LRI Report No. 28a

Ex Post Facto: The source of intractable origin problems and their resolution

Peter G. Ossorio

1981

Linguistic Research Institute
Boulder, Colorado

Foreword

This report is a transcript of an address to the Society for Descriptive Psychology at its third Annual Conference in 1981 at Boulder, Colorado. A revised version will be published at a later time as Report No. 28.

We are very grateful to Mary McDermott Shideler for making the transcript available.

P.G.O.
1981

mS' - Society for Descriptive Psychology, National Conference 16-20 August 1981

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THE EX POST FACTO CREATION OF FACTS

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Jane Littmann: ..... When I was talking with him about his topic, I asked him if there would be anything to help introduce the topic, and he said, "The less said, the better." Here's Pete.

Peter: A couple of preliminaries: one, just to make it easy and pleasant for you, there's an outline in roughly the order in which I'm going to deal with some topics, so that will help you orient. Number two, I'm glad that Joe went half an hour ago, because he's going to make me sound very reasonable and conservative, which might not otherwise be the case.

Let me tell you how it all began. [laughter] A year ago, I gave a talk on the mind-body problem, and afterwards, during the question period, Bill Plotkin said, "How did persons originate?" That was kind of a stopper, and what I said was, "I think that to give an answer to that, you would need an ex post facto formulation. And that sounds like a good topic for next year." Well, here it is--next year--and that's my topic, and that's how it started.

As you can see from the outline, I'm not just going to talk about ex post facto formulations. To a large extent, I'm going to talk about origin questions, and I'll use the ex post facto formulations to give us some entree into some more general problems of understanding people and their behavior and the world.

The first thing is, we do ask origin questions. We do ask questions of how did it begin, how did persons originate, how did language originate, how did behavior originate, how didlife originate, how did thought originate, how do concepts originate? We also ask where do they come from? where do concepts come from? where did life come from? where did persons come from? where did Descriptive Psychology come from? We do ask those kinds of questions. Some of these questions lend themselves to a simple historical account. We answer the question just by giving an account of what happened over time, and there's your answer. The interesting ones don't. Characterstically, with the interesting origin questions, there's something peculiar about the question how did life originate, how did people originate, how did language originate? And that peculiarity carries over into the answers, including that we have a hard time generating any answers. Part of the peculiarity appears as soon as you even describe the phenomena without trying to explain them at all. It appears in the form of reports that say, "X changed into Y," or generalizations that say, "X's change into Y's." We can paraphrase the origin-type question as, "What was it that changed into X?" "What was it that changed into Y?" What was it that changed into life? what was it that changed into language? what was it that changed into persons? That's the nature of origin questions, that you can ask them in these various forms.

This last one, "What was it that changed into X?", is one that should tickle our consciences. As soon as you put it in that form, red flags go up. The red flag -ays that there's something wrong there, there's a rocky road ahead if you keep going.

You get your first taste of that rocky road when you start trying to explain how or why something changed into X. Take a classic example, and it really is classic, and many of you are familiar with it. This is Allport's theory of functional autonomy. Allport was concerned to affirm that persons acquire genuinely new motivations in the course of their lives. The contrast was psychoanalytic theory, and he was reacting against that--which implies that people do not change their motivations in the course of their lives; they only change the means whereby they try to satisfy their eternal motivations, or their unchanging motivations. His heuristic example was the insurance salesman who joins the country club to try to increase his sales, and plays golf for the purpose of increasing his sales of insurance, and finds that he enjoys it, and later on plays golf just because he enjoys it. Playing golf just because he enjoys

it is Allport's candidate for a genuinely new motivation. His particular version of X becomes Y was what used to be a mere mechanism has become a motive. What used to be the mere performance of doing golf things for some other motivation, namely, selling insurance, has become a motivation in its own right: now he plays golf for its own sake.

There you are with a case of X changes into Y, and that's the explanation for the origin of Y. What was the origin of his motivation to play golf for its own sake? There was a previous mechanism which changed into this motivation. In Allport's case, and that example, there was trouble, and the trouble is that it's impossible. It's impossible not merely causally or technologically. It's not impossible because it's too hard. It's logically impossible. There is no possible process that can start with a mechanism and end with a motivation. There simply isn't. And no matter how people try, there's no way to bridge that gap. So that should sound familiar. Remember the "17 banana" last year: there is no process that can begin with a banana and end with a number 17. Well, there is no process that can begin with a mechanism and end with a motive.

That poses us with a dilemma, that if you have that kind of origin, you might as well say it came from nowhere. If you have that kind of development, or developmental explanation, you might as well say the thing came from nowhere.

?: Probably less pathogenical.

Peter: It probably would spread less confusion if you said that. Now with respect to that particular example of functional autonomy, we did find a solution and it was not Allport's, but it was a success at what he wanted to achieve with his principle. The elements of the solution are these: first, at a given time T, a given description (namely, plays golf and its various details) correctly describes the salesman's instrumental performances. It's a correct description of this aspect of behavior--performance. That's the force of saying "there used to be a mechanism". Now at a later time, the same description (namely, plays golf and all of the other elaborations) correctly describes a different aspect of his behavior, namely, his motivation. What has not happened is that the performance has changed into a motivation. Nothing has changed into something there. The performance is still a performance, the motivation is still a motivation. What is it that's The person has changed. The person has changed from somebody who didn't have this motivation to somebody who does. And there's no paradox about that kind of change.

That particular example serves as a springboard for a general principle concerning change, concerning this notion of X changes into Y. The principle is this: what can change about a thing are the values of its parameters. Secondarily, what can change about a thing is its relation to other things. For example, if the parameters of a table are its size, shape, color, composition, and location, then what can change about it is its size, its shape, its color, its composition, its location. None of these changes will change it into the number 17. You can't get there from here. But those changes can occur, and if they occur they're non-problematic, non-paradoxical. Or if the parameters of persons are traits, attitudes, interests, knowledge, values, abilities, states, and embodiment, then what can change about a person is he person's traits, attitudes, interests, values, knowledge, abilities, embodiments. None of those changes will make that person into the number 17, either. Nor will they turn a person into a chair.

Now that is a fundamental principle of change. The interesting origin questions are the ones that seem to violate this principle. That's why they're interesting. That's why they have this mystery, this attraction, this fascination, this transcendental quality, is that they seem to violate something that is a necessity. That's what hooks us. Now those cases are either where something seems to come out of nowhere, or where something seems to come out of something that's radically different in the

parameter sense. You find this with the question "Where do concepts come from?" There isn't anything that's at all like a concept; therefore, no matter what you mention as "This is where it came from", it's going to be radically different from concepts, and you're going to be left with that nagging sense that you might as well have said, "Concepts come from nowhere". As a matter of fact, that's what I normally do say: concepts come from nowhere. So when somebody asks me, "Where did Descriptive Psychology come from?", I say, "Nowhere."

Where did language come from? Again, there is nothing that isn't language that's at all like language. So if you're going to mention some non-linguistic antecedent to language, it's going to be like the table becoming the number 17. You might as well say, "Language comes from nowhere." The same thing with thought. Do you know anything that isn't thought that's at all like thought, that has the same parameters? No matter what you mention as the X, saying "thoughts came from X" is going to involve you in the same apparent violation, and you might as well say, "They come from nowhere." Now saying they came from nowhere isn't all hat satisfying, either. One of the famous questions of this sort has to do with developmental theory in psychology. How does an infant become an adult? How does an organism become a person? Well, the parameters of organisms are different from the parameters of persons, and so you have the same issue: if you start with this (namely, an organism), and you wind up with this (namely, a person), how does that transition take place? If you think back through the history of psychological explanation of development, once you have this parameter principle that says that the only things that can change about a thing are the values of its parameters, it becomes very clear that psychological theorizing on human development has been an attempt to work around that issue, and you can see what the obvious solutions are. The first one is to say, "The parameters of persons are really the same parameters as we're familiar with with organisms. The differences are merely apparent." And so you get a theory like psychoanalytic theory that says basically the picture of the infant is the true picture, and what you have with adults are merely refinements and elaborations of that, but it's essentially the same picture. This was what Allport was reacting against.

Now it isn't just psychoanalytic theories. It's essentially every psychological theory xhat you're familiar with. Except one like Piaget's theory, which does the other thing and says, "Well, it just happens." People just do move through these stages. And if you have the addition, "What makes them move through is disequilibrium," there's nothing in the theory that gives you the slightest notion of why disequilibrium will cause that movement, or how it would work that disequilibrium causes that movement. So you're back to, "Then you might as well say it comes from nowhere," or in the case of Piaget, "You might as well say it just happens."

The second kind of explanation is to say, "No, really the parameters in question are the parameters of persons, and organisms and even inanimate objects really have these parameters." Then the particular explanation will deal with the technical problems of explaining why you don't see some of these things with tables and chairs and infants that you do in normal adult human beings. And there are a variety of explanations for why, even though they're really there, they don't manifest themselves, or you don't observe them but they're really there. There isn't any scientific theory I know of that does it this way. Mostly they are metaphysical systems like Whitehead's, or some of the metaphysical systems associated with religions, mostly of the Eastern variety. You can see that both of those ways of explaining are responsive to this dilemma that you have this principle that says, "These are the only kinds of change that can take place," and you have an apparent violation. The technical problem, then, is to preserve the principle and explain how come you have this merely apparent violation. And all your ingenuity, then, is making the violation merely apparent, given whichever end you started out with, saying "That's the real thing."

Joe Jeffrey: How does that second one differ from the formulation of Gurdjieff along the lines of, "Well, you could treat a clam as a person, also"--a clam or a table or whatever?

Peter: It's one thing to say you can generate a clam from a person by doing a paradigm case formulation and generate deficient cases. It's another to say, "Clams are really essentially like persons, and they have all of the essential characteristics; they just don't manifest them very well."

None of these explanations are satisfactory; that's why people keep trying to generate new ones. Both kinds of explanation involve two parts. One is the parameter principle which says, "Here's the only kind of change that takes place." The other is a picture of history as a simple progression of events through time. If those approaches are fundamentally wrong, then something has to give. And if the parameter principle is sound, then it's the other that has to give, namely, the picture of history as a simple progression of events through time. Let me give you a couple of versions of that way of looking at things. The one is the one that appears in State of Affairs Systems, and it's what I call the physicalist's view--it's the one that Joe Jeffrey, I think, referred to in passing. This view is what I think most educated people in our society have. This is what you learn implicitly, explicitly, one way or another, this is the picture that you build up as a result of the kind of education that we routinely get. There are twelve points to this--as you can see, they flow along. The first point is that what here is in the world is objects which are historical particulars. Second, these objects are the sort that physicists' mention in their theories, namely, sub-atomic or other ultimate particles. Third, the world consists of objects like those in particular configurations and dynamic relationships. Fourth, the configurations are those which can be represented geometrically, that is, in space and time. Fifth, the relationships among these are of the sort mentioned by physicists in their theories. Sixth--here's where the action starts getting hot--human beings are middle-sized configurations of these basic objects. There's the small ones, there' the middle-sized ones like people, and then there's the big ones like universes. So human beings are middle-sized configurations of basic objects. Objects observable by humans are large or middle-sized configurations of these basic objects. Eighth, relationships of other sorts are reducible to relationships of these basic sorts. That is, they are nothing other than these basic sorts of relationships. Other sorts of relationships are nothing other than these basic sorts of relationships under a different description. Any other relation is just a fancy way of talking about these basic, physical relationships. Basic objects, configurations, and relationships are what linguistic terms are about or refer to, in so far as they have any real meaning and are not just emotive, mythological, or merely subjective. Tenth, the presence of human beings in the world is a historical accident. Corollary: the principles on which the world operates, and the constituents on which these principles operate, in no way depends on the nature of human beings or even on there being any. A summary of that is: it was there before we arrived on the scene and it will be there after we're gone. It in no way depends on us. Second corollary: human beings as such are in the world as spectators. They have no part in the basic goings-on that happen.

Jan Vanderburgh [laughing]: Any time anybody engages in theological speculation around here - - - - - - - .

Peter: The eleventh principle is that the presence of language, in a world that contains human beings, is a historical accident. It needn't have been the case. Corollary: the principles on which human beings operate, and the constituents on which these principles operate, in no way depend on the nature of words, sentences, or utterances. Second corollary: human knowledge of the world is acquired first independently of language, and only then translated into or coded into verbal expression. Third corollary: the relation of language to the world is entirely external; therefore a connection between the two must be made if linguistic expressions are to be applicable to the world. Fourth corollary: the relation of language to concepts

and relationships is entirely external; hence a connection must be made if linguistic expressions are to have that kind of application. Finally--no, next to finally: although the preceding eleven statements are the way the world is, I (and that goes for all of us) can't operate with that notion literally, because none of the things I observe are in fact reducible in the way that I said. All I have is a verbal formula that says it can be done, but I don't see it done and I can't do it. Secondly, I can't separate out my language from my knowledge from my knowledge of the world. I can't get outside myself to see what the world is like independent of how I see the world. The very distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic is a linguistic distinction. This is an open-ended one. You can generate paradoxes all evening.

Finally the last one is: in spite of all these paradoxes, those eleven postulates must be accepted because that's what science says is so. That's a view of the world hat I think fits. Furthermore, I've tried it out on engineers and computer scientists and guess what they say? They say, "Well, of course! How could you doubt it? Could you imagine anything different?" So indeed, that is a view of how things are. Part of what's involved there is this left-to-right "The history of the world is simply a simple progression of events through time".

Okay, let me give you a much less formal view, but much more succinct. In this form, it says: "The moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on, and all your piety nor wit shall lure it back to cancel half a line, nor all your tears wash out a word of it." Essentially, that's the same thing. The moving finger writes from left to right. It's a simple progression of events through time. And it's unchangeable, it has nothing to do with you or me; we can't change it; it's there; it happens. Those are ways of elaborating what I said was the second piece of these developmental explanations, the first piece being xhe parameter principle, the second piece being this picture of history as a simple movement from left to right--the moving finger writes.

What I want to introduce now, and the point of the ex post facto formulation, is to introduce a new way of looking at these things, so that we can say, "Well, if it's a case of the moving finger writes, it's going to be a fickle finger." That sets the stage for ex post facto phenomena and ex post facto formulations. What they contrast with is the moving finger writes. Let's start with the archetypal case, which is found in the field of law. Ex post facto is taken from the notion of ex post facto laws. Let me give you an example. Suppose that today, Congress passes a law that says it's illegal to drive over 55. Here it is, 1981, and they pass this law. Okay, from now on, if I drive 55, it's illegal. Three years ago, I was driving down the highway at 65, but it wasn't illegal. That's a normal law. Now let me give you an example of an ex post facto law. Suppose that Congress today passes a law that says it's illegal to have driven over 55 any time after 1970. All of a sudden I'm a criminal, because back in 1978, I drove down the highway at 65. According to the law, it isn't that now I'm a criminal. That law says: back then in 1978 that was a criminal act. And if Congress really passed that, which they might if it weren't unconstitutional, it would be true that back in 1978 that was an illegal act. Notice, though, that even if they did pass a law like that, in 1978 it wasn't true. It only now becomes true that it was so back in 1978. You might say that's unfair, which is it, and that's why it's unconstitutional. But it's not something that Congress couldn't actually do, and the reason it's unconstitutional is that people did indeed used to do it and it was objectionable, and that's why the Constitution prohibits it. So it is possible to pass laws that make it a crime to have done something before the law was passed. That then makes you a criminalex post facto.

That gives us the essentials for an explicit formulation of what's involved in ex post facto phenomena. The ex post facto explanation is the penultimate form

of a certain kind of logical progression, and it has this form: At a given time, T2, something happens so that it becomes the case that a certain thing, P, was so at an earlier time, T1, even though at T1 it was not already the case that P was so. That describes the ex post facto creation of the state of affairs P.

Jan: Do you make a distinction there between that people say at T2 that so-and-so was true --

Peter: It's not a matter of saying. It makes it - - -

Jan: I was thinking as an example of some of the proclamations about the divinity of the Roman emperors, who said that they had been gods and their families had been gods before them, which was an ex post facto kind of thing. Now if people -ehave according to that it makes it fact, or what? Okay.

Peter: Think of that again in connection with the status assignment example, and if it doesn't fit, raise a question.

Joe: - - - that makes it so for a certain community of people. - - - - - on the other hand, it might be that for us to look at it and say, - - - - It seems like a question of true for what community of people is involved.

Peter: Yes and no. You can only talk to somebody in your community. Within that communit4, it isn't just a matter of which community; it is so. In the same way, for a third person, what you see as real, he says that's your perception. But from your point of view, you don't say, "That's my perception." You say, "That's what's here." It's up to somebody else to relativize and make it subjective.

Okay, here's some garden-variety examples of ex post facto phenomena. The first one is--I think I mentioned it last year, but let me start you off with it. Imagine sitting in Folsom stadium at 1:30 on a Saturday afternoon. The teams come out on the field, they flip the coin, they line up, and the guy fades back and throws a pass. Being of a philosophical bent, I nudge you and say, "What was it we just saw down there?" And you say, "That was the first play of the game." Now being a philosopher, I don't let it rest at that. I saw, "Now wait a while. Look: nothing can be the first play of the game if there isn't a game. There isn't the game until the game is finished. So how can you say now that that was the first play?" Not being a philosopher, you just say, "Okay, wait." Come 5:30 and that final gun sounds. You nudge me and you say, "See, I told you that was the first play of the game." As soon as that final gun sounds, it becomes the case at 5:30 that at 1:30, that was the first play of the game. And indeed, at 1:30 that was the first play of the game as it turned out. But at 1:30, it wasn't already guaranteed, because had the heavens fallen and the game discontinued after two plays, there wouldn't have been a game and those two plays would not have been the first two plays of it. We could call it something else, but they would not have been the first plays of the game.

That's not all that puzzling. It's not all that paradoxical. But it is a simple kind of ex post facto and it fits the formula, namely, that it only becomes true at a later time--5:30--that something was already true at an earlier time, namely, 1:30, even though at 1:30 it wasn't already true then.

Take a second example. This is one that I usually use as a heuristic for Move 2's as an influence principle in therapy. The heuristic example is: just imagine that we're standing around talking and somebody taps me on the shoulder and makes a comment that could about equally be taken as a friendly joke or as a mild insult. If I take it as an insult and treat it accordingly, then it was an insult unless the person who delivered it can get things worked around so that it isn't. But he's going to have to work. Once I count it as an insult and treat it accordingly, that's what it's going to be "unless -- ". Conversely, if I treat it as a friendly joke, then a friendly

joke is what it was, again, unless the other person can work his way out and make it stand as an insult if that's what he wants. But he's going to have to work once I treat it as a friendly joke. Why is that ex post facto? Well, whatever I treat it as is what it now was.

So far, because these are the unproblematic examples, you're thinking up reservations and saying that that's just having to do with how you describe things. It's just a matter of semantics. Try that last example, and instead of imagining that I simply treat it as an insult, imagine that we come to blows and then somebody asks you, "How did it start?" And you say, "Well, he tapped him on the shoulder and that was the beginning of the fight." Now at the time when he tapped me on the shoulder, it wasn't already the beginning of the fight, and it needn't have been except as it happened. So what happened afterward made it into the beginning of the fight, and that's not just a matter of what we call it. That second one, the beginning of the fight, fits a very simple paradigm and you'll see why it's convincing. Suppose I put a brick here, or I put a brick over there and say, "What's that a part of?" You say, "I don't know. Just wait." And then we put other bricks around it and make a wall. Now we can say, "That was the first brick in the wall." If we put other bricks in a different way, we say, "That was the cornerstone of a building." If we put the bricks in still another way, we say, "That's one of the pillars of a bridge." So depending on what else we add, his thing becomes very different, and it really is different because there is a difference between being the cornerstone of a building and being the pillar of a bridge. So what a thing is depends in part on what else goes with it, or in general, what whole or pattern it is a part of. One of the things this does is sensitize you and remind you how much of our description of things are these part/whole descriptions, where you describe a thing in terms of what it's a part of. My usual example of that is a carburetor or a colonel. Calling something a carburetor is giving a part/whole description of it. Calling somebody a colonel is giving a part/whole description, saying, "This is an individual who is a part of, and a specific part of, this larger thing." Calling this a carburetor is saying, "This is an individual that is a part of, and a specific part of, this larger thing." Many more of our descriptions than you would believe, until you start examining, are of that sort, that they imply the other thing that this is a part of.

A third example is the degradation ceremony that we heard this morning. Remember the line that Jane raised a question about, namely, at the end of the degradation, "What he is now is what he was all along." So it now becomes the case that that's what he was all along. An informal version of that, you see very often when kids who are -riends break up. One of the famous last lines is, "I never liked you anyhow." And you can make up variations: "I never really trusted you." There's a whole bunch of things like that that people do say, and it becomes the case after the fact. Those ire variations on this degradation ceremony.

All I want to use those examples for is to give you examples of something other than "the moving finger writes from left to right". That just gets us started into something else than just that. And it's good to get started with those, because those are simple, non-problematical, non-paradoxical, and it's good to get your feet wet with them because some of the other ones are not so tame. [change tape]

Joe: - - - a more specific description, like the first play of the game, if you start arguing about whether it was the first play, you're in the soup. If you take some sort of more novel thing like, "It's the kind of thing that ordinarily would be the first play of the game," or "I'm not going to answer you. We'll see what it turns out to be." That's a description that doesn't commit you.

Peter: No, look: if that's a practice, they're on the practice field and the guy goes back exactly the same way and throws exactly the same pass, you could give that description, namely, "It's the kind of thing that people do in a football game". That's very different from saying, "That was the first play of the game."

?: Are you saying that you couldn't be noncommittal enough?

Peter: No. It's that if you try being noncommittal, you can't say what you want to say, namely, that that's the first play of the game. You can say other things and not run into the problem, but you can't say this, which is the thing you want to say. The reason you want to say it is because you know it's so. At least, you're not doubting that it's so or otherwise you would be - - - - .

?: What happens when you insert the word "tentative" - - - - -

Peter: You can't have real parts of hypothetical things.

Jan: Try that one on the politicians.

Peter: You might try saying that it was intended as the first play in the game, and that's like talking about "his perceptions of the world". That's okay for a third person, but it's not okay for him, because you talk to the guy who threw the pass, and he'll say "This was the first play." But again, you see, you can do some manoeuvering, and that's because these are tame examples. You get a sense that you can't do just any kind of manoeuvering. You're going to lose--you don't get something for nothing, here. If you buy safety from the dilemma, you're going to lose something.

Let me now introduce a distinction that will simplify things later on, and that's the distinction between a historical argument or formulation, and a categorical one. In the relevant sense, a historical formulation is one that makes essential reference to historically particular persons, occasions, events, objects, processes, etc. That's why I say, "Saturday afternoon at Folsom stadium, on January third, 1975"--it's a particular game that this thing is the first play of. That's a historical formulation. In contrast, a categorical argument refers to no historical particulars. It just refers to certain kinds or categories of things. There's a relation between the two -n that a historical formulation, if it's successful, is going to have to be backed up by a categorical one. Roughly speaking, the categorical one for the football game is that without wholes, there's no parts either. That refers to no historical thing at all. It just refers to categories. If you don't have wholes, you can't have parts. If you don't have parts, you can't have wholes. From that, then, you can generate all kinds of examples that you can't have wholes without parts, etc. Some of them will be historical, like the football game, because the whole in question there is a temporal process. It's a behavior pattern that's extended through time. And something that is extended through time is not a whole, it's not there until it's finished. In contrast, a car with a carburetor is not a temporal fact, but the same argument applies. Where there no cars, there would be no carburetors, or if there were no motors, there would be no carburetors. So the categorical argument is: without wholes, there are no parts. So when you describe something in a way that implies that it's a part of something, you can't do that if there's no corresponding whole.

?: How about a person's life?

Peter: That's a whole.

?: - - - - -

Jan: That has some interesting implications for the family legislation that Congress is considering.

Peter: "Where does life begin?" Not all of these origin questions are trivial. Okay, there's some elaboration that you could make on wholes and parts, but that's the basic idea, that to have a part, you have to have a corresponding whole, and

logically you can't have one without the other. So if the one is not present, whether because it's incomplete or because it hasn't finished yet, or whatever, then you don't have that part, either.

Now let me enrich the mixture with another example that sounds historical but really is categorical. That' the example of chess, and many of you have heard this one, too. Imagine that we have a chess board with a bunch of pieces laid out, and the pieces are made of onyx that's carved into appropriate shapes. So I pick this one up, and it's a pawn, and I say, "There it is, and it's a pawn, and there's no hocus pocus about that." It is a pawn. I say, "Now chess was invented about three thousand years ago, as far as we know. Suppose this scene had taken place four thousand years ago. Would this be a pawn?" The answer is No. Until chess was invented, nothing could be a pawn, including this. That has a certain air of creating something out of nothing, doesn't it? And indeed, it's true. This wasn't a pawn before chess was invented. Nothing was a pawn before chess was invented, but now it is. Notice why I say it's really a categorical one, even though I put it in historical terms of "before chess was invented". You could put it in timeless terms: without the game of chess, nothing could be a pawn. There's no time element involved. So the historical one collapses back into a categorica. one. Or imagine a peculiarly shaped and inflated pigskin. A hundred years ago--was that a football then? No. Is it a football now? Yes, for the same reason. Okay, those are what you might call intermediate examples. One of the good things about games is, they are so clearly human inventions, and the logic of "without chess, nothing could be a pawn" helps to make it plausible, because it's quite clear with those examples that certain things are created by human invention. Certain things don't exist if certain human inventions don't take place. That's one of the general notions that we're going to need, that human inventions create the existence of certain things. With those games, again it's not problematic, it's not mysterious, but it's there and it works that way.

?: Is this related to the significance of things?

Peter: Probably but not centrally. The main issue is, What is it? And the answer four thousand years ago was not, "It's a pawn." Now the answer is, "It's a pawn." One of the other things about games is that they involve conceptual systems. The conceptual systems are given by rules, and it's nice to be able to say what they are. Most other conceptual systems, other than some mathematics, you know there's one but you can't lay it out and say here it is. So with games, it's nice that we can lay out the rules and say, "Here it is. This is what the rules are; this is the conceptual system that determines the notion of pawn and bishop and rook and castle, etc." So one of our part/whole formulations is, "Nothing can be an element in a conceptual system (like a pawn), or an instance of such an element (like this pawn), if the conceptual system doesn't exist." Then you can paraphrase the last line into, "before the conceptual system was invented." Nothing can be an element in a conceptual system, or an instance of such an element, before the conceptual system is invented. That's the paradigm that these game examples fit.

Jan: - - - - - - we use game concepts to describe historical events--"So and so was a pawn of such and such a ruler". How would they have described that kind of thing before there was that concept?

Peter: Who knows?

Jan: What I'm wondering is whether--this is a serious question; I'm not being - - - -

Peter: The description might have been, "He was a toy in the hands of".

Jan: So that the creation of a role, say in a game the role of a pawn, would not necessarily be the creation of an entirely new role or an entirely new concept, but it could be --

Peter: No, it is. There is nothing like being a pawn in chess.

?: It thereby enriches the language, and makes possible the locution.

Jan: I understand it from that end. I'm trying to look at it from the other. I'll ask you later.

Peter: Just for future reference, because of continuity here, what I want to suggest is that there are relevant wholes of which everything else is a part. And what these wholes are, are human social practices and institutions. Games are merely a special case of human social practices, and as I say, they have the virtue that in connection with them, it's quite clear that and how they are human inventions. Because of that, they provide clear examples of how the existence of something can depend on human invention.

Come back to this pawn here, this piece of onyx. Did the piece of onyx become a pawn?

Gideon: It couldn't until pawns were discovered.

Peter: We wouldn't like to say that, would we? One reason being that it's still a piece of onyx, and when you speak of X changing into Y, usually it's not X any more. So in this case, you wouldn't want to say that the piece of onyx changed into a pawn.

Joe: You could, though, without violating preservation parameter - - - - - -

Peter: The parameters of onyx don't include being captured by a bishop. We're talking about onyx, not 'object', and the parameters of 'object' don't include being captured by bishops, either.

Joe: They could still acquire new eligibilities.

Peter: Not as objects. You have to say, "the same thing that is the object, is the pawn". It's not that the object is the pawn; it's not that the onyx is the pawn; it's that same thing. You remember that crucial move in the State of Affairs System: "the same thing as". This thing is the same thing as that, not that one is really the other. It's coordination. So the same thing that is the object is the same thing that is the onyx is the same thing that is the pawn, but it is not that the onyx is the pawn, etc.

The resolution of that fits the functional autonomy situation, namely, that what's changed is the community. The community has changed from a non-chess-playing community into a chess-playing community. And that change in a community is not paradoxical. That's the kind of change that routinely takes place in communities. That -ind of change fits the parameter principle, that what changes about a community is the values of some of its parameters, and one of the parameters of communities is social practices. So the change in the social-practice parameter of communities is not paradoxical; it fits the parameter principle. With two examples, that should lead you to a generalization, namely, that what you pick as the thing that's going to change makes a real big difference in the kind of freedom you have to say what changes occurred. If we pick the onyx as the thing that's changing, then we're prohibited from saying what we want to say, namely, the onyx changed into a pawn. If we pick the community as the thing that's going to do the changing, then it's very simple and non-paradoxical. And that was the case with the functional autonomy. Instead of saying it's the mechanism that changes and it changes into a motive, you say it's the person who changed, and that kind of change in persons is not problematic. What we pick as the thing that's going to do the changing, in the formula X becomes Y, what we pick as the X makes a whole lot of difference in the kind of freedom that we have to specify change.

These are still tame examples, and you might register that by saying, "It still sounds --little physicist that I am--like the difference between hard facts and soft facts." It sounds like the difference between real things that go on and human interpretations of them. That has a certain amount of plausibility within this range of examples, even though one might point out that in fact, when you invented chess, that was new, and that pawn really couldn't have existed before then, etc., and that's not just a way of talking. That's literal, hard fact. Still it's easy to--because, as I say, these are relatively tame examples--so let's turn the screw another notch.

Paul Zeiger: Before you go on --

Peter: This won't hurt a bit, Paul.

Paul: Would it be fair to interpret some of the examples you've given as an admonition to--when it rouble with one of these things, look for changes in the whole, not the part?

Peter: That's a good rule of thumb. The reason is that the way we've gone wrong in the past is to go the opposite direction because of that physicalist view, and that's why it's a good rule of thumb to go the opposite way. When you're in trouble going down, try going up. But it's only a rule of thumb.

The next move is going to draw a little blood, but it won't hurt. And it's a very simple move, namely, what holds for the pawn holds for the onyx, too. Before people invented the social practices and the corresponding conceptual system which involved distinguishing onyx from other substances and treating it accordingly, there were not and could not have been pieces of onyx. There might have been something, but it wasn't onyx. The logic of that is exactly the same as the pawn. Until there were the practices and the conceptual system that created the distinction, nothing could have been an instance of those distinctions. That invention happened further ago, probably, than we have good history, at least the informal distinctions, but you can readily imagine that there was a time when this system of distinctions got invented, and now we distinguish between onyx and quartz and other sorts of minerals. That, in fact, may not have been in the dim past. It may have been in the relatively recent past. Now why this one draws blood is, number one, it is just as simple and just as direct as the pawn, which I think is indubitable. Secondly, it has another wrinkle to it, namely, as soon as we invented that system and there were pieces of onyx, it also became the case that those pieces of onyx had been around for a long time. That wasn't true with the pawn. Pawns only began to exist when we invented that game, but with onyx, once we invented it and it was onyx, there already had been onyx. That's your first true ex post facto example. It then became the case that there had been onyx lying around for a long time previously, because onyx is that kind of thing and its being that kind of thing is part of the game.

The next move: what holds for onyx, holds for everything else. [laughter] There is nothing else whatever that you couldn't plug into exactly the same formula as the pawn and the onyx, whether it be objects--stones, rivers, trees, buildings, minerals, planets--they all fit the same formula: before we invented the distinctions for which these things were to be instances, there couldn't have been any such instances; there couldn't have been any such thing.

Notice what a flip we have now. We have a completely ex post facto world. So it's not merely that now we have an exception to this moving finger picture. The whole world is ex post facto. What does that lead us to say at this point? Would we say, "Well, then there was no world before there were people"? Not quite. That's still the simple moving-finger formulation. What we need to say is, "There was no world before there were people, before there were people."

?: Say that again. [laughter]

Peter: Let me give you a grammatical paraphrase: "There was no 'world before there were people' until after there were people." It's only once there were people that it became the case that there was a world there before people came along. The same thing goes for afterwards. It's not that there won't be a world after people are gone; it's that there won't be "a world after people are gone" after people are gone. Or the paraphrase, "Only so long as there are people will it be the case that the world will be there after people are gone."

?: The ex post facto is one instance of a general pattern --

Peter: Yes, it's the category argument that can go forward --

?: -- - - - - - - -

Peter: I told you we were going to start drawing blood.

Joe: It seems to me that some of the blood is coming out of - - - - - which sounds like it's historical. In fact it isn't historical.

Peter: No, that's why I said that we're into category arguments even though they sound historical. Behind every good historical argument there's a corresponding category argument. We're really working categories.

?: - - - -

Peter: Because categories have historical instances.

Joe: I don't understand the point of doing it - - - without people there would not be a world - - - - problematical - - -

Peter: Because it's in the historical form that it creates the apparent paradox that things happen through time in simple progression. And that's what we're interested in. At this point.

?: Are you saying that one of the things you are trying to do is weaken this notion of - - - - time?

Peter: Yeah, first weaken it, then totally substitute. That's why I say, at this point we have an ex post facto world, not merely occasional exceptions to the left-to-right unfolding through time.

?: You say there will not be a world after people are gone, after people are gone. Will there be a world after people are gone before people are gone?

Peter: Yes. That means now. This is before people are gone. There will be a world after people are gone.

?: - - -

Peter: Yes, but that's another discussion and we'll get to it briefly at the end.

Gideon: - - - - that's part of the historical picture.

Peter: Now, having an ex post facto world is a good place to be, except that it, too, has its disadvantages. The major disadvantage is, it sounds as though we're omnipotent and could just make it all up. If you say, "People created the world", my God, it sounds like people are God and they could do anything they want. That violates our ordinary observation, which says clearly that we can't do whatever we feel like doing. So let's look at some of the limitations on omnipotence, look at some of the things

that people can't do. Number one, we can't create objects out of nothing. I can create a table, but I can't just snap my fingers and there's the table. I can't create a table out of thin air. I've got to put the pieces together, and putting the pieces together preserves the parameter principle. Snapping your fingers and there's a table would violate it. So that's one limitation on our omnipotence.

Gideon: One way of paraphrasing it is that the world was here first.

Peter: No, not at all. Secondly, we can't move objects at will. I can't just snap my finger and have this table move over there. It's possible to get it to move, but only in certain ways and certainly not just by deciding to have it happen. So that's not something I can just create, either. A third interesting category is perception. We can't perceive other than the way we do in fact perceive at that time. As I look over at the wall, I can't see an orange wall. I can see a cream-colored wall; I can't see an orange one. We can't perceive things other than as we in fact do. Or at least, our ability to do that is extraordinarily limited. That's what the whole notion of observation depends on, that since we don't have a choice about it, we take what comes, whereas if we could choose what we observe, we could create any experimental data we wanted. And we wouldn't have found out anything.

Now we can, and routinely do, create something out of nothing, namely, our own behavior We have no tendency to ask, "What was it that changed into the behavior that you just engaged in?" Your behavior has to be very peculiar before somebody asks, "Where did that come from?" You can relate this to the more general categories of object and process. Objects can't be created out of nothing, but in general, processes are, because there's no presumption, with processes, that they came from anywhere, and there is no presumption of continuity. So when I reach for the coffee, here, there's nothing that that behavior came from. There's nothing that changed into that behavior at that time. That's just what occurred. So if you're going to put it into the context of where did it come from, the answer is Nowhere, and that's routine. So there is one thing that people routinely do create out of nothing, is their own behavior. Within some limits, we also move at will. When I reach for this cup, I move and I do that just by deciding to do that. I don't have to manipulate anything in order to reach for the cup: I just do it. So again, within the limits of our embodiment, we move at will. So those are the two things where we seem to have--in some sense--the ability to create something out of nothing, to create things at will, is our own behavior.

There are limitations, because our own behavior is limited by our knowledge, by our motivation, by all of our personal characteristics, including our inventiveness. If you tried to invent new behaviors, you'd get stuck pretty quick, start repeating yourself. People are not infinitely ingenious. So evem though in principle we create behaviors, in fact we have an awful lot of empirical, practical limitations on which behaviors we produce.

Joe: How about states of affairs? Are those created - - - - -

Peter: States of affairs are like objects, in that you have to pick the size of it carefully. At one level of description, one state of affairs does not change into another; it's simply succeeded by another one. But if you go to a more global description, you can say that it changed from one to another. Again, the rule is "Go up, young man".

Dan Minerva: I would say that behavior is created from experience and personal characteristics, just like --

Peter: Try the parameter rule. How can an experience change into a behavior? It's one thing to say that you behave the way you do because you have the experience, etc. It's another to say you create the behavior out of the experience. Again, it's a case of - - - - .

Okay, those are some of the limitations and some of the non-limitations. We turn the screw again: what holds for pawns and onyx and everything else holds for behavior. It's another limitation on behavior. If you take behavior X, you can apply the same formula: before we invented the social practices and the conceptual system that involves distinguishing between behavior X and behaviors Y and Z, and treating them accordingly, there couldn't be and weren't any behavior X's. Before we invent a system for distinguishing behavior X from behavior Y, you could have some behavior, maybe, but not behavior X.

?: But we invented that system, and the people over in some other place might not know about it.

Peter: Once you invented it, it doesn't matter who. For us, it's behavior X.

Tom: It's behavior X, but those people there don't know it.

Peter: Yeah, but it is behavior X because we know it.

?: Is it the distinction to describe behavior X and behavior Y?

Peter: The distinction is what you use to describe it, but creating the distinction also creates the possibility that there is something of that sort.

?: - - - - social practices that were sexist - - - - -

Peter: That fits the degradation ceremony. It also fits the pattern of insight therapy where at some point you say, "Aha, now I can see that all my life I've been competing with my father." As soon as you see it, it becomes that, just like the Move 2. "Ah, now I see that all kinds of things that I've been doing have been sexist." That fits the Move 2 pattern. That's what I can now see that they were then. Except that if I hadn't achieved that insight, who's to say that that's what they were? That's the ex post facto aspect.

Jan: What happens when you try to stuff the genie back in the bottle, as is now a common practice? Where people are saying that there is no such thing as sexist acts. The distinction's already been made.

Peter: I've never heard that. It doesn't seem to make sense.

Jan: As for instance, "There is no such thing as racial discrimination". Two or three weeks ago, one of Mr Reagan's tame friends said that one. "There is no discrimination in this country on the grounds of race or whatever." But it's still accurate that there is if one has already made that distinction. Is that right?

Peter: Yeah.

Jan: What happens when somebody tries to teach a bunch of people that that's not a meaningful distinction to make? That's what I wonder.

Peter: I was just about to say something relevant to that, namely, that at this point it would be natural to feel that we've kind of lost contact. So let me give you a clinical sort of example. Once we say that what holds for pawns, holds for behavior, and that no behavior is an island because it requires that there be other behaviors in order that there be this one, all behaviors then are interconnected. We could no more have a single behavior, without any other behaviors, than you could have a single number 5 without any other numbers. You've got a whole domain there, not a bunch of things. In ordinary clinical practice we encounter what we call distortions of reality. For example, suppose I said, "Hey, there's an elephant there." You look over there and you say, "Bullshit." Then you start negotiating. You take a hard line: "What do you

mean, there's an elephant there?" I say, "Look, it's right here." You say, "That's no elephant, that's a cup." I say, "No, it's an elephant." You say, "If that's an elephant, you ought to be able to feed him something." I say, "Yeah, I'm going to feed him some alfalfa." You say, "That wasn't feeding him some alfalfa. That was just moving a paper around." Notice that that conversation matches exactly the formal thing that I've presented, namely, that there's an initial judgement, an initial distortion, which if I want to maintain it, has to be backed up by other distortions, because by common standards I did not succeed in treating that as an elephant. Furthermore, on the second round I did not succeed in treating my own previous behavior as a case of successfully treating that as an elephant, and in the third round, I did not succeed in treating my second behavior as a case of successfully treating my first behavior as a case of treating it as an elephant. So when I make that initial distortion, you start putting pressure on me by giving me the implications: if that's so, then this other thing has to be so, and if that's what you did, then this other thing is so. And either little by little we retreat from reality and maintain that there's an elephant, or you put enough pressure on me for me to admit that no, after all there wasn't an elephant. And that's what you routinely do in therapy. Because saying that's an elephant is not just an isolated, single thing. It's a piece of a whole network, and if that piece is there, the rest of it is there, too, and I have to back it up with every one of these others, and usually I don't. Usually I don't. Usually I back off. But if I'm in the right frame of mind--guess what?--that's an elephant and you're just bugging me, and all of you are just bugging me, and you are all perceiving wrongly, and on and on and on. It's just a gigantic conspiracy to conceal the presence of that elephant.

There you have it, you see. No behavior is an island. You have a whole domain of logically interconnected things. But remember, behavior was what we can create. And we don't create single behaviors; we've got the whole system of behavior, the whole system of concepts for different behaviors, and they are connected in fancy, sequential logical, categorical, various ways. It's a highly structured domain.

That gives us what you might call a different center of gravity. Instead of a left-to-right moving finger, what we have is the domain of behavior, and stuck in there is worlds--things, tables, chairs, mountains, planets. They are all part of this one network which includes natural objects, it includes histories, it includes processes, objects, etc. And it's the domain of behavior and behavior patterns that all of these are included in. You remember I said earlier, by way of anticipating, it's human social practices and institutions (which means organized practices) that everything else is a part of.

Paul: Are you saying that the limitations on our ability to create behaviors come from the fact that all behavior is of a piece, and there's a whole bunch of links here to other behaviors that somehow have to be - - - - and we codify those links in terms of what we would call the physical world?

Peter: Yeah. Now I said that this is a highly structured and complex domain. In fact, that's the domain that the whole effort to formulate the Person Concept is directed at. The Person Concept, as formulated, is the delineation of this domain, and it includes World, People, Behavior, and Language as its essential parts. So we have an approach, a view, which is entirely different from the left-to-right moving finger. Now what about these origin questions, again? How did language begin? How did persons originate? Where do thoughts come from? Where did the world come from? There are still those questions, and to the question Where do persons come from, you can go out and study fossils and you come up with an evolutionary theory.

Paul: No, that's where their bodies came from.

Peter: Well ... What you have then is a story with gaps. You always need that missing link, because you still have the gap between persons and non-persons, and

if you start saying that persons came from something non-person you have a gap, and you keep trying to fill it with missing links. That's okay, because what we've done by generating the ex post facto world is, we've removed the mystique and the transcendental aspect of that question. It loses its voyeuristic interest. Instead, if you ask, "Where did language come from, how did language originate, etc.?", it's a purely practical question for human purposes. It's not a ringside seat for looking at what really, really happened. Because of that, most of the magic is gone, most of the interest is gone, there are still practical purposes to be served by doing the natural history and doing what we can to either codify or gloss over the gaps.

Joe: That's where the physical world, or a piece of it - - - where did the behavioral world came from? Where did the domain of behavior come from?

Peter: Again, as a practical question, you always answer it with what you have available. And what you have available is all of the observations and theories and explanations that people have come up with.

Joe: What about the whole behavioral world, the domain of behavior?

Peter: It has no history. That was the essential precondition for there to be a history. You remember, after there were people, there was a world with a history, not before.

Joe: So you're saying there's no question? It's not a proper question to ask where the domain of behavior came from?

Peter: Yeah. The answer there is Nowhere. But once you have it, you can still ask the same old questions, but they've lost their magic.

?: Before last year, there was not a 17 banana. [laughter]

Peter: You remember, I commented that we have a lot of practical questions like that, nd we answer them routinely by giving a historical account, and we have no problem and they're not exciting. At this point, what I'm saying is that once you generate the ex post facto world, if you continue to ask those questions, you're going to have to ask them as purely practical ones, take the practical answers that you can generate for whatever they're worth--because you're going to generate them for a human purpose--

and they lose the kind of interest they had, because they are purely --

Tom: Pete, give an example of practical questions [change tape]

Peter: ..... -- is here, and moving that individual over here. If you can establish the sequence, then maybe you can make it happen by following that sequence, by bringing it about. Now if you can't, you can't. That's what I mean by 'practical purposes'. Having made these questions about beginnings purely practical, it becomes very practical to end. [applause]

Jane: - - - question period.

Peter: I thought I had filibustered my way through the question period.

Paul: Earlier today, Joe and I were discussing religious notions of the origin of the universe, and we concluded that the ones we were familiar with were not historical but logical, that is, they represented logical evolution of some sort. And I think for all of them, you could say that what's trying to be explained here is some sort of logical inner structure of this Person Concept, the thing you were pointing to at the end of the lecture.

Peter: I'm not sure I understand you. Are you saying that the explanations have shown

an evolution, or are you saying that a given explanation is of an evolutionary sort?

Paul: I'm saying that if you're going to try and give an articulation of the Person Concept, you have to start someplace, and that most of the stories of creation with which we're familiar make various choices about where they're going to start and how they're going to build on that starting point.

Peter: I don't have them well enough in hand to agree, but I don't know of anything that would lead me to disagree. Let me add something on that, because one of the points I wanted to make is on this evolutionary thing. If you do a natural history f human thought and just look at the sequence, one of the main things that we observe is that thinking becomes more sophisticated. That's because history is cumulative. We don't just repeat the mistakes of an earlier generation of thinkers.

Jan: You mean, we make new ones.

Peter: Yeah, we make new ones in the light of having solved or resolved or rejected theirs, and then doing the best we can. And so there is a trend, and it's not a simple linear trend through time like the moving finger. It is also--every now and then we say to hell with it all and let's start fresh. But even there, you see, saying, "Let's start fresh", you know what you're rejecting. You go to something that seems preferabl to what has gone before, so again it's the increase in sophistication--if you're successful. And what I wanted to suggest is that the moving-finger type of view is obsolete. It was good in 1900, it may have been good in 1920, but by God this is 1981. And what becomes apparent over time is the inadequacies of a given account, of a given viewpoint, and I would suggest that the inadequacies of the moving-finger approach have become very apparent, as you can see by the plethora of ex post facto things that you can point to. The notion that things just go from left to right was a candidate for abandonment at least 60 years ago. And you don't abandon it until you have an alternative, usually. And we have an alternative. Whereas it may not be the last word, it's the last word now.

John Forward: It's the case that the reality constraints on producing behavior are hemselves ex post facto formulations.

Peter: That - - - - - is yes and no. As soon as you see that sequence of behaviors, where behavior X depends on some other set of behaviors, then the issue of creating the thing that you used in behavior X is no longer a simple matter. In fact, practically everything depends on practically everything, and even the reality constraints on a behavior, before we invented those concepts of reality constraints and acted accordingly, there weren't those reality constraints. So you can see--the reality constraint you can formulate them, but basically they are boundary conditions, and so again it's not like having a single thing that you can point to and say, "There's the limit." It's a very different sort of logic in this kind of thing than a process that simply goes from A to B to C to D. And what it has is logical depth and logical structure, and history through time is only one, maybe minor, aspect. Except that how we live our life is through time, in history.

Paul: In looking at the world we've got now, it's all ex post facto, suggests to me that we ought to be aware of the possibility that it could change in fundamental and unanticipated ways. It's not terribly likely, since the whole system has a certain amount of inertia, but it looks to me like we have much more to grab hold of than one would ave otherwise believed.

Peter: Yeah, and let me give you a characteristic sample or example. Among the humanists, it's characteristic to say, "Human potential is unlimited." And that sounds nice, and it sounds like their heart is in the right place, except that you say, "Who the hell could know that, the way this guy seems to know this?" Well, there's a way of saying it that doesn't create those problems. The way of saying it

is in a double negative form, namely, that one of the limitations that human beings have, in fact, is that they have no way of setting limits to what they may come to be able to do. That gives you the same practical mileage of saying that human potential is unlimited. It does not involve you in the problem of claiming to know something that you couldn't possibly know. But as I say, you arrive at the same point. And there's nothing about reality constraints that says they stay the same. They may change over time. They seem to. So what is not possible for us today may be possible for us tomorrow. I think this is the kind of idea that you're getting at, is that there's nothing fixed there. There's no limit to the kind of changes that could possibly take place, but there are practical limits and practical guidelines. Now where can we get from here in a finite time with what we have, etc.? And then recognize that our formulation of those limits is not foolproof, either. That's part of our creation, too.

Paul: I can't resist a humorous one. If all the scientists in the world really got this notion that these origin questions in natural history don't really have that kind of significance, how many of them, do you think, would quit doing science?

Peter: Quite a few.

Paul: I think so, too.

Peter: It's a very grabby sort of idea that you could sit at the right hand of God and know what it was really like, and know how it really happened. That's why I call it voyeuristic. Okay.