through which they saw. Silvia loved a doll and held this doll a great deal of the time. Her mother bought a baby crib for the doll for Silvia to use—as a baby crib. However, Silvia saw the bed as a perfect kind of couch or love seat for herself to sit on and hold her doll that way. She sat down on the love seat, and her mother corrected her when she saw what Silvia did. Silvia explained what she saw and why she sat. The mother explained in return that she bought that crib, and it wasn't meant for sitting, it was meant to serve as a bed for the doll to lie down on and take a nap or sleep through the night. Silvia nodded, and she might have laid the doll down as her mother watched, but when alone, she went back to sitting comfortably on her loveseat and lovingly holding the doll as closely as she could.

Silvia went through the same sort of tensions between her vision based on her way of seeing and her way of feeling the world and the meaning perspectives others knew that she should see. When Silvia received a doll house, she saw it and used it as a car while lovingly holding her the doll she cared for. Later, Silvia heard her mother talking to someone and the mother made this definitional statement about Silvia and her outside the conformist meaning perspective behavior: "Silvia always seems to find a way to turn her toys into something else."

The tension between a personal vision, the vision of the self and the meaning perspective defined perception and conception of the world happens to children and to all of us at any age a good deal of the time. People often ask us to "see it my way." So long as they ask for understanding in that way, it works. When they mean us to surrender to their perception and conception of the world, it doesn't work—not for us. Seeing, perceiving, conceiving all function as an essential learning tool and eventually motivate choices and actions. In this case, Silvia felt her own perspective profoundly. She wanted to hold the doll and give it the unconditional positive regard she wanted for herself. She showed our desire for the unconditional comes along with a desire to give the unconditional and feel it received without threat or conditions of acceptance. The doll, other toys, blankets and all manner of objects offer themselves to children and adults for such attention. In that way of seeing, separation from the doll made no sense. Putting the doll in a crib, an act of separation, made no sense. Putting the doll in a house also meant separation, not something that promotes that feeling of the unconditional Silvia very much wanted to express with and through the doll. The mother held a meaning perspective that wanted normative or conformist behavior. The crib said "Doll Crib" on the box with a picture of a little girl putting a doll in the crib. It cost money, and the receipt read, "Doll Crib," so that was its purpose. She paid for that purpose, and she meant Silvia to fulfill that purpose. Silvia did not do so, and in



that way, the mother felt some level of disturbance and disappointment. She turned that into something humorous about her child, but this would feel like a condition for regard or a withdrawal of regard to Silvia. She could not feel accepted for what her becoming self wanted in the world, and she began to learn the lesson of meaning perspectives: learn them, do them, integrate them, become them, and conform.

## ***Villains and meaning perspectives —November 8, 2011***

For those of us who seek a villain in every story, find someone to blame, the mother here takes on that role. Aside from some momentary gratification, finding and blaming a villain, seeking some kind of vengeance, serves little purpose. Vengeance exists as a meaning perspective which brings with it doubtful value. We can understand that the mother perceives, responds, and acts out of a very powerful, identity defining meaning perspective. She acts out of her meaning perspective and conception of motherhood. She also acts out of love.

This mother, who worked her way through her own struggles with conformity and individuation, feels that the child for whom she cares will wander far enough away from the mainstream to be seen, forever, as a misfit. Such a role takes on some very uncomfortable characteristics for the identified misfit. Such people become permanent exiles in relation to the mainstream. Worse than an actual exile, these misfits feel the sting of the otherness of the exile but from no country that exists in the world. Although she may not have thought about this directly at the time, she would essentially feel the truth of the role of the exile and the misfit: misfits and exiles rarely feel the comfort of the clear recognition of unconditional positive regard. Paradoxically, one more time, at the same time the mother wishes to show her unconditional positive regard for Silvia, she has to withdraw the unconditional positive regard to do so. That may well come as a painful paradox for anyone in a position of offering unconditional positive regard and still do things for others which we perceive, often through an unquestioned meaning perspective, as the right and even loving thing for the good of the other person. We withdraw the unconditional even as we feel that we give the unconditional.

In this light, in our recognition of the determinative power of unexamined and unquestioned meaning perspectives, we may perceive that very few absolute villains really exist. That doesn't mean that evil doesn't get done by certain people. It means that we can understand those acts more complexly than we have before. When we do that, we can still deplore and condemn the evil itself, and still try to work with the actor in such a way as to keep us within the moral sphere as much as possible.<sup>114</sup> This also allows us to reflect on our own questionable actions, actions that have caused unwanted results or harmful results, in a much more productive, gentle, and forgiving manner. In our search to return to the becoming self, it will help extraordinarily if we can see the forces within us that prevent that return. Those forces stem from our meaning perspectives and from the manipulation of our perceptions and conceptions of the world and ourselves by these meaning perspectives.

## ***Rediscovering the definition of self—November 9, 2011***

At first, the idea of the meaning perspective seemed interesting and worth thinking about. After further thinking and deeper examination, we find that the idea and operation of meaning perspectives takes on a much larger, if not dominant, role in the conduct of our external lives and our internal lives. As a whole being, we want to discover or rediscover the definition of that self or becoming self and see how we can get more fully engaged with it:

The self (or the becoming self) exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility of those choices and results, and the process begins again.

Looking at this definition now, it seems a little spare, but it still works in a way that we can use. Given that it describes the functionality of the becoming self, it keeps us from value judgments about the choices made in its operation and simply presents us with what it does for a living. What the meaning perspective does to prevent the operation of the self becomes evident when we drop the meaning perspective in the midst of this definition. The definition ceases to operate in every place where a meaning perspective operates. The becoming self, the one that perceives the world directly, finds that perception denied or limited by these meaning perspectives.

A clear perception and conception of the world highly influences our ability and power to learn no matter our inherent ability to learn. We can even find our perception of our inherent ability denied or limited to us by a meaning perspective. Such perceptual problems came up repeatedly with students while we worked on the seeming purely instrumental process of learning to use the computer and word processing and spreadsheets.

Such a learning process will almost inevitably lead to mistakes. How we learn in such a process depends very heavily on how we choose to respond to those mistakes. If we choose to respond to a mistake by accusing ourselves of failure and filling ourselves with blame and derision, our ability to learn what the mistake offers can nearly disappear. We just relearn the lesson, the meaning perspective regarding our learning has to say—over and over again: "You're so stupid." What we actually hear comes in our own voice, the voice in which we hear meaning perspectives: "I'm so stupid." In that we hear that perspective with our own voice makes it all the more irresistible. We believe what we tell ourselves. That's part of the power of the meaning perspective. We don't know it's actually the voice of an artificial construct, the meaning perspective. It sounds like it's an incorrigible and irrefutable truth we have known all our lives. Generally, this attitude toward failure manifested itself in the force of the "tyranny of the shoulds" which we discussed earlier.

We return to this example because it gives us insight into how meaning perspectives can deny us a full perception of ourselves and the world. When we perceive of ourselves as stupid and some task before us as beyond our ability to grasp, it limits us in every way possible. We can never engage in that form of learning for that kind of subject. We cease to feel we can choose our

freedom of response to a mistake, to the process of learning itself. In this way, the meaning perspective stops us from participating fully in our life, in our becoming self.

## ***On how meaning perspectives can do us harm—November 10, 2011***

We get invitations to question and critically reflect on meaning perspectives almost every day. Generally, we just don't see them. The meaning perspectives get in the way. All our meaning perspectives are as smart as we are, and they defend themselves as well as we defend ourselves. In that we feel very deeply if without question that these meaning perspectives form absolutely indispensable parts of our identity, our ego defends those perspectives and what we feel is our identity from any disruption caused by questioning and critically reflecting on these meaning perspectives. This makes for a false and unhappy dualism within our whole being. Our identities serve as a presence in the world and to our selves. Identity gives us a sense of substance, or existence. As such, our ego protects our identity as it protects meaning perspectives. The existential paradox that arises from this rather neat arrangement comes when we discover that such a defensive mechanism leaves us wide open for acting in destructive ways to others and to ourselves. The invitation to question and critically reflect may feel like a threat, but it's also an invitation to something life enhancing and even life saving. We also end the false duality through resolution not through struggle and inner domination. We exist as a whole being ready to find our natural inner unity.

The invitation to question meaning perspectives comes every time we experience a critical moment. These critical moments come when we experience something directly that causes us to feel cognitive dissonance. Many in the Middle Ages through the Renaissance followed Aristotle's, often called "The Philosopher," views of reality absolutely. If he said something, it was a fact. To paraphrase a bumper sticker: "The Philosopher said it. I believe it. That settles it." One such believer was taken to see a dissected body and shown how the nerves actually go to the brain and not the heart as Aristotle asserted. The man felt a disruption, a dissonance in his thinking, in his cognition—cognitive dissonance. After a moment he answered, "That's very convincing. If Aristotle didn't say otherwise, I would believe it." This answer represents a meaning perspective, thus identity, defended by our ego using the powerful tool of self-justification.

When we say, "I am a believer in Aristotle," we make that belief an essential part of our identity. We actually say, "I be a believer." We have made that belief a way of establishing our public persona, our external self, and we don't want that persona violated. We don't want to question or critically reflect on the meaning perspective that represents. We can see this as an amusing and harmless delusion on the part of the Aristotle believer, but if he were a physician, it might become quite a dangerous belief and justification.<sup>115</sup>

Even more dramatically, defending meaning perspectives and identity can put our whole being in jeopardy. Many years ago, I began to experience incidents of profoundly disabling vertigo. The incidents were increasing in number, and my life looked as if it would take a permanently disabling turn. A doctor told me that he had heard in the hallway of some medical conference that reducing salt had helped some patients with this disorder. I was quite a salt eater at the time ("I am a salt eating person" or "I love salty foods"), but that dissonance didn't keep me from taking salt completely out of my diet. My meaning perspective told me I couldn't give up salt. My whole becoming self told me I could give up disabling vertigo, and the salt as well as the

vertigo ended. However, I have told others who would benefit from such a choice in diet any number of times, and I was often if not almost always told things like these: "I couldn't give up cheese," "I couldn't give up salt," and "I don't think that would help." The meaning perspective and our identity trumped the well being of the whole being.

I have seen this self-justification, sometimes in the form of simple denial, most strikingly in students with diabetes 2. One woman told me that she and her family loved to cheat on their diabetic diet together: "It's our favorite thing to do." She died—death by denial, death by meaning perspective, identity and ego.

## ***On the defiant human spirit and the power of choice—November 11, 2011***

The adult students with whom I worked generally came to our efforts with a desire to make their future substantially different from the past. For one reason or another, they believed they needed new instrumental skills to realize that difference. Most if not all of them posed this need for difference as a need to change themselves. If someone wants to make a difference in her/his life, that person almost always says, "I need to change."

I accepted that phrase as quite natural and normal until quite recently. In the midst of the intimacy of working individually with these adults, I found that phrase unfortunate although well meaning. In that I worked with people so they could discover and enjoy what was right with them, it seemed counterproductive to say they needed to "change." In fact, it seemed like a return to a previous meaning perspective we often hold about ourselves. If someone needs to change, there must be something wrong with that person. When we evoke the need for change, we may well say to ourselves that we are, in some substantial and essential way, wrong in ourselves, failed in ourselves, and unworthy in ourselves as ourselves. That's why we need to change.

The meaning perspective we hold demands we must change ourselves to do something with our lives. At the same time, and from the same meaning perspective, we hear that we can't possibly change. In the parlance of a meaning perspective I have known, it sounds like this: "You're a bum. You need to change." That always got me going, and then this followed: "You're a bum, how in the hell can you change? You can't." Fearing that I would commit some sort of relative solipsism on others, thinking they experienced my experience because everyone must have experienced my experience, I asked my students if the word "change" had such connotations for them. Upon reflection generally everyone agreed. Besides what I asked, they often said that "change" just sounded so huge, so overwhelming that it felt necessary and impossible. As a result, I looked for another idea and word that would take us into the future without the onerous and paradoxically charged word and idea of "change."

The answer to that need came nearly spontaneously from the voice and thoughts of Viktor Frankl as soon as I asked. In the depths of his stay at the concentration camp Auschwitz, Frankl looked nakedly into the face of meaninglessness and hopelessness. Stripped of everything that made his identity before, nearly egoless in his lack of ability to defend whatever identity he could maintain, he found the following and recaptured it in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*:

Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms  
-to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own  
way.

The word and conscious perspective he gave me was and remains "choice." When we say "change," we clearly imply there's something wrong with us. If there wasn't something wrong, we wouldn't need to change.<sup>116</sup> However, there isn't anything wrong with us essentially. We may well make choices or have made choices we no longer want to make, but those are choices.

Choices are not the becoming self. The becoming self can generate new choices without changing itself. Indeed, it can make new choices by becoming more of itself.

No matter our past, whatever we have done, we remain healthy and whole in our essential being, in our becoming self. Frankl refers to that essence of self as the "defiant human spirit." That defiance isn't about anger. It's about that kind of moment where we feel stripped of everything, and yet we remain defiant to the whips and scorns of time however they have come to us, even if we brought them upon ourselves in some way. The defiant human spirit forms part of the resilience of our human nature. In that way, those who enter a recovery program, for example, haven't failed because they are there. They have succeeded in returning to their becoming self, their defiant human spirit in order to liberate themselves from choices they no longer wish to make.

Our defiant human spirit stays whole and healthy whatever happens to us, and we can choose to turn to that spirit within us at any time. It may not provide us with a way to remove ourselves from some situation. It does provide us with the remarkable ability to choose how we respond to that situation. All of these qualities we can ascribe to the becoming self which remains the positive core of our essential being of our whole being. In essence, again paradoxically, we do not need to change, nor do we change, even as we become more of our becoming self. Experiencing the transformative may more fully express our becoming self and whole being. Nothing about our previous lives and sense of self disappears or changes. All of our experience and learning remain with us in the present and the future, not as an anchor or box but as a vital foundation for more and more expression of our essential, becoming self and our whole being.

It's our choice.



### ***Critical moments and transformations that result — November 12, 2011***

Critical moments, as we have discussed, can happen spontaneously when we simply bump into something that powerfully contradicts an unquestioned meaning perspective. A very simple and compelling example came to me when I was in my early thirties. A woman I knew simply asked me why I spent time and effort in brushing back my hair when that very hair curled in what she saw as a lovely way. I had never thought about it, but at that moment, I realized my mother always told me to get it brushed. For some reason I didn't know nor understand, she thought it looked "messy" as it naturally came, so I spent a great deal of useless time and effort trying to control something that was good enough let alone. I stopped brushing my hair, which never worked in the first place, and let the curl come in, just naturally fall into place. It felt wonderful. It felt liberating. In a minor key, it felt transformative to let myself return to a natural state where I belonged. Once again, there's was nothing wrong with me.

Eleanor asked me about it the next time she saw me, but even she didn't know why she thought it messy. She let hers curl. I haven't brushed the curling hair since. It sounds funny, but on the other hand, all my life, I have known people who either had their naturally curly hair straightened or people who had naturally straight hair curled. Each side held a meaning perspective that told them their natural state was unacceptable, something wrong with them, and they spent time and money denying that natural state. Such a meaning perspective stops being minor when people seek change through higher and higher levels of plastic surgery.

Jack Mezirow, the originator of the phrase and formal concept of transformative learning came to the recognition of meaning perspectives and the transformative when Edie, the woman to whom he was married, returned to formal learning at a community college. During her participation, he saw her question assumptions about herself and make many new choices about herself and her life as a result. The courses she attended did not offer anything directly like the transformative in them. She just learned and understood new things generally, and she found the stimulus to question and critically reflect on that which had served as meaning perspectives that defined parts of her self-image and thus her life. In the terms I offer here, she returned to her becoming self and shifted her identity and ego accordingly.

We may also find such challenges to meaning perspectives, such critical moments, offered directly and purposefully by someone else, someone like a teacher or even a child. I found many meaning perspectives critically raised when I became a father of Gavin, a one-year-old. I was forty-four when this happened, and it felt difficult and emancipating both to make the choices that my critical reflection on those perspectives caused. Thinking about it now, that made Gavin a teacher in my life and a very important one at that. We meet possible teachers every day which is one reason why we can experience critical moments every day.

In a more formal setting and manner, I tried to introduce students to the experience of critical moments directly. I did this in a number of ways. The primary way I accomplished such critical moments came in simply how I treated them—with unconditional positive regard. As part of that, I surrendered my "position power"<sup>17</sup> of grading students' work and gave the process over to them. This caused original joy in students, then often confusion and consternation. Some

students complained quite loudly in class and told me that grading was part of my job. That meaning perspective about my position power of grading and thus domination got questioned when I responded that I certainly agreed that my job meant I responded to their work, but establishing its value really belonged to them. I asked a simple question, such questions can often lead to transformative learning: "In our lives, whose opinion matters most?" Students responded, usually after some pause, that their opinion mattered most. That being the case, it seemed reasonable for them to evaluate the work they did. If they didn't feel confident in exercising that ability, the ability to correctly value their own work, our class was a good and safe place to begin their practice.

A former student came by with his family for a visit to our home. We have stayed in touch during the more than ten years since we shared classes together. He once again remembered the experience of trust and growing confidence he felt by grading his own work. More importantly, he felt that he could express himself freely for the first time in his life, and by doing so, he discovered that he liked what he thought. He discovered his mind worked well and held values and ideas that would make his life work for him after years of wandering around rather aimlessly. In essence, he discovered that when I removed the coercive force of grading and the dominator model in our classroom, he experienced how well he could see and judge the quality of his work and the choices that went into that work. That began to open him to seeing that he was more than capable of making choices about his life and his career. He felt liberated then and even now by that knowledge. He runs his own restaurant business with that very idea in mind. He leads but he doesn't dominate, and the people that work for him show him loyalty and bring their original ideas and energy to work every day.

Lately, I have brought the transformative and a critical moment to students by asking a question that we looked at before:

"What would happen if you found out that every negative thought and feeling you ever had about yourself were unfounded, unfair, and untrue?"

## ***Liberation from the unfair, unfounded, and untrue comes hard—November 13, 2011***

This question brought most participants into a direct encounter with the very idea of a negative thought and the meaning perspective that drives that thought. When students and others answered, they often spoke from a very real place inside them. They intuited immediately the implication of "negative thought." Such thoughts turn our past mistakes and actions into a motivation for self-condemnation and even degradation. We think bad and even destructive things about ourselves, sometime even crippling things. Their answers tended to be spontaneous. Many came under the general idea, "I'd be really mad at myself." This response shows the rather exquisite subtlety of a meaning perspective in its defense of itself and the status quo of our identity. Even as the question breaks through into a questioning and critical reflection on a meaning perspective about such negative thoughts, the meaning perspective immediately turns the positive reflective response into a negative: "Thinking untrue negative thoughts about myself makes me a very bad person who deserves my anger if not outrage." The liberating possibilities of the critical moment caused by the question become another negative thought, and off we go again. We wind up right back where we began. It works like a positive self-justification of the negative.

Another common response came in this very declarative form: "That's impossible." When we discussed that response, it turned out that the speaker felt that the mistakes and actions of the past which didn't work out well deserved negative thinking. The meaning perspective works something like this:

Making a mistake means I have done something wrong. If it's wrong, then it's bad. If I do bad things, I must be a bad person. Bad persons deserve negative thoughts. That means that my negative thoughts are true.

Much of this fits into a previous discussion about the positive nature of mistakes. They can teach if we want to learn. If we want to punish ourselves, we only learn to think more and more negatively about ourselves. That's a choice we make even if it has become so automatic we forget that it remains a choice. If the negative meaning perspective makes the choice, we will see only the negative. If we experience the past through our becoming self, we will find those same occurrences, but we will see entirely different meanings. Our becoming self doesn't want to seek the past to innumerate our failures. We seek the past to learn the lessons that for which we have paid dearly. The "impossible" becomes the practical and the inevitable. When we tell the story of our past, we can transform ourselves from the bad guy to the hero and still report every detail honestly. In our terms here, we speak even more honestly than when we reported ourselves as the bad guy. All the difference comes in the storyteller's choices in the telling.

The last infrequent but still possible response came from students and others who spoke with emphasis: "That would be wonderful." This critical moment brings with it a vision or a feeling of a future in which mistakes become learning and simply form part of the development of life and the becoming self. The burden of negative thinking about ourselves is lifted. The energy needed to support that negativity becomes freed, and our liberation opens us to our present and

our future in a way we had not perceived before. This represents the transformative. It may feel difficult in some ways, but in the end it feels gentle, natural, and wonderful. In the dominator model no gain happens without loss. In transformative learning, we lose nothing and gain everything.

***Transformation and liberation as a recognition of and return to the natural—  
November 14, 2011***

We search for the becoming self, and every time we engage our meaning perspectives, question and critically reflect on them, we always gain in that search. When we question, we may find value in some meaning perspective we held. The change comes in transforming the unquestioned meaning perspective into a conscious perspective thus increasing our awareness. With that awareness, we can use that perspective in a way that doesn't limit our thinking. With such a conscious awareness, we can also keep an open mind about what we see in the world, how we respond to it, and how we act in accordance. In that way, the formerly unquestioned, unyielding meaning perspectives transforms into our critically reflective becoming self—out of the past and into the present and future.

You can find that idea imbedded in the language above. Language reflects, expresses, and enacts thoughts. In my case, I have questioned and critically examined the use of language that reflects violence or serves as violent metaphors. Due to that shift in my perception, I used the word "engage" above and not "confront." The word "confront" generally implies an enemy and some form of combat or struggle. The word "engage" signifies something more understanding. When I combat someone or something, I work within a dominator model and my position power in order to win or beat the other. When I engage, I look for a cooperative and collaborative effort which comes to a shared solution. When dealing with our whole being, we can choose to see our ego and identity as enemies within us which we must beat or even destroy. In that way, we might want to confront those parts of ourselves. However, they do not exist as enemies but vital elements of our whole being with which we engage to maintain and increase development generally and specially in the becoming self. Any form of attack on elements of our whole being implies an ugly dualism and leads inevitably to unnecessary harm. That brings us back to the dominator meaning perspective: no gain without pain and loss.

In the examples I write about above, we find no loss or pain unless someone chooses to find it there, to produce it. That negative choice always hovers around the edges of critical moments. We can always respond to the opportunity of the critical moment with anger at ourselves and others. That brings us back to choosing to punish ourselves and others for what we should have known before we could have known. I could have gotten angry at my mother for her meaning perspective about my hair. She never quite got over my letting it curl, but that was a meaning perspective she didn't question. I did, and I found myself liberated from unnecessary work and allowed my authentic physical self to become acceptable to me. In that way, I brought me closer to my authentic self in general, to the becoming self. It also liberated me many years later from making meaning perspective based demands on Gavin, the child once in my care and now an adult in his own care.<sup>118</sup>

I saw many men take considerable umbrage when the women in their lives returned to school and found new levels of their becoming self. That umbrage led to conflict and often marital collapse. Professor Mezirow paid attention to Edie, took an interest, and found himself experiencing transformative learning which became the core of his life's work from then on.

When my former student found himself engaged in valuing his own work in our classes, he took that as an opportunity to revalue himself and all his work in school and in his life. He found that he wanted to express himself honestly when he valued his work and himself. He also saw he had cheated himself of that honest effort in school and in his life generally because he unquestioningly abided by a meaning perspective that caused him to choose to doubt his abilities in mind and spirit. Instead of punishing himself for his past mistakes, he took the new vision and made substantial and continuing positive choices in his personal and professional lives.

Whenever anyone chose to respond, "That would be wonderful" to the question I asked: "What would happen if you found out that every negative thought and feeling you ever had about yourself were unfounded, unfair, and untrue?" they gained a new vision of themselves and the story of their past. They saw new possibilities in the present and the future by choosing to question the previously unquestioned, limiting and diminishing meaning perspective and choose a new and helpful one for the present and future. Once again, from all these stories we see all gain and no loss.

## ***On why not the transformative—November 15, 2011***

If all this sounds even remotely true, we have every reason to ask why we don't enter into the transformative as a natural and if not inevitable part of our lives. This sort of question came up in the classes where I introduced many of these thoughts. From the child with the endless and chaotic pieces through our creation of perspectives and conceptions, we can see that we feel an impulse toward making form out of the world, and we do so. This impulse to form might well lead us into the *transformative* learning that brings us to liberation and returns us to the search for and participation in the becoming self which seems our natural state. We seek the authentic, and our becoming self provides us with that authentic sense of being. That authenticity, we intuit, will bring us a kind of inner security and a sense of personal stability. All this can happen. When that happens, when we reach for the becoming self, our identity and ego take part in that authentic becoming. Our becoming identity and ego can reach for the authentic as well. They find motivation for our identity's manifestation in the world from within, from its becoming. It no longer expresses itself and defends itself in pleasing, impressing, or surrendering to the world. We escape the life of the persona that T.S. Elliot delineates: "To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet."<sup>119</sup>

Generally, we don't even look at or for self-awareness, that awareness that enters into a beginning to becoming. As I found out in those interview and many other classes, given all the forces that we face as we have discussed in these pages, we fear self-awareness because we fear what we will find. After all the years of battered vulnerability, of unsatisfied desires for unconditional positive regard, we fear meeting the person we must find if the world has done what's done to that person. Indeed, given our identity's constant need to adjust to the world and deal with the world, we internalize what has happened to us. All of these rejections, doubts, and dismissals have created an identity and ego that feel that the resulting meaning perspectives are essential to our personal survival. We feel we are completely dependent on these meaning perspectives to survive as an identity. Self-awareness might well bring us to a place where we do question, and in this questioning we fear we will lose ourselves. We will cease to exist and reenter the formless chaos we have always feared. The ultimate power of meaning perspectives to keep us from moving into the transformative comes from its creating our sense of an inextricable bond between our identity and the meaning perspectives. In that way, we become transfixed on those perspectives, frozen like a butterfly on a pin. We may look beautiful and successful in many ways, but we are stuck in the past, in the perspectives that others helped build but over which we have taken ownership.

No matter how long we remain transfixed, no matter how painful it promises to feel, we can choose liberation anytime we want. As soon as we become aware of our unquestioned meaning perspectives, question them and critically reflect on them, we choose to make new choices in our lives. We may have forgotten, or maybe we didn't notice when we chose what we chose in the past, what have become meaning perspectives, but we did choose. As Frankl says, under all circumstances, we can still make choices.

## ***Another inner dualism—November 16, 2011***

We chose unwittingly then, and we can consciously choose now, but generally we find we don't make that new choice. Something about what we learned from time and tribulation in our lives keeps us from the freedom of that choice, has become an obstacle to the power of choice itself.

Part of that obstacle, we can find in the way we speak to ourselves. When we listen to our inner negative inner dialogue, we find things that don't help and even sound quite odd. It makes for a turmoil we can often hear voiced. Many of my students talk to themselves out loud when they work. Many of us do. I do so myself. Often when I hear those voices, I hear their inner turmoil. Sometimes they express that inner turmoil to me. The person who tells me doesn't see or feel this as turmoil. In fact, students and others feel almost as if they accomplish something by their negative inner dialogue.

Revelations can arrive so swiftly and evidently that it seems as if we should have known that new understanding all along. Such a revelation arrived for me when a student said, "I'm disappointed in myself." I epiphanied: "What a remarkable thing to say." I asked the student if I could talk about that sentence, and she agreed even if somewhat confused as to why. I went to the little white board and wrote out the phrase, "I am disappointed in myself," and asked my students, "Who are these two guys?" They looked at me. They saw no epiphany aside from possibility of the instructor having slipped a gear one more time. But there it was in dry erase marker. Who is that "I" who makes a judgment on the "self"? Our internal dialogue is full of such expressions, and none serve a very happy purpose. The "I" inevitably judges the "Self" in almost universal ways: "I am my own worst critic," "I am my own worst enemy," even to the extremes of "I hate myself" or "I must change myself." Who is this "I" who doesn't seem to like the "Self" very much?<sup>120</sup>

In terms of this writing, the "I" represents the "I"identity. Our identity always feels the need to prove something to the external world. It suffers from the standards previously defined. Making these sorts of internal demands, our identity can tell the world that our identity has a very high standard of accomplishment, and it can be very self-critical in order to achieve that standard. Of course, what we hear in this identity construction resonates with the punishing behavior we received from adult authorities to serve some higher purpose. As with those authorities, the structure of the relationship stays the same. All the effort and the work happens because the becoming self feels and acts on the motivation to accomplish something. In that effort, mistakes happen as a natural and almost inevitable part of the process. All this comes with the self saying "Yes" to the opportunity to make that effort and to learn from the process. Our identity acts solely as the non-participatory judge in the matter, and the judge always finds fault in the activity and the achievement of the self. Our identity somehow always finds the "No" in what the self does, and in that "No" our identity denies the value and denigrates the effort of the self in its attempt to choose a "Yes." This dialogue might remind some of us of expressions we heard before such as "Can't you get anything right?" "How many times do I have to repeat this?" "If you'd try harder, you'd get it." "You're not trying hard enough." "If your head wasn't screwed on, you'd lose it." "You are trying my patience."



## ***Inner dialogues that harm—November 17, 2011***

This process reflects processes we have experienced in our lives, but because we have internalized it, we see it and feel it as just and fair. It forms a central part of the "every negative thought and feeling you had about yourself . . ." complex meaning perspective. A personal arrangement we would like to convert into something more useful and less painful. This makes quite a picture when we question and reflect on it critically. The "Self" does all the work, makes all the effort, takes all the chances, and suffers from any loss or pain encountered in the process of living every day. The "I"—what does that guy do for a living? Not much. The "I" just judges, and all the judgments seem foregone conclusions. Whatever the "Self" does, the "I" finds lacking. This strikes me as a very, very bad deal for the Self, and it's equally bad deal for the "I". This rift in our being, this other and unnecessary and untrue dualism, sounds like and feels like one of the loneliest and saddest places in the world. When we consider that the defensive ego gets involved and uses this negative dialogue as a source of pride and self-justification, we can see how bad a deal it becomes.

Another element of the whole being that we can see, if we can get past this obviously negative material, is how much we do get done in spite of everything. It's like the resiliency of the human body. We can and do punish our bodies in many ways that can and does do harm to its natural and healthy functioning, yet it still goes on working remarkably well. As a whole being, we get on with living and acting in our lives remarkably well in that same, resilient way in spite of everything we tell ourselves, in spite of how we talk to ourselves. That resiliency may well come from Frankl's defiant human spirit or from what we have identified here as the becoming self.

I talked to myself in such a way for a very long time and used far more degrading language I would not use here. You may know what I mean. In fact, I talked to myself in a way I would not have talked to anyone else, including people I didn't like very much. When a very young Gavin broke a glass, I spoke to him kindly. I worked at encouraging him to feel better about what had happened and find ways to avoid experiencing such an accident again. For Gavin, my compassion was easy to call on. If I broke a glass, my "I" would tell my "Self" the following: "Why are you always so stupid and clumsy (a question which was a statement if I ever heard one)?" "Can't you get anything right (I exclude the more colorful language along the same lines)?" These comments and others like them preclude the idea that I can avoid such a difficult because of my own, ingrained incompetence. This monologue from the "I" to the "Self" never reflects any compassion or communicates any possibility to learn from this mistake or even to learn that what happened wasn't a fault but really an accident. The only learning comes in reasserting my divided and damaged self.

I have discovered, after a rather stunning number of years and endless divided-self monologues, it doesn't have to happen like this. This meaning perspective doesn't have to prevail. We can make choices that will move us away from this perspective and establish a pattern of transformative learning and transformed thought and action. We can actually create some balance in our internal conversation and heal the divided self. I may not have done so perfectly,

but I don't demand perfection of myself. That demand speaks as the meaning perspective that expects the unachievable—control over ourselves and our lives.

## ***Why we can choose and not need to change—November 18, 2011***

We have looked a little at the idea of change as opposed to choice before, but it bears reexamining here. This difference, I have found very recently, may well work in a vital fashion in our search for and union with the becoming self fully.

When students told me that they needed to change because of the things that had done in their past that had not worked out, I always felt ill at ease. I wondered who I was to help someone change. Besides, once they changed, I asked myself, then who were they and who would they change into. When I approached myself with the idea of change, as I noted, meaning perspectives that plagued me its truth about my weaknesses every day spoke up and told me that those weaknesses made it impossible to change. It told me I was just—stuck. When students talked about change, they spoke about it with general disappointment because they felt if they failed at any small changing task in any way, they felt they had failed in the entire project. They felt that if the little went wrong then the big just couldn't happen. They felt failed, and that feeling of failure brought them right back to their negative meaning perspectives. I really knew how that worked.

Besides all that, it finally came to me that when I asked myself or my students asked themselves to change, or anybody wanted to change, we all told ourselves that there was something wrong with ourselves in ourselves. We said we didn't like ourselves very much. We removed any possible unconditional positive regard for ourselves by asking for change. That being the case, there was no way in the world that we could change. Who did we think we are in the first place? That certainly makes for a cycle of doom.

Along with all that, when I actually tried to think about change and the nature of making a change, it felt quiet huge—an enormous and an incredibly daunting idea. That made change seem an even crazier notion. Then I realized that it made very little sense in any case. A good deal of what people wanted to change wouldn't change.

Frankl did not tell us in *Man's Search for Meaning* that he could change himself or his situation. He knew that the only things which would free him physically from the camp came in the form of death or military liberation. He told us that he could choose how he responded to his situation, to life in the camp. He tells us right now that we can choose how to respond to any situation or condition in which we find ourselves. Choices of that magnitude, as small and simple or as big and complex as we wanted to make them, felt like something I could accomplish and everyone could accomplish. At that point, I resolved to take the idea and the language of "change" out of myself and my work with myself and put in the word "choice." It has made an enormous difference in ways that I had not anticipated.<sup>121</sup>

For all my adult life, for as long as I could remember, I lived with what the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders called then Manic Depression. I called it just plain crazy.

## ***Saying "Yes" to life in spite of everything—November 19, 2011***

I lived inside the pain of that depression for years, and for years, it loomed over and undermined the rest of my life. I struggled mightily to keep it at bay, and in that struggle, I succeeded to a great degree. The struggle, however, never went away. Years and years went by, and I got a great deal accomplished in life, but the daily struggle against the depression which was, after all, a struggle with myself, went on every day. Sometimes I felt exhausted by the struggle just to get out of bed after a night of troubled or non-existent sleep. For all the struggle I went through each day, I thought it was a really good bargain with this personal demon I had unwittingly chosen. I could enter into and engage the world as fully as possible whatever the cost, it didn't matter. The struggle gave me a freedom, albeit limited, I hadn't known before.

Then I read Frankl, and he told me about suffering and about my free choice of response. I realized then that I could stop fighting against something that I chosen to appear like and feel like a demon and simply choose not to accept the daily, and sometimes constant, invitation the depression sent me to join in and fall under its sway. The depression formed a part of me which, at that point, I simply thought was built in, that it "be" part of me as much as my biological sex or my age. If I couldn't change it, unavoidable suffering Frankl calls it, I could choose how I would respond to it. I had chosen, unbeknownst to me as a choice, to see depression as an enemy and fight it like mad. Now that I knew I had a choice, I could make a new choice in response to the invitation. As I write now, I realize I had always made a choice. Now that I knew about choice, I could make a new one.

When the idea of choice filled me with power, I could accept the depression as a part of me, like it or not wasn't the point. I would let it go if I could, or rather, allow it to become a balanced part of me, but that seemed impossible. I chose to make balance with it by accepting it, even acknowledging it, and choosing to get on with the open life I could live as if the depression could not hold me in a more closed place. In terms of this writing, I spent years upon years saying "No" to depression. It worked, but the struggle, the "No" cost me dearly every day. Some days, often if irregularly, the "No" failed, and I fell back into the morass of depression. When Frankl introduced me to the idea of choice, I learned how to say "Yes" to life in spite of the depression. As Frankl writes, I could say "Yes" to life in spite of everything. I further find now that when I said that colossal "Yes" in spite of everything, I also said "Yes" because of everything. That "Yes" brought me into a very new feeling of balance and a wonderful increase in life filling energy toward myself and toward the world around me. I don't know that I reached happiness, but I found a kind of peace in myself I hadn't believed possible.

In the process of saying "Yes," I questioned and critically reflected on the meaning perspective I held about myself and the depression with which I lived. I discovered life was not a question of the power of control through the life denying "No" but a much more peaceful and fulfilling question of the power of balance and the life sustaining and celebrating "Yes." A "Yes" to choice becomes a "Yes" to life.

## ***When we choose "No"—November 20, 2011***

Many of the people with whom I worked knew in a vague way that when they didn't make an active choice, that was a choice. Still, in a post-modern age, many also lived with a kind of existential passivity if not despair. Life and choice become a kind of resigned shrug, a "No" that seems to inhabit the world for them even before they make their non-choice choice. To quote a bumper sticker: "\_\_\_\_\_ happens and then you die." Whatever fills in the blank, it often implies a lack of real choice because it asserts a uselessness in life. In the face of such a feeling, we often give up making active choices, a "Yes," and just get on with acting out the meaning perspectives that have become the unknown and unquestioned center of our perceptions and our lives. The "No" as an essential part of our identity makes something of our lives that we don't really want to choose. As familiar as the "No" feels, "Yes" comes as part of our human nature, our defiant human spirit, our becoming self and whole being—"Yes."

When we choose to say "No" to our lives, we say "No" to our becoming self. The negative we speak paradoxically but inevitably speaks a positive. It says, "Yes" to the life denying dominator model. That model acts on the belief that it knows what's best for us because what's best for us is best for the dominator model. That model tells us who we should be and holds us to the abstract standard we have seen and discussed before. It tells us who we are and that we have to make ourselves conform to the way things are in whatever way we need to do so. It defines us as early as possible. In most ways, the family myth helps in saying "No" to our whole being and "Yes" to the dominator model.<sup>122</sup> Although done without malice, the unquestioned way we talk about children serves that purpose. One child is the smart one. Another child is the emotional one. Another child is the artistic one. These early references to a developing self, to a child wishing to make some form out of the world she/he finds around her/him can distort the process. The child wants to find and make form in and out of the becoming self, but myths and labels get in the way. These family labels get exacerbated by a school system that labels students soon and often. Those labels can and do distort the inherent "Yes" within each child, the "Yes" that forms an essential part of the becoming self.

Many students came to me with an embedded myth or label, a "No" about themselves. This meaning perspective prevented them from reaching their becoming self and reaching out into the world, so they could that would make a positive form out of their lives however those lives were constituted. One student, Ruth, quickly showed her intelligence and perceptive abilities in our first meeting. She reported to me that she spent most of her adult life as an exotic dancer in various clubs. She also danced with dependencies of one kind or another. She had ended both dances soon before we met, and she wanted to begin her life again. She told me she felt somewhat hampered by her appearance. She was endlessly told she was "cute," a rather dismissive comment in terms of her other and more personal and professional qualities.<sup>123</sup> She showed these in many ways, but she also believed she was permanently hampered if not definably hindered by her "learning disability." At some early point in her school life, she got bored and restless and labeled ADHD. That put her in special classes and put her through the same sort of dismissive pattern we have seen before in other special class experiences. She also learned best visually, and she reported that seemed to keep her out of learning almost altogether.

She came to the training center to learn skills to use in a new career, but she was telling me she couldn't learn—not a great start for her.

The power of meaning perspectives showed in her in this very unhappy and restrictive way and they hampered her life. We talked about these unquestioned barriers she had learned if she learned nothing else at home and at school. She told me she had to think about these ideas, so she left and came back the next day ready to talk but wary of where we might be going.

## ***Using choice to retell our story—November 21, 2011***

Ruth came back and allowed as how she could listen and think about what we said. She didn't really think she could change, most of us don't, but she'd listened. I talked to her about choice not change, and she liked that. She also liked the idea of grade-free learning, and that my job was to support her and nurture her as she was not as she felt she should be. We agreed that being herself was a not a disability, and she had used her mental energy and agility effectively all her life when she looked at her past in a new way. Her survival had depended entirely on her intelligence and learning ability however they presented themselves and not on how she looked. She began to see that computers are fast and look smart but a really quite dumb, as binary dumb as a light switch just in the billions of switches, and her fear diminished. She chose to see the computer not as an alien and superior but as a three-year old named Fred, and she began to love the little beast for what it was. It was not what she chose to fear. She chose to say "Yes" to her ability to deal with it. Ruth chose to believe in her learning and her ongoing ability to learn. As time went on, she made many choices and each of these strengthened other choices. In the process, she questioned many meaning perspective that limited her, and they transformed into open and opening perspectives. Eventually, she found that other people asked her for help on their computers, and she could, as we had learned to practice, figure out many solutions. Ruth retold her story, recognized her heroic role in that story, and began to feel joy in her becoming self far more that the defective identity and ego she constructed as part of her survival in the very hard and unforgiving world in which she had lived.

Ruth showed enormous agility and ambition as she went on, and she managed a grace in choice that many struggled with. She found the "Yes" in seeing her new choices as a joy and liberation in her present life and not a condemnation of her past. She felt happy to know what she had found out. She didn't condemn herself for not knowing what she hadn't known or had any reason or motivation to know. Ruth allowed the "No" she felt toward the past fade away and began to see that past as a wonderful repository or library of experiences. This happened more and more as she freed herself from the meaning perspectives that had limited her vision and understanding of those experiences. When she re-visioned herself and her heroic role in her past, the success of her past, she could release her anger and abandon feeling apologetic about what happened to her and the choices she made in the past. She could and did take pride in her new choices and ultimate results. Ruth discovered she could return more fully to the working definition of the becoming self, of her becoming self:

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility of those choices and results, and the process begins again.

Essential in all of these choices was a primary questioning of the anger she and we can hold onto about the present or the past. Just knowing we have a choice about anger, we can give it up and let it simply go away, choose that as a response to situations in the past and present that motivated us to choose anger. Many people deny anger in its immediacy is a choice at all. That may be, but only at the immediacy of the moment of the shock or trauma that brought it on. As

soon as that settles, we can choose to let the anger go. It comes hard for many of us to accept the fact that we really can choose how we respond to any situation even if we can't change the situation

In class, we worked out this simple and striking hypothetical example of this idea of freely choosing our response to the unfair and unchangeable. Many who heard about Frankl and the concentration camp felt impressed, but his story felt a little remote even abstract to them. That's how we came to this more immediate and tangible illustration.

Imagine a person has been hit by a car through no fault of her/his own. Given the severity of the injuries, the doctor amputates a leg of this person. The person had no any ability to choose to grow a new leg or keep the one already amputated. This person can, must, and will choose how she/he will respond to this physical mutilation. That person can, and many do, choose to stay angry for the rest of her/his life. None of us could see how that would compensate for the loss of a leg. In fact, we all saw that such a choice would limit the life of that person. Indeed, such a choice would form a meaning perspective on which that person remained transfixed, stuck endlessly in loss with no chance to find liberation into a freer life. If this person chooses to come to a balance with this injury, that person will go on and live life fully, leg or no leg: unfair and unchangeable on one level, and changeable in result on another. It's a choice.

A friend found the power of choice remarkably true with a graduate student of hers. She always opened her classes in every way to student participation, presentation, group and individual discussions. One student showed his dislike for everything anyone said and everyone who spoke. No one wanted to work with him, and the class was settling down into a kind of uneasy silence overshadowed by this angry student. My friend and I spoke about choice, and she presented the idea of choice to this student. His first choice was anger. Did my friend think that he chose all the terrible things that happened to him? He listed the sadnesses of his life which were indeed substantial and lamentable. She answered that he still had a choice in how he responded to all of this. He left hurriedly, and she had no idea how he would react in their next class. In that class, he watched her most of the time, and he let the class talk without his disquieting interruptions. The next class, he spoke well, listened to others, and generally contributed to a productive and happy classroom. By the next class, everyone wanted to work with him, and the class came completely alive. He told my friend that that he decided to try to choose to let the anger go and take his life as he found it. His life got better for him at least as far as she could see in that classroom.



## ***On how anger works—and doesn't—November 22, 2011***

Our anger meaning perspective arises out of the normative structure and practices of life in the having based, dominator model, conformist culture in which we grow up and live. It tells us that the only power we possess comes from denying others' power over us and taking their power from those same people. We must achieve positional power in every situation. Power feels like a something our identity feels the need to possess to keep that power. When we feel powerless in some situation or through some action, we feel anger in response because we feel our identity threatened. We also, and this primarily, feel the pain of our vulnerability. The possession of power, we feel, protects us from our vulnerability and the hurt it represents. Of course the resort to anger as a choice does the opposite. It makes us more vulnerable because it makes us more exposed in our weakened feeling identity. Anger forms our ego's knee-jerk response to that situation. It attempts to regain power and protect vulnerability through some sort of personal protection and force.

It doesn't work. We may feel some momentary gratification in anger, but it doesn't satisfy our need. Our need, the place where keep our becoming self and our vulnerability, finds its answer in unconditional positive regard. To return to Fromm, he writes, "Love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence." That love is the unconditional. That love does not seek its power by denying power to others or taking their power from them. That violates the ends principle because it turns others into a means to our end. The unconditional celebrates and accepts the personal power of the other person, the Thou we have come to choose to see in an unconditional manner. Paradoxically, we may make ourselves into someone else's means. We give up our personal power, in order to gain positional power. It's like Faust. We give up our soul, our becoming self, our personal power to gain positional power over others. We choose to lose everything about our being to gain the ephemeral of having. As Fromm also writes, "If you are what you have and you lose what you have, who are you?"

At the same time as our ego wants to protect our identity from a loss of position power through anger, we surrender our personal power in the process. When we discussed anger in class, we did so because many students told many stories about their past anger which they carried with them in the present. When that anger turned up in a job interview or in the workplace, it would hurt them and forestall their success. Once again I introduced the idea of our "locus of control," (and again "locus of balance"). Once we translated "locus," we all agree that such a location should exist within us, within our center. When I asked what happen to that center when someone or something "made me mad," most realized that the location of control, our personal power, shifted over to what we perceived as the cause of the anger. In an attempt to regain our sense of position power, we give up our most important power, that personal power that offers us the power to live fully without dominating others.

Anger reduces us. My students also found it interesting, paradoxical one more time, that we feel angry at people we don't like, at least at that moment. At the same time we don't like them because we choose anger, we give them our personal power, our location of balance. The longer we hold on to the anger, the longer that other person holds on to our power, our location of balance. Many of my students knew people who had done that for years, and that loss of

personal power weakened them. Other of my students admitted that they held on to such anger, and now they realized it weakened them. They said they got it. It made sense, but what happens next? They asked about how they could recover from the bad things that happened without anger, or at least, how do they let go of anger as soon as possible. In a phrases used in this writing, rather than trying to say "No" to anger by itself, to what do we say "Yes?" When the time comes, when some anger producing situation arises, we can't just stand there not getting mad. We want to do something. We have to do something. What is that something?

## ***Anger and critical reflection—November 23, 2011***

Silvia reminds me about an age old something to do: count to ten—slowly. Some say that can help, but that depends on what we do for those ten seconds. If we can gain a new perception on the situation, it might help. It can also give us ten more seconds to stew and stir our anger to a higher pitch. It also doesn't help if you already slugged the other person and Rocky is down for the count.

This idea also relates to the notion of what gets called "anger management." That clearly implies that the anger will happen, and we need to manage it. That's quite an image. Someone sets fire to a house, gets it going, and tell us to manage it. That's not much of a choice. A more effective choice might appear in the form of not setting the fire in the first place. No fire, no management. Besides that, most if not all of us know when our anger happens, and we can examine why it happens as we do above. When we question our anger, especially the naturalness of anger itself, we critically reflect on the meaning perspective we hold about anger. In that way, we can enter into transformative learning about anger, and we might discover we don't have to manage what we can avoid. We can say "Yes" to maintain our locus of balance, our personal power.

Just in passing, anger and I know each other—quite well, so I don't discuss the idea abstractly. Once after a long day driving a taxi, I walked into my apartment choosing anger like crazy. I threw my substantial bunch of keys on a table near the door. That scarred the table, and I had to look at that evidence every day until I moved. The keys bounced off the table and hit a wall. The keys bounced off the wall and went straight through the picture window. I can't for the life of me remember why I was angry, but I will never forget the sight and sound of that window smashing to bits. It cost me a day's work, and it cost me for the window, and I felt it a very critical moment for me and my anger meaning perspective. That moment brought me to realize that I could not remember any incident of anger having done me any good at all. They all cost me dearly in many ways, and they always cost me dearly in personal power. I certainly could remember the harm as I can remember that window now.

Once I was working on anger with a group of single parents many of whom admitted to carrying a good deal of anger with them most of the time. The discussion was going well, when Barb, my partner in the support group she founded, slammed in. She said she was furious, and she had every right to be. "That guy really pushed my button," she said and looked at me to see if I would like to do some pushing. Everybody stirred but stayed quiet. I drew a button on the board and said, "That guy really pushed your button." Barb walked to the board and pushed the drawn button a number of times. "Yes, he really pushed my button." Satisfied for the moment, she stopped.

After a pause, I asked whose button that was. She said it was hers. I wondered out loud why she had that button hanging out there for anyone to push. We all laughed, and I erased the button, and said that I had never thought about that phrase until that moment. Why would any of us have a button to our anger, and if we have a button or buttons, to what are they connected? When we look at the sources of anger, critically reflect on that anger, the thing to which our buttons are connected, we might disconnect from that something and find ourselves free.

We are all individuals, and so is our anger. Critical reflection on that anger and the meaning perspective it represents is a process in which all of us can engage if we choose to do so.

### ***On choosing our mood wardrobe—November 24, 2011***

Most of us choose to resort to anger when some situation or action offers us a choice to feel powerless. That feeling comes as a choice. We don't have to feel anger. Most people I worked with deny that anger comes to us as a choice. It just happens "naturally" because the situation demands it. Anger has come to us for so long, we may not remember how and why we first chose it, as I can't, but it has become part of our matrix of meaning perspectives. Even after all that, most of us can recall a situation that we use as a motivation to anger at one point and the same situation at some other point, we choose calm. It can depend on what we call our "mood" for one thing. If we feel we are "in a bad mood," many things that might not bother us typically now motivate our choice for anger. That idea takes us back to the father who showed love to the child he cared for in one mood and rejected her in another. That's a choice.

A student in our computer training class called me to help her. When I sat down and asked what I could do for her, she answered in this remarkable way: "You'll have to excuse me. I'm in a bitchy mood." That phrase struck me as if it were the first time I had heard it. She got the help she wanted, and I asked her if I could talk about that phrase to the class. She said she had no idea why I would talk to anybody about what she said. She had hardly noticed she'd said it, but I could go right ahead. Full of enthusiasm, I did.

I drew a closet on the board, and I said that I had just heard a phrase which just stuck me in a new way. I acknowledged the student and her permission to speak and told the story. I said, "If I say, 'I am in a bitchy mood,' I must have chosen to get into that mood." That being the case, I got an image in mind which I began to illustrate using the closet on the board. I hurriedly sketched the closet in with all kinds of costumes: "So I get up in the morning, I look into my mood closet, and I find a wide variety of things to choose from. Some are just beautiful and help me look and feel my best. Some are just comfortable, and they help put me at ease. Still others are business like and help my image for an interview or something like that. Then in the corner, all scrunched up, is this ill-fitting, completely itchy, uncomfortable, and ugly piece of clothing called "bitchy," and that's what I choose to put on for the day. Why in the world would I do that?" After some laughter, students opined that it must have been something that happened the day before that made the mood a bad one. That would probably make the rest of the day a bad one. Things would irritate me more and would open me to angry reactions to things that might not bother me on a better day. On the other hand, why would I choose to allow that previous problems from the previous day make the rest of my day just plain lousy? We decided that one very good reason was that something still bothered me, something that offered me a sense of powerlessness or helplessness, and that helped me choose a bad mood to put on for the day. We also agreed that the bad mood would do nothing to increase my power to deal with anything. If anything, it would decrease my power to deal whatever happened that day or to deal with what was still bothering me.

Out of that discussion came another which associated all kinds of unhappy and unproductive behaviors with the sense of powerless that we choose: worry, fear, anger, resentment, envy, grudge holding, and revenge. All of these and more remain a choice in all circumstances

because, as Frankl discovered, we all have the freedom to choose our response. When we choose actively, we actively choose to free the essential, personal power within our becoming self.

## ***Powerless, anger, and choosing the transfixitive—November 25, 2011***

When we look at anger and other manifestations of powerlessness, when we open ourselves to how we really feel when they arise, we may find that we feel hurt more than anything else.<sup>124</sup> Our identity does not wish to show our vulnerability inherent in our hurt, so our ego chooses anger and other responses and actions to express the hurt and aggressively defend from more hurt. This works to some extent, but it generally does more harm than good as the phrase goes. When we stop later and think about it, such a response and the actions that follow cut us off from fully making sense out of the incident in which we are involved. This happens especially in terms of the other person involved, including ourselves.

When we feel anger toward another, we immediately turn that person, including ourselves, into an It in an I/It relationship. In abandoning our I/Thou relationship with another person, including ourselves, we may well lose our ability to heal from that hurt, cause hurt to the other, and make ourselves even more vulnerable in the future. We can also use such incidents of anger and hurt reactions as a way of developing a new meaning perspective which we consciously, and less than consciously in some way, create through which we will from then on see the world and respond to it. Such a meaning perspective will keep us in the past we just experienced. With this new meaning perspective as the motivating factor, the defensive ego will rise up in such situations, take command, and eliminate our finding anything else from that situation other than hurt and the accompanying sense of identity vulnerability we encountered or even produced before and chosen. We just get torqued all over again even if we're mistaken altogether.

My life has offered any number of occasions where feelings of hurt and vulnerability happened to me. After five years, a woman with whom I thought I was living told me that she had never loved me and summarily dumped me. She had lied to me for all those years on her own report. She did so, she said, "For your own good." Out of that incident, and the hurt that followed, I developed a perspective that I developed very consciously and with due critical reflection. It didn't involve protecting me so much as others. I decided that people have a right to know what we think is in their good before we act on our assumption—no surprises. That still makes sense to me today, even more sense given other ideas that I have gotten from my other experiences and learning in life. Doing something for another person only when we know from that other person what they want fits nicely inside the moral sphere and the end principle. When I ask what someone wants or how they respond to my idea of their good, I treat that person as an end in that person's self and not a means to my end. This choice of response left me with more personal power to act effectively and do so not out of defense but out of my becoming self which acts not out of having position power but allowing my personal power to live and work with the personal power of others. That highly conscious response to this critical moment motivated me to question previous meaning perspectives and make a very clear choice about my conduct in the future.

This experience also tempted me consciously, and less than consciously, to develop a meaning perspective by which I would act unquestioningly in the future. This would happen without critical reflection and find its basis on some previously developed meaning perspectives about vulnerability in terms of betrayal and defense against such perceived betrayal. I might have

come to a meaning perspective that told my hurt and unquestioning identity the following: "All women are liars." That might have seemed to keep me safe from betrayal, from anger, from my essential vulnerability. Of course, it would have also kept me from experiencing anything like unconditional positive regard or love with another woman or even compassion with or for one. Both love and compassion work as unconditional, so I would have cut myself off from both love and compassion with the permanent and unshakeable judgment about all women as liars. That would become one of the meaning perspective screens or lenses through which I saw the world.

When I met and got to know Silvia, whom I have loved for twenty years or so and with whom I am now married, I would have seen none of her remarkably fine qualities except, perhaps as a ruse moving toward betrayal. I would have seen her as a woman, and I would know for certain that all women are liars. I would have rejected her out of hand, and my life, and my becoming self would have been immeasurably impoverished. If that were the case, the critical moment I might have chosen to produce something of a transformative response would become something quite diminishing. I would have chosen, at a low level perhaps, to make it transfixitive, stuck myself permanently on the lesson I chose to learn, stayed transfixed in that lesson, and remained stuck in that past possibly for the rest of my life. That choice would also have deprived me of a great deal of personal power to act out of my becoming self in any unconditional manner possible.<sup>125</sup> In the end, in response to the person who did me harm, whatever her rationale for that harm, I would make her memory a very decisive presence in my now transfixed life. Paradoxically, in order to protect myself from the kind of hurt she offered, I surrender much of my freedom of being and personal power to her memory. Happily, I knew and felt enough about choice to keep free of such a meaning perspective. I could choose otherwise.



## ***On compassion, forgiveness, and choosing freedom—November 26, 2011***

We can all choose otherwise. We can always regain our freedom to choose otherwise. When we find ways of making awareness and conscious choices as natural as possible, we make all of our attempts at keeping balance within our whole being and with the world all the stronger. As we discussed before, the less we let anger into us, come out of us, the less we need to manage the anger we feel. We can choose otherwise.

We left off with the idea of counting to ten, and that idea may have some merits, but it has its possible drawbacks. Besides, it doesn't really help us to do anything but control how we feel. Counting does nothing to help us make another choice in response to any stimulus to anger, to choose to experience our sense of personal hurt which we translate as insult and assault and into anger. When we can relatively easily choose a non-violent or compassionate response to the one motivating our response, we will find an enormous freedom and a wonderful and refreshing maintenance and increase in our sense of personal power.

Many say that when we can feel compassion and forgiveness for the one we perceive as causing our hurt, the person we see as an enemy, the vector or the carrier of anger to us, we will escape our anger and loss of power. That's easier said than done. It's easy for some wise person or expert to tell us to do something like feel compassion, but that instruction doesn't give us any idea of how to enact that feeling or action. My first attempts at feeling compassion worked reasonably well in that I could ask myself to feel compassion and worked at doing so. I could ask myself to forgive, and in the asking itself, I gained some ground in both compassion and forgiveness. My students and I talked about both of these, and it seemed to help in that when we could conceive of feeling and doing compassion and forgiveness. It began to make them real to us. It helped when we discovered that forgiveness of the person did not mean forgiveness for the action. The action happened, and we could not change it, nothing can do that. If it was a heinous act, it remains that even as we forgive the actor for the crime. It also remains part of the actor no matter how much we forgive. The actor will know what happened and live with it and with its results. Actually, it becomes easier generally to reach to compassion and forgiveness if we can find in ourselves the empathy we need to sense the nature of the other person's internal struggles and pain.

One of the ideas that has helped me feel compassion universally and unconditionally came when I recognized that anyone who does anything unpleasant to me engages in that sort of behavior and much worse within that person. It came to me as an anodyne, a relief, for anger and hurt. One New Year's morning, Silvia and I were walking. I and we say hello to people we see in the street. That morning, I or we said "Happy New Year." It's a cliché, and partly phatic, but it seemed relevant and relatively harmless. One fellow approached on a bicycle, and I waved and said that magic phrase to him. His face contorted, veins stood out on his forehead, and he let loose a stream of oaths, incendiary language sufficient to set the air to shuddering. My first response was defensive, to choose anger and even a minor kind of hatred for this man on a bicycle. Then it struck me: "If he is doing that to me, what in the world is he doing to himself?" I calmed down and shifted directly into compassion. Once I entered compassion I found that forgiveness and acceptance of his humanity and our shared humanity followed.

## ***On wishing good—November 27, 2011***

Because I experienced this empathetic moment for the man on the bicycle, I felt the terror of domination and the sheer misery of feeling on the wrong end of that domination, to feel left out of the seeming comforts of conformity it offered, to feel a personal failure, and a deep and abiding self-disgust if not hatred. I knew that feeling, perhaps many of us do to one degree or another. In that way, I did establish the I/Thou with that tortured man. I didn't want to live within his suffering, and I felt compassion for the fact that he made that choice. That's the very moment that I knew and experienced the truth about others' actions toward me. It's almost Newtonian. For every ugly and aggressive action an actor commits toward another, the actor undergoes a dis-equal and disproportionate ugly and aggressive set of feelings within. Experiencing and knowing that piece of truth has made the idea of compassion feel quite natural and inevitable. Compassion comes and the rest of that wonderful triad plus one appear: compassion, unconditional positive regard, forgiveness, plus acceptance.

That helped my anger exponentially. I found it liberating and transformative. The more I felt these positive and generative emotions toward others, the more I could feel that way about myself, not something to which I was overly accustomed. In some way, ultimately all that didn't quite satisfy the need of the situation. I felt positive qualities, but I did nothing discernable with them. Sometime after that, I read C. S. Lewis' book *Mere Christianity*. In that book he asserts that an essential thing we can do for ourselves and others best manifests itself in wishing good. That act of wishing good can happen in spite of everything. Thinking about it now, wishing good can and maybe definably must happen in an unconditional way. Maybe it just happens unconditionally because that's just the way it happens. Wishing someone good in an angry way simply doesn't work. If it's not unconditional, it's not the good that Lewis means.

If we need an action to perform at a time of stress, as a response to a moment that can instigate a choice for anger, we can choose to sincerely wish the other person good. I find it especially helpful when other drivers seem to attack me personally in the way they drive. When I wish that driver good, I actually do something in response to the very unpleasant experience the other driver affords me. In moments where we seem to inspire negative feelings about ourselves, we can wish ourselves good. When I make that wish for self-good, I find that I learn better from whatever the error I chose and enacted that might have stimulated self-anger.

Wishing good does me good. Anger doesn't. Good calls me to my becoming self which, in its essential operation, seeks good as a primary end in itself even as finding the good begins even more search for the good. My wishing of good enters into and reengages my becoming self in the quest of aspiration toward an ever increasing universal good. Anger calls me to somewhere entirely else. When we engage in wishing and even enacting good, it calls us quite naturally to the unconditional, the compassionate, the forgiving, and the accepting of all the worlds of Thou which surround us every day.

## ***To see others in the I/Thou—November 28, 2011***

When I wish someone good, it represents the right thing to do in any case. However, one day I found a very happy ancillary result of such a wish. Generally, I feel called upon to make this wish in a stressful moment because I feel the other person has treated me a way that takes the other person out of the moral sphere. That person violates the end principle by treating me as a means to that person's end. When someone cuts me off in traffic, it feels dangerous to me, stops my getting where I want to go, while the driver doing this gets her/his end by cutting me off. In that simple example, I wish the other good. If that wish, even prayer if you like, came true, the driver would not do what she/he did again. In the spirit that the feeling of good would bring, the other driver would understand and appreciate what happens as a real consequence of her/his driving for her/himself and for me and others. Once fully understood, perhaps even felt, the driver would take responsibility for the act and would want to choose a new way to drive that kept her/him within the moral sphere. That would be good.

Our identity and ego can resist logical or even forceful arguments against negative conduct that brings us out of the moral sphere, but when we feel the power of the good, of the right thing to do because of what really happens in consequence, the becoming self responds and our identity and ego may allow us to accept this new choice for the fulfillment of the good. When we choose the wish for good for those outside the moral sphere instead of the wish for revenge and punishment which may drive us and that person further outside that sphere, we act within the end principle and the moral sphere. When we choose revenge and punishment, we strive to make the other person a means to our end. When we choose good for that other, we wish that the good voluntarily becomes the end of the other.<sup>126</sup>

When we choose the I/Thou in response to a stimulus to the choice of anger, we have done something positive, and that choice places us within the understanding and responding of the becoming self. Happily, the opportunity to choose anger comes to us relatively infrequently. The rest of the day opens before us and asks how we might bring the unconditional and compassionate into our everyday experience and the experience of those who interact with us during that day.

One idea came to me through a book by Rabbi David Cooper. *God is a Verb*. The rabbi writes about Kabbalah, a mystic Jewish tradition and study. In this tradition, the rabbi finds the imperative for charity on a daily basis. One way he sought that goal was to keep a folded dollar always in his pocket, so when someone asked for spare change, he would give that person a dollar. Like many of us, I had avoided even really seeing such people in need, and when I felt I could do nothing else, I dug into my pockets and swiftly handed over some change still not really seeing. I took the rabbi's suggestion, and prepared a dollar to hand away. That seemed better, but I knew it lacked the full compassion I wanted. Charity often comes without really seeing the other and feeling compassion. In fact, I realized that I still didn't really see that other person. I realized that was how I often dealt with those who moved me in their distress. I just didn't see them, not really. My identity felt threatened because I couldn't do enough, and my ego defended my identity by not seeing, creating an inattention to the existence of those who caused such a

feeling. I understood, finally, that those people I purposefully did not see, saw me and felt me not seeing them.

At fifteen, I left home and spent a little time homeless. I remembered not being seen. It hurt me. It must hurt those I did not see. If I wanted to choose compassion, I wanted to see these people in terms of the I/Thou. When someone asks me for money, I always have two dollars in my wallet ready to go (given inflation, it seems fair). Before the exchange, I look at the person directly and ask that person's name. I exchange names with her/him, and I offer my hand. I try to express my concern for their well being, and sometimes we talk for a little while. When we separate, I thank them for asking. Sometimes, one of the people I meet in this way will come up to me again and just chat, no exchange involved. I know that this exchange doesn't make much of a material difference to this person in need, but it seems the right thing in and of itself. It gives my unconditional feeling of compassion some tangible voice. If the other hears that voice and believes that we saw each other as fellow beings, it might hold some meaning for that person, answer some small need of theirs puny as the two dollars really is.

## ***On Compassionate Communication—November 29, 2011***

Giving voice and vision to our compassion and to our resulting feelings of the unconditional might seem a daunting task. Such a consideration on a daily basis could feel well outside our daily meaning perspectives. Our insecure identity would ask about how such a thing could be realistically accomplished. Our defensive ego might declare that it's a good idea, but no one has time for such a thing these days. That internal dialogue sounds like the one I went through when I examined my life in all its forms to see if I could find ways of discovering some way of speaking my "Yes" to the I/Thou.

A good part of the answer came when our friend Janet sent me a cassette: *Introduction to Nonviolent Communication* by Marshall Rosenberg. This form of communication is also called *Compassionate Communication*, a title I rather prefer. The first title reads as a "No" to violent communication, but it may speak more clearly to a time of such essentially violent daily communication than a "Yes" to the idea of compassion. In life generally, we may need to expose the disease before we can pursue a remedy.

I listened to the tape a number of times, and I felt and applied compassionate communication, rather uncomfortably for a while, to my job as an English teacher at a community college and beyond. Its use presented quite a challenge for quite a while, but it showed its value in my use of it. I kept moving further and further into the idea and practice of Compassionate Communication. Later, when I was teaching employment skills to students seeking a new start in their professional and personal lives, it became a natural part of what we learned together. The communication component of this training class served as a central part of the often dour discussion of customer service.

In our discussion of customer service, most of the students thought we would just go through some of the very instrumental, learn-it-and-do-it-have-a-nice-day forms of customer service. That's what they learned before in jobs they'd held, and that's what they felt accustomed to in being dealt with as a customer. In striving to question the usual and prevailing meaning perspective of customer service, we critically reflected on how we defined "customer" and how we defined "service."

Our beginning discussion about customer service went very much the same most of the time. Someone would say that a customer was a "walking wallet" or "the one who pays your salary." Most everyone would focus in the customer as someone to whom you sold things. That stems from the dominator model of business where you only serve others because they really serve the business, the dominator. Eventually after asking whether any of us wanted to be treated like a wallet or a paycheck, to which they all said "NO," we looked for something more satisfying than the usual and prevailing ideas about who customers really are. We decided all customers had a need. We also decided that we all had needs all day long. It was an essential part of all of our lives, of ourselves. When we could let go of the meaning perspective about customers that came from experts and others, we would find ourselves experts at human needs. Being human ourselves, we all felt those needs. We all wanted them fulfilled.

We wondered what would fulfill these needs. Many students answered that customers, and we are all customers, wanted respect.<sup>127</sup> Granted that we want respect, it would serve our purpose to define respect. Definition comes hard for most of us. We don't do it often. Many times our definitions came out in a circular fashion: respect = polite and polite = respect.

## ***Customer service and fulfilling essential human needs—December 1, 2011***

When we returned to asking ourselves what we wanted, our human needs, the complexities slipped away revealing the simple truth. We wanted to be heard, really listened to. We wanted to be seen, really cared about. In that way, we wanted to feel a valued partner in a human exchange. In terms we know in this writing, we wanted to feel a Thou to another Thou. We wanted to feel that we are an end in ourselves and not a means to someone else's end. In every exchange with another person, we can feel some level of the unconditional. With customer defined as a being with needs, service rather defined itself. Service came not in the business exchange primarily. It came in serving the human needs presented to us in our every interaction with another person.

We can reciprocate. As customers, the receivers of another's service, we can offer the same level of attention and concern. We can see those who serve us as a Thou who has an end in her/himself and treat them in that way. Customer service goes both ways. The best of customer service stands as a quiet and compelling "Yes" to our shared humanity and sense of self, and as such, operates happily outside the dominator model. That's a choice we all can make all day and every day in our private and public lives. It keeps us close to our becoming self.

We also asked where and with whom customer service begins. It begins, we decided, with the moment we wake up and choose what mood we take out of our mood closet. If we choose a bitchy or angry mood, the day and any customer service within it become settled—and not for the good. When we look in the mirror in the morning we get a good look at our first customer of the day—us. The way we address this customer in the terms we decide upon above, we realize that we can exert enormous influence on how the day goes. It's very often here where we establish our conscious freedom of response to whatever situation arises through the day. When we can begin the day with a recognition of our healthy and becoming self, the being that needs and offers the unconditional, we will choose a mood that fits our essential and positive being. We will seek our motivation from within and not approval from without. That inner approval gives us the chance to define ourselves and our responses during the day. Authenticity of self becomes the core of our choices throughout the day. When we find our authenticity, our individuating, becoming self, we find ourselves open and deeply receptive to the community we build an in which we participate all day.

When we worry about what others will think about us, rather than how we decide to think about ourselves and how we treat others, we shift to our public identity and our ego that goes with it for guidance during the day. We adopt something generally inauthentic. We perform and fail to perform, our choices come from unquestioned meaning perspectives rather than the conscious choices we can make otherwise.

In that first choice of the day, we can realize that we are the first customer we face every day in the terms of the unconditional we have discussed here. After that, we may encounter those closest to us in our home and beyond. In those customer relationships, the second of the day, we especially want to serve their needs and feel better able to do so because our knowledge of those people helps us serve them unconditionally—when we choose to do so. The workplace offers us

customer relationships with our colleagues, the third customer of the day. Those relationships will work to establish the feeling of the workplace throughout the day. Finally, someone from outside enters the theatre of customer service, and when we feel in balance with the previous three, we can make choices for this fourth customer in a relaxed and even joyful way.

Our communication of these simple and also complex relationships happens largely through language.<sup>128</sup> What we say to others and what we say to ourselves actually matters. It is through language and action that we serve others' and our own needs for recognition and the unconditional.



## ***The joy of saying "Yes" to life—December 2, 2011***

My students agreed and asserted there was little if anything less simple in the language of respect than the common, if less used these days, expressions "please" and "thank you." Seeing and feeling this language in the conscious perspective of the becoming self, the moral sphere, and the end principle, they take on a far greater depth than most of my students or people in general realize in their meaning perspectives.

Most parental figures still tell their children to say "please" and "thank you" as part of their reaching for the higher cause meaning perspective they feel but don't know or understand. We can note that by and large, these parental figures don't use "please" and "thank you" with those very same children. This happens even when they tell their children to use those two words themselves recalling the "do as I say not as I do" principle we encountered earlier. When I asked why we use these two words, most students and others answered that it was "polite" to do so. I asked why they worked in that way as language, why polite. Often they had no answer or said "because it shows respect." When asked about respect, we wind up back at polite. One very good way to tell something learned through the dominator/conformist model appears when people believe in something, like what to say in some situation, but lack any explanation, any consciousness about why that's the case. That holds true for polite language, so called, and it may also be why it use diminishes over time. When such language of recognition diminishes, it diminishes us in our everyday lives.

"Please" and "thank you" represent the language of recognition quite directly and well. Such language serves as a sign of our recognition of the full humanness of another person regardless of age or condition. It speaks out of the need for the I/Thou relationship in the smallest detail of our verbal exchanges with one another. When we say "please" to another, we verbally recognize that person as an end in her/himself and not simply as a means to our end. Nobody "has to" do much of anything in life generally, and they certainly don't "have to" do it for someone else. When someone serves us, she/he consents to making our end their end as a kind of gift. That holds true in the workplace as well. When people serve us, we can connect with them by asking them for help and still recognizing their independence as equal and independent beings by says "please" and "thank you."

I almost always read name tags and use the name of the person with whom I deal. I ask that person to help me not implicitly demand help. I ask, which means "please" as part of my question or request. I often ask how people are, and I actually listen to the answer. That takes the question "how are you" out of the phatic, rather empty and conformist social noises, and into the communicative. When the exchange finishes, I thank others for their help even if the result did not fully satisfy my material need, the business might not sell what I asked for or have it in stock, but the exchange still can meet both our human needs.

When I worked with students on customer service, we discussed how we can say "Yes" even while we say "No." When we satisfy the essential needs of our customer, that person feels recognized and cared about. We say "Yes" even as we may need to say "No" out of honesty. The training program I worked in had its name and number listed under "Employment" in the

telephone business listings. In hard times, people would go through those listing asking for openings. A call from such a person had no business value for the training program, and I could offer no job possibilities for the caller. That's a "No" for both sides of such a conversation. However, I could still ask for the caller's name and tell her/him that I knew she/he had gotten to my number, a "w" listing, by going through the long list of numbers one by one. I congratulated the caller for working so diligently to find a job, any job. I asked if they knew of other resources that I could offer the caller, and if the caller didn't know the information, I told her/him about these resources. When the caller thanked me, she/he did so mindfully. In a very personal way, we made a "Yes" out of the "No" of the situation.

After such an exchange, the person who has served our need might say "you're welcome."<sup>129</sup> That offers meaning and recognition. It says that the exchange has worked well for the speaker, and the speaker welcomes us to ask for help again. Instead of the cold and calculating process based only on a material exchange, this has become a moment of mutual recognition and reciprocation of the I/Thou, a moment lived out in the moral sphere. Instead of a mercenary exchange about money alone, it becomes an exchange of gifts, the gift of the unconditional and the becoming self.

### ***Individuation, community, and the becoming self—December 3, 2011***

When we speak out of the qualities of the becoming self, we speak to ourselves even as we speak to others. When we speak in a way that communicates our compassion and acceptance of the unconditional, we speak out of our becoming self. Such speech and the intentions that support that speech come from the being part of our whole person rather than the having. When we speak out of our being self, we continue and enhance our quest of aspiration, the search for and to enter into the becoming self. In the writing of this book, I became more fully aware of the nature of the search. The search doesn't seek a conclusion even as we reach our becoming self. Our search brings us home and to a place of continual beginning. As T. S. Eliot writes in the *Four Quartets*, "In my end is my beginning."

The more our search discovers, the more we find to discover. Our search for the becoming self opens us to knowing that we continue becoming throughout our lives. Our continual becoming to ourselves means we know more of the I in the I/Thou. It also means that we have the chance to know the Thou better in that relationship. The more we enter into our becoming self the less we fear from others because we critically reflect on the meaning perspectives that keep us alienated from others and ourselves. Once reflected upon, we can make new choices with the same energy that we found in the power of the meaning perspective, and that power becomes more liberated as we become more liberated.

These liberations all open us to what Carl Jung called "individuation." Our individuating self has become a whole being in balance with all the elements of that being. We find ourselves more and more authentic and autonomous and, perhaps paradoxically, more connected to life and to the lives of others. In the smallest exchange with others, we can look for the unconditional connection between two selves, look for the I/Thou in all its many manifestations and dimensions. The transformative opens us to individuation which, in turn, opens us to a freer state of choice wherein we say "Yes" to diversity in community rather than domination in conformity which simply becomes beside the point.

These discoveries and becomings can happen through many forms of interior and exterior communication. As a species, we humans developed language as our needs became ever more complex and, eventually, more abstract. Language makes form. We replicate this need for and construction of language as we grow from a baby into an adult. As a neonate, our needs get fully expressed and answered through crying of one sort or another. When we develop a desire to do more in our world and take some authority within our environment, we start to work with the sounds and structures of language. Whatever else we see in all this, it becomes apparent that the more complex needs to understand ourselves and the world often comes in our developing awareness of the power and significance of language.<sup>130</sup> As we enter more fully into the search for our becoming self, we may choose to look for a way of using language that brings us more fully into our becoming self and the unconditional expression of that self. That's where we can return to Compassionate or Non-Violent communication.

## ***Non-Violent or Compassionate Communication in handout—December 4, 2011***

I base this discussion on my understanding of the cassette I mentioned above. It's from 1995, and a few copies may still be available through on-line sources and for those who still have a tape player. The Center for Nonviolent Communication maintains an extensive website with many educational opportunities and learning products for those who want to get more deeply into it. This all goes to say that I discuss my practice and everyday living with Compassionate Communication as a devoted practitioner but not as an expert. I shared what I gleaned with my students through a handout I wrote along with a thorough discussion. They also experienced such language as I practiced every day with them. They also become aware of it when I corrected myself in its use. I feel and think that our awareness of our language means we have a greater awareness of the thoughts and motivations behind that language. Such awareness can lead us to question meaning perspectives that we expose through that awareness. After all, when I want to make free choices in my life and actions, I want as much clear and complete information available to me in order to make those choices freely and honestly. Language awareness helps us find that sort of freedom and honesty. In the end, everyone makes her/his choices. I would like these choices to come as well informed ones.

I offer you the handout here and a discussion to follow just as did with my students.

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### Principles of Nonviolent or Compassionate Communication

from—Rosenberg, Marshall. *Introduction to Nonviolent Communication*. Cassette. La Crescenta, CA: The Center for Nonviolent Communication, 1995.

#### Living, Speaking, and Writing Compassionately

Inspires compassion toward ourselves  
Inspires compassion toward others  
Inspires compassion in others

#### Three Kinds of Communication that Interfere with Compassionate Communication

1. Demands
2. Language that obscures choice
3. Diagnoses and interpretations

#### Expressing Communication that Inspires Compassion--Four Questions for Ourselves

1. What am I observing? "The highest form of human intelligence is the ability to observe without evaluating." Jiddhu Krishnamurti (1895-1986).

Answer in action language with as little interpretation as possible

2. How am I feeling about what I have observed?

Use language that reveals emotions as vulnerably as possible.

Trying to find harmony between what we observe and what we want.

Not what other people do but how we react to it.

3. What are my underlying wants, needs, or values (usually what you wanted to happen or were afraid wouldn't happen) that contribute to our feelings?  
Provides an opportunity to identify and liberate ourselves from things we want which may not be in our own interest.
4. What actions would I like to be taken to make happen that I now would like to have happen?  
Use positive, action language. Better results come from asking for what you do want rather than what you don't want: "How do you do a don't?"

These 4 steps are used in 2 different ways depending on:

- A. If we are trying to tell another honestly about what is happening with us, or
- B. If we are trying to help another tell us what is happening with them.

When we empathize with others who choose not to do as we request, our requests are not coercive. Empathy is the foundation of responding compassionately to the other person. It comes when we ask ourselves, "What are they going through?"

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## ***Inner and outer manifestations of Compassionate Communication —December 5, 2011***

"Living, Speaking, and Writing Compassionately" seemed an adequate subheading at the time I extracted this handout from the cassette, but the longer I practice Compassionate Communication, the more I experience other effects in my sense of my whole being and my connection to my becoming self. The practice of Compassionate Communication opens me and us to a steady stream of reflection on why we say something and how we say something in a courageous attempt to speak authentically. In that sense, such communication begins within, and in doing so, encourages us to critically reflect on meaning perspectives and make new choices with our conscious perspectives. In that way, we experience and thus learn not a new way of thinking but practice a more authentic way of thinking. It also allows us to choose a more authentic way of feeling, compassionately, which comes from the nature of our becoming self. The practice of Compassionate Communication makes my life feel more fulfilled in even quite mundane situations.

The word "practice" holds very true in this regard. I practice all the time, but it never makes perfect. Different situations and different responses within me make for daily challenges in using this language. I have also found that the use of Compassionate Communication always stands me in good stead. At best, everyone involved feels good about the exchange even in what could be sensitive situations. At worst, I go away from some encounter that did not work well feeling I have tried to do the right thing in my speech. I also go away reflecting on how I might learn from that encounter, so the outcome might serve the participants more fully in the future. This means telling myself the "Yes" of "This is how will do it next time" rather than the "No" of "I should have said it better." The basics of Compassionate Communication may well come to us as accessible and meaningful. The practice of this form of language takes very conscious effort and even courage. Most of us, if not almost all of us, speak rather automatically using forms of expression we have rehearsed so many times that we no longer think much about those words as we speak them and what they actually mean. In my practice, I have found that automatic or phatic speech rarely if ever gets to authentic speech. The authentic commits us to what we have said. Automatic or phatic language just fills an uncomfortable language void without much if any content. This communicative awareness might sound rather daunting, but it becomes quickly rather fascinating as awareness grows and all kinds of levels of meaning spring out of our newly practiced compassionate speaking which connects itself with a newly realized sense of compassionate thinking and feeling. That's what gives life to the next part of the handout:

Inspires compassion toward ourselves

Inspires compassion toward others

Inspires compassion in others

When we experience that compassion toward ourselves as fully as possible, it takes the sting out of the conscious effort that this practice calls for. In a dominator model, all effort happens on a field of judgment, generally negative judgment: "I am disappointed in myself." When the compassionate nature of our conscious effort at speaking in that way reaches us, we will feel acceptance of that effort even when it doesn't get the result we originally wanted. That process comes as an engagement with our becoming self. Our becoming self makes no negative

judgments. The becoming self practices no dualities. In the becoming self, we experience the wholeness of our being even as it recognizes and values the elements that make up that being.

During this writing, I have become more and more aware of the very things about which I write. In all honesty, this writing itself speaks of my own growing awareness of my becoming self and the choices I have made and will continue to make to encourage and nurture awareness of that becoming self as well as the becoming self as the defining core of the whole being which is me.

### ***On inspiring compassion—December 6, 2011***

The handout next reads the following: "Inspires compassion toward others." This internal positive expression of the compassionate also creates a corollary with the anger driven one we discussed before. In that discussion, we identified that every negative act toward us from another person serves as a reflection and extension of the way in which that other person treats her/himself. It follows that when we feel compassion toward ourselves, we will more likely extend that compassion, the unconditional and acceptance to others. If we truly experience ourselves as an I in the I/Thou, we will experience others not as an It but as a Thou. When we truly say "Yes" to the I of the becoming self, we say "Yes" to the Thou of everyone else, to all others' becoming self.<sup>131</sup>

"Inspires compassion in others." As whole beings, we continue to seek unconditional positive regard and all that comes along with it which I have started calling simply "the unconditional." This quality opens us to feelings of love, to the I/Thou, and to the end principle. It also makes us vulnerable. We will, most if not all of us, feel this vulnerability and have felt exploited or abused many, many times. That's part of what makes it so hard for us to express our feelings of the unconditional. Such an expression can leave us and our vulnerability feeling exposed to the dangers of rejection and manipulation. That sense of exposure can take us into fear because fear also serves as an expression of the feeling of powerlessness, a profound loss of position power. When we feel rejected or manipulated, we can choose to feel powerless. Once we make that choice, the next choice can come as anger, as we have seen, and it can also come as fear. If we feel that fear strongly enough, we will not act compassionately toward others. The corollary to that can mean that when we reject compassion in its universal sense, we may reject compassion for ourselves as well. As Buber tells us, if we choose to form an I/It relationship with others, we make an It of ourselves.<sup>132</sup>



## ***Struggling with the interferences with the compassionate—December 7, 2011***

Sadly, the dominator model meaning perspectives that propel us into everyday speech very often if not always work at odds with the compassionate. As it says in the handout, there are three kinds of communication that interfere with compassionate communication: demands, language that obscures choice, and diagnoses and interpretations. In the dominator model, every exchange is a demand. Demands always obscure choice. The dominator constantly diagnoses and interprets. Gosh—

When I remember the first time I heard three interferences, I felt absolutely flummoxed. As a teacher of English, what I did as a major part of my practice, as radical as I saw myself at the time, came in the form of all three. I made demands of students by controlling the syllabus and the assignments. I eliminated choice by making all this class structure incorrigible and the assignments unchangeable. I interpreted and diagnosed when I graded their work and their attitudes. Not only did these three horsemen of the dominator ride over compassionate communication, they trampled the ends principle and did damage to the moral sphere as well.

When we make demands, we tell the recipient of those demands that her/his ends don't count, only the one embedded in my demand counts. Even if we make that demand in the spirit of doing good for the other, we still violate the ends of the other. In fact, it often happens that when someone tells someone else, "I did it for your own good," as with parental figures to children, the speaker is explaining to the other why the speaker has done something to the other that the other would not have agreed to in the first place—something that the recipient feels has done harm.<sup>133</sup> We touched on this idea when we reflected on the use of "please" and "thank you."

## ***On avoiding inherent demands—December 8, 2011***

In this more complete discussion of Compassionate Communication, something gets added to our reflection. We can look at how a question can actually work as a demand. To avoid such demands, it helps to examine or reflect on our response to any possible "No." When we respond to a "No" with any level of hurt, feeling of rejection, or even some degree of anger, we have not made a request. It was a demand. If saying "No" involves any cost at all for the speaker of that "No," we have made a demand. In the future, the person we have asked for something may well assume that any request we make actually signifies not a question but a demand. We can recover that situation only when we recognize within ourselves that we actually have made a demand. If we can do so, we can express our regrets, and ask if we can start again by making real requests, requests with no inherent forms of coercion or constraint.<sup>134</sup>

That's not so easy, recognizing that we have actually made a demand rather than request. When we ask, we may not recognize what we say as a demand until the person we ask says "No." Our vulnerability can feel exposed when we ask something from someone else. When the other person says "No," we can easily perceive that as rejection. In the dominator model, it's insubordination in most contexts. No matter how politely that "No" is expressed or no matter how sound the reasons given for the "No," even though, people have a right to say "No" without any reasons, our ego may spontaneously defend our identity from such a perceived rejection. . That defense may come as passive, simply feeling and showing hurt. It may show more aggressively: "Okay, be that way" or even, "I'll keep that in mind when *you* ask something." In any of these cases, we can see that when we ask our seeming question, perhaps without consciously knowing, we really don't want to take "No" for an answer.

That takes us back to the idea of choice. When we begin with our right to choice, which is a right we want to maintain for ourselves, we can easily project that right as inherent with everyone with whom we interact. When we ask a question, we create a situation in which the other person will make a choice based on any one of other criteria. If the other person gets to a "No," it really doesn't necessarily signify a rejection of us. It simply signifies that the person asked has made a choice for reasons known to that person. It isn't necessarily a "No" to us personally. It may only come as a "No" in the overall context. A "Yes" can always feel like a gift when we really ask. A "No" does not have to feel like a rejection if we really make a request and not a demand. When we "won't take No" for an answer when we ask a friend on a salt free diet to share salt laden food, we are making no gift but simply wanting to dominate the situation and make the other person conform to our way of thinking and living, to our meaning perspectives. No matter how unaware we are of what our implicit or explicit demands mean, they still violate the ends principle thereby work to make someone else a means to our end.

## ***On escaping the "have tos"—December 9, 2011***

Demands happen in a relatively personal manner, generally one person to another. Language that obscures choice happens in larger contexts to varying degrees. Such communication happens in small contexts like a classroom or workplace, and on a cultural and societal level as well. Communication that obscures choice speaks in violation of the moral sphere and the ends principle. It works as the language of the dominator model and the conformity that model enforces of those within its sway. This model specifically and conformity generally violate the ends principle as an inherent element of their functioning. When people accept domination and conformity, they deny their own right to stand and perform as an end in themselves and become a means to the end of the dominator and its conformist structure. When we conform, we become a means to the end of conformity and the dominator. Language that obscures choice obscures our search for the becoming self because it eliminates the possibility and power of our individuation as whole beings. It inevitably takes us from what we think is right and what we "want to" in life to what others declare right and what we "have to" as demanded.

When we hear the "have to" that obscures choice, we hear a threat. You "have to" because if you don't do what you "have to" do, the speaker of the "have to" will punish you or see that you are punished in some way or another and by some force or other. This takes us all back to the judgments and punishments of childhood. When the child with the toy of many pieces hears that she/he has to do A with that toy rather than B, the parental figure inherently makes a threat, perhaps of taking the toy away. The toy will disappear until the child agrees to act in accordance with the "have to" that has become associated with that toy, agrees to conform generally making no sense out of the situation aside from learning about implicit if not explicit threats, "have tos," punishments, and deprivation.

In our vulnerability of wanting unconditional positive regard, we can often agree to conform because we develop a meaning perspective that tells us we simply "have to" when we hear a "have to" in the air because rejection hovers there as well. As in childhood, somehow all this coercion happens for our own good and serves a higher purpose. When we get told that something is happening for our good, we might understand that as implicitly saying that our end and our Thou have gone out of the situation. We also know that what follows will come out of creating a fear of loss in us and will continue to teach us how much we "have to" fear in order to live our lives in a proper, dominator, conformist way.

As with rebellious children, we have the power to say "No" to such coercion. All we have to do is deny that we fear the punishment the "have to" implicitly signifies. A student doesn't "have to" turn in a paper by the deadline (the word signifies not a very subtle threat) if the student doesn't care about the grade. If you don't fear the loss, you don't fear the "have to." Then you don't have to do what you are told. Ultimately the only absolute "have to" we face comes in death. We can always exercise our right and power in saying, as do children in rebellion: "Go ahead and hit me. You can't hurt me." For a child, the hurt has already happened, and that child has given up the hope for the unconditional and takes the highly conditional attention provided when the rebellious, insubordinate "No" is spoken.

In the quest of aspiration, as with the search for the becoming self, we can find ourselves lost in a dark wood of "No." What leads us on into the quest and the search is some form our "Yes" to ourselves and to the world around us. Language that obscures choice can deflect us from that "Yes" even when we deny its immediate power by saying and acting out our "No." The other difficulty arises when we develop "No" into a primary meaning perspective. Such a "No" denies us real access to the becoming self because we wind up conforming to that "No" in situations where "No" distorts the situation and our response to it. We can become transfixed on "No" which makes it nearly impossible to say "Yes" to life in spite of everything. In a book called *The Now Habit*, Neil Fiore instructs us in getting past procrastination, a choice in life many own up to as something they "be." "I am a procrastinator," they say. In our internal dialogue when something appears a good thing to do, we tell ourselves that we "have to" do it. As soon as we say "have to," we say "No" in response: "You're not the boss of me" as the phrase goes. The "No" gets in the way of getting the thing done, and goes undone even in the face of a very real consequence. During a discussion of that very point, one student admitted that she had procrastinated writing a check for the electric company. She had the money and the checks, she just said "No" to having to write the check and send it. The electric company said "No" to her "No" and turned her power off and charged her a new hook-up fee. In saying "No" in that way, she and many others of us actually restrict our choices as much if not more than does the language that obscures choice. "No" often obscures choice in and of itself.

## ***On family myths as diagnosis and interpretation—December 10, 2011***

Diagnoses and interpretations may serve as the most aggressive way to limit or eliminate choice in others and in ourselves. These practices form an essential therefore in some way invisible meaning perspective we use all the time. Internally, we find the results of diagnoses and interpretations represented by the "I am" statements we discussed early on in this writing. In that section, we discussed how we come to create the internal "I am" statements, but these statements, these existential statements about the nature of our being, come from others as well.

In the process of creating a structure of belief, families adopt myths that define that nature of their relationships and how the family relates to the outside world. The nature of who all the members of a family "be," form the essential structure of these family myths. They define the true nature of each member. This generally happens quite early to children, and this comes to the child as a diagnosis and an interpretation. No one who perpetrates a myth, brings a myth into being, feels aware of that process,<sup>135</sup> but it actually comes as more vital to the child involved than the more conscious decision parental figures make about what to name a child. Myths often become meaning perspectives, and those perspectives can define the life of the child about whom the myth is told even into adulthood.

Some action on the part of the child will seem to motivate the inception of a family myth about a child. There seems an almost Jungian collective unconscious set of archetypes about these myths. Generally, a family will have a child who is the "intelligent one." They will have another who is the "sensitive one." We can take some serious note of the word "one." It ain't kidding. In most instances, a family will create only one child myth of a certain kind within that family. The family generally won't support two of the same archetypes in the same family group. That makes birth order all the more important. When the first child born receives that myth of "smart," none that follow will receive that myth.

Going back to the child with the toy of too many pieces, a child may become the "smart one" if the child uses these pieces in a way that indicates "smart" to the adults involved. That requires an interpretation of the act and a diagnosis of that observed act. This first child lines up all the pieces out of wanting something to do with no plan in mind. Perhaps she/he will put all the similar colors together. What the child actually does matters little. The matter of the situation falls into the hands and words of a parental or other adult figure. That figure will observe that child's actions and state, pontifically no doubt, "Look at that! That's a smart thing to do, lining them up and putting the colors together. That's a smart child." Thus we arrive at a family myth, the child is the "smart one." The second child inherits the same toy, and does more or less the same thing with the pieces, and some adult, maybe the same one, will speak pontifically again: "Look how incredibly neat that child is! That's a fussy child." Thus we have a second family myth about the "fussiness" of child two. The actions are very much the same, but the family myth structure only allows for one child per category. The adult interprets her/his observation and diagnoses the cause of that observed behavior and makes it the myth. Whatever happens in reality to these children as they grow, child one chooses a fussy way of life and child two chooses an intellectual one, these myths will hang on and hector these two people all their lives. It happens when someone in the family actually regrets that people in the family have not shown

themselves true to the family myth assigned to that person: "I always thought you would be the athlete in the family."

## ***On interpretations and diagnoses—December 11, 2011***

We unquestioningly fill our lives and the lives of others with these sorts of interpretations and diagnoses, and by choosing them, we add to the materiality of our identity and ego and detract from the non-material becoming self from ourselves. An awareness of how these choices and processes work offers us an opportunity to make new choices based on our critical reflection on the meaning perspectives that motivate such interpretations and diagnoses.

As with the child and the toy, we strive to make form out of the world around us. When we are very young, a great deal of that form comes from those around us. We learn from the company we keep. These learned perceptions inform our lives at the beginning, and their sense of form becomes our sense of form. In that way, our youthful contexts and influences inform the nature of many of our major syllogistic premises. These unquestioned premises become the first step in making our meaning perspectives feel like valid logic, like inherent truths of being. In their unquestioned way, meaning perspectives operate on the ontological level; they define the nature of being, existence in the world. We originally accepted this ontological point of view without even knowing what that can mean, and our way of seeing, our way of learning about the world, our epistemological experience becomes limited to the meaning perspectives of the past. We see the present and future in terms of and limited by the past.

This construction of meaning perspectives can happen all of our lives. When we lack awareness or attention to these formations of past driven meaning perspectives, we will see through them and remain unaware of how they define the nature of our experience of the world. The becoming self seeks as clear a vision of the world as possible so it can respond to the world and learn from the world as we discussed in our working definition of the becoming self:

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility of those choices and results, and the process begins again.

"I saw what I saw" and "I heard what I heard" are phrases that we often use to speak about our perceived experience. On its linguistic surface, it forms a kind of tautology, a circular statement that doesn't serve to clarify or add to the truth value of that statement. However, it does tell us something about our beliefs in our experience. We do see what we see, but that we believe in its absolute truth makes for a weakness in our reflection on our perception. No one sees with absolute objectivity. In the book *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Robert Heinlein invents the idea of "Fair Witness," a person trained to observe and speak with absolute objectivity, no interpretations or diagnoses. When asked "what color is that barn," the Fair Witness answers, "The side I see is white." Training forbids the assumption that unseen sides share the same color. Even in this extreme case of a highly trained person, all the other factors that can make for a subjective viewing aren't considered. The time of day and weather conditions can influence how this person sees. Changes in the vision of that person can influence even something as simple as the perceived color. Even the way in which the definition of "white" may vary can lead a highly trained "Fair Witness" into some level of subjectivity. Granting we cannot see

absolutely objectively, we become aware of our subjectivity. When we take on and employ that awareness, we will better see the world for what it actually offers rather than the one we see through the screens of meaning perspectives unquestioningly formed by past experience and learning.



## ***The burden and harm of labels—December 12, 2011***

Our most common forms of interpretation and diagnosis come in the form of a kind of metaphoric structure: *synecdoche*. This happens when we take part of something and make it represent the entire thing. A "skirt" used to serve as a term for a specific woman or women as a whole. "I will give you a ring," signified calling on the telephone. Calling someone a "jock" refers to a part of apparel closely associated with male athletic activity and tends to contain a generally clichéd assessment of the person in question. Synecdoche may serve a purpose as an illustrative rhetorical trope, but it can also serve as an interpretation and diagnosis that can have deadening effects on our search for the becoming self.

We saw this in an earlier discussion about "I am" or "I be" statements. When we make an interpretation, we impose our perspective of something we see or experience. Once we have committed that imposition on the specific, we generalize it, and it becomes true of the entirety of what we have seen or experienced. Within ourselves, this happens when we take note of an action we have made, generally a negative one, and interpret and generalize it as a diagnosis of our self. We take an exam, and it comes back with a low grade. We feel a natural disappointment because we studied for the exam, and we thought we had done quite well. At this point we have a choice in our response. We can respond to this situation as an opportunity to gain a greater understanding of some misconception we hold about the material in question, or we can respond out of a negative meaning perspective. When we choose the first, we visit the professor and work to reach a reconception that will serve us in our studies. When we choose the second, we tell ourselves how stupid we are which serves as an interpretation: "I was stupid on this test." Once we have said that to ourselves, we shift from the particular condemnation, "I was stupid on this test," to the generalized diagnosis: "I am a stupid person." Our discussion earlier shows the results of such a synecdoche in terms of our internal dialogue and later actions ([On what we be or what we choose to be—July 22, 2011](#)).

This process serves to create labels for ourselves, and we use it to create and enforce labels on others. "I am" statements that label become "She is/He is" statements about others. When I taught in public schools, I heard this a great deal. Tanya asks one or two questions that Mr. Smith doesn't like. Smith makes an interpretation: "Tanya is making trouble deliberately." Nearly instantaneously, a kind of quantum entanglement, Smith arrives at this diagnosis: "Tanya is a trouble maker." Smith's conclusion becomes common knowledge in the lunchroom where a good deal of teacher venting and complaining stems from this very process: "Tanya is such a troublemaker." Such a statement can soon become an incorrigible reputation. This reputation, this label, may well stick to Tanya for her entire pre-secondary academic career and beyond.

## ***Fear and the Compassionate Communication—December 13, 2011***

When we speak out of the awareness of Compassionate Communication, we say "Yes" to the I/Thou and the end principle. When Mr. Smith chooses to label Tanya as a "troublemaker," he has reified Tanya. He has made her into an object, an It, to be dealt with in any way he or the system chooses. He has chosen to say "No" to Tanya and thereby to the I/Thou and the end principle. Mr. Smith lives through some meaning perspective of his own which feels Tanya has violated. In that violation, Mr. Smith also feels his identity in question, an intolerable feeling of exposure and violation of his vulnerability as a teacher and as a person. His ego responds by defending the Smith identity by turning Tanya into an outlier, someone who does not belong in the same way that other people belong in his or any other classroom. In that speech act, in that choice, he has chosen his own status as an It, reified himself through the use of his position power. When Tanya fails his course, and will probably do so every day in some way or another, she will feel the weight of her It status, and it will do her some form and degree of harm. The domination of Mr. Smith over Tanya will do him harm. In the process, he will give up some if not all of the humanity in his teaching, that part of his teaching which connected him with his becoming self and the selves of his students, their shared humanity. His identity may feel somewhat appeased by the act of position power domination, and he will use it again because the sense of vulnerability and exposure will only grow as Mr. Smith continues to exclude himself from the human exchange of learning. Through all of this, Mr. Smith has chosen to say "No" to his becoming self and an unquestioning "Yes" to the fears that his meaning perspectives offer him.

Fear interferes with Compassionate Communication. When we feel fear, we feel powerless. When we feel powerless, we will act out of our sense of threat and act in defense of the feeling of deep vulnerability that comes from this fear. Thinking about this now, meaning perspectives often inspire fear in us. When we live through meaning perspectives, whatever it is or who it is we see in the world absolutely must conform to that meaning perspective, or they threaten and violate the way the world is supposed to work. We fear such a violation, and we can choose an angry, even violent in response. Out of such feelings of fear comes violent language at the very least, the kind of language I might have chosen to direct to the angry man on the bicycle New Year's morning. Out of the anger produced by my meaning perspective driven interpretation of this man, I may have spewed violent and accusatory language and feelings at him. Out of the compassionate conscious perspective of my becoming self, I could direct compassionate feelings toward him even if I could not communicate it to him at the time.

In our search for the becoming self, we also search for an end to unwarranted and unnecessary fears. I have found that the more consciously we choose our language and the perceptions behind that use of language, the more we use Compassionate Communication internally and externally. Every time we aspire and achieve such an awareness, we also become aware of the positive qualities of our personal power to make our small part of the world a better, happier place, us too. We also find ourselves closer to our becoming self, the part of us that perceives the world clearly and freely and responsibly responds in accordance with the real needs of the situation.<sup>136</sup> In this way and others, Compassionate Communication continues our positive dialogue with life and living. We say "Yes" to the I/Thou and the ends principle which brings us

more fully to unconditional positive regard, compassion, forgiveness and the common thread of acceptance. In such a condition of being, fears diminish naturally in our clarity of mind and emotion. Interpretations and diagnoses becomes something we recognize and use consciously and with great care if at all.

## ***What we observe and what we perceive—December 14, 2011***

In the process of achieving Compassionate Communication, we can choose to ask ourselves the four questions listed on what I used as a handout ([Non-Violent or Compassionate Communication in handout—December 4, 2011](#)). These questions ask for a good deal of effort and practice both in conception and in action. The entire enterprise of Compassionate Communication offers a rather simple appearance, but it takes a goodly amount of self-reflection and critical reflection on how we see the world and ourselves in the world. This, in turn, leads us to question meaning perspectives previously unexamined which, as we have noted before, takes effort and even courage to do. It can look deceptively simple, but it takes commitment and practice. The results make the entire effort very worthwhile.

Given our human propensity for making form out of the world around us, we may find the question difficult to get to, or even to make much sense out of it: "What am I observing?" That phrase stands in contradiction to our common beliefs: "I see what I see. I saw what I saw. Seeing is believing." We might consider changing those phrases of conviction into something else in light of the question asked here: "I perceive what I have perceived. Believing is seeing." We live quite dependently on our past perceptions for our current perceptions. When we can't fit something into a category we have known before, we can feel quite disoriented. When we think of the child overwhelmed by the number of toy pieces, the disorientation comes from the child never having experienced that level of choice or that level of apparent chaos. Because we don't like the possible chaos of our direct perceptions of things ("What *am I* observing?), we construct meaning perspectives that put what we experience into some sort of form and order. Those meaning perspectives constitute essential prejudices, prejudices that we need to survive but also prejudices that get in the way of what we see because our perceptions and what we feel because of those perceptions, simply get in the way of our immediate experience and our response to that experience. Immanuel Kant told us that we can never see the "thing-in-itself" due to our perceptual nature. However, when we become and remain aware of that predilection of perception, it allows us better access to what we actually observe.

I lived in New York City a good deal of my life. Certain perceptions of such a life become rather standard. These perceptions formed meaning perspectives of which I remained unaware because those perspectives were rarely challenged. Some years later, I taught in a semi-rural community college which housed students from even more rural communities. When I observed many of these students, I didn't observe them directly. I perceived them as "cowboys." They wore huge hats that made their heads look Stetson shrunken, and these heads sat atop generally or apparently huge bodies. They all wore apparently huge, pointed boots. I had lots of opportunity to see those boots because these cowboys generally stretched their feet in front of them making the bottom of those boots stunningly apparent to me. They sat with arms crossed in front of them, slid down and back in their seats, and sat staring apparently blankly at me all during class sessions. That's what my big city perceptions believed and how my prejudice toward them formed.<sup>137</sup>

I perceived myself as a very liberal if not radical thinker, so I didn't know I held and felt these prejudices, even though I described these cowboys (and cowgirls for that matter) comically if not

satirically in conversation and correspondence. All that changed when one of these perceived cowboys came to see me in the office I worked from. He told me he was "kind of shy about these things" shy, which accounted for his class silences, but he liked the class a lot and wanted to show me some things. He handed me a small sheaf of paper which turned out to be his poems. It turned out that a number of those attending the same English class wrote poetry, often what some call "cowboy poetry." The public quality of the poetry held no importance for me in comparison to the honest feelings and perceptions they contained. These young men and women allowed me to see a world of agriculture, ranching, hunting, and rodeo that was entirely closed to me before. They perceived their world as one filled with beauty, challenge, and the love of the life itself.

Along with their perceptions, many demonstrated remarkably agile and open minds. In one research paper, a very cowboy appearing member of this informal group did a research paper on cattle raising. He wanted to prove that some outside people who attacked their traditional and proven practices were not seeing the truth, and he would prove that. He did his research with integrity, and found that traditional and current cattle raising practices did produce overgrazing. Through research, he discovered that if ranchers raised fewer cattle per acre, they would raise larger cattle and would get more poundage with fewer cattle. He called his final draft "Fat Cows Over Skinny Cows." He also appended a note and asked me directly never to tell anyone from his hometown he wrote such a paper. It was a very small place, and those folks "just wouldn't like it." He had a strong sense of perceptions, prejudices, and meaning perspectives without ever hearing the words or ideas themselves. Everyone who lives in a conformist structure will feel these ideas in reality to a greater or lesser degree. Knowing that we live in such a structure, we just want to make choices about what we observe based on the highest level of awareness we can muster. Whatever happens we will, just like the highly trained Fair Witness, make choices about how and what we observe of the "thing-in-itself."

### ***Full expression in action clarifies what we conceive—December 15, 2011***

The handout suggests that we choose to use the descriptive language of action as perceived. It asks us to consider speaking in a way as to keep our meaning perspective based biases and prejudices out and keeping the Kant problem of direct perception of the thing-in-itself and our limitations as careful observers in mind.<sup>138</sup> When we choose to observe and speak in that way, we accentuate what actually occurred rather than what we think or feel about what occurred. When we say, "Mack assaulted Polly with a knife," we have already changed what actually occurred to what our interpretation and diagnosis of what occurred. Our listener and our mind create a very real sense of what this means, and it means absolutely no good. When we choose to say, "Mack cut Polly with a scalpel in the operating room," we come closer to the thing-in-itself not our interpretation of the thing. If we observe more about this occurrence, we can create a more specify statement: "Dr. Mack cut Polly with a scalpel in the operating room to remove her inflamed appendix." That last sounds very distant from the first description of a violent act, yet they speak about the same visual information.

When we call George a liar, we have made an accusation about the very nature of George while offering no specific evidence as to the fact of our statement. When we mindfully choose to say, "George lied to me," it makes the accusation specific to one perceived situation with George not a global condemnation of George. The more action specific information we supply, the closer we get to the truth value of the observation we have made: "George told me he would go home. Less than ten minutes later, I saw George at the bar down the street." In this way, we offer action instead of opinion, the where, and how information on which we based our statement. However, when we reflect on our original statement, we might see that we have still committed a diagnosis. We do not know if George actually lied when he said that he would go home. George may have fully intended to do just that when an emergency occurred in that very bar in which he felt compelled to get involved. In order to correct our original statement, we can choose to withdraw any opinion whatsoever and speak as much as we can about only the actual appearances and actions we experienced: "George told me he would go home. Ten minutes later, I saw him at the bar down the street." When we critically reflect on the seeming simplicity of the question, "What am I observing?" we find the answer and its expression come complexly. It may feel nearly impossible to perceive and speak in this way. However true that may prove, we can still strive to achieve the closest we can to the ideal observation and reporting of what we observed as we can. Truth, we may actually find, comes to us as a quest of aspiration.<sup>139</sup>

Factual data may also serve to obscure the truth. Kant held an absolute position on this question, and asserts that lying is intolerable under all circumstances: "By a lie a man throws away and, as it were, annihilates his dignity as a man." In some way, he speaks truly. When we choose to lie, we throw away all the value of truth in the world and in ourselves. Everything becomes a means to the end of our identity as expressed through the lie our ego tells. Everything becomes an It.

In such a consideration, however, it might serve us well to remember that things happen in a reality that exists on more than one level or dimension.

## ***On knowing the thoughts of others—December 16, 2011***

I have often heard students and others offer me this most remarkable interpretation and diagnosis: "I knew what she/he was thinking." As when people resort to using the phrase "human nature," I came to notice that whenever someone read the mind of another, knew the other's thoughts, the next thing she/he said about those thoughts would almost if not always express a negative realization. In terms of the interview class, in an employment interview, the interviewee interprets and simultaneously diagnoses the interviewer's thought, with nothing tangible in evidence whatsoever, as, "She/he didn't like me." I sometimes asked the person who asserted she/he could read minds why they were looking for work at all. With an ability to read minds, there must be some very interesting ways of making a very substantial living. I hoped that would bring a laugh or, at least, a smile.

In class, we discussed how this worked. I asked, "What can we really know about what goes on in someone else's mind." The honest answer after reflection said, "Really nothing." "What can we mean when we say we know someone else's thoughts?" I would also ask. Generally, the answer came, "What we're thinking they're thinking." When we put our own thoughts into the head of this other person, we interpret ourselves. When we interpret our own thoughts in that way, we might find it remarkable that what we perceive comes in the negative, comes in rejection. We could easily perceive this process as a rejection of not the other person but ourselves.

This almost inevitable process stems from what we have discussed about meaning perspectives and our secret fears and discomfort with ourselves. Many of us, if not most of us, live with a very powerful intuition that we live and act in the world as inadequate people. We live and express our failings to ourselves all the time. Because of this unspoken but tangible part of our meaning perspective dominated identity, our ego constantly stands on the ready to protect that identity from the discovery of our inadequacy and the rejection that would follow. Our ego sometimes defends against rejection by rejecting others before the others can reject our identity. We read our own thoughts when we claim to read others' thoughts. The thoughts we read may well, if not certainly, represent our unquestioned meaning perspectives.

In response to this writing and in talking with Silvia as she reads along as I go, I came to a realization about interpretations and diagnoses. They almost never have anything good to say. When we seek to make an interpretation followed by a diagnosis, we almost always see something negative in what we are meant to simply observe. In the same way we read others' thoughts as negative, we read and understand their actions as negative as well. We don't have to, and it is not inevitable, but it often happens that way. Indeed, we might see these almost inevitably negative observations as inauthentic. Our authenticity expresses itself in fully engaging with the moment and the elements of the moment without making judgments which distract us from the wonder and energy of the immediate.

## ***Heuristics that help and meaning perspectives that harm—December 17, 2011***

Those distractions come from our meaning perspectives which are forever dragging the present moment into the past and defining the present by the past and generally make those distractions negative. Through meaning perspectives, we rarely live fully in the moment. We stay too busy making negative judgments about the present to participate fully in that present. We do want to relate somewhat to past experience in the present to give certain worldly structures meaning and form, a heuristic. "Green lights mean go, and red lights mean stop" is a conscious perspective from past experience and learning that allows us to drive safely (or run the light if we live with that sort of meaning perspective). These conscious perspectives help us live in the moment because we don't have to relearn every element of the world every moment of the day. When heuristics operate properly, we find that past a very helpful part of our present and also help lead us safely into the future. In that way, our past and future inform but do not dominate our present. Our immediate experience exists as a collaboration of past and present events which open up future, possible events to us. All that is to the good for living fully in the moment.

If something gets in the way of our living fully in the moment, even if we think these are conscious meaning perspectives, it may well really come from unquestioned meaning perspectives. When we fear what others will think about us, we really fear ourselves and what our meaning perspectives tell us about ourselves and our identity. We feel anger and hurt because when we make interpretations and diagnoses, we often do that to defend our identity through the aggressive offices of our ego. In that way, we cause ourselves harm as well as do harm the persons we interpret and diagnose.

The dominator model wants us to perceive the world through interpretations and diagnoses in this way because these perceptions support conformity and societal forces that inspire fear in us. When we do, we miss what the world really has to offer us because our vision is limited to the dominator's vision. In terms of the meaning perspective, that is even more the case. The meaning perspective functions as the dominator of our observations. In that meaning perspectives transfix us in a past defined by some perceived traumatic event, some perceived nearly deadly assault on our vulnerability. Our lives feel threatened when we feel our identities threatened. We transfix as an act of defense against these perceived events that have happened and we fear will happen again. By setting up interpretative meaning perspective barriers to the present and future, the best things in life can simply pass us by, as the saying goes, because we diagnose them in terms of our past suffering. As an ironic consequence, we bring our suffering with us and relive it constantly even as we think we are avoiding it happening again.

If I had succumbed to the seeming safety of a negative meaning perspective about women after my summary dismissal by one woman, my life might have felt safer, but it would have been stunted. When I met Silvia who has nurtured my life so I thrive and grow, I would have interpreted her as a deceiver and a fraud because "all women are like that." I would have diagnosed her as a threat and never really seen her and all the intelligence, sensitivity, creativity, and emotional scope she offered.



Many of us live through meaning perspectives that cause the very thing we fear: deprivation in a general sense and deprivation of unconditional positive regard specifically. Our negative perspectives become our negative interpretations which cause us to make negative diagnoses. A woman lies to me and hurts me. I want to avoid that hurt, so I create a meaning perspective I think will protect me from such lies: "All women are liars." It may keep me safe in some ways, but it also keeps me from seeing nay woman in her self. I condemn myself forever to distrust and blindness to the true qualities offered to me by women. That kind of self-inflicted meaning perspective keeps our world a fearful and a very small and isolated place. In that way, we have chosen alienation from the external I/Thou which causes alienation within us. It keeps us from exploring the liberating creativity of a life fully lived where bad things happen, but many more good things happen if we look for them and believe we can create them. We can even learn from the immediately perceived bad things. In a sense, something I discovered while attempting to recover from a long term physical problem will serve as a brief counter to the negative: "we want to look for the good stuff 'cause the bad stuff is too easy to find." We can choose to take every negative interpretation and diagnosis we make as an invitation to question and critically reflect on the meaning perspective that gave force to that interpretation, to that diagnosis. That process can lead to the transformative and liberation.

## ***The violence and dominator nature of gossip—December 18, 2011***

The negativity of meaning perspectives behind interpretations and diagnoses relates directly to the practice of gossip which relates directly to the dominator model and conformity. Gossip uses the heavy handed tools of interpretation and diagnosis to maintain a constant diligence for those who stray too far from the mainstream conformity. In the process of gossip, we enforce domination and conformity. We teach the lessons of conformity and the dangers of violations of that conformity. In the process, we also learn and relearn these lessons as a shared activity of that conformity. Gossip teaches us that there are limits to our individuation or right to believe what we believe and live the way we wish to live by acting on those beliefs. Gossip reinforces the presence and power of conformist judgments on conduct or perceived conduct. Gossip either keeps us in line, or it throws us out of line. It can make us an outlier, a stranger and an exile in our own context, in what should be our own country.<sup>140</sup>

At the same time gossip serves to maintain the essential conformity of the dominator model, it also alienates us from each other. Conformity is not community. Even as it reinforces our group loyalty, it violates the loyalty and compassion we might feel for each other. Gossip stands as inimical to the unconditional qualities we can feel toward others and ourselves. When any two or more people gossip about someone else, or even another group, they establish their judgmental bonding as a group. Those who gossip reassure themselves that they operate as the "us" group, and that happens by identifying others as the "out" group. In the process of identifying those others as the "out" group, we reify them. We turn them into objects of our scorn even when that scorn comes in the form of envy.<sup>141</sup> In that way, we violate the principle and realization of the I/Thou and the unconditional qualities that idea represents through the practice of gossip and its group judgments.

In that way, gossip can afford its participants a rather cozy feeling of belonging—for the moment. At some point, perhaps even as we work at gossip, we can experience the rather sick-making feeling that the group in which we want to remain, the "us" folks, could turn their gossip on us in a veritable blink. We can become the "it" to their group Thou. That experience of vulnerability can propel us even more deeply into the act of gossip to better show how deeply we can show our belonging to the "us" group, to maintain our identity in the conformist norm. Still, no matter how secure that makes us feel momentarily, we know that the gossip can turn on us very easily and for any one of a number of reasons. The reasons don't really matter because the reason comes in the perception and interpretation of the other not in the direct observation of the other. When we reflect critically on the meaning perspective that motivates the "us" group of gossips, we can see they live out the truth of the I/Thou idea. When the "us" group reifies the "them" group, they reify themselves. The gossips become an "It" even as they reify others into the "It." The feeling of belonging that gossiping can bring will always feel fragile to its participants especially when they find themselves gossiping about someone who moments ago felt secure within the charmed circle of the "us" group.<sup>142</sup> In that inherent fearful sense of instability of conformity enforced gossip, the force of negative interpretations and diagnoses, the dominator model and its concomitant conformity strengthen and endlessly reinforce their power.

## ***Feelings and observations—December 19, 2011***

The handout also refers to this quote from the cassette: "The highest form of human intelligence is the ability to observe without evaluating." Jiddu Krishnamurti. Quotes tend to strike us forcefully, but they do come out of context, so our understanding of the impact lacks a certain clarity. Ironically, seeing this quote out of context may well bring us to think we observe something in it that isn't quite there. In any case, I would rather talk about forms of human intelligence and how they each assist us in knowing ourselves and operating in the world rather than constructing some dominator competition between intelligences. As we discussed, competition does not necessarily if ever assist us in our aspirations toward the excellence of becoming. Krishnamurti may simply want to emphasize the essential value of as clear an observation as possible. When we can't observe as fully as possible with our inherent complexities of perception, we will almost inevitably make inadequate or distorted evaluations of what we think and feel we see.<sup>143</sup>

Once we observe as fully and clearly as possible, we can move consciously and freely to next level of our observational experience, our response to our observation: "How am I feeling about what I have observed?"

That may sound quite simple on its surface, but after all this discussion about meaning perspectives and interpretations, getting to how "I," or how we actually feel about something that we observe or experience may not come to us as easily as all that. One thing we may choose instead of feeling what we feel comes in blaming someone else for what we observe or experience: "You made me mad." In this construction, we do not even admit to our anger. We force the responsibility of our anger onto the other person or thing (computers suffer from this quite often). The utterance makes a claim about the other person. In such an utterance, what we really express is our desire to blame another person for a choice we have made. We choose to get angry, but what we really feel is a desire to blame. In that this thought hasn't come to me this clearly and well before, I feel quite pleased about getting to this, and it gives me a way of writing about an incident in my life which illustrates this well if not all that self-congratulatory.

## ***On seeing, feeling, and responding—December 20, 2011***

I participated in a charter school created expressly for teenage children politely referred to as "at-risk."<sup>144</sup> Actually, these folks had long since jumped out of the "at-risk" category into the profoundly dangerous category of outlier-cum-criminal as adjudicated and judged by the powers that be. In their high level of identity neediness, their egos expressed these needs in some interesting ways all of which older people and authority figures found aggressive, disrespectful, a very insubordinate. Through their body language, I often perceived them as expressing some levels of defiance and contempt. I wanted to work with these students, and I liked them. Still, I found this body language difficult to deal with. I actually felt an adult and teacherly resentment of their attitude, so-called. In such moments, I thought, "What's your problem?" That felt quite natural. If I were asked and answered honestly and immediately, I would say they had a problem, and that their attitude irritated me. In a sense, I felt that. Except, it was *their* school I had joined, and such feelings had no part of *their* school.

After some critical reflection, I realized that my "feelings" functioned not as authentic feelings but meaning perspective driven judgments. As an authority figure, liberal to radical or not, "I deserved respect on my terms," spake the meaning perspective. This perspective motivated me to see and judge these students as violators of that meaning perspective of respect. I feel rather ill looking back on this, but I escaped from the throes of this meaning perspective. Thinking about our discussion, Compassionate Communication, I realize now, also means Compassionate Thinking and Feeling. At the time, my commitments as a teacher and as a human being stood in direct conflict with my supposed feelings. Such cognitive and emotional dissonance brought me to a critical moment I needed to resolve. I asked myself whose problem was the one I saw, mine or theirs. Uncomfortable as it made me, I knew in a blink it was mine. However they acted, whatever their intention, I could choose my response, and I could choose acceptance and the unconditional not resentment or even anger. I could feel and did feel compassion for the profound neediness their performance elicited from my authentic emotions. That feeling of compassion came to me as very authentic indeed.

I came to work with these folks as their teacher in an I/Thou relationship. If I violated that relationship, reified them into It, I fell deeply into the inauthentic, in the very kind of violence that caused the very neediness their apparent attitude disguised and repressed. My supposed feelings of irritation came from a meaning perspective and, now that I think about it again, my fear of my powerlessness to help them. Such a feeling certainly meant that I lost even more power to offer them the essential thing they needed. Not surprisingly, they needed, craved, and fought off mightily, unconditional positive regard, compassion, forgiveness, and the binding element of acceptance. Authentic feelings may not come to us immediately but hidden behind the complexities and obscurities of meaning perspectives and the habits of mind that these perspectives produce. When we feel the tension this produces in us, we recognize a dissonance that makes for a critical moment. In response to that moment, we can choose to question our immediate and often unproductive "natural feelings." In the critical reflection that can follow, we can choose to better fulfill the needs of the situation and our authentic feelings based in our essential belief in and desire for the unconditional.

Compassionate Communication also brings us back to Frankl and our freedom of response. It's not what other people do. It's how we choose to respond to what they do.

## ***On knowing why we feel what we feel—December 21, 2011***

As we approach the third question in this section of the handout, I realize that when discussing the handout up until this point, we have already examined the third question asking for continuing self-awareness in communication:

"What are my underlying wants, needs, or values (usually what you wanted to happen or were afraid wouldn't happen) that contribute to our feelings?"

These underlying wants and the rest take two forms. We find them in our authentic desire to reach to the I/Thou, the moral sphere, the ends principle, and the unconditional. We also find them in an inauthentic form which concerns itself with our material identity and our ego that defends our identity based on unquestioned meaning perspectives. Our authentic needs and desires lead us toward individuation and the becoming self. Our inauthentic but strongly felt needs and desires, through the meaning perspectives from whence they come, lead us into the dominator model, conformity and competition. Even in situations where we seek the unconditional from someone about whom we care deeply, we choose to fall into the habits of mind: communication patterns of position power, competition, and confrontation. We demand. We control. We fight. We work so hard at defending our identity that we don't realize we are actually doing damage to ourselves and to the others with whom we compete—even those about whom we care deeply. That competition disallows our giving or receiving the unconditional. We abandon Compassionate Communication and what follows can escalate into something quite painful, harmful, and nearly inevitable. We feel that we have lost our ability, our power to choose how we respond, and leap full blown into struggle.

After some time of not expressing her feelings and needs, Polly says to Mack, 'The other day, you told me to shut up, and I really feel hurt about that. You just don't want to hear what I have to say.' Polly has made a statement which may well form an interpretation and diagnosis. This brings the conversation to an unhappy brink because she has left Compassionate Communication behind; however, she did speak a truth of her own. She declares her feelings and wants her feelings recognized and respected. We all do. Still, we are halfway to a fight. Mack can choose how he responds, as Polly could have. He chooses to compete. Mack responds out of his hurt, fearful, and defensive self: "I never said that." Polly wants to ask for a reassurance of his unconditional regard for her, albeit badly, so she chooses to say something accusatory. He feels her accusatory lack of regard threatens him, so he defends himself and implicitly tells her that she is lying. It never happened. You made it up. Now we have a fight. In that this fight will not address what it needs to address, the original misunderstanding of what Mack intended to say and what Polly heard him say. The fight will concern itself with who is right and who is wrong. It will become of a fight not over substance, as generally fights don't. It will concern itself with who wins and who loses. If it ends on that note, one of them wins and one of them loses, the fight will simmer below the surface until another occasion arises and this fight will return to give even greater energy to the next. The loser will not, as they say, take the first loss lying down.

Such fighting does not come inevitably as it often feels. When we can address our authentic feelings after some critical reflection, we can express ourselves in ways that leave the

compassionate and the unconditional in place and still have our needs fulfilled. Indeed, the chances come much higher when we do so. If Polly, had told Mack that she thought she heard him tell her to shut up, but she knows he cares about her, so it must be a misunderstanding, Mack would respond in kind. He can regret her sadness and tell her he would never mean to say that. The actual cause of the difficulty would get addressed immediately with every hope of a caring resolution. Even after Polly spoke in the way she chose, Mack could have made another choice. He could forget that he felt attacked. He could choose his response. If he chooses his response out of his real affection for Polly, he will respond in the same way as above. He would acknowledge her feelings, regret what she heard, and reassure her that he would never intend to convey that message. When our first response comes from our compassion in that communication, our chances of fulfilling the needs of those involved will happen far more frequently than not.

## ***Our right to express our needs—December 22, 2011***

We can fulfill our own needs best by communicating those needs. One of the most common, passive, and aggressive means of communicating in an inherently violent fashion comes when we feel a need, we don't express that need, and then we hold other people responsible for not meeting that need. This can only lead to blame for the one not fulfilling the need, and harm to both the one not expressing the need and the one who cannot fulfill an unspoken need. This doesn't mean we choose to blame the one who does not speak. Blame interferes with the unconditional and only does harm. We don't voice our needs because we have learned that rather than tortured silence, we learned a meaning perspective that tells us not to ask to have our needs met.

Silvia and I overheard a remark made by a parental figure to a young girl: "I might have bought you some gum if you hadn't asked. Now that you've asked, I won't get it for you." That has never made sense to us as long as we thought about and talked about it. The adult offered the child a lesson the adult had learned and in which she believed. It doesn't make any sense sitting here nakedly on the page, and it couldn't have made much sense to the girl, but she would have to cope with it and learn from it. The child learned that she was not worthy of asking for what she needed. All she could do was hope that the dominator in her life would somehow spontaneously know that unspoken need and answer it. This would include her need for the unconditional. Indeed, demanding the silence of the need denies even the possibility of the unconditional.

If the young girl learned that confusing lesson, she may well have developed a meaning perspective which disallowed asking for her needs to be fulfilled. It won't help us to blame ourselves or others for learning that lesson and living by that lesson. Once we become aware of such lessons, and they can come to quite a number, we can question them, critically reflect on them, and make new, conscious perspectives and choices by which we can live more freely. We have that choice.

Interestingly, some students and others have looked at the idea and practice of Compassionate Communication as something that would prevent them from having their needs fulfilled. When we feel motivated by a meaning perspective that tells us that only the dominator gets her/his needs fulfilled, that would be the case. However, domination never truly fulfills our human needs. When the need is a desire for domination, it will never get fulfilled. Domination always hungers for more and more domination.<sup>145</sup> If we couldn't get our true needs fulfilled without domination, it would take all the compassion out of this form of communication. Expressing our needs enacts a fundamental part of our natures as human beings and even as our simpler, animal selves.

Expressing our needs comes as the first volitional act in our lives. We cry. In that cry, we can hear a lifetime of needs reaching out to the world and to those nearest to us. These begin as primarily material and instrumental, but even then, they are inextricably linked to the non-material, to the emotional and, perhaps, even to the spiritual. When a baby cries for food, it wants more than the food to satisfy her/his needs. The baby wants connection, a connection that replaces the semi-conscious intimacy of the womb and creates new intimacies through a



becoming consciousness and a becoming self. At the core of these needs comes what we have seen again and again, the need for the unconditional and all that the unconditional entails. Compassionate Communication offers us a mechanism wherein we can express our needs fully, even more fully than less conscious communicative choices. Using such communication allows us to ask for our needs to be met by ourselves and others without violating the needs of ourselves and others. In this way, we can satisfy our needs fully and remain within the moral sphere, the ends principle, and the I/Thou. Our needs form an essential part of our ends as people. If we do not satisfy those needs, we are denying our ends, and in that denial, we become means to some other sort of end. This condition denies our inherent right to live our lives fully through the expression of our becoming self.

Our needs do not give us the right to express them as demands. Demands act against the needs of those whom we address our needs. Demands also deny our need because whatever the response, we will know that the demand has not been met or offered as a gift from one free person to another. It has not happened through the unconditional, only through domination and submission. That's why "please" and "thank you" work so well in that regard as we discussed earlier.

## ***On what the "No" perspective means to action—December 23, 2011***

When we choose to commit to a compassionate way to express our needs, we encounter this last of the four questions on the handout: "What actions would I like to be taken to make happen that I now would like to have happen?" Getting our requests to ourselves and others expressed in action language takes more effort than we might think. When we think about the way adults generally speak to children, they often make requests, actually demands, in negatives: "No," "Stop," "Don't do that," "Bad girl," "Bad boy," and the like. Negative instructions don't tell us much about how to proceed. They just tell us to stop. They tell us all about a world full of "No," but they say little or nothing about the very much more open and becoming world of "Yes."

After a first class in English at a community college, a student came to the office I worked in and asked very softly to talk to me. I agreed gratefully, and she came in and sat down. She sat quite straight and kept her arms straight and her hands grasped tightly in her lap. She asked me about what we talked about in class. When she asked if I meant that she would have all the freedom to write what she chose, be as creative as she could, and that she couldn't really do anything wrong. I agreed that sounded like a good summary of what we discussed.

She said that she couldn't do any of that. She would happily fill out any sort of workbook, memorize what I asked her to memorize, or ask her to take any test no matter how hard, but she couldn't write in the way I asked. I asked her why that was the case. After some hesitation, she answered that her father always told her that she shouldn't do anything unless she knew it was the right thing. He told her in no uncertain terms that he was the only one who had the right to define right from wrong, so anything she did on her own was probably the wrong thing. She couldn't write freely or creatively without her father agreeing, and she couldn't ask him to do that. He wasn't very happy about her attending college in the first place. We talked for a while after that, and I hoped we came to see that she had the right to set her own way of seeing and writing. In fact, the expression of herself worked as the right thing to do, at least in our shared classroom. She had the ability and the right to set her own standards and let them grow and change through new experiences. She had the right to say "Yes" to adventure and discovery. Our talk and my hope did not help at that point, and she not only left our class, she just left. The "No" meaning perspectives that we learn when young and can continue to learn through the vicissitudes of life, can freeze us nearly solid, transfix us in the past with little or no idea of the actions, the "Yes," that will bring us into the present and take us into the future.

When we make our requests known as actions, the recipient of that request can act or not as matter of her/his choice. If we don't accept either a "No" or a "Yes" with equanimity, we didn't make a request. We made a demand. When the telephone rings, and we ask someone else to answer for us, and that person says, "No," that's that person's choice. If we respond by saying, "Alright, be that way" or "Why are you so selfish?" we have made our original compassionate request into a demand.

### ***On expressing unspoken needs through manipulation—December 24, 2011***

It may also stem from our vulnerability, our innate fear of rejection that encourages us not to ask for what we want. Oddly, we may not ask but choose to demand what we want instead. Ironically, when we demand, we tell the other person that no choice exists. As adults often say to children, "Do it—or else," "Do it or you will get it." When our demand is fulfilled, we get the material thing we want, but we don't get the immaterial thing we want even more. The unconditional may well not feel like the unconditional when we demand service rather than ask for the gift of someone choosing to and acting freely in our interest. Sadly or not, if we want to receive the unconditional regard of others, it comes generally with exposing ourselves to rejection. Our identity deals with such rejections, no matter how minor, rather badly, and when our identity feels discomfort, our ego strikes out in some way, sometimes against anyone who refuses, and sometimes against our identity that feels the discomfort: "Why should anyone help you?" our ego says to our identity, "You don't deserve any help." It's an unhappy bargain to strike within ourselves to turn things on ourselves, but it makes a kind of peace with our disappointment and minimizes our sense of rejection.

We also can choose to not to ask for something directly but through some form of manipulation. This relates to not asking at all but expecting our need to be fulfilled in any case. In manipulation, we send out some form of message that could indicate our desire for help of some kind, but it doesn't expose us to any direct rejection. Eleanor, my mother, visited us, and she and I were talking. I asked her if she would like a cup of tea. She responded, "Oh no. Don't bother. I'm fine."<sup>146</sup> I got myself some tea, and she said, "That tea looks good." I asked again if she would like some, and again she reasserted her fineness. We talked a little longer, and she said, "You look like you're really enjoying that tea. What kind is it?" I responded by asking her to simply ask me to get her a cup of tea. She demurred once again, and I gave in and got her a cup of tea for which she thanked me by saying, "Oh, thank you, but you didn't need to do that." And she drank her newly won tea quite happily from what she said and what I saw. She even had a second cup, but only when I went for a second cup. We might want to call that polite, but it certainly felt like manipulation.

Others of us choose to put the burden of desire on the person we want to help us. We can ask in the following way, "Would you like to help me do a heavy, dirty, and unpleasant job?" The honest answer to such a question as posed, "Would you like to," is very clearly, "No." Why would anyone *like* to engage in such an act? If that same person asks another, "Will you please help me with a heavy, dirty, and unpleasant task," we might very honestly answer, "as a friend I want to help you do something that neither of us will like particularly, but if it needs doing, we can do it. We can even enjoy working together, but that still doesn't reach liking to do the act itself. I, for one, rarely wake in the morning looking for heavy, dirty, and unpleasant acts to accomplish for their own sake. I will do so happily and gratefully if I can fulfill the need of another person, sometimes even my own need. In that way, my act becomes a gift, the gift of the unconditional to this other person.

### ***The right to say "No" and the power to say "Yes"—December 25, 2011***

To remain unconditional, the one asked must always have the right to refuse. On the other hand, even in refusal we can say "No" to a specific request and still say "Yes" to our unconditional regard for the other person. Many times, we find it hard to say, and many times we find it hard to hear, but we can learn to trust a "No" as a sign of honest regard. When we care for another person, we want them to act freely with us sharing a mutual trust on both sides. As part of that, it will help us maintain that feeling when we feel free to say "No" when appropriate. That way, we can also ask freely because we trust the other person to respond honestly. Eventually, it all works out quite well, and the person who speaks the "No" also has no obligation to explain why, to defend that "No."

When we speak honestly to each other, when we speak in deepest trust of the other, we may find ourselves faced with a critical moment. We may well run into a "No" we did not expect. We may well run into a meaning perspective of our own or of the other person that brings us to a realization of some kind, and sometimes that's a rather uncomfortable realization. As with other critical moments, we may feel a very real if not profound cognitive dissonance which we will want to resolve if we want to live through our honesty of the becoming self rather than the occasionally self-justifying dishonesty of our identity and our ego.

This discussion will take us somewhat beyond the limits of this writing, but we will look at it briefly. When we operate out of our vulnerable identity, we strive to feel liked, sometimes at any cost. That introduces a dangerous element into relationships which asserts itself in the first date delusion. It begins as an unspoken agreement. Both parties on a first date delude themselves and each other into being and acting like a different person than the one they feel themselves to be. This comes from wanting to be liked. Seeing this baldly, the irony nearly jumps out. In the first date delusion, we desperately want someone to like us, so we pretend to be someone else. In that case, we, our actual selves, are not liked at all because we haven't allowed ourselves to turn up for the date at all. The more we feel liked in this delusional state, the more we feel inadequate in ourselves. If we can't be liked for ourselves in that we pretend to be someone else whom does get liked, then what of value do we see ourselves? Polly likes Chinese food, and the actual Mack hates it, but he tells her what she wants to hear: "I love Chinese food, too." That shows her how compatible they are. Mack likes blood and gore movies, and the actual Polly hates blood and gore moves, but she tells him what he wants to hear, "I love blood and gore movies." That really shows how compatible they are. In all this apparent funniness and silliness, something very insidious happens especially when the relationship turns into an attempt at any real closeness and permanence.

After some length of time, the truth will turn up, and it may well do so when one or the other asks a simple question. She says, "Let's go out to Chinese food." He refuses, "No, I hate Chinese food." Polly feels shocked and betrayed. When he wants to go to a blood and gore movie, he gets the same sort of refusal, "No, I really hate those movies." Then they may shift into a very accusatory fight about who lied to whom. Food and movies may seem trivial, but it could just as well be about how they should use money or whether they should have children and how to care for them. They may find in the long term that their essential values, and perhaps the meaning perspectives behind them, are stunningly divergent. At that point, they will face a

reality of self and other that they may not feel remotely prepared to deal with. This serves as a kind of relationship cognitive dissonance.

We must always have the right to refuse a request, but we may need to deal with past lies and current realities that will feel very difficult indeed when those refusals come as a very unpleasant surprise. Speaking compassionately very much includes our thoughtful honesty and authenticity.

## ***On lies and truth and their results—December 26, 2011***

I gained a realization while writing the above. We can choose to speak and act inauthentically to gain some goal we desire. When we speak and act inauthentically, we will find the goal, even when we attain it, as inauthentic and unsatisfying as the original intention was inauthentic. When we lie to ourselves and others to get what we think we want, what we really get remains the result of a lie. It stays alien to us because we have gained it inauthentically. It can't form part of our whole being when we gained it outside and in ways alien to that being. In some very perverse way, we have made ourselves a means to an inauthentic end that we intended because our identity felt that the artificial gain it made in this way would offer genuine connection to the unconditional.

Truth does not come from lies. The authentic does not come from the inauthentic. We have violated the ends principle and taken ourselves out of the moral sphere even if we do it to ourselves. In our search for the becoming self, we can find many distractions and desires in the material and endlessly wanting world of things that we hope will make our self-alienation bearable. They don't, so we endlessly strive to gain more and more of less and less.

At some point, most of us will face the reality of this paradox of apparent gain and undeniable loss. At some point, Polly and Mack will see beyond the inauthentic mask originally presented to them as an object of desire. They may even discover that the apparently minor differences of taste in food and taste in movies represent a very deep difference in essential values or even in unquestioned meaning perspectives. Polly may like Chinese food because she believes in life as an exploration of the unknown and the unfamiliar. She sees life as an adventure in which we can care about others as part of that adventure and value them in all their differences from ourselves. Mack may watch violent movies because he holds a very strong belief that life operates as an endless struggle against others. Life is war, and everyone else may, at any point, come to him as the enemy in that war. Anyone with differences from him means that they are inherently suspicious and dangerous. He doesn't seek growth and change in life. He wants things the way they always were. He wants them his way.

This dissonance between values and beliefs, between conscious and unquestioned perspectives, will initiate a critical moment of cognitive and emotional dissonance. That moment will give Polly and Mack the opportunity to discover more of the truth about themselves, what they wanted from each other, and that they have both deluded themselves and each other. It will become a moment of possible liberation from the unquestioned meaning perspectives within them when they seek to resolve their individual and shared dissonances courageously and honestly. When they seek to simply escape those dissonances through self-justification, they will transfix on their meaning perspectives all the more, each working with all her/his might to prove the other wrong.

When we speak and act outside the compassionate model by speaking and acting inauthentically, even violently, we return to the questionable comforts of the dominator model. When Polly and Mack reach their critical moment, it won't simply be about them in that moment; it will be about their personal and world views. If they choose domination, they will choose the having way of

life as well. They will seek to possess their desires, to own them and keep them for themselves. When they choose compassion and the unconditional, they will choose the being way of life when we experience everything in life fully and meaningfully not as an owner but as conscious part of the becoming universe. They will experience the adventure of their whole being and the becoming self. Having deadens our way of living, takes us into what Fromm calls "necrophily," a love of dead things that reifies us as well. When I love an It, I enter into an It/It relationship. Being opens us to participating in the essential and eternal wonder of life endlessly becoming more, what Fromm calls "biophily," a love of life and living themselves that imbues us with more life. When I love a Thou, I enter into an I/Thou relationship of being and becoming. In such a realization of being, we find a measure of success in our quest of aspiration, in our search for the becoming self.

## ***Making choices into a do, not a don't—December 27, 2011***

In all this, I find that we as human beings, whole and metacognitive beings, exist as an affirmation of life not as a negation of it. That would mean that we will naturally express ourselves in our actions as a "Yes," unless we have learned and live with a meaning perspective that demands that we repress that "Yes" and live by the rule of the "No." This relatively innocent and funny phrase in the handout eventually brought me to make sense of out such an idea: "Better results come from asking for what you do want rather than what you don't want: How do you do a don't?"

When we seek some positive difference in our lives, in our choices and in our actions, we often start with a "No," a demand toward the negative: "I won't get angry anymore." Our child with the many pieced toy may have heard such negatives as instructions: "Don't make such a mess." A great deal of the instruction we get as children either expresses itself through the negative or points out the negative rather than the positive to make its point as these instructions demand that we improve our behavior. In school we hear a great deal more about perceived errors than perceived success. Generally, we abide by a dominator meaning perspective that tells us negative human behaviors arise from human nature. When we believe in that perspective, and we see human nature and behavior are negative, we need to counter those internal and behavioral negatives with very forceful and dominating external negatives: the dominator model, "No."

The typical dominator model cares primarily about behavior, the external expressions of the individual not the internal well being of the individual.<sup>147</sup> In our search for our becoming self, we seek the internal life of the "Yes," which will inform our external life and actions as a "Yes." The "don't" is inherently repressive and negative. It can leave us feeling powerless which can motivate us in some very negative and rebellious ways. The "do" allows for positive action which can replace the problem we encounter in the negative with actions that make for growth.

The minute we tell ourselves a negative, "I won't get angry anymore," we run into a very real difficulty. The situations that we perceive as angry making will occur again. We will want to do something in response. When the only demand and preparation we give ourselves is, "Don't get angry," what do we do about the situation? We will want to act. If we repress successfully, that repression may stimulate higher levels of anger—the volcano metaphor often used in these situations. Telling ourselves to count to ten may have some value, but it doesn't really get to the problem of the situation itself. We sometimes turn ten counts into a countdown to blastoff.

Such things need individual attention and thought in the becoming model of life. In the dominator model, one size of repression fits, or doesn't really fit, all. In the becoming model, we may find principles which we can all use, but each individual enacts those principles in ways that make sense to that individual. We may all share a "Yes" as an idea, but our individual uses of "Yes" can vary greatly and still allow us to maintain the unconditional and the ends principle. The moral sphere exists as a very spacious and fulfilling location of mind and spirit.



### ***My example of a choice into an action—December 28, 2011***

When we choose to make unconditional positive regard an essential quality and principle for us to adopt as part of our lives, we also form a familial relationship with the moral sphere and the ends principle. Those principles become part of the choices we make in the situations and suffering in which we find ourselves.<sup>148</sup> I find in Frankl suggestions for the pattern in which we can enact the principles of the "Yes" attitude to life.<sup>149</sup>

In all we have discussed in the section on Compassionate Communication, we assume an attitude toward language in relation to how we treat others. That choice of attitude becomes active and effective in how we choose to act on that attitude. Attitude needs to become action. We will want to make choices based on that attitude, that principle, so that it takes on meaning and becomes part of our quest of aspiration, the existential search for our becoming self. The action we take puts us in the way of experience and encounter with the world and with others. I offer two examples from my experience in demonstration of how I worked this out as an individual making individual choices based on the broadest base of the principles we discussed. The first deals with a rather mundane encounter with the world which becomes meaningful in attitude and action. The second deals with encounters with others which has become part of the essential meaning of my life and remarkably instrumental in my search for the becoming self.<sup>150</sup>

During a lull in my career as a teacher, I worked as a messenger for a courier service. All day I drove in traffic under the cloud of endless demands for immediate service, a very strict schedule that had to be maintained in the face of constant bad traffic. The whole process offered me a chance to choose tension and stress, and I took that offer very much to heart and body. As we can suppose, our daily levels of stress, our habitual physical posture of tension, may well result from meaning perspectives that inform us to fear our failure through our inadequacy. When we rush to get somewhere on time, we do so in that same sort of fear which heightens that standard level of bodily, and therefore psychological, tension. I got rather deeply involved in that process and feeling and so did Silvia and Gavin when I brought it home. I saw that as an intrusion and a burden in their lives I had no right or reason to impose on them. Looking back, it seems a violation of the ends principle thus outside the moral sphere.

At first, I told myself to stop feeling tension and stress and express that when I got home. "Don't do that" didn't work. My level of stress actually increased because I not only feared my inadequacy as a messenger, I knew I failed at not stopping my tension and stress. That threatened to become a downward spiral that would invite me to choose nightly depression as a response to this situation. Instead, I chose to examine the meaning perspectives behind what I felt and chose. I understood the idea of doing, not "don't do" something, and I chose to change how I physically reacted to the situation to reduce my emotional and psychological response to the situation. I didn't look for the cause of the meaning perspective. I looked for a way to act that would question and make moot that perspective through action itself. We can choose actions as if we didn't feel the meaning perspective that directs us in a very different even stunning way. I did.

I looked at what happened every day that increased my possibilities of stress and tension. In a relatively detached way, I watched a day on the road. Lots of things might upset a day, bad weather conditions or the erratic behavior of other drivers, but the one thing that always happened that made for delays and encouraged my choice of stress came in red lights. The meaning perspective I heard told me desperately to "Hurry up. You're really late. GET GOING." The red lights demanded that I "GET STOPPED!" When I stopped, I increased my tension by rehearsing the meaning perspective of "GET GOING" and its demands. Every light took an inordinately long time to change, and I drove off in anticipation of the next tension filled light. The suspense felt as if it were, quite literally, killing me. I couldn't change my situation. Changing the light color through sheer will seemed doomed to more failure, and ignoring red lights would bring a different and far more dangerous or expensive form of failure. I could, as always make a choice about how I responded to those demon lights. The choice of response found its manifestation through action.

When I got to a red light, instead of sitting there with my foot on the brake and my hand tense around the steering wheel, I put the car into park, took my foot off the brake and my hands off the steering wheel. I relaxed. I took a break as if I had all the time in the world. Everything by way of stress shifted to relaxation and all that tension energy transformed into positive energy to take home with me at the end of the day and share happily with Silvia and Gavin. It got so I looked forward to red lights. Through choice of attitude and action, I turned an hour or so of tension and stress filled delays every day into an hour of paid vacation every day. If my employer knew about that, he might have cut my pay. I said "Yes" to pleasure quite easily as it turned out even as I had failed miserably at saying "No" to tension, stress, and unhappiness. My unquestioned meaning perspective transformed into a conscious awareness attitude about driving into one of calm and ease—when I kept that awareness well in mind. I still keep it in mind and practice it in driving and other aspects of my life. I chose as best I can at the time I chose and later I reflect on the choice and the result.

## ***When we do the math, we find can gain but not lose—December 29, 2011***

A momentary interjection—In that I write what I write here, I feel a responsibility to report my own vulnerability to unproductive choices even as I work out the details of this writing. A number of things happened just after I finished the above, and in response to those situations which I felt as demands, I briefly chose an invitation to rush which lead to the choice of frustration which lead to a choice of anger which led to a choice of dumb. Happily, I managed to choose to stop relatively early by choosing to act in such a way that belied hurry and belied frustration. I acted in my own benefit and thus the benefit of everyone else involved. The situations quickly resolved, and my becoming self, the balance of my whole being returned to a process of balance much to my ultimate relief. In that I write what I write, I managed to go through this without unnecessary punishment or damage. I didn't like it, and I haven't made such a choice for a long while. I do wish to suggest to all of us that any momentary return to past behavior, meaning perspectives rather than conscious perspectives, doesn't mean failure, just humanity. Loss doesn't come in such cases unless we choose to see it as loss. Our achievements in our quest of aspiration do not fall away from us. They belong to us even if we return to old choices and meaning perspectives for short or even extended periods. Once we have seen and felt a new place in our quest, it forms a permanent part of our being to which we can return when we feel ready and simply choose to return.

When working with many people in recovery, I have heard them report that it often feels like, "two steps forward and one step back." That serves as a meaning perspective that keeps us from feeling and celebrating our advances. When we reach such a point, I ask them to do the math. If we take two steps forward, +2, and one back, -1, we still wind up a +1. Even if we take two steps forward, +2, and two steps back, -2, we still find ourselves at the start point rather than two steps back, ending at -2. No matter how we count in the mathematic of living and developing, we cannot lose any advance. Every advance becomes part of us part even as we step back as many steps as we count forward or more. It seems the power of the affirmations and actions we make in life never leave us. We can always make up the steps we have lost, but we can never lose the steps we gain. I find this sort of awareness perspective quite reassuring.

However, we live with a meaning perspective that prevents us from seeing and feeling this everyday mathematical awareness perspective. This meaning perspective repeats the judgments we have felt all of our lives, the one that keeps us trapped in the world of the highly conditional state of regard to ourselves and others. It counts and concentrates on a very different mathematic. I have offered this hypothetical situation and asked many students and others this resulting question:

Let's say that in a single day you engage in fifty actions of one kind or another. Of that fifty, 20 you accomplish splendidly, 20 you do with solid competence, nine you get done with some struggle, but they all work out. One you just miss getting resolved, but understood why and how, and will do better next time (I just had one of those myself). Later that night, when you may not be sleeping, you think the day over. What are you thinking about, the forty-nine or the one?

The answer I have always heard—the one.

If anyone else did that to us, we might feel hurt, some resentment, and even anger. When we do it to ourselves, we find it quite natural and fair. That's the very odd mathematic of that meaning perspective, the one that deprives us of our achievements and recognition of the daily affirmation of our lives. We said "Yes" forty-nine times, and even said "Yes" to the one as a learning experience, but the meaning perspective turns the entire day into a "No."

When we speak and act in the affirmation of "Yes," we act as a primary if not an essential part of all of life. The mental and spiritual processes we have developed over human time, as our human consciousness developed over time, shift toward the positive, toward the affirmative. When we recognize that within us, we can choose to act on that belief even if we don't feel it about ourselves, and we can return more fully to our quest of aspiration, to our search for the becoming self.

### ***On choosing to live—regretfully—December 30, 2011***

Whatever happens in our lives no matter how far we feel we have wandered into some inescapable morass, or simply become so totally distracted and even debilitated we feel we have lost our connection to our becoming self, our search continues unabated. Often, our search for and our return to the becoming self comes in very small increments, but as we just discussed, no matter how small each increment, even if we barely notice them, they will accumulate and we will feel their presence within us at one time or another. We don't need patience so much as to choose acceptance of the pattern, rhythm, and pace of ourselves and our lives. We want to choose those things that we believe will help us in our search for the becoming self and participate in our fully becoming life, the life of the I/Thou, the moral sphere, and the ends principle. We can choose the unconditional, and with it, our autonomy. The more and more we feel the power of the autonomy we gain from our growing awareness or our becoming self, the more we will accept others as they come to us in their autonomy and form community of individuation without conformity. We can and will find and create our liberation from the fears and suffering that have bound us to reliving the fears and judgments of our lives.

In my earlier years, I felt that death was the only liberation from how I felt every day and all through the sleepless nights. The nightmare of living held me fast to it, and I knew that death offered the only peace. At some point, I found that I didn't want to die, to feel my life and light become extinguished. At first, I felt a great disappointment and sorrow at the loss of that idea. Incrementally, I accepted it and started to face myself and the world differently, not quite so temporarily. The pain and madness I felt seemed all the more naked and intimidating, but I simply wasn't going to kill myself, so I wanted to deal with it. At the time, I would have said that I *had to* deal with it, but that wasn't really the case, but that's how my meaning perspectives perceived it. I didn't have to. I could have died instead. As soon as I lost the impulse to what Freud called the death drive or generally others call *Thanatos*, I wanted to live. I just didn't know how to call it that. If I wasn't forced to live, had to live, I felt I couldn't. The truth now seems more that I couldn't accept the power of my decision to live, but the power came nonetheless, and I wanted to live as fully as I could at whatever level I could at any given time. My meaning perspectives kept me from seeing and feeling it that way, indeed, it has come fully to me just as I write this. The moment I stopped wanting to die and planning on dying, I wanted to live, no matter how hard or painfully. I wanted it, no matter how much I resented it or for how long I resented it; I wanted to live.<sup>151</sup>

## ***The nature of time, resolutions, and the story we tell ourselves—December 31, 2011***

As I face this next section, I hesitate about what I feel will be worth writing. Right now, in talking with Silvia, I look at the way we divide time. These divisions into years do many positive things as a record, as a historic structure, but it does more than that. It gives us a specific time where we all can look and tell ourselves and each other that tomorrow doesn't have to be yesterday. We don't celebrate a re-dating for historic purposes or contractual purpose, or tax purposes. We say Happy New Year with the emphasis on the new. It's a new year, and in that newness, we hope and believe that we can make things new. That's what it says. We can do so, and that's what all this writing is about, the newness we can make and become every day.

However, we can choose to make this newness into an attempt at domination of our ego over our self through what we call resolutions. Such resolutions tend to work like weight losing diets. We force an arbitrary goal on ourselves, declare that we have to do this resolution or suffer some unspoken consequence. We even do it for a while, but generally it falls away. These resolutions feel like deprivation and coercion, and our self resists the force, even our identity and ego resists that force because we don't realize how deeply committed we can feel to a way of acting and seeming to ourselves and the world. In the end, because we feel them arbitrary, they fall quietly away. Some weight is dropped and then regained. A few cigarettes go un-smoked, but the light up irresistibly beckons again at some point and so on. The main effect of the resolution into loss of resolution comes in our trusting ourselves just a little less. We tell ourselves we will accomplish some goal or another, and our ego answers: "Sure, just like that last time." Resolutions come to us and sound and feel like demands. If we want to find the new, create the new, we might do better through the idea of choice rather than the demand for change. That's also what this writing is about.

We are the story we tell ourselves, and we can retell our stories in such a way that we become inevitably the hero of our tale. At the very moment we make the choice of retelling our story to make something new from the story of our lives, we have become the hero. We have taken our past and make of it a tool to make a better present and future by creating balance and movement through choices. These choices bring us back to our search for the becoming self, for an identity that opens us to the joys of the moment and the possibilities for the future. These choices may need to come incrementally as have mine, but when they come, we know our heroic selves. Whatever choices we have made in our past, no matter how much those choices did us and even others harm, they have become part of the hero's journey not a record of our failure as human beings.

Charles Dickens opens *David Copperfield* with this: "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show." Interestingly, the very act of writing or penning in the voice of the times, in these words, David, or Charles himself, becomes that hero. When we look back and take stock of what we have lived, we can tell our stories to make us a hero. That heroism comes in the very act of finding or making meaning out of the past, by finding or making meaning in the present, and out of the present which carries us into the future. We can make our sufferings and supposed failures as

well as our joys and successes all part of the hero's journey and the hero's tale. I am no different than David and Charles as I enter this next section.

## ***On the hero's journey as our story—January 2, 2012***

We are not lost. We are never lost. In writing this section, I began to wonder about the possibility that the search for the becoming self could imply to some that any of us exists in a lost state because they aren't searching or don't feel that search goes well. We are never lost. As I think back to my suicidal impulse and many years of desperate struggles with depression and nearly endless negative ideation, I see that I was never lost no matter how I chose to feel or to think about myself and life. My path and destination toward the becoming self lived within me always, and every time I reached for it, there it was. The process often came very hard and very painfully, but it came. So long as I continued to aspire to something slightly beyond my limits of belief, I continued on my journey. I was not lost. I write that for the first time. I think that for the first time. I feel that for the first time. Even when I had no real sense of direction or purpose or meaning, direction, purpose and meaning always existed. The spiritual poem and song *Amazing Grace* sounds that very idea: "I once was lost, but now am found." As a spiritual, it does so in a formally religious context, but we can read it in a more secular context as well.

This hero's journey takes the speaker through much pain and sorrow all of which becomes transformed by "grace." The nature of this grace in the poem stems from a direct intervention of the divine. Suffering takes on beauty and liberation even as we can see our suffering as meaningful and direction filled. The speaker of the poem never moves a step physically. She doesn't travel to distant realms to achieve her becoming found. She finds it within herself. She sees that as finding the divine within herself. We can also see it as finding the essential power of the becoming self within us. No matter how long it takes and what terrifyingly bad choices we have made or will make, our becoming self remains healthy and whole. In that sense, we remain also healthy and whole because no matter how distracted life has made us in one sense, we are our becoming self, our defiant human spirit, our whole being always. No matter how much material identity we build and ego we invest in that material identity, the having and necrophily mode of living, our self, our being, our destination always lives within us. That's how we survive the un-survivable and recover from the unrecoverable. The self within always embodies the truth of our essential value as a whole being, and that whole being can attain some measure of that wholeness consciously and live with it as the core of everyday life. In that way, everyday life stops feeling quite so everyday. The everyday becomes the unique, and the "Yes" we speak to life becomes more and more natural. The wonder in every moment we live, the wonder in every encounter in the I/Thou fashion we create, brings a joyful momentum to our living with ourselves and in our living with all the others in our shared world.

We are not lost because our human nature offers us incredible levels of resiliency of all kinds. When we find within us that which does not fear, as does the speaker of the *Amazing Grace* poem, we find that our resiliency in our sense of self in community offers far more of what we want from life than the dominator mode of living expressed through conformity. Although I would not have believed it for many, many years of denying myself unconditional positive regard, we can find a connection to the becoming self, so we feel we are becoming and have been part of that becoming all our lives even when we were unaware of that connection. When we feel lost, we feel fear, the fear of the unknown. When we fear the unknown, as we discussed earlier, we do not fear the unknown, we fear what we put into the unknown. We make the



unknown the personification of what we fear in ourselves, our essential inadequacy and inability to deal with what may happen to us. It's the child's boogeyman. The less we offer ourselves unconditional positive regard, the more we fear.

I spent many, many years of my life endlessly afraid and endlessly sick and miserable because of it. I felt lost then, and until I chose to leave suicide behind as the answer to my fears, I stayed lost. In wanting death, I denied my resiliency because I did not believe in myself or my life as worthy of living. It hurts deeply to feel alive and unworthy of life itself. That really feels like the end and depth of lost.

But now I am found.

## ***On a long day's journey—into life—January 3, 2012***

Getting found, in my case, took many, many years. At the very beginning, it also took a single instant of waking to find myself having chosen not to kill myself. I said "No" to suicide and felt some very real regret. It took a long time before I came to understand that I wanted to speak the "Yes" to life, but it came. Most of the voices I have referred to in this writing came to me much later in my life. Even the deceptively simple phrase "How do you do a don't" had to come to me on my own before I heard them from another source. I suffered from the deadening "No" and I suffered from the inchoate "Yes." For longer than I care to count, I endlessly acted against my endless fears and sometimes sheer terror of life by acting as if I wanted to enter life. Struggle served as the constant companion and *leitmotif* to a life that continued but always felt out of tune. Still I acted. I did something active in the world. Before I met Frankl through his work, I chose what I would do and did it. Depression wove itself into the fabric of the everyday, and I fought and struggled with it as if it had a life of its own. As if it existed as its own entity rather than forming a part of my whole being.

At some point, I moved my actions toward caring for others. I could not find a way to care for myself outside of acting as if I cared about myself. But I could do more for others. I began to act toward others as I wished others had acted toward me and would do so in the present. I had not heard of "unconditional positive regard" as a phrase, but I could feel compassion. I couldn't feel it toward myself. My self-hatred continued, but I could act toward others in a caring way.<sup>152</sup> Oddly, in those acts of kindness toward others, I made my attitude toward myself more tenable, and I continued in what I see and feel now as a search. At the time, I saw it not as search but ineptitude, simple and stupid stumbling and stammering. As Eugene O'Neill wrote in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, "Stammering is the native eloquence of us fog people." As a fog person, who produced his own fog, I could not see that I engaged in a quest of aspiration and in my search for the becoming self.

This writing serves as a product of that quest and search. As time went on, and I found the helpful voices of many others to whom I have referred here and many who get no direct reference, and all that helped to clarify the process in which I engaged and helped in how I could deal with the inner tensions of my life. When I heard Frankl tell me I could choose my response, my attitude toward whatever happened to me, I realized that I didn't need to struggle with depression. I could quietly accept its presence and choose not to dance when depression called the tune. The endless struggle ended in this choice, brightening and lightening every day. Frankl also told me that meaning comes in every moment, and a greater sense of meaning comes in retrospect.

In retrospect, I see everything that I experienced as meaningful. All of that has brought me to now. I once wrote a very short poem:

Our entire life  
Is a conspiracy  
To bring us  
Into this moment in time

In 2011, I wrote the following after a remarkable overnight experience and revelation.

In this moment of my assuming my 64<sup>th</sup> year, I find that another gift has come to me that I would scarce have credited a very short time before. In fact, I never did. As you know, I have long taught in a way that I hoped would offer people a chance to find the transformative within them. Once they could see that they unconsciously held some meaning perspective which restricted their vision of self and the world, they would find liberation and a new way of perceiving self and life. This new perception offers not so much change of self but an opening of choices to self in a way that renews life and the world. Sometime in February and into the eternal Now, I have gone through such a transformative moment. It came softly in the sleepless night and left me with a newness of self that allowed me to transcend something that had weighed me down for all of my remembered life. Without a more intimate detail of specifics, I found that I accepted some essential part of my being, my self, my essential nature, that I had always rejected and kept locked away: repressed, oppressed, dominated. This quality of self actually informed much if not all of the best of me, but I didn't allow it into consciousness out of some deep fear. Now that fear has gone. I am free, transcendent of the weight of that entombing meaning perspective and all the endless tension and suffering that came out of it. It's only been a month or so, but in that time, for the first time in my remembered life, I don't feel any depression inside me, not even the slightest tidal pull. I remember the feeling of its being there, the endless and tireless depression that so influenced every moment of my life, even after I learned how to keep it in balance most of the time. Now that it's gone, I feel wonderful and free. At the same time, I do not feel changed at all. I have simply become who I was all along. It has made my love for Silvia and Gavin sweeter, clearer, and more intense but with even less of a sense of possession. When I achieve a greater sense of being, I transform most of my need to possess anything or anyone into acceptance and a greater sense of the I/Thou of Martin Buber. It has intensified my love and care for all others from the closest friend to the newest student.

All this is the gift of life that life has brought me. And it only took sixty-four years to find it.

What a bargain.

## ***On the dimensionality of knowing and searching—January 4, 2012***

As we can read in these thoughts, my entire life has served, as does any life, as an indispensable part of my search for the becoming self seen in the retrospect of meaning and how I choose to tell this story. At any given point I might not have seen or felt the meaning of the moment of the experience, but looking back, the pattern seems quite clear. This may happen because when we achieve more and more conscious perspectives about our lives, we can see the experiences of life in more and more dimensions. In such a consideration, it might serve us well to remember things happen, reality exists on more than one level or dimension.

The life of a fly demands the fly see and experience the world dimensionally in a way that serves and benefits the fly. That doesn't make the fly's dimensional view of reality less valid in its way than our human dimensional view or perspective. However, neither the fly nor I can see from the perspective of the other without a conscious awareness of multiple levels of dimensional reality. Through some forms of study, we can see if not experience directly some of the ways in which a fly experiences the world. The fly may only experience our dimensionality in its own terms. I may impinge on that dimensional reality by trying to swat the fly and end its life, but even at that critical moment, the fly only knows its own sense of my movement toward it not the full dimensionality of my being. Indeed, if we made up a fly fantasy, we might have two flies debate whether the deadly force of the movement means that a movement god really exists or deadly movement happens randomly in a world that only exists by chance.

Although I cannot know the universe of a fly or the consciousness of a fly, I believe that the fly does not conceive of meaning in its unique dimensionality while I can form such meaning as I do as an inherent part of my human nature as we saw with the child with the toy of too many pieces. That child's perception of the chaotic nature of the toy and its pieces stemmed from a limitation of the child's perception of the dimensionality of that toy. Once the child works with the toy for a while and fully experiences various aspects of that toy, the child's dimensional thinking may well expand to include the forms the toy can assume not immediately apparent when at the pieces spilled on the ground. When the child has a chance to make choices and discoveries without external judgment, the child may form a conscious perspective about the manipulation of the pieces, the toy, and being able to feel a sense of making or finding meaning in the apparent chaos of the world. That would mean a growth also in the dimensionality with which the child can see the world. When some dominating restriction interferes with the child's ability to discover, "Do it this way, the right way," it may well produce a meaning perspective about limitations of discovery and limits the dimensionality with which the child sees the world. In that way, we can see meaning perspectives as limitations in our dimensional experience and thus our dimensional thinking.<sup>153</sup>

We can understand my life-long rejection of some essential quality of my becoming self may well have stemmed from meaning perspective or perspectives and a resulting limitation in a dimensional apprehension of my becoming self. We can hate ourselves because we cannot see ourselves fully and also fear doing so.<sup>154</sup>

## ***The nature and question of identity—January 5, 2012***

Very often, our identities form from and around limited dimensions drawn from our meaning perspectives and the habits of mind we develop from those perspectives. We might also consider that any identity, no matter how negative or even self-destructive, feels better than no identity at all. Even in the darkness of our identity inflicted night, even my suicide centered identity we find comfort in that our identity persists and feels real.

The nature and question of identity and how it relates to our becoming self and our whole being deserves our profound and repeated attention and interest. Once again, it also does us good to think about the wholeness of our being. The examination of our being into parts does not signify a separation into separate parts in that same way examining and treating an infection of the lung means that the lung exists in an independent life from the body. In fact, many people consider the treatment of one part of the physical body as a separate entity from the rest serves as an error which can produce, and often does produce, very unwanted effects. Reductionism works when we need to examine components of a system to understand that component and that system more fully. It fails when reductionism settles with knowing the parts and ignores returning to the system in its entirety, ignores the whole being. In a search for the becoming self, we really search for the whole becoming being to find a way to allow all the features of the single entity of the whole being to fulfill its own purposes and thereby fulfill the purposes of the whole as well. Indeed, that microcosm of the becoming self, identity, and ego can serve as a reflection of the macrocosm of our whole being in general. Every entity exists in its place for its own reasons, and these entities also serve in a larger structure, thereby creating a dynamic ecology of being and becoming in the microcosm and the macrocosm in balance.

In a world that can appear chaotic and formless, we can feel ourselves threatened by the nothingness of that chaos. When nothing follows some specific form, we, as lovers of form and makers of form, can feel a lack of control which we can feel threatens our essential existence in the world. The becoming self relates to some other standard of being rather than the material, but as whole beings, we need to live in connection and interaction with the material world—dimensions within dimensions. If that world feels chaotic we will seek to find something in our being that makes for another kind of stability and balance. Our identity means to serve that purpose. Our identity allows us to feel that we "be" in the world. We offer ourselves some stability, something definite and real that we can hold on to, a benchmark for our psychological, intellectual, and emotional existence in the external and material world.

During our early youth, many of us find stability in our homes with our caregivers and other adult authority figures. They seem to show us a world that takes on a form and a stability that we feel we need, and in our finding it from them, we need less from ourselves. As we age, we find that these figures offer us less and less of the quality and quantity of the stability and form we need within ourselves. At that point, we work to build an identity for ourselves. We do so because we feel a desperate need for that identity to operate in the world and accomplish many if not all of the most necessary functions we have as social beings.

In our selves, even if we don't exactly put language to it, we need a sense of being someone recognized, accepted, and valued by others. We want and need a sense of family, friendship, and community, and we want to feel that what we do and what we are shows some quality of meaning and form to a small or large material world. We want unconditional positive regard, and to feel such regard really means something to us. We want to feel that regard directed to our very identifiable "I" identity.

## ***The exploitation of needs and vulnerability—January 6, 2012***

These primal needs that come with living in the material world can do wonderful things for us and those around us. They also make us vulnerable.<sup>155</sup> The dominator model exploits our vulnerability as it often exploits whatever it can. We someone seeks domination, they do so by working on some weakness perceived by that dominator in others. The most obvious and immediate form of such exploitation comes in a violent coercion which produces fear. We all experience that from childhood on. That in itself can make for a very oppressive and exploitive use of our identity vulnerability, but it has its limits.<sup>156</sup> As we have experienced in many ways, rebellion may erupt among the oppressed. It takes constant vigilance on the part of the dominating oppressor so the oppressed have no opportunity to fight back, to rise against the oppression and the oppressor.

The dominator model can also exploit our identity needs and vulnerability by causing us to voluntarily surrender our autonomy and possible individuation in exchange for gaining that which our identity desires. It constructs a seemingly voluntary exchange in which we give up our autonomy, and we look to the dominator to supply all our identity needs. This happens in such a way as to cause us to believe that we find a kind of liberation in the exchange, in our submission. This illusory relationship serves as an essential structure of conformity.<sup>157</sup>

When any form of military or paramilitary group, from governmental forces to rebel and terrorists forces, recruits others to surrender their autonomy, they offer a very powerful exchange program. In exchange for autonomy, a non-material, insubstantial, and questionable idea at that, that organization offers a full blown identity complete with all the material and substantial elements we feel we need.

When we put on the uniform and obey the rules, we feel regard in this situation but only and absolutely conditionally. We find ourselves recognized, accepted, and valued by the organization and the individuals within it. That provides us with friendship, family, and community. As a primary part of the group we have joined, we find meaning, a cause which represents the greater good and a loyalty to the group that also provides us with a sense of meaning and certainty of personal and group value. This identity attracts and absorbs individuals to such a degree they paradoxically and willingly give up their lives to this group and for this identity.

## ***Identity and dependency—January 7, 2012***

As extreme as this last sounds, many of us threaten our personal welfare and our lives every day to maintain our identity which we feel we possess and which possesses us in return. We can recall my student who cheated on her diet for diabetes. Many of us know others who suffer the same paradox of care. People can identify themselves with their condition: "I have (possess) diabetes." They can also identify themselves with something contrary to the first identification; "I love (possess) fried foods and candy." People can maintain such dissonant beliefs and feelings because they identify with both these elements of condition and choice as integral parts of their identity. They feel they must hold on to their identity in order to live at all (Please fill in the blanks): "It's \_\_\_\_\_ to die for," or "I couldn't live if I didn't have \_\_\_\_\_." In that they feel they have these contradictory elements within the identity they have, they feel powerfully that they can't surrender or lose either of them no matter how much cognitive dissonance they produce. They may not consciously know Fromm's question, "I you are what you have, and you lose what you have, who are you?" but they act as if they do. Some of us feel we are what we have, and we hold on to what we have for dear life—even if it kills us.

Most if not all dependencies of every kind contain these paradoxical elements of identity. Once we feel a dependency, we also feel we have all the elements we wish for our identity no matter how detrimental these elements are to our wellbeing, even to the becoming whole being itself. In the threat we can pose to ourselves through our identity pursuits, we threaten our relationship with our becoming self as we threaten our physical being as well. For many, the physical threat looms immediately in terms of life and death, but for many others, such a threat remains far off, abstract, and ignorable. When we can satisfy our identity needs of the present, meaning perspectives about we need to live, we give up choices we could make in the future. So long as we can continue to have these material need fulfillments, we forget that we can't take them with us. We forget that we do not possess them at all. We can only borrow anything material, and one of our identity needs we feel may well come in being able to forget about the reality of the ephemeral nature of material life, to be distracted by what the world has to offer.<sup>158</sup> In that way, we make the Mephistophelian bargain; we violate the ends principle within ourselves. We make our being a means to end of our having, and in the end, we lose it all.



## ***The media and the becoming self—January 8, 2012***

Our identity and dominator bargain against our becoming self enters our lives powerfully and nearly irresistibly through the media generally and advertising specifically.<sup>159</sup> We can also find the tool of both in our popular culture. If the media chose to serve our ends, the media could provide us with life and self enhancing ideas and images, but it rarely does so. If it found its purpose in our well-*being*, we might experience ways of finding the best in our whole being and in our becoming self in some part through the media. Media and advertising finds its purpose in our well-*having*, in our confusing material gain with our gain as whole beings in ourselves and in an authentic community relationship with others. In that way, it has to seek to dominate us, get us to conform to its standards of living which function as standards for consumption. It inherently works as part of the having and consuming meaning perspective which exists in direct opposition to our being and becoming conscious perspective and against our becoming self. Advertising by its very nature never carries with it any real sense of unconditional positive regard. It may appear to do so, and work quite diligently to seem as if it speaks in such a way, but such regard could never serve its commercial and economic purposes. Advertising and what it provides needs to make us want it and its regard, which it will mask, but will always come to us as essentially and completely conditional and contingent on how much we participate in the consuming system it represents and serves.<sup>160</sup>

It works in a subtle way for a number of reasons, primarily because we come to these entities as seeming volunteers and very open to every level of message contained therein. As volunteers, we open ourselves freely and easily to the experiences and messages provided by these entities in a way that probably takes us back to our early and very trusting years of life. The media and advertising use all of the vulnerabilities and needs we have felt since our very beginnings as whole beings. They exploit these essential human qualities thus use them in ways that work to manipulate us into surrendering our individuation, into surrendering our right to the ends principle, and in that way, we seemingly volunteer to become the means to the advertising system's dominator ends. Truly, we engage in surrender and submission.

***Saving ourselves from rejection—at a cost—January 9, 2012***

Paradoxically, we lose our individuating self, our possibility of giving and receiving unconditional positive regard, compassion, forgiveness, and realize the nature of the I/Thou we experience in acceptance, in order to save ourselves from rejection.

## ***The business, dominator model and our whole being—January 10, 2012***

The loss of our individuating self and our relationship to the unconditional comes from the essential nature of the business model which the media and advertising serve. It works as an I/It model in which we must serve as a means to the dominator structure of the media and advertising. Their ends come in what we all familiarly now call "the bottom line," the profit levels they receive for their efforts and exploitation.<sup>161</sup> They achieve that end by turning us into their means by providing what seems like entertainment and information geared to making us into their willing means to that end by getting us to use our money and ourselves to completely support the system of the consumerist/conformity in which we live and on which the economy of the United States is based.<sup>162</sup> All that seeming entertainment and information confuses us about the nature and value of life by using our human and very precious needs and vulnerabilities, and it makes everything into a commodity including ourselves.<sup>163</sup> It works.

The child with the overly demanding toy works diligently to make form out of seeming chaos. The media and advertising does that for us. It presents the world in recognizable, in very accessible and comprehensible forms. That satisfies our need for form, but it does so at a price, something other than in an economic and monetary way. It leads to our almost complete surrender to the forms that the media and advertising control to gain our willingness to be used as a means to their end. When the media and advertising become our essential meaning perspective for the value of living and of life itself, the economic exchange between us and consumerist/conformity, therein created and supported, can take full force.

Such an exchange leaves us with very little. It can cost us our search for and connection with our becoming self. In that way, we give up our being for having, to gain a very little part of a very ephemeral material world the media presents to us.<sup>164</sup> Part of our essential self comes in our ability and the right to make form out of the world ourselves, and we have a need to do so in order to live fully and continue to live as aware, whole beings in relationship with our becoming self. When we voluntarily surrender our apprehending and making form out of our direct experiences in deference to the media model of life and reality, we surrender one absolutely necessary part of our working definition of the becoming self:

The self exists as a conscious, independent entity which perceives the world, takes information from that perception, learns from that information, makes choices based on that learning, and acts freely on those choices. The self experiences the results of those choices, accepts the responsibility of those choices and results, and the process begins again.

When the media model makes form out of the world for us, we give away our perceiving the world ourselves. When the information we receive comes from another source, a source that has its own ends in mind at all times, we learn what it wants us to learn, and we make choices based entirely on that learning. In that way, we surrender our freedom, a quality of life and living for which many have striven and fought for throughout human and personal history. Indeed, many of us rail madly against limitations on our freedom by some entity or another. We generally do so because of something we saw on television, heard on the radio, or read in some publication or another—our form makers. As hard as form making can seem at times because of the

responsibility that comes with the choices and results from our form making and acting in the world, without it, our lives are profoundly diminished.

No matter how stupid the media and advertising present themselves, they never act in any way but through strategies created in an intelligent and highly manipulative manner. The very fact that it can look so incredibly dumb works as its best and most intelligent strategy.

The invisibility of this strategy came to me very clearly one morning in the interview class. A student told me that she had done nothing the night before. I asked what "nothing" meant. If we live as form makers of the world, we always do something if we remain aware. We make form out of our experience whatever that may be. Perhaps one core and quite invisible strategy of the media model keeps us from our awareness. The student answered that she spent that night watching children's television shows with her niece. I thought that was kind, but she insisted it was "nothing." That came from her belief that watching all those programs wasted her time. It wasn't because they were for kids. They wasted her niece's time: "She's a kid. They didn't teach anything." She didn't learn anything. It was just dumb and stupid. No matter the appearance and feeling she had then or we have now, television always teaches. These public television programs taught the very young niece a number of things. They taught her to watch television and to watch it with pleasure. They taught the passivity of watching and receiving not doing and creating. Accepting what her aunt said about these shows, they taught her to accept dumb and stupid as acceptable entertainment and information. It also taught her that if she accepts dumb and stupid as acceptable, she must feel quite dumb and stupid about herself. The student agreed. After a night of these shows she said, she felt pretty stupid herself.

## ***On the commodification of ourselves—January 11, 2012***

When students talked about the nature of the media and advertising, they saw it first as an entertainment, as a diversion. Of course, when asked, they said that what it really did was make money by selling us those products that will save us from our inadequate selves. Once the students reflected on this economic relationship between information and entertainment and our consuming products to make money, they saw and expressed other possibilities in discussion.

The most obvious and least important thing that the media sell us comes in the form of products. More importantly, if not vitally, they sell us a way of thinking, a way of living, a way of acting, and way of perceiving ourselves and the world. The media in all its forms, entertainment, information, and advertising, pervade our lives and thus seduce us softly into accepting meaning perspectives about ourselves and the world. Once we accept these meaning perspectives, we will willingly continue to submit and serve as unquestioning volunteer participants in the creation of other's wealth and power while we pay for the privilege of doing so.<sup>165</sup> Whatever the economic costs we suffer from this arrangement, we suffer another cost we feel hidden from us, but showed in my students' attitude toward interviews. Participating in the media and advertising fed my students' fears about themselves. It fostered feelings inside them that cause them to feel essentially defective, essentially flawed and inadequate, undeserving of the unconditional. As the expression would have it, when they went to an interview to sell themselves, they felt they had precious little to sell.<sup>166</sup>

My students felt they had become a product, a commodity which was rather a drug on the market—a dime a dozen, and defective and flawed at that. They had become reified, an It in an I/It relationship with the media and with their economic and personal worlds. When we looked at the advertisements and programs they watched, we could see how their self-perception had become defective and flawed, inadequate and unacceptable on the open market. That's a bad enough self-perception/meaning perspective when you think about my students and our general approach to valuing ourselves in the workplace, but it absolutely hammers at our human vulnerabilities, our need to receive and to give the unconditional. This assault on our worldly identity and ego comes at a very high price. The more we concentrate on an identity that will please others, the more we surrender to the dominator, conformist meaning perspective for the world. Our ego becomes more and more defensive and thus more and more aggressive. All of this distances us from the becoming self we seek.

It occurs to me now that we all seek the becoming self even when we feel no conscious desire to do so. This recalls us to my sojourn in the cheapest cab in town. Those people I met sought the becoming self because they felt a hunger for some non-material or spiritual part of themselves wherein a peace with self and the world might lie. However, the world in which they lived never suggested the existence of something other than the material to feed hunger. As a result, they felt their need through material and dependency creating means. In that process they gained another form of identity which in some strange way satisfied their need for identity even as it made any real experience or pursuit of the non-material, spiritual part of themselves nearly impossible. They found a very tangible identity, but in exchange, they lost their connection with the unconditional.

The media, advertising and the popular culture break our connection with the unconditional as well in much the same way. They create identity and dependency, too. They tell us our human needs can only be feed through material consumption.

## ***On making our human needs into consumerist material needs—January 12, 2012***

Our becoming self manifests the "Yes" of the unconditional—unconditional positive regard, compassion, forgiveness, and acceptance. Our becoming self speaks and enacts the "Yes" of the unconditional. Within ourselves and toward others, when we find our connection with the becoming self, we find the aspiration toward unconditional positive regard, compassion, forgiveness, and acceptance. The media, advertising, and the popular culture recognize these essential values but only to deny them to us through manipulation, cynicism, fear, and subversion. The meaninglessness of self and being, of life itself, has even become part of our academic discourse.<sup>167</sup> They speak the "No" to what life and the becoming self have to offer. The less they feel they can participate directly in such life and becoming, the more they will work to keep their needs endlessly fed but will remain always unsatisfiable, insatiable. They remind me very deeply of the people I met in the cheapest cab in town. They just drive better cars.

We might remember, thus forgo the far too expensive luxury of condemnation and blame, that those individuals who perpetrate these distortions of life live inside the dominator model. They feel the sting of the profound fear of scarcity that forms part of the dominator model. They live inside the world they create and the meaning perspectives that motivate that world and perpetuate that world. They undoubtedly need more liberation than those who just try to navigate through the sea of negative media, advertising, and popular culture. It lives inside of them, and it must contaminate them very deeply. If the unconditional is universal and absolute, these people also need our compassion. We do not wish to speak a "No" to their "No." Through becoming aware of what happens to us as we slog through the seemingly inescapable endlessness of the constant sales pitch, we can say "Yes" to what the being way of life suggests and what our becoming self offers us as whole beings and lovers of life.

We have been told by the endlessly friendly and helpful voices of the media model that they express unconditional positive regard for us, the only condition to this regard comes in our buying and using what they tell us will make us feel better about ourselves. When we follow their advice, we will really form part of the having world, the conformity of consuming for which these voices speak. These voices substitute buying and having for living and being. They substitute our basic needs for the unconditional and caring with buying and having. They tell us that the good life is a life of scarcity, and we better buy what we can while we can.

The media model continually sells us on the idea of our essentially defective being. Once we buy into that idea, we will feel endlessly dissatisfied with ourselves and everything about ourselves as instructed to feel by the media model. When we feel dissatisfied with ourselves because of who we are not and what we do not have, we feel endlessly deprived. Once we feel all of that, we buy what they tell us to buy to satisfy this sense of deprivation and palliate our painful dissatisfaction. We buy what we get told will satisfy our artificially created but now deeply felt needs. For some moments we feel better, maybe even a species of good.

It doesn't last. It can't last. If we didn't have any real need for the product in the first place to satisfy our real needs as whole beings, and the product only palliates our false needs at best, our

feeling of good can't last. It only exists during the consuming of the thing we hope will answer our needs. The having of it doesn't. It can't. It never will. Besides, the voices will tell us soon that the thing we bought has become passé, and no one who is anyone uses it any more. We need to buy the new improved version of our self before anyone can see we have fallen out of our delicately poised place in the dominator, consumerist, conformist, media promulgated model.



***On how media makes us feel worse and better about ourselves —conditionally—  
January 13, 2012***

The media model builds in us the same kind of relationship to the material as others feel toward dependency on substances of one kind or the other. It all comes to dependency on the material in one form or another and not a relationship with the becoming self or an individuating community of becoming selves. It tells us that our immaterial and very human needs become best answered by the material. We can have the unconditional, the inevitably friendly and caring voices tell us, but there's only one condition. We must correct the flaw, repair the defect, revise the unacceptable and the unconditional will be ours—conditionally.<sup>168</sup>

When we encounter ourselves in the media, on television or even the Internet, we find ourselves defective, diseased, and disordered. The voices we find there tell us this in a very concerned almost intimate way. They invite us to find friendship and companionship with them in some form or all forms of media-land and popular culture. If we make that choice, which we may not even notice, we may also isolate ourselves from others because we feel in a position to judge them. When we come to look at the mechanisms of the advertising and the programming, we will find a very strange symmetry, but one that works to make for a pattern of feeling that draw us into that form of reality, into that world which then dominates us, dominates our perceptions, or thinking, and our actions. It will endlessly tell us that we are defective in our bodies, our homes, in our minds, in our sexual lives, and simply an unacceptable product on a flooded market. However, the media model will also offer us images of others in far worse shape especially, as I understand it, in what the media is pleased to call "reality shows." We may also know these programs as "reality television," which comes as one of the more oxymoronic expressions we can find.<sup>169</sup> At least, the television voices tell us, we don't live in the truly incompetent, outlier reality of the people in the programming presented.<sup>170</sup>

For all our deficits as human beings, the programmers tell us, at least we can feel humorous contempt for the people who horde, the people who get arrested, the people who fight with each other, for the people who are not us. In that this comes to us as entertainment, we must feel superior to the people we see in the media otherwise they wouldn't amuse us. This may even hold true for the celebrities we see in the same artificial environment given that people so despise them when they appear in the gossip newspapers, magazines, and television shows which expose all their many problems and disasters. It's a neat trick. At the same time the media exploits our human and identity vulnerabilities, it assuages the fears and trepidations of our ego by giving us sacrificial victims of the consumerist conformity it proposes and promulgates. The media doesn't need to use propaganda to promote itself. It is propaganda every moment of its intrusions into our lives and minds. It makes form out of the seeming chaos, or we might see the media model form as another type of chaos, and it seductively invites us into their reality, their world, their chaos.

This world exists in the media model, but when we get drawn into that world, that reality, we may well take on some if not all of its attributes. It sees a world without the moral sphere, without the ends principle, and nearly if not completely devoid of the I/Thou. Unconditional positive regard finds precious little or no space and couldn't in a material world based on

commerce in non-existent needs it creates, and makes the zero-sum game our norm. Assuming the environments we choose as a place to spend time and attention influence us, build meaning perspective within us, and offer us convenient forms of speech generally and small talk specifically, and cause us to see the world as presented, we might choose to ask ourselves what this form of entertainment and information does to us.

We can reduce it to a single question, simple on its surface, but the one we have discussed for this entire writing. What does the media model and reality do for us in our search for the becoming self, in our finding and exercising our individuation and autonomy?

***When the identity becomes the only life we can live*<sup>171</sup>—January 14, 2012**

Media inspires the creation of and belief in a consumerist, material identity as life itself, and the survival of life itself happens only through the survival of this artificially created and media maintained identity. Given that this identity almost totally identifies itself with the material and external world, it does all it can to ignore the intuitive impulse toward our becoming self. This identity seeks the endless distractions that the world has to offer, an endless consumption of that world and of its own life. Even as this identity becomes consumed by the dominator/conformist/media model of existence, this identity feels that it devours the other. The more powerless this identity becomes in creating its own internal integrity and authenticity based on its own ability to see reality and the world on its own terms, the more fragile power it feels through the identification of the things that this identity believes it has, it owns, it possesses.

What this identity feels it possesses, has, and owns the most fully is the identity itself. This identity has, possesses, owns itself as a thing as much or more than it has a car or a job or an exotic vacation or a home theater or a massively expensive wedding or any other latest-thing that a thing-driven world has to offer. This identity invests all of its way of life into this artificial existence, and this ego self-justifies that existence and defends that existence against all comers. That means this ego defends against any or all possibilities of this identity's making a new choice based on a critical moment, a moment of cognitive dissonance which makes very clear the falsity and fallacy of the meaning perspective that drives this chosen lifestyle in any or most of its parts. Oddly, it isn't any one specific material choice this identity makes that does the most harm. It is the essential choice of keeping up for its own sake, not with what was called "keeping up with the Jones's" sometime ago, that does the most harm. Keeping up with keeping up for its own sake, keeping up with keeping up, that makes all the rest of these lifestyle choices mandatory and increasingly harmful to that identity and to the whole being of which it is an integral part. The only permanent thing about a lifestyle comes in living automatically and irresistibly according to that media driven style and no longer a conscious perspective or choice about our own way of life. For "style" in that phrase we can read artificially, media created "meaning perspective." All the chasing after the material, the buying and discarding and buying and discarding over and over again, serves only as the ephemeral activity of the choice of living in a equally disposable lifestyle rather than making a real individuating choice about the life we choose to live.<sup>172</sup>

The more this identity lifestyle feels threatened, the more this ego will defend it. We discussed that in the stories of the ADHD students who identified with their label and the student who cheated on her Diabetes 2 diet and died. The more this identity feels threatened by an instructive reality, the more this ego says that it can't really think about change. It can't change. Change is too big. Change is too hard. It's what this ego says this identity can't do because this identity feels the loss of any part of its lifestyle will lead to the death of the entire lifestyle and thus to life itself. This identity and this ego fear their answer to Fromm's question about the nature of having: "If you are what you have, and you lose what you have, what are you?" This identity and this ego answer that question: "dead, extinguished, nonexistent, lost, chaotic." The media/advertising/dominator, conformist meaning perspective tells us there is no life beyond lifestyle, and any of us who consume the having meaning perspective and are consumed by that meaning perspective will believe that idea and fear.

## ***Death is dead—January 15, 2012***

When choices come to us as the result of a critical moment and the possibility of a new choice in our lives appears, we can fear that moment. The fear almost if not always rises out of a meaning perspective of identity defending itself against dissolution and a kind of death. Because these elements of identity define themselves so completely against the material and the dominator, they feel that if they don't maintain that materiality and superiority, that kind of power, it means the end. In their transfixed state, they do not sense the transformative and liberating possibilities of choice and becoming. We can feel compassion for this element of our being, and we can help that element of our being not through despising it and wishing its end but by our knowing there is no death or dissolution within our whole being and our becoming self. Transformation denies the very idea of death and dissolution. No matter what ashes we feel we might come to, we will rise out of them in transformation to reach into new choices and into new becoming. Even as the universe itself continues in its own creative state, we can also continue in our own creative state.

Eugene O'Neill, a man who testifies often and eloquently to the pain and confusions of life, wrote a play in which he seeks to find something transformative in his and our experience: *Lazarus Laughed*. In that play, Lazarus says the following: "Death is dead! Fear is no more! There is only life!" Lazarus had come to that transformative revelation because he experienced an actual resurrection through divine intervention. Such transformative moments can come to us with or without what we feel as an existent Divine. It can come to us because such an experience and thus belief forms an integral part of our lives and living. It forms in our beginning and becoming, our birth into life and living out our lives wherein we each undergo transformations that bring us from one state of consciousness and becoming into another state of consciousness and becoming. Each stage might seem as if the previous stage or stages die, but that never happens. There is no such death, no such dissolution. It is an illusion created by meaning perspectives and their illusory interpretation of life and the world.

Such an experience came to me just last year, and I attempted to sort it out for myself then and now in this writing.

It seems to me now, that I can't believe as much as I do in the inherent and essential value of every human life without having a belief in the Divine and in the survival of personal identity beyond material death. It occurs to me now that we have already survived such death or deaths within the material web of life and its connection to the eternal Divine and the eternal self.

I remember my past in a very fragmented way. This has not come to me through aging. I cannot remember remembering which rather makes it own tautology of validity in its own terms.

At some very early age, well before twenty and maybe before my teens, I thought about identity, my identity, and its survival. What a paradox. I felt deeply that death was preferable to the suffering I felt, and simultaneously, I wanted desperately for my identity to survive that very death. Did I feel some unspoken but intrinsic belief that some essential quality of identity would survive and find itself stripped of the nature of my suffering? Did I feel an instinctive or intuitive sense that my suffering was connected more with my life as one of having and what

would survive after death would emerge with my full sense of the being of my life? In any case, I lived in that inchoate paradox of immediate and liminal survival and wondered if any time in the future, I would have changed so much that the then current sense of my life would, to all intents and purposes, be dead in some very real way. In all the suffering of my daily life, I dreaded and feared the idea. All that suicidal ideation, as the phrase goes, and I still dreaded the illusory dissolution of that same contemplative self even as I wished its conclusion. I didn't want to be dead in one way and alive in another. This thought reoccurred many, many times, and it has come to visit me again.

This early and deeply painful and confused and depressive contemplation, our contemplation, my contemplation on the nature of a real material death and extinction and the illusory material pretense of life and continuity returns to me at sixty-four although it has never left me.

I was and am right. We die even as we live. I do not feel and think in the very way as I did as this person in memory. That person did die in the real sense he feared. Yet his fear was founded on his fear of losing the very thing he wanted to lose: endless, immediate, and crushing suffering with nothing compensatory but the hope of something after suffering, after death. It did come, the kind of death and release from that kind of suffering and turned to be the long process of dying and rebirthing out of which life, my life, can come and has come to be lived. Death happens all the time as we move more fully and inevitably toward living. Death comes when the detritus of our having self transforms and forms part of our being self, the self that the young and deeply pained and lonely me and the older and freer and loving me were and are the same self. He lives in me as I once lived in him in some sort of escape from space and time to make a connection in the eternity to which we all were and are bound. In that eternity, the selves, identities, egos, of all our desperate, disparate, and distanced times of life will find themselves as the one, the unity they have always been.

We are reincarnate in ourselves any number of times, too many to imagine and perhaps even want to imagine.

I feel such compassion for that young person and his pain, for the me I was and am. He and his pain are not alien to me even now, and I can understand that in all the scattered, shattered, and tangled memories I find, my first happy moment in memory came at twelve when he and I were drunk for the first time, and all that pain seemed so far away: life from the wrong end of the telescope. I no longer need a telescope, or want a telescope. Now, I immerse myself in life and living, in the joy of being. In that joy, all of the suffering manifestations of my earlier life find their place in the unity of my and our whole being.

It's not that life in the material world is an illusion. It is our response to it, how we think and feel about that world that constitutes the illusion. It is the having nature of the material world that is the illusion not the being nature in the same world.

### ***The life in transformation and transcendence—January 16, 2012***

I found in that prolonged and continuing critical moment of transformation a kind of transcendence. I experienced on many levels that we can speak the "Yes" to our becoming because the "Yes" brings us nothing to fear. Indeed, the "Yes" took me beyond unfounded fears into a clear sense of my becoming self, the self I had always been, and what that meant to my whole being. Paradoxically, I became what I had always been. What changed was my acceptance of my becoming self and whole being that kept me alive and living beyond the limits beyond any meaning perspectives. My becoming self and whole being informed and comforted me through all the painful years of my living. This becoming self and whole being had lived in me and motivated the best of me all my life. When the transformation came, I became a realization of who and what I was all along. Seeing it now, it happened like a kind of fairy tale. Even as I experienced this transformative and transcendent moment, I wondered what my realization would mean to Silvia. After nearly twenty years of living together, she might feel somewhat disoriented with my realization. Very soon, I found the glowing truth about her love. Silvia had always accepted me, and she continued to accept me. Actually, it was like beauty and the beast wherein she saw the beauty in me always, and all I had to do was discover that I was my own beauty as well. She simply felt happy that I could care more about myself than I had ever done. Silvia always lived the "Yes" with me, and at that point, I became more able to live out the "Yes" in myself more fully with her.

***On living in the affirmation, on living the "Yes" and the "No" that hurts—January 17, 2012***

The "Yes" lives in us from the very moment of our birth. The "No" we learn along the way.<sup>173</sup>

We enter the world fully open to participate fully in the most positive of exchanges. Our inner born drive reaches out to the "Yes" in life in spite of everything. We enter ready to engage in the I/Thou, in the mutuality of unconditional positive regard, compassion, forgiveness, and in that exquisite thread that binds these three, acceptance. As with life in the Garden, we enter the world with no inborn prejudice or meaning perspectives. As with the Garden, we will discover a rebirth of our whole being in the consciousness that will come to us in time. This will take us out of the empty paradise of unawareness and open us to the becoming being, the becoming self in which we find the beauty of our own continuing creation even as the universe undergoes its continuing creation. As great as that universe, we exist as no small or insignificant part of that universe in our remarkable expression of consciousness in what appears an unconscious universe. All that comes in the feeling and the speaking of the "Yes."

Our entry into the world places us into the dominator model where all the definitions of life and self find their predestination in the meaning perspectives of those into whose lives we are born. Out of a feeling love for us, out of a feeling of some higher cause, they use the dominator model as their device of education. They teach the model even as they learned the model to which they conform. They teach us the "No" to life in spite of everything.

The dominator's first powerful tool comes in endlessly watching. The dominator always sees. It sees through the interpretive meaning perspective of its own domination. The second tool comes in judgment, an easy shift into interpretation and diagnosis. The dominator uses the third tool to drive the fourth tool home. The dominator judges, and we are always wanting in the eyes of the dominator—always. Out of all this, the dominator wants us to learn fear and to internalize that fear, so we always feel the eyes of the dominator upon us. That internalized fear and the process behind it can become our primary meaning perspective that limits the scope and dimensionality of our perceptions and therefore our learning, thinking, and acting. We have internalized the "No."

All these realizations came throughout my life, and they began to come into focus even more with my interview students and me wanting to know, to make sense out of their fear of an interview, something that was about them, about their self. The question we asked, "If I feel afraid of an interview about my self, what's wrong with my self? Why am I afraid?" compelled a great deal of questioning and critical reflection.<sup>174</sup> In connection with this fear and the ever seeing dominator, a student said the following: "I know exactly what you mean. When I saw my mother give me The Look, I knew I was in trouble." I asked if she always knew why she got the look. She said that she couldn't remember the why of what happened, just the how of her mother's judgmental "Look." She also admitted, as did many other students, that they had a "Look" for their children. Some admitted that they had a look for themselves and their actions. "The Look" never speaks the becoming "Yes" only the dominator "No." Welcome to the fear, to having to learn what's wrong with us. That's why there's nothing wrong with us at all.

## ***The voices and resiliency within us—January 18, 2012***

The "Yes," our "Yes," is our essential impulse toward ourselves and the world. Layer after layer of the "No" gets piled on by all the authorities of our lives from parental figures, through school, and with our peers, friends or not. These layers continue to build through what we see as entertainment and information through the media. It gets layered on through conformity. Our material based identity and ego grow and change with each layer. They defend past choices and conduct that produced dissonances and deny such moments their critical quality. That can stop us from questioning the meaning perspectives that brought us to those choices and conduct and the "No" they spoke. Each layer deflects us from the core of the affirmative becoming self. Each succeeding layer may convince us that we are only the layers, that our life is only an accumulation of these meaningless manifestations of our material life.

All of the voices that spoke the "No" to us, the voices that exuded these layers, eventually and insidiously become our own voice. No matter how much these voices sound like our own voice, they are always external to our becoming self. They remain the Voices of Judgment that spoke the essential "No" to life in spite of everything, but they cannot eliminate our essential "Yes," our essential voice. We may feel and hear that all these voices come from ourselves as a single voice, a voice that keeps claiming that it represents reality, our personal as well as our public reality. That seemingly single voice also comments on the meaning of the world around us through a generally negative perspective, and it generally represses anything that speaks in a positive way, interred and interred over and over again. Our other voice, the Voice of the Self or the Voice of the Becoming Self still sounds within us and keeps us whole.

These Voices of Judgment made something like the interview a fear driven nightmare instead of a pleasure or at least a reasonable, doable task.<sup>175</sup> When my students spoke to themselves about the interview, negative answers came back asserting the reality of those answers: "Face the facts. You're a loser." The interviewer, they heard, would see through them to the essentially incompetent person beneath. Whether they looked into the mirror of mind or the mirror on the wall, the answer that came back to them spoke the "No." All of these "No's" came to feel nearly paralytic, and some students never even made it to some interviews when the "No" became completely overwhelming.

Remarkably, no matter how bad, how negative, how loud these Voices of Judgment became, no matter how painful my students reported their preparation for and performance in the interview, they had all gotten jobs, they had all worked and succeeded in the workplace to one degree or another. We asked, "From whence did that unstoppable resiliency come?"

It came from deep inside all those layers, and no matter how deep and even impenetrable those layers seem, our essential resiliency will make itself heard and felt. It comes to us as our true voice, the Voice of the Self, or the Voice of the Becoming self. This is the voice of what Viktor Frankl calls this the "defiant human spirit" throughout his work.



After all we've discussed by way of barriers to the becoming self, to living as fully as possible, we might wonder if too much stands in the way. According to Frankl and the power of the freedom to choose, nothing is too much. Our essential will to life, the essential health of our becoming self stays with us and continues to inform us no matter what choices we have made that didn't work for us and whatever else has happened. The Voice of Self speaks with that authority and that energy. It is our voice, and we can listen. We can hear. We can find our becoming self through that voice. That voice is our becoming self, and through that voice we can find our liberation and our individuation and autonomy. We can find and live as a whole being and continue our becoming as well.

There is, after all, nothing wrong with us. If that's the case—

What happens now  
You have you found out  
every negative thought and feeling  
you ever had about yourself  
*IS* unfounded, unfair, and untrue?

If you have any questions, suggestions, and gentle constructive comments, please feel free to write: [lrcsmr@hotmail.com](mailto:lrcsmr@hotmail.com).

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<sup>1</sup> The book, *A Perfect Mess: the Hidden Benefits of Disorder: how Crammed Closets, Cluttered Offices, and On-The-Fly Planning Make the World a Better Place* by Eric Abrahamson and David H. Freedman argues that to some degree, mess does make form, very usable and positive form.

<sup>2</sup> *cognitive dissonance* refers to moments where our encounters in the real world seem to prove something we believe unfounded in reality. That makes for an unbalance state of mind, an unease in how we feel, so we try to resolve it to regain the balance we want. We can do that by questioning our belief or by explaining away our direct experience to fit our belief.

<sup>3</sup> In rereading this, I just to note of the word "realization." The ending "ization" means an action or a process, the result of making or acting. Realization me we engage in seeing or making the real. Oddly, I come to a realization about the word "realization."

<sup>4</sup> Here we find a new narrative choice. In order to tell a story that happened to me, I switch from "we" to "I" as the narrational because it happened to me alone. In a way, it becomes a "we" story when I tell it to you. We have shared it.

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<sup>5</sup> I encountered this question in a program about education on ABC News (1993), *Common Miracles: The American Revolution in Learning*.

<sup>6</sup> *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, 1983: Logical-mathematical, Spatial, Linguistic, Bodily-kinesthetic, Musical, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal Naturalistic, Existential/spiritual

<sup>7</sup> I do not mean to imply or condone such competitions as parts of the learning process, but the analogy works as an illustration of the usual and prevailing system at hand.

<sup>8</sup> I found in my teaching to ask questions about personal conduct and attitudes indirectly by referring to abstract others served as a worthwhile habit. That allowed students, and anyone for that matter, to reflect on their answer freely without making, perhaps, unwanted admissions. It limited if not eliminated any sense of the confrontive. They could always use our discussion for some personal self-reflection if their spirit moved them to do so later on.

<sup>9</sup> All of the following developed as a dialogue, and through dialogue, we made many changes to what the book had to say but still held to the principle it maintained.

<sup>10</sup> The authors offer this observation. They ask us not to blame any caregiver for what that caregiver does or does not do. We can condemn their harmful acts, but we can still understand the caregiver as a person. All caregivers, they write, want to love their child fully, but many have never felt or even seen such a way of life, and they have no idea how to give unconditional positive regard to themselves let alone to their child or children. When you feel inner unhappiness, you unknowingly share that inner unhappiness with others.

<sup>11</sup> Allowing the children and others in our care to suffer from a consequence unnecessarily also feels like a deprivation of unconditional regard. When we can, we may well ameliorate the effects of mistaken (nice word and nice idea inside it) choices while still making the result of that choice a learning experience without a punishing lecture. When Gavin, the son in our care, forgot to bring his lunch to school, Silvia brought it to him. We explained conversationally what all that involved and what would have happened if we couldn't offer that support for some reason that did not include arbitrary withdrawal. He took that to heart and took care to remember in the future. He may not have always succeeded, but he always took responsibility for his actions even when we helped him out with the result. People who take responsibility for their actions, interestingly enough, have a much better chance to act freely.

<sup>12</sup> *Smart Love* rather brilliantly and simply advises us to look at things from the point of view of the child.

<sup>13</sup> We might also make note of the possessive use of language when speaking about those with whom we have a relationship: *my* son, *my* daughter, *my* wife, *my* husband and so on. People often introduce this other person first as that possession: "And this is my daughter." They might even forget to offer the name secondarily. When we possess something, when we own something, we feel we control that something. We feel we can do what we want to that thing. A possessive relationship turns the other person into thing we own, and we can treat that thing as we will. In frustration, people abuse the things they own in all kinds of ways, punishing children and others as well, which comes as part of that ownership, that possessiveness. We generally feel little or no compassion for the things we possess.

<sup>14</sup> Frederick Douglass in his autobiography writes about the same sort of phenomenon that occurred in the slave owner. No matter the original intention of a slave owner to remain humane toward the person the slave holder owned, the demands of ownership distorted the emotional self and the perceiving self of the slave owner. The role of master became the identity of the owner, and in that role, the owner acted destructively toward the being he/she owned. In doing that, the owner denied their shared humanity and thus his own full humanity as well.

<sup>15</sup> This phrase originated and has been developed by Riane Eisler in her book *The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future* (Harper Collins San Francisco, 1987) and other of her books along with other authors.

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<sup>16</sup> The word "unconscious" carries with it a good deal Freudian or psychological baggage. We often associate it with things we have repressed, buried thoughts and feelings or incidents about ourselves and our past which need prolonged treatment to uncover and expose to our conscious mind. Here we might better use a word such as "preconscious," something that suggests that the knowledge of this unconscious meaning perspective or thought is unrepressed and available to us if we know to look for it. Our immediate conduct, the choices we make about that conduct make for perfect markers for those unconscious or preconscious thoughts and feelings.

<sup>17</sup> Only through the stories told by women, Silvia most deeply, who generously shared their mothering experience could allow for such a description of breast feeding. Otherwise, what do I know?

<sup>18</sup> We might reflect on the words "right" and "wrong." They do not serve a moral purpose here. On this simple level of clarifying discussion, right means that our action worked, wrong that it didn't. In learning and creating, things don't work out all the time. That's the nature of the process. Wrong does not necessarily mean bad. That's why intention has to do with how we deal with either right or wrong. *Smart Love* asserts that it will always serve us and those entrusted to us to assume a good intention whatever the outcome.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Kane, in his book, *Through the Moral Maze*, suggests we take our imperative for choosing how to act from the ideas of Immanuel Kant. Kane calls this the "ends principle": treat all other as ends in themselves and never means to our or anyone else's end. We can also extend this to something we can do for others for their own good without consulting them if they think it's their own good, or doing something for an unspoken higher cause or ideal which turns others into means to that end.

<sup>20</sup> I worked with a group of convicted misdemeanor offenders in a life skills diversion program. Part of the program caused us to talk about these very issues. In one class, almost all of the participants declared unequivocally that we had to use physical punishment to make children learn how to behave. They knew because that's how they learned right from wrong (the irony of their claim escaped everyone at the time). I responded by telling them they had given me a great idea. Instead of my working twelve hours with participants, I would charge them the fee, hit them two or three times with a two by four, depending on the severity of the misdemeanor, tell them not to do that again, and send them home. Those participants told me in no uncertain terms how negatively they would feel about that, and the point was soon made.

<sup>21</sup> The extremely high recidivism rate in prisons in the United States would stand as a testament to punishment and fear as failed in teaching much of anything aside from more violence and resentment.

<sup>22</sup> The idea of unconditional positive regard offers us a daunting challenge to fulfill its promise. Under no condition whatsoever do we withdraw our regard. Whatever that person chooses to do, no matter how much we disagree, our unconditional regard stays in place. Given that admonition, we want to think about how we make our disagreement clear and offer real guidance without any withdrawal of regard—not an easy trick, but doable. It's like hating the sin and loving the sinner except that hatred even of the sin will feel like a withdrawal of regard. We can disagree with a choice the person has made, point out why, show the consequences, and maintain an open and unconditional positive regard for the other person. It takes practice, but it can be done. We just have to learn it for the first time and practice it. We might begin such a practice with ourselves. In the end, we might find more natural than not.

<sup>23</sup> The question of guilt may arise here. The need to escape punishment and rejection trump the reflective teaching power of guilt. Guilt means to teach us. Fear prevents such teaching.

<sup>24</sup> Given the lives of many students, they also thought that is what the American justice system means to do. It punishes people so they will feel the threat of such punishment and will not repeat their offences. Others will see the power of that punishment and feel fear, thus deterring them from some offence by fear of such a punishment. Given levels

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of first time offences and recidivism, that dominator meaning perspective appeared then and appears now badly flawed.

<sup>25</sup> At the end of George Orwell's utopian novel *1984* the protagonist doesn't simply surrender to domination and its symbol, Winston Smith embodies that in the following "But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother."

<sup>26</sup> That has served as a cliché of our time, and it often meant travel, drugs, and excesses of many kinds. It inevitably sent people outward to seek someone else's answer which, in a way re-substantiates the idea of the dominator model. If we can't find our self within our own world, we seek that self and some unconditional positive regard for that self from some other world that will allow us to subordinate in a way we feel brings us out of the insubordination against which we rebel. Subordination is, after all, subordination. None of that thrashing about guarantees anything by way of individuation and autonomy. Besides, we could think that with the endless number of self-storage locations in the United States, we should encounter our self tucked away somewhere in there.

<sup>27</sup> We can call into question the idea that the essential family must function in the dominator model based on the dominator meaning perspective. An essential family does not definably function through domination. Domination free families exist and base themselves on unconditional positive regard. However, when we discuss rebellion, such families do not come up. If a family structure works without domination, the need for rebellion ceases to exist. We can find disagreements in such a family, even rather nosily at times, and those differences of opinion can work themselves out in equitable ways. Whenever no one element of a family dominates in every situation, serves as the arbiter and the final, decisive word in all decisions, the need for rebellion ceases to exist. Such a family structure remains open to the diversity of its members, and accepts the power to contribute and even lead that each member of a family inherently feels and expresses.

<sup>28</sup> One student of mine was hoping for medical care from the disability system. He said that if that didn't happen because he was refused, he would execute a plan he had for going through the exercise of robbing a bank. He would go through the motions of a note and all that, but he would make sure no one felt at risk. He would wait quietly for the police to come and get him. He even said that he would bring enough donuts for the officers to enjoy a snack while they went through their motions of arrest as he went through his motions of theft before they took him away. This too is rebellion by way of subversion.

<sup>29</sup> The practice of state terrorism be it by crucifixion, torture, or indiscriminate bombing means to nullify the ability of the individual to make such a statement. Jesus surrenders to the cross as rebellion and subversion even as suicide bombers blow themselves to pieces as a form of rebellion and subversion. That's why Orwell constructs Room 101 in *1984*. In that room the object of torture will face "the worst thing in the world" for that individual, so the subversion and rebellion cease.

<sup>30</sup> Viktor Frankl suggested that the Statue of Liberty on the East coasts should find balance on the West coast with a Statue of Responsibility.

<sup>31</sup> Stanley Milgram tells us that the agentic person comes to see her/himself as an instrument to an authority and is fully obedient to that authority.

<sup>32</sup> Gavin, our son, refused to talk about any subject he learned at school or hear any additional information about such subjects. He said that if he learned something that was not what the test wanted as an answer, he would do badly on the test no matter what he knew or how valid his thoughts and ideas were.

<sup>33</sup> Children learn that form of attention from our, often unwitting, conduct as parental figures. In my case, when I first spent time alone with Gavin, I found it generally pleasant because he entertained himself very well even in his pre-language stage of development. He would play happily for some time, and I would busy myself with something else even while keeping him in sound and sight. At some point he would make a noise or do something that displeased me for whatever reasons, and I went to him to express my displeasure. He would look confused at such times, and I felt the need to

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think about what happened between us. I knew I was teaching him at such moments, and I needed to question the nature and content of that teaching. It became clear that from Gavin's point of view, when he thought things went well, and I said nothing, he got little if any attention. When he did something I did not feel comfortable with, he got my attention even if it came at a cost. I changed my attitude and my choice to make sure I expressed positive attention and regard for him at all times when such attention would feel positive and meaningful. Many students expressed the lack of such positive attention in terms of what they had seen or experienced in their lives.

<sup>34</sup> We could see this phrase as better expressing a more realistic need by calling it the "*Locus of balance*."

<sup>35</sup> No one suggested I could run people over if I had a mind. Students recognized that certain vehicular conduct would take me out of the category of "traffic tickets." Their recognition of that fact also rather made the point about actions being controlled through threat and fear.

<sup>36</sup> As it happened in our classes, this begins a tangential discussion which relates deeply to the purpose of the class and this writing. Why did my students and others in general, feel fear when they went to an interview, an occasion they could feel was an opportunity to celebrate their professional and personal selves?

<sup>37</sup> I use the phrase "negatively critical" to preserve the use of the word critical or criticism as a possibly positive expression. My students, as well as most people, respond to the words "critical" and "criticism" as if they have only negative manifestations. As a critic of a work, I can offer my criticism of that work in a completely positive light. Mostly, however, we all forget that. When we criticize, we make a judgment of the merits of something or someone else. What did my students and others (including me) think of their professional and personal merits, I wondered, to respond to that word in that way?

<sup>38</sup> There may be some parental figures who act out of some sort of neurological disorder, but that act comes from the disorder not the person. They may also act out of the damage done to them which may trace back multiple generations. As I write here, I seek to keep otherness out of the discussion and keep compassion in. This idea also comes from *Smart Love* which seeks to liberate us from negative responses to positive knowledge.

<sup>39</sup> We have discussed the learned aspect of turning into those who cared for us. The meaning perspective discussion includes all parental figures at the moment of intention turning into action.

<sup>40</sup> Most people understand this as a biblical phrase which gives it more relevance for many. It doesn't directly. Samuel Butler used it in 1662. It takes its basis from the biblical phrase found in *Proverbs 13:24*: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chastened him betimes."

<sup>41</sup> This does not go to say the some meaning perspectives don't have some substance about them. We may hold such a meaning perspective which will serve us well after we question it. Our critical reflection will make that perspective more meaningful because of our awareness of it.

<sup>42</sup> Martin Buber establishes the intimate a loving nature of the I/Thou relationship in his book *I/Thou* which I discuss in greater detail later in the book: [I/Thou, I/IT, the Other and having—October 30, 2011](#)

<sup>43</sup> Frankl suggests that we, "Live as if you were living a second time, and as though you had acted wrongly the first time." Most of us don't have to make up such past lessons; we earned them. If we learn from them, we can make new choices in the future.

<sup>44</sup> The difference between judgment and compassion comes in the form of perception and conception. Both judgment and compassion see the same thing, perceive the same actions. They conceive of them differently, conceive of what they mean as very different. This conception finds its basis in the end sought. Judgment seeks fear and domination as its end. Compassion seeks unconditional positive regard and liberation as its end because it is the end of the one for whom we feel compassion. These notions of

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*perception* and *conception* come from *The Great Ideas in Psychology* lectures, # 24, by Daniel Robinson found in the Teaching Company *Great Courses* series.

<sup>45</sup> The reference here is to work of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) wherein the only motivation for social structures comes in fear of a life that will become "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" without a dominator structure. Fear built structures memorialize the fear within them, so we never escape the presence of the fear at their foundation.

<sup>46</sup> *Neurosis and human grow*, 1950

<sup>47</sup> "But, alas! this kind heart had but a short time to remain such. The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work. That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice, made all of sweet accord, changed to one of harsh and horrid discord; and that angelic face gave place to that of a demon." *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass An American Slave* Chapter VI

<sup>48</sup> The meaning perspective of psychological blaming may have risen out of readings of the work of Freud. Some would say this is a misreading and others not. Whatever the case, forms of the psychological have been with us and, ultimately, have not done us very well by many whomever they may have helped.

<sup>49</sup> Please accept this paraphrase of her thoughts. I may miss something exactly in what she said, but I believe I can express its essence.

<sup>50</sup> This seems a good moment to tell you that I dropped out of high school at fifteen. Before I dropped out, I admit to living a completely click-less existence at school. Whenever I turned up, rarely as possible, I was always click-less.

<sup>51</sup> For those familiar with George Orwell's book *1984*, they will recognize the similarity between the click for of governance and the utopian form of governance Orwell suggests. Whatever else a utopia demands, it demands complete, absolute surrender of independence and consciousness to the groupthink of the utopia. The click seems to function with a groupthink point of view. In such a view, the individual either exists completely within the groupthink, no matter how it may change and contradict itself. If anyone fails to stay in, that individual is completely out and loses the essential identity and thus humanness assigned to the individual by the utopian institution of the click.

<sup>52</sup> Prejudice generally operates as a syllogism in which the premise offers a false assumption, often the product of a meaning perspective.

<sup>53</sup> In *Punished By Rewards: The Trouble With Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, And Other Bribes*, Alfie Kohn reviews and condemns this system quite thoroughly.

<sup>54</sup> We have come across this pattern and what follows before. It came up again and again with students, and it serves us well to allow it to return to our discussion in the shifting context of this writing. We return to it as a source or wellspring of self-doubt and even self-contempt.

<sup>55</sup> My students have shown they can design and execute their own tests when asked. These tests have worked in a demanding and thoroughly educational process. In such a test, students think about their individual response to the material at hand and learn from thinking and expressing their thoughts about that learning.

<sup>56</sup> The results of the 29th Who's Who Among American High School Students Poll (of 3,123 high-achieving 16- to 18-year olds – that is, students with A or B averages who plan to attend college after graduation) were released in November, 1998.

<http://www.glass-castle.com/clients/www-nocheating-org/adCouncil/research/cheatingbackgrounder.html> October 1, 2011.

<sup>57</sup> In *1984*, Winston Smith's commits the central crime in utopia. He loves another person instead of loving Big Brother, the utopian dominator itself.

<sup>58</sup> Another brief visit to the Internet provides this figure: "The test-preparation industry makes \$4 billion a year." <http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2009/12/test-prep-internet/>. October 1, 2011.

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<sup>59</sup> The tests don't always do what they say they do. I did a small experimental review of the Miller Analogy Test and found it didn't do what it said it did to predict learning outcomes. The test claims that the ability to understand analogy speaks well of student outcomes. In my experiment, I removed the analogy part and simply left the actual question and asked for a response. The original would say "Segovia : Guitar :: Casals : \_\_\_\_." I removed the first part, so only the actual question remained: "Casals : \_\_\_\_" followed by the choices. It turns out that the analogy test is just another test of general knowledge which has a distinct cultural bias. If a student knows that Casals played the cello, she/he has no problem answering. If the student doesn't, the first half of the analogy doesn't help. The scores I received from the student who volunteered to take my version generally exceeded the scores reported by the Miller Analogy Test information material.

<sup>60</sup> This may also account for the growing number of diploma mills and the scandals that follow them when public figures are exposed for using such diplomas to fake themselves into high positions. "The proliferation of diploma mills is rising at a shocking rate – a 48 percent increase worldwide over the last year. There are now as many as 2,500 known diploma mills, excluding those that are still unidentified." *Diplomafraud.com*, April 12, 2012.

<sup>61</sup> The idea of the ends principle comes from a Kantian imperative through the work of Robert H. Kane, *Through the Moral Maze: Searching for Absolute Values in a Pluralistic World* (1994). It states that to live within the moral sphere, we must treat every individual as ends in themselves and never as means to our or anyone else's end. When Faust makes his deal with the devil, he uses himself, his soul, as a means to some higher purpose for his identity and ego, for that part of him who wanted more power in the world but ignored the needs to the becoming self. The loss of self, in this regard, becomes the metaphoric loss of soul.

<sup>62</sup> This idea has long been a cliché, but it remains current because it offers a clear view of reality. As Aristotle said, "Man is by nature a social animal."

<sup>63</sup> Many people quote Vince Lombardi quite freely in this regard: "Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing." That being the case, what's left for everything and everyone else?

<sup>64</sup> The story of Lance Armstrong, very current at this writing, serves as a very striking case in point.

<sup>65</sup> Meaning perspectives work context free. We can develop a meaning perspective in one situation, cheating makes sense for taking tests or competing. That perspective may find some validity of outcome in that context. Even granting that, cheating in another context can prove to initiate a very different outcome. One student of mine lived with Diabetes II. According to her, she loved to "cheat on my diet." She died of that cheating. Hyper awareness of danger works as a meaning perspective in some situations, combat for examples, but in other situations makes for pathology, paranoia. Whatever else an unquestioned meaning perspective may do, it can motivate us to perceptions and actions that do not comport with the context of living in which we find ourselves.

<sup>66</sup> T. S. Eliot expresses this view in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*: "There will be time, there will be time/

To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet."

<sup>67</sup> We can look to advertising for the identity claims it explicitly makes for us. If we buy and use the right thing, it enhances our identity to others, a powerful point about such interactions. Advertising also makes it implicitly clear that without such purchases, we live an inadequate life. That inadequacy makes our identity feel deprived, and that stimulates our ego to act. We can also see that those who recruit for the military, from terrorists to governmental forces, promise us a full identity upon entering the structure. They will provide a recognizable identity, a familial structure that offers positive regard, a mission, and in that way, a meaning in our lives. This makes for a very attractive offer, especially for the young who often desperately need a clear sense of identity.

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<sup>68</sup> Viktor Frankl points to this idea in *The Doctor and the Soul*: "It is life itself that asks questions of man. It is not up to man to question; rather, he should recognize that he is questioned, questioned by life."

<sup>69</sup> In teaching and learning, we spent much of time in conversation, in community dialogue. In that process, I might pose a question. Somewhere along the line, I learned that if I asked a question directly to those involved ("Who here feels you should have control in life?"), most students would freeze up. I had asked for a self-disclosure which could make students feel they had to confess or say nothing. It helped to deflect questions to "do you know anyone who . . ." allowing answers to come from anywhere in their lives rather than just their own. Eventually, students might talk about themselves, but they didn't feel as if they had to do so.

<sup>70</sup> Occasionally, a student who had survived a controlling or abusive relationship would describe the first time they might have spotted something to suggest later abuse. At first, the abuser would always appear so perfect, saying whatever sounded right to the other. It was hard to see what was coming, but in hindsight, sometimes during our discussion itself, they could see there were signs. Even on a first date, the future abuser would very politely ask for the other to change clothes to suit the occasion better or to please the future abuser better. That didn't feel like a violation of independence at the time, always said very nicely, but no one has the right to take such authority over another, exert control over the other in such a way. Whenever we see or feel such an implicit or explicit demand happening, we can take it as a sign of something that will develop into something more complex and controlling later. Any violation of the ends principle, any time one person uses another as a means to their end, is a form of abuse.

<sup>71</sup> A common sense of this idea comes in the word "prejudice" (pre-judge in derivation), but a meaning perspective holds us much further in its sway than simple prejudice although both can be hard to move.

<sup>72</sup> I use "developed" advisedly. This material never became a set piece, a set of units. Even as some basics remained the same, everything stayed in flux. A few students who needed to repeat the class generally remarked on how different the class was the second time around.

<sup>73</sup> At this writing, physicist Daniel Shechtman earned a Nobel Prize in chemistry because he found the vision and courage to violate the incorrigible meaning perspective science held about crystals, even his own meaning perspective about crystals.

<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, after I read the above again, I realize it may come as difficult to sort out because it violates a meaning perspective about ego that many have developed, taught, and learned over the last many years.

<sup>75</sup> This book serves as a record of the transformative adventures and learning I have experienced in and through my years of life and teaching. It also reflects the transformative experiences that came as the result of writing this book.

<sup>76</sup> I had worked for many tears on this idea, on the idea that we are the story we tell ourselves, when Silvia encountered a book by that same title: *What's Right with You* by Barry L. Duncan, Psy.D and offered it to me.

<sup>77</sup> This can manifest in learned helplessness, an idea developed by Martin Seligman, where we feel that we have no influence in what happens to us and makes us feel defenseless in the face of life.

<sup>78</sup> With all my students, this involved long term use of medications all of which had their unwanted effects. These unwanted effects often occurred strongly wherein the desired effects occurred weakly if at all. In the long term, they received precious little if any actual human support in their lives, just more prescribed drugs.

<sup>79</sup> The idea of story comes up repeatedly here because it came up repeatedly in my work with others in all types of contexts.

<sup>80</sup> We can recall Augustine who wanted God to liberate him from his sinful life—later, not when he was enjoying his life so: "Make me chaste and continent, but not just yet." This also brings to mind the miser about whom Petrarch wrote. The miser wanted to be liberated from his gold chains, but he wanted to hold on to the gold.



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<sup>81</sup> Unlike the Cartesian dualism of essential difference, these facets of being all share the essential nature of existence. No absolute dualism need apply.

<sup>82</sup> Frank Stockton may have felt an intuition of this in his story of the *Lady or the Tiger* (1882) and can bring us to a metaphoric understanding about how close we are to the truth of ourselves and our lives but how distractions can occur to prevent realization. There is no tiger for us, but endlessly choosing the wrong door may cause us to despair and believe in the tiger: alienation and meaninglessness. We can also see the hero's journey as received through epic and myth as an allegory of the unification of the becoming self, ego, and identity.

<sup>83</sup> When a dominator model uses the phrase "know thyself," it always means the individual to find an appropriate place in the dominator structure, our self's place in the ordination and subordination system supported by and supportive of the dominator model. Western radical individualism has its place in the dominator model because it denies the right and meaning of individuation, a very loving and compassionate state of mind and being. Individualism gets along very well with the competitive, relatively anti-compassionate nature of this model. Domination and conformity tend to discourage compassion as working against its interests. Conformity finds its strength in endless judgment of the individual. Individuation finds expression in unconditional positive regard, forgiveness, compassion and acceptance—not dominator or conformist structures.

<sup>84</sup> *Through the Moral Maze: Searching of Absolute Values in a Pluralistic World*, 41.

<sup>85</sup> *Empowering Parents*, <http://www.empoweringparents.com/Manipulative-Child-Behavior-How-Kids-Control-You-With-Behavior.php> (October 18, 2011).

<sup>86</sup> Early in my teaching, and even before, I realized that no one can or even should empower someone else. When that happens, the power remains in the hands of the one who did the empowering. If I empower you, I can take that power away. If a teacher empowers a student by granting a good grade on some submission (interesting word here), that same teacher can take the power away by dropping that student to a very low grade. We can help build environments wherein others can discover and regain the power within themselves. That's where their power resides and from where it must return.

<sup>87</sup> I worked for a short time with a group of adolescents labeled ADHD. They had taken those labels, with all their concomitant negatives, on as their identity and their egos invested a great deal in that. They completely rejected my attempt to see them as whole and healthy in themselves by showing them my authentic unconditional positive regard.

<sup>88</sup> *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 1968, 1970*.

<sup>89</sup> *Through the Moral Maze: Searching of Absolute Values in a Pluralistic World*, 98.

<sup>90</sup> In *The Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm tells us that in one translation, the divine responds to Moses' need to know the name of God by saying, "I am that I am becoming."

<sup>91</sup> As I write, I realize that I include these "as I write" sections because this book is becoming as I write it. That also means that I am becoming as I write it. Beyond that, it means that the book is becoming as you read it, for your reading will offer the book its immediate form whatever my intentions and desires at the moment of composition.

<sup>92</sup> We can even look at our adult selves and question why adults feel such powerful emotional responses to a baby's cry, the ones for whom we care especially and the ones we don't know as well.

<sup>93</sup> We all know the ubiquitous quote, "Winning isn't everything. Winning is the only thing," ascribed to Vince Lombardi and others. The Modern Olympic creed expressed by its founder Pierre de Coubertin: "The most important thing . . . is not winning but taking part (in the Games)" scarcely has any currency anywhere and especially in Olympic competition.

<sup>94</sup> When I played competitive games, Monopoly as a quintessential example, I wanted desperately to win. In that specifically, we make plans to beat the other persons or person playing. I also found that although I felt some success at winning, I felt absolutely terrible at the other's disappointment and pain at losing. That turns out an uncomfortable place to arrive. Without a desire to beat somebody else, all I had left was the unhappiness of

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being beaten by somebody else. If I won, I felt bad. If I lost, I felt bad. When I actually felt the results of competition, I just felt bad. So I stopped and in doing so, I believe I returned to the becoming self. That facet of my whole being seeks a non-competitive community of mutual support for excellence not the denial of the unconditional to anyone by beating them.

<sup>95</sup> Old Western movies often featured the idea and the figure of the fastest gun. Once established as the fastest gun, the winner and temporary holder of the epithet becomes the target of every other gun in the West. Eventually, we are assured by the movie, a faster gun will come and take the number one position. In these movies, being number two meant being dead.

<sup>96</sup> The idea of our saying "Yes" to personal power as opposed to positional power comes from the writing and practice of Patricia Cranton.

<sup>97</sup> Once again, we can look at Alfie Kohn's *Punishment by Rewards* for clarification along with the very concrete story of Mr. Armstrong again.

<sup>98</sup> Juliet B. Schor discusses an abundant way of life in an economic form in her book *Plenitude : the new economics of true wealth*.

<sup>99</sup> Another realization or clarification makes an appearance. When we experience a rise in what we call revolutionary feelings and activity, we see and feel a hope for things to start anew in some way. The problem comes when the revolutionary movement, as happened in the Sixties and Seventies, remains mired in the dominator, competitive meaning perspective. From that revolutionary fervor, no matter how sincere and well meaning, a hierarchy will appear which will generally coerce people, in one way or another, into conforming to the revolution—now the dominating form of the dominator model.

<sup>100</sup> *Family Members in Arabic*—

<http://www.italki.com/groups/563/topic/30036.htm#.UQev9B3Ae3E>

<sup>101</sup> George Orwell appends that book he wrote, *1984*, with a section on Newspeak. In this section, he makes the claim that we cannot think about what we cannot say. When the dominator controls the language, the dominator controls our thought.

<sup>102</sup> *To Have or to Be* discusses the language of having and being extensively.

<sup>103</sup> You may have found my attempts at getting around such language in this writing somewhat awkward. This holds especially true when I discuss parents and children. Still, it accentuates this point. We do not own the children for whom we care. We do not even own ourselves. We be who we are becoming. We can and do feel we possess our identity and ego.

<sup>104</sup> It may also be the case that the having identity constantly seeks some form of personal gain or recognition. After all, its business manifests in continuing to maintain visibility, an image in the world. In the case of compassion, if we ask, "How good will some compassionate act make me feel?" it converts from possible compassion to just another material exchange. That same holds true for wondering about how this compassionate act or another would make the identity look to the world, to those who matter.

<sup>105</sup> Immanuel Kant saw this distinction and called the hypothetical imperative and the categorical imperative. The hypothetical imperative acts only in a manner for potential exchange: "If I do A then I will get B, so I will do A." The categorical imperative acts in aid of simply doing the right thing: "I do A because this situation calls for me to do A as the right thing to do."

<sup>106</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti suggests that we consider moving a stone from a path or a nail from a road to make the world safer for an unknown person who will pass. In a nearby cancer center, someone placed a basket of knitted hats for bald and balding heads. The sign read, "Free. Please take one." The giver remains unknown but the receiver feels the gift of care in a hard time. This comes as an anonymous compassionate exchange of the becoming self with nothing owed and nothing gained materially or even in image. Such acts make the world a better place, a stronger moral sphere.

<sup>107</sup> This phrase stems from one I discovered through my relationship with Silvia. It occurred to me one day that I loved her more every day, and I had never loved her less.

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<sup>108</sup> By "tragic optimism," Frankl means the following: Optimism because we can optimize whatever we see in the world and in ourselves. Tragic because such optimism answers the tragic inevitabilities of life: suffering, guilt, and death. In such optimism, we can find meaning in suffering, learning in guilt, and in the face of death experience the intensely valuable nature of life. This also serves as another way of saying, "Yes," to life in spite of everything. In *Man's Search for Meaning*.

<sup>109</sup> This happens to us generally because we have decided on a "No": "I will not act like my mother." However, we have not developed a "Yes," so when the time comes, we feel we have to do something as a parent. We turn into acting like the mother because we have nothing else to do. As always, we accomplish far more by affirming and acting on a "Yes" (what I am going to choose) than of denying and defying in a "No" with nothing to do in its stead. As human beings, we generally need to act to satisfy an immediate situation.

<sup>110</sup> Although adults often deny that children can feel and exercise the unconditional, Silvia reminded me otherwise. She treated her doll, as many if not all children treat some object, with unconditional positive regard. She treated her doll in imitation of the mother who gave her care, and she also did so in a way she felt natural, spontaneous, and self-generated.

<sup>111</sup> We address the idea of love in a being sense not a having sense. Erich Fromm says, "Love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence." When we possess our lover, we have lost our love.

<sup>112</sup> The feelings of that time in my life have not completely gone. Just now, I inadvertently deleted all of yesterday's work. Out of that came invitations to anger, self-abuse, and depression. I choose to write it again, knowing what I lost remains lost even if the second version has offered more teaching and even some improvement in the writing. The becoming self knows and accepts loss for what it is and what it isn't. Somehow, the writing still lives in me and expresses what it taught me even if I can't get back to it word for word. Wordsworth touches on this realization of the becoming self in "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood": "Though nothing can bring back the hour /Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower; /We will grieve not, rather find /Strength in what remains behind."

<sup>113</sup> A physical analogy happens quite frequently. If a child is born with a defect in vision, the child will not know or report that defect because the child has no awareness of difference with any other vision. This often becomes evident when the child engages in some task, like looking at writing in a school setting. The defect may then become clear to others. Sometimes the lack of visual acuity is mistaken for a lack of intellectual acuity which will make matters much worse. This is also analogous to a critical moment in our lives when a meaning perspective becomes evident to us. How we respond to that awareness will change our life in some way or another.

<sup>114</sup> Philip Zimbardo does not use the phrase, meaning perspective in his examination of evil in his Stanford prison study, but the presence of such elements in action make themselves evident. Stanley Milgram's work in his "Behavioral Study of Obedience" also shows that apparently reasonable people will act in evil ways when the meaning perspectives they hold and are instructed to hold tell them that they have no choice but to act in the way directed by the meaning perspective in response to a specific context. In both cases, apparently reasonable people inflicted actions on others which were degrading and even dangerous.

<sup>115</sup> The book *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me): why we justify foolish beliefs, bad decisions, and hurtful acts* by Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson examines the processes of cognitive dissonance and self-justification in depth.

<sup>116</sup> When we change a light bulb, for a very accessible example, we no longer find anything good about the bulb that needs changing. We throw it away.

<sup>117</sup> This phrase comes from Patricia Cranton a deservedly well known and respected educator in transformative learning.

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<sup>118</sup> One nifty example of that came when Silvia and I watched Gavin holding on to the bars of his crib. We all know that children of that age are *supposed to* sleep and play in a crib. He looked like someone in the slammer peering out through the bars. When we examined the *supposed to* meaning perspective we found in this situation, we couldn't think of anything that could keep Gavin sentenced to crib imprisonment. We made accommodations so that he would sleep safely even as he stayed naturally free of the crib slammer. He seemed quite happy to be freed. He also helped teach me to see things through the eyes of others.

<sup>119</sup> "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" " In a very real sense, we can say that Eliot/Prufrock's awareness of these "faces" shows an intuitive awareness the violated authenticity.

<sup>120</sup> Soon after the above happened, I encountered a book that presented a very similar observation: *The Inner Game of Work*, W. Timothy Gallwey, Random House, New York, 2000.

<sup>121</sup> In a very personal note, I wrote to Dr. Frankl to tell him that he and his book had liberated me from my self-constructed concentration camp of mind as surely as the Sixth Army Corps had liberated him. Well into his nineties, he chose to answer me and thank me for my new way of seeing his work. That was his choice.

<sup>122</sup> Silvia Rayces introduced me to the idea of "family myths" which she received from studies in a Marital and Family Therapy course.

<sup>123</sup> She told me that she attended a class at the local community college. The teacher told her that she was so "cute," that she would get an "A" in the class. I called that sexual harassment and an abuse of power. She found it dismissive and impossible to get through. She attended the class, didn't do much, and she received her "cute" and belittling grade.

<sup>124</sup> Powerlessness also links to levels of competition and the nature of denying another person's power by beating them at one competition or another, by taking a victory and thus position power over and away from the other.

<sup>125</sup> We can also notice that meaning perspective, highly related to prejudice, often if not always works as a syllogism. "All women are liars" serves as the major premise. "Silvia is a woman" serves as the minor premise. "Silvia is a liar" comes as the supposedly logical conclusion. The structure is valid, but only as structure. The major premise is false, as are many "all" statements of a certain kind; therefore, we wind up with something that sounds logical but really makes no sense. When we choose to question our major premises, critically reflect on them, we engage in transformative learning.

<sup>126</sup> As the facilitator of a life's skills diversion program, I found that when the participants understood that the purpose of the program wished them good and not punishment, they responded far more openly and participated far more fully than when they thought I was there to lecture them on their criminality. When they knew I wished them good, they reported feeling far more open to the information and discussion. They came to know that the program offered them a chance to make new choices that would help them achieve the ends they wanted. My work with them wished them the empowerment that comes with understanding and acting out of the becoming self.

<sup>127</sup> The idea that we are all customers might sound off-putting as if that would degrade our all our human exchanges into a demeaning economic exchange. What it could mean, what we meant, would raise the level of business transactions into the human exchange, into the collaborative and caring model rather than the dominator model of working with each other—customer service as the I/Thou relationship, an expression of the unconditional.

<sup>128</sup> The overstressing of body language makes this less clear than necessary. Cultural meaning perspectives dominate the way in which we interpret body language. Thereby our interpretation of body language often provides us the wrong cue for understanding and really hearing the person involved. One body posture or movement in one culture

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may say something quite normal and acceptable in one place and nearly obscene and objectionable in another. That issue arose during the conflict in and occupation of Iraq with the ambiguity of the "thumbs up" sign.

<sup>129</sup> For many, the preferred form or response has become, "no problem." That seems lacking to me in its verbal expression, but I like to believe that the spirit behind it is the same as in "you're welcome," as in saying, "for you, I feel completely at ease in answering your need."

<sup>130</sup> George Orwell in the Newspeak section of *1984* describes how an absolute dominator uses the deprivation of complex language to exclude all types of unwanted and thus forbidden or taboo thoughts. If we can't say it, we can't think it. If we can't think it, it soon ceases to exist. The form of thought dies with the language.

<sup>131</sup> We can actually strive for this the other way around. Without unnecessary personal exposé, I disliked, perhaps hated would be more accurate, myself quite deeply for all of my remembered life. As part of my working toward a more liberated life, toward my becoming self as it turned out although I was unaware of such an effort, I chose to treat others as I had always wished to be treated by others (even though I did not treat myself in that way). The struggle came in the inner dislike I endlessly expressed toward myself. I see now that my expression of the unconditional to others eventually allowed me to find some compassion for myself at very long last.

<sup>132</sup> This may serve as the reason why others often ask me if I am not afraid of being used, or misused, by others such as those who ask for money on the street. That worried me for a moment, and then I realized something I find true for myself. If I choose to act out of the end principle and within the moral sphere to help someone else, I choose to serve the want the other person as expressed to me by that person. In that way, I can't be taken advantage of or manipulated because of the freely chosen and authentic nature of my act. If the other person thinks she/he is getting one off on me, that serves as their choice to degrade themselves and their reception of my act which happens on their terms. I make a gift in gratitude for the chance to make such a gift. If the other person chooses to make it a theft, that's their choice, their meaning perspective, their self-degradation. My personal power remains intact if not stronger.

<sup>133</sup> This rather introduces a problem inherent in the Golden Rule: "Do unto others what you would have them do unto you." It can work as a modified solipsism. In that way, someone can make another a means to an end by making an assumption or interpretation of the others needs and acting on it. This often happens in the case of gifts and especially surprise gifts. People even give animals to another person as a gift, a surprise. Such a giver often would enjoy an animal as a gift. However the recipient feels about animals generally, may have even complimented the giver on a pet, doesn't mean that the recipient wants such a presence along with the distraction, expense, and responsibility which come as a very real part of an animal—even a plant—as a gift. In the spirit of Compassionate Communication, we ask a possible recipient of a gift from us if that person would find that gift acceptable and enjoyable.

<sup>134</sup> The person rejecting a request can speak that "No" in a compassionate way.

<sup>135</sup> The formation of family myths which become meaning perspectives arise from a meaning perspective that tells us we must create these myths to establish identity and order in the family structure.

<sup>136</sup> The word "responsible" speaks of its meaning to us very clearly by reordering its structure: able to respond. This becomes a statement about ourselves, that we believe we are able to respond to situations, and are therefore responsible for the actions we take. That carries a very positive quality rather than a negative one.

<sup>137</sup> This also serves an example of why body language produces ambiguities and confusions—misperceptions.

<sup>138</sup> This holds true on the quantum level which accounts for the Heisenberg uncertainty principle. It tells us that we cannot know where a particle is and simultaneously know how fast it's going. Also in physics, we encounter the "observer effect." It tells us that what we observe can change because of the observation.

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<sup>139</sup> Plato discusses this in *The Republic* among other places in his work. When others express doubts about the achievement of the perfected society of the Republic, he responds that the idea of perfection leads us to greater and greater efforts. He asks them if an artist should stop making art because the art will never reach perfection.

<sup>140</sup> Gordon Allport's landmark book, *The Nature of Prejudice* discusses this structure in compelling and different terms.

<sup>141</sup> This may account for the interesting phenomenon of the glee many of us take at the downfall of those we have envied, celebrities of one kind or another. When we gossip out of envy, we essentially wish that person or persons we envy ill. They have what we perceive as something we should have, and that makes them into an object of desire and scorn. When they lose what we have desired, we can feel a very high level of petty gratification.

<sup>142</sup> Arthur Miller delineates how easy such a fall from the "us" group can happen in his novel and later movie *Focus*. An average sort of fellow forms part of an immediate neighborhood group which holds anti-Jew feelings. They all agree on the "It" nature of the Jew. The man included. That man begins to wear glasses, and everyone begins to see him as a Jew. For no reason other than the interpretation and diagnosis of his group, he has become a threatened outsider to the group. He has become the very "It" he has despised before.

<sup>143</sup> Resorting to my English/literature teaching identity, this holds true in textual analysis. Before we pursue other levels of interpretation, we want to fully engage in the first level of interpretation: what it says on the literal or surface level. We can also call that its simplest linguistic level. Many times in textual analysis, we come at a text with a theory about texts in general in hand. Seeing the text through the lens of a theory, which in this case functions as a meaning perspective, disallows us from seeing the text in itself. If someone holds a theory that all of human life expresses the futility of that life, she/he might declare that Hamlet's suicide attempt typifies that futility. He wants to escape the futility of his life and human life generally, and he fails to escape that futility. How futile. It may sound compelling, but Hamlet does not attempt suicide. He just thinks about it. The theoretical meaning perspective perceives something the text that's not there.

<sup>144</sup> This school came about through the good offices of one of the most intelligent, caring, and effective people I will ever know, Sepp Sprietsma.

<sup>145</sup> C.C. Lewis' book, *Screwtape Letters*, exposes the devil's ultimate goal, to dominate everyone and everything, to consume all of existence. This sounds like the epitome of having. That's a kind of dominator need that would never get satisfied even if the devil could accomplish it. He can't consume himself. Nothing is enough.

<sup>146</sup> The use of "I'm fine" in such a situation remains something of a mystery to me. Of course she's fine. We're not discussing her state of being generally. She could want a cup of tea and be quite fine in any case.

<sup>147</sup> In Orwell's utopian scheme *1984*, the dominator works through the external behavior and physical weaknesses of the individual to destroy the individuality of that individual. As with Lewis' Satan, Big Brother means to devour everyone. In the utopian novel *We*, the dominator develops an operation that removes the imagination of all its citizens, so they can't think a thought of their own. Utopian schemes operate on an absolute level seeking perfection which must dominate every being to end all becoming. Imagination and becoming both make the static nature of perfection, the essence of utopia, impossible, so utopian schemes work diligently to destroy them. Freedom of any description is an essential casualty of such a utopian effort. When we dream of utopia, we dream of a nightmare of perfection. We dream of the absolute and all powerful, "No."

<sup>148</sup> Frankl generally writes about the attitude we strike toward suffering. Although that has an obvious if not overweening importance, it occurs to me now that the attitude we strike toward success and good fortune, to pleasure, also needs our attention. In our lives, we may live modestly and happily even in the face of some levels of stress and suffering. Many of us do that. Occasionally, the lottery or inheritance or some such strikes and

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casts us into higher level of material good fortune. At that point, we want to question the meaning perspectives that arose from that material good fortune. For some who lived a modest and fulfilling life before, such material good fortune will call on a materialist/consumer meaning perspective: "go for it." They will respond to it by assuming a wasteful and self-destructive attitude that will take on disease like proportions: "nothing is enough."

<sup>149</sup> In a section of *Man's Search for Meaning*, "Logotherapy in Nutshell/The Essence of Existence" 133.

<sup>150</sup> As always, my example doesn't represent an instruction, a how-to, or worse still a do-this but simply an example of how-I.

<sup>151</sup> Once again, I feel the need for honesty. I find this difficult if not painful to write about, and I need to stop for now.

<sup>152</sup> In our life together, Silvia has often commented on the paradox of how much I actively cared for her and for others in the world while caring so little for myself.

<sup>153</sup> In Edwin Abbott's book *Flatland*, we see entities living in a two dimensional world. One of them gets thrown into a three-dimensional point of view and can see things three dimensionally even while the entity can still see the two dimensional world and also a one dimensional world. What the liberated entity sees as a revelation; the other two-dimensional entities see that as just plain crazy—even dangerous. I felt a dimension in me that from a lesser dimensional perspective was deplorable, so I deplored it. Frankl also uses dimensionality to discuss meaning. From a two-dimensional perspective we can see three black circles. In a three dimensional perspective, we can see these circles not simply black dots but shadows of two-dimensional projections of a solid ball, a solid cone, and a solid cylinder.

<sup>154</sup> I sent a friend the above 2011 note about my experience. He wanted to know what I had done to cause this self-rejection. I did not answer him because the specific what makes the no difference. It's not what it we reject. It's that we reject. Each of us will find that whatever seems to motivate such self-rejection will come in a very idiosyncratic form. A tall person may reject tallness, and short people reject shortness. Whatever it is, if we can't choose otherwise and remain a whole being, we do ourselves harm to reject any part of ourselves. As a note, a great deal of the consumerist and advertising world has to do with rejecting ourselves in some degree or other.

<sup>155</sup> When we look at the world, we see good and evil in the actions of people in that world. They seem quite paired, good and evil. They are. They exist as a pair, but of the two, good embodies and acts out of the essential power for the affirmation and support of life. Evil comes from that same power, but it uses that power as a negation and limitation if not elimination of life. When we want to say "Yes" to life, we choose to act in a positive way, a way that affirms life and the moral sphere. I can study pharmacology and come to a high level of expertise. I can use that knowledge to help lives and those living them, or I can sicken lives, and those living them. It's a choice. When we want so say "No" to life, as do the dominator model and societal conformity, we choose to act in an evil way to one degree or another. As with life generally, good and evil come to us as a choice not a preexisting condition. We can choose evil in one moment, and we can actually experience the force and cost of that evil, and we can decide to choose good from then on. The "Yes" of affirmation always exists in the face of any "No" of negation. Frankl found that true even in the belly of evil, a concentration camp.

<sup>156</sup> The so-called, "Stockholm Syndrome" abets this exploitation process. In it, the captive in a situation cathects, feels an emotional bond with and loyalty to the captor.

<sup>157</sup> Erich Fromm explores the relationship between the individual and dominator conformity extensively in *Escape from Freedom*.

<sup>158</sup> Silvia introduced me to this evocative phrase.

<sup>159</sup> In the interests of honesty, Silvia and I don't receive television in our home. It went digital, and we went away. However, the basic principles about these phenomena remain pertinent. Media commentary found in *The Ad and our ego* documentary film [http://www.parallaxpictures.org/AdEgo\\_bin/AE000.01a.html](http://www.parallaxpictures.org/AdEgo_bin/AE000.01a.html), and in Sut Jhally's work

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generally, <http://www.sutjhally.com/>, and specifically in his *Advertising and the End of the World*, make these points quite clearly and convincingly. I have shown them in classes for discussion, and many students reported feeling a terrible loss of their previously uninformed enjoyment when they could see what these messages actually did to them in terms of manipulating their feelings and thoughts. Interestingly, PBS aired a program which allows the advertising creators to speak for themselves in ways that we might think they did not want people to hear given the level of cold if not cynical manipulation they put into their messages based on our human needs, wants, and vulnerabilities: *The Persuaders* <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/persuaders/>. My comments will relate only to this discussion and not to the larger discussion of the media and advertising themselves.

<sup>160</sup> Sut Jhally argues that whenever we participate in a media exercise, television most especially, we actually work for the advertisers and the television stations. We are not so much the volunteers we feel ourselves to be, he asserts, but we act as low level employees who work and pay for everything offered by the very exercise in which we engage for distraction from our work in the world:

<http://www.sutjhally.com/audiovideo/videothefactoryint/>

<sup>161</sup> Whenever we use business phrases and words such as "bottom line," in terms of our essential human exchanges, we accept the business/dominator model meaning perspective that turns all of life into a very limited economic exchange in which the ends principle, the moral sphere, the unconditional, and acceptance have little or no place except as devices for manipulation.

<sup>162</sup> Commonly expressed in the information sources I encounter, consumer spending makes up 70 percent of the U.S. economy.

<sup>163</sup> Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) said, "A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing." We can see a corollary to the phrase in saying the following: when everything has a price, nothing has any value.

<sup>164</sup> In another context, the question sounds like this: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Mark 8:36.

<sup>165</sup> When I heard about cable television, I was amazed, and still feel that every time I see it, that people pay directly for the privilege of having people sell them things. Infomercials and other programs don't do anything else but sell things. On cable, we pay for the watching, and we pay for the buying. That's quite a deal.

<sup>166</sup> The common metaphor, "sell yourself," works in pernicious way to diminish us as whole beings of intrinsic, inherent, and incalculable value.

<sup>167</sup> Before I even start on this section, I want to remind us that in spite of all this endless, ubiquitous barrage of destructive and distracting informational noise, we still do very well with our lives. We still feel and enact the quest of the becoming self in many ways. It once again shows our resiliency as human beings, as whole beings in spite of the life denying forces that surround us. That's what reading this text means on one level as well as many other activities into which we enter every day.

<sup>168</sup> While working with people in recovery from some form of dependency or another, we look carefully at this media driven consumerist model. They inevitably describe it as addiction. They realize that their recovery from what they chose among the few proscribed dependencies faces a struggle against the forces of the media model that sell dependency as a way of life every day, all day, everywhere.

<sup>169</sup> I entered the word "reality" in the Google search field, and before I typed another letter, it can up with "reality TV" and "reality television." Google seems to have made up its programming and data bases to see where reality can really be found.

<sup>170</sup> One of the more violent forms of communication comes in teasing others and holding them up for ridicule. We live with this form of violent and abusive communication as one of the public's preferred forms of entertainment. When we find something a preferred form of entertainment, we will generally find it and use it in our everyday lives, much to our detriment.



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<sup>171</sup> The language of having makes itself felt in this section. When we refer to some element of material and even spiritual being, we express that in a possessive way: "our body, mind, or spirit." I have used that form in this writing not to express ownership but to express a quality of unity for which I find no word. We don't own the self, we "be" the self, we "be" the whole being. The identify and ego discussed in this section seems so outwardly driven in their materiality, I have chosen to write about them as an "this . . ." However, they will return to their being relationship with our becoming self and whole being whenever they question and critically reflect on the meaning perspective that drives their alienation. We naturally live and become as a unity of self not as a fragmentation of our many facets of self. It's been difficult to express in the alienated language of the dominator model.

<sup>172</sup> We can buy any one of a number of lifestyle magazines including glossy, expensive, advertising driven magazines that promote living simply.

<sup>173</sup> The "No" represents any denial of the affirmation of life and the becoming self, the individuating, and autonomous self. Appropriate times to say "No" exist even as appropriate times to feel fear exist. Whenever we know that some situation calls upon us to violate our part of the ends principle and the moral sphere, or violates, manipulates, or coerces us out of our rights in the ends principle, we can simply say "No" to that situation even as we can still say "Yes" to those involved as human beings with needs of their own. This works well with our discussion of customer service and saying "No" on one hand and "Yes" on the other at the same time.

<sup>174</sup> The essential elements of this writing grew out of my long time search for my becoming self: observing, experiencing, and knowing that grew over my life. They also arose through a great deal of discussion with students over many years which were equally compelling. That's the nature of the humanities and its study in all its forms.

<sup>175</sup> Patricia Cranton told me that she asked students to draw events and ideas that they felt hard to articulate in words. When I asked my students to do so, they almost invariably came up with nightmare images. Generally, they produced a core image involving one very big or even enormous very powerful person, the interviewer, and a very small or even insignificant, powerless person, the interviewee. When I drew the image they gave me on the board, we all realized that it looked like an adult and a child. Faced with an interview, many returned to the childhood of parental judgment in which they would inevitably be found wanting.