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# Reducing Conflict Between Ordinary People by Third Party Interventions

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**Title:** Reducing Conflict Between Ordinary People by Third Party Interventions

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**Response to this paper by:** Gerald Nosich

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## ***Introduction***

In the argumentation literature there are numerous references to the idea that arguers and rhetors should try to understand their interlocutors and audiences (Liu 1999, 306; Tindale 1999, 15, 17, 67, 69, 72, 76, 89, 98, 115, 189, 190, 200, 203, 206; Adler 1996, 337; Crosswhite 1996, 62, 66, 67, 68; Gordon 1996, 263; Jacquette 1996, 4; Brinton 1995, 330; Cohen 1995, 182; Foss & Griffin 1995, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12; Johnson 1995, 261, 1981, 8; Kaplan 1995, 113, 116; Walton 1992, 108, 255, 256, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 277; Ayim, 1991, 86; Fiumara 1990, 8, 12, 28, 29, 74, 85, 115, 144, 150, 157, 165; Bartlett 1988, 225; Blair 1987, 4; Blair & Johnson 1987, 52; Blythin 1979, 185; McKerrow 1977, 139, 140, 141; Johnstone Jr. 1973, 388, 389, 1965, 3-5; Brockriede 1972, 4-6; Ehninger 1970, 104, 109, 110; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 117, 118, 141, 145-148, 492; Natanson 1965, 12, 14, 15).<sup>1</sup> Different terms and phrases are used to convey the idea; for example, self-risk, existential risk, empathy, openness, willingness to be changed, seriously consider objections. In the field of critical thinking there are many theorists concerned with the issue of critical thinking dispositions. A standard disposition one finds in this literature is that of “openmindedness” (Ennis 1996, 171, 175; 1962, 86; Siegel 1993, 163-177; Norris 1992, 157-164; Fisher 1991, 31, 32, 34; Missimer 1990, 145-153; Walters 1989, 76, 84; Millman 1988, 47; Paul 1985, 12, 17, 18). The critical thinking field is not only characterized by the goal of identifying dispositions, but also of how to teach them. It has been over a decade since Arthur Millman (1988, 47) challenged the area to move the discussion “...beyond the level of catch phrases...”. While there has been progress<sup>2</sup> (Crosswhite 1996, 269-299; Redshaw 1994, 13; Glaser 1992, 24, 26; Weinstein 1988, 44; Cannon & Weinstein 1985, 29, 31, 33), argumentation theorists have yet to seriously turn their attention to the issues surrounding understanding and emotion. [At least one exception is Gilbert (1997).] The issue of emotion in understanding is crucial for two reasons: first, there is a difference between an arguer who is intellectually open but emotionally closed and an arguer who is intellectually open *and* emotionally open; second, many deep conflicts between ordinary people do not have a hope of being resolved unless the parties more adequately understand the emotional aspects of the conflict. [For the issue of deep disagreement see the following: (Churchill 1988; Fogelin 1985; Davson-Galle 1992; Garver 1993; Kienpointer 1996; Levi 1992; Lugg 1986; Markham 1989).]

This paper will touch on both reasons, and also the important issue of fusion that arises when normative claims are made about certain attitudes which arguers and rhetors should adopt toward their interlocutors and audiences. In a recent paper, Foss and Griffin (1995, 12) recommend that a rhetor adopt the Rogerian attitude of “unconditional positive regard”. There have been other attempts to find in Carl Rogers tools with which to help ground a dialogical theory, in particular the communication scholars Rob Anderson and Kenneth Cissna. Anderson

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<sup>1</sup> This list is not meant to be exhaustive.

<sup>2</sup> By ‘progress’ I mean the work being done in trying to develop critical thinking dispositions in people.

and Cissna as well as others, adopt Rogers' prohibition on fusion. I will argue that such a prohibition is a mistake if we want to reduce conflict between ordinary people in deep conflicts.

### *Dialogue*

My investigation into the dialogue approach begins with a recent book by Jay Rothman (1997) about resolving deep conflicts between people. [When I refer to the 'dialogue approach' I do not intend to refer to everything that mentions the word 'dialogue' or its derivatives. Obviously I am only dealing with a slice of this literature. For the purposes of this paper, the "dialogue approach" is what is cited here (Anderson 1982, 1984; Arnett 1981, 1982, 1986, 1989; Arnett & Nakagawa 1983; Cissna & Anderson 1990; Johannesen 1971; Poulakos 1974; Stewart 1978, 1983; Stewart & Thomas 1986).]

There is much to admire in this analysis, although I believe it is ultimately too cautious. We can get an initial understanding of the dialogue approach to the reduction of conflict, by seeing that it is different from conventional negotiation and interest-based approaches to managing conflict. Interest-based methods are appropriate where the parties make a crucial "tacit agreement" (Rothman 1997,15). The tacit agreement made by both parties is that a negotiated settlement is better than no settlement at all (Rothman 1997, 15). However, in some conflicts no such agreement is made. In these cases, what is needed is a *dialogue* between the parties that results in an understanding between the parties such that conventional negotiation can begin (Rothman 1997, 15).

Rothman (1997, 40) states that the way people can overcome attributing negative dispositions to each other is to gain "analytic empathy". There are two relevant aspects to Rothman's concept of analytic empathy.

The first is the notion of an internal perspective. In discussions about empathy we commonly find the idea that the achievement of empathy allows us to see how a person understands his situation. The way Rothman (1997, 45) puts it is that "...we can begin to understand their viewpoints and assumptions as contextually legitimate". This is a standard view.

However the second aspect, the notion of analyticity, is not standard; it emerges from the needs of a particular context. The term 'analytic' in this context, suggests that the way in which we "begin to understand their viewpoints and assumptions" is mainly cognitive or intellectual. Even though the terms 'cognitive' and 'intellectual' are not synonyms, I believe they are roughly adequate for the contrast Rothman wants to emphasize. We can see this clearly when Rothman (1997, 45) distinguishes between analytic and emotional empathy: "I term such an understanding *analytic empathy* (Rothman, 1992). Ralph White speaks of *realistic empathy* (1984). This is quite different from *emotional empathy*, when parties come to feel like one another" (italics in original). Here Rothman has linked the concepts of emotion and feeling, and contrasts them with the term 'analytic'.

Thus Rothman's view is that emotion has something to do with feeling. This seems to imply that he has an affective or feeling-based view of emotion because of the limitation he places on the concept of analytic empathy. The limitation arises out of the context of reducing deep conflicts. Rothman states that the concept of realistic empathy is similar to analytic empathy. The idea appears to be that emotional empathy is a useful concept, that people really can feel what

another feels, yet in *this* context where we have two parties in deep conflict, it is just not realistic. Therefore we must lower our expectations to see if analytic empathy can be achieved.

Rothman admits the possibility of emotional empathy, but doesn't think it is realistic for his purposes. I think Rothman is wrong about this, but he is importantly wrong. In his recognition that there are different kinds of empathy he shows sensitivity to contextual considerations. The achievement of empathy in deep conflict will mean something different from its achievement between say, friends. Therefore, the facilitation of empathy or emotional understanding between parties in deep conflict may require different techniques from those used in other contexts. One implication of this is that the concept of *dialogue*, and therefore its facilitation, may have to mean different things depending on the context in which one works. Unfortunately, this kind of sensitivity to context is not shown in an important strand of the dialogue literature.

In this literature there is a limitation on "fusion" in empathy and understanding generally. To see just what this means we have to look at the work surrounding the exchange of ideas between Martin Buber and Carl Rogers (Anderson & Cissna 1997). Rothman states that he was influenced by Buber's thinking. This should not be surprising, since Buber is widely known as *the* philosopher of dialogue (Johannesen 1971).

### ***Carl Rogers***

Carl Rogers was also influenced by Buber, and it is to Rogers that I will turn first. There are numerous places where Rogers admitted this influence. For an interesting personal account of Buber's influence on Rogers see Shlien (1997). Relatively late in his career Rogers became active in resolving conflicts between large groups. This interest included what could be called peace issues between nations (Corsini 1989, 182; Rogers 1986a). However, Rogers' interest in this area was present early on (Rogers 1948, 1970). The key to these efforts was to find a way for people to become more empathic with each other (Corsini, 183). However, *empathy* is shorthand for the three conditions that are necessary and sufficient for therapeutic change: congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding (Rogers 1957, 96). That these three conditions are intertwined is confirmed by Rogers & Truax (1967, 100). In his book on encounter groups, Rogers (1970, 45) states, "In no basic philosophical way, so far as I can see, does this approach differ from that which I have adopted for years in individual therapy".

For Rogers, empathy is the goal because it will lead to therapeutic change. He believes that we must go through empathy to get to change because a direct route will not work. This is the basis for his famous non-directive approach to therapy (Rogers 1951, 1970, 45; Grant 1990). Rogers makes this point in his dialogue with Buber, using Buber's term *meeting*: "And yet in the, in the interchange of the moment, I don't think my mind is filled with the thought of 'Now I want to help you.' It is much more, um, 'I want to understand you.'" (Anderson & Cissna 1997, 60-61). And also this: "...I've learned through my experience that when we *can* meet, then help does occur, but that's a by-product" (italics in original, Anderson & Cissna 1997, 61). So if help occurs as a by-product of understanding—empathic understanding—we could say, what does Rogers focus on in understanding?

In a word, his focus is on feelings, as we can see from the following quote.

I am centered in the group member who is speaking, and am unquestionably much less interested in the details of his quarrel with his wife, or of his difficulties on

the job, or his disagreement with what has just been said, than in the *meaning* these experiences have for him now and the *feelings* they arouse in him. (Italics in original, Rogers 1970, 47).

It is true that Rogers says here that he is interested in meanings as well as feelings. However, in Rogers' (1975, 2) own view it was the issue of feeling that was crucial. In his practice the kind of responses Rogers gave could be described as "reflection of feelings" (Rogers 1965). In the history of psychotherapy, this term became operationalized and was thus taught as a technique (Bozarth 1984, 59; Rogers 1986b, 375). In a late article Rogers (1986b) denied that what he was doing was reflecting feelings.

Rather than reflecting feelings, Rogers (1986b, 376) claims that "I am trying to determine whether my understanding of the client's inner world is correct—whether I am seeing it as he or she is experiencing it at this moment". Interestingly, Rogers does not use the word 'feelings' right after he denies that he tries to reflect feelings. Instead, as shown above, he makes his point in terms of 'experiencing'. I believe the reason for this is that eleven years before, Rogers (1975, 3) wrote his last major article on empathy, where he proposed a new definition based on Gendlin's work on experiencing. The late paper on the issue of reflection bears the marks of his rethinking of empathy. To see what Rogers does with feelings we need to return to this paper on empathy.

In this paper Rogers (1975, 3) states his early definition. This is important enough to justify a lengthy quote.

The state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the 'as if' condition. Thus it means to sense the hurt or the pleasure of another as he senses it and to perceive the causes thereof as he perceives them, but without ever losing the recognition that it is as if I were hurt or pleased and so forth. If this 'as if' quality is lost, then the state is one of identification. (Italics in original).

Here Rogers warns us three times not to lose the 'as if' condition or we will end up with identification.

It is this issue of identification that I want to focus on. What does Rogers mean by identification? In an important paper on empathy, Dan Buie (1981, 290) states that some have used the term 'identification' in their concept of empathy. For example, Buie (1981, 290) says that Sandler and Rosenblatt "...write about identification in empathy as a form of momentary fusion of self-and object representations". I think this is a good way to understand what Rogers means by identification. Rogers (1951, 29) is against fusion, and particularly a certain type of fusion, as we can see from the following quote.

...since the experiencing with the client, the living of his attitudes, is not in terms of emotional identification on the counselor's part, but rather an empathic identification, where the counselor is perceiving the hates and hopes and fears of the client through immersion in an empathic process, but without himself, as counselor, experiencing those hates and hopes and fears.

Here Rogers warns against *emotional* identification. However, it is crucial to point out that he does not believe that he is against emotion per se. This allows him to feel to a certain extent what his clients are feeling, but he doesn't emotionally identify with such feelings.

Now I will quote some examples of the influence of the warning against identification found in the dialogue literature. The influence stems from both Rogers and Buber. Kenneth Cissna and Rob Anderson argue that Rogers and Buber share more similarities than Ron Arnett and John Stewart believe they do. This debate over similarities and differences does not effect the general agreement that identification should be avoided. As we will see, Arnett, Stewart, and Milt Thomas goes so far as to criticize the Rogerian concept of empathy for not providing enough resistance to identification.

In a paper about the contributions Rogers made to a philosophical praxis of dialogue, Cissna and Anderson argue against the misinterpretation of Rogerian empathy which held that it meant giving up one's own ground. Cissna and Anderson (1990, 138) set the record straight.

Not losing sight of the essential 'as if' means simply that Rogers recognized the danger of losing oneself in the other. Empathy, he thus emphasized, does not involve an abandonment of personal ground but demands an active imagining of how real another's ground might be.

Rob Anderson has defended Rogerian empathy before. In a response to a forum in the journal *Communication Education*, Anderson (1984, 195) adds a note on Buber: "Effective empathizers don't pretend to mind-read isolated inner feelings, but seek to imagine how the world might appear from another's perspective, while not sacrificing personal identity". And here is the note: "Katz, Rogers, and others believe that the empathic paradigm is sometimes best illustrated by Martin Buber's dialogic notion of 'inclusion'. Buber avoided the word 'empathy' because—contrary to current applications—he associated it with an abandonment of identity" (Anderson 1984, 195). One more quote from Anderson (1982, 354-355): "Buber equates the label of empathy with subjective experience in which one's identity is abandoned, but in Roger's notion, empathy does not involve such abandonment".

Ron Arnett and Gordon Nakagawa (1983, 370) interpret Rogers' prohibition on identification in this way: "Rogers underscores the necessity of *maintaining separate identities* when he notes that empathy is experienced when a counselor senses 'the client's inner world of private personal meanings as if it were your own, but without ever losing the as if quality'" (my italics). The difference between an acceptable level of therapist feeling, and identification, seems to have to do with a confusion of identity. A therapist is allowed to feel what his client feels as long as he realizes it is the *client's* feeling that he is feeling. In emotional identification, it appears that the therapist can't make the distinction between his patient and himself.

As I mentioned above, Arnett (1981, 210) criticizes Rogerian empathy from what he takes to be a Buberian perspective.

Rogers talks about experiencing another's feelings 'as if' they were his or her own. However, the 'as if' is often forgotten, because empathy is rooted in the psychological concern with possession, which often implies, 'I *can* understand your feelings,' emphasizing personal ownership and command of the situation, rather than stating, 'I will *attempt* to understand.' (Italics in original).

The only thing I want to point out is that the criticism is that Rogerian empathy is not *distanced* enough. John Stewart and Milt Thomas (1986, 182) echo this criticism when they describe the flaws in an empathic listening approach: “But there are also some problems with this view of listening. For one thing, it is based on a kind of fiction. As we mentioned, you cannot actually ‘get inside’ the other person’s awareness, and it can be confusing to try to think, feel, and act as if you could”.

We can see more evidence that Stewart (1983, 382) is dissatisfied with empathic listening when he contrasts it with hermeneutics: “An approach to listening consistent with this perspective enables one to give up the subjectivity and psychologizing of the empathic paradigm and not to depend on the occurrence of some ‘mysterious communion of souls’”.

When Arnett (1986, 276) describes Buber’s warning about leaving one’s ground, it sounds like a warning against identification.

First, an individual may leave his ground and blindly follow the other’s understanding and perception of an event, thereby escaping responsibility for his own unique response. The other’s concern becomes his direction. For example, a person could leave his own ground and only feel the other’s pain or hurt. This apparent helping of another could be detrimental to what the other may need.

This is not as clear a statement of the danger of identification as some others. However, I do think it amounts to the same thing. Arnett states that a person could “only feel the other’s pain or hurt”. To what extent is this possible without momentary identification? Even if there is some doubt about this, Arnett is stressing the *irresponsibility* of this feeling. There doesn’t seem to be any irresponsibility in feeling what another feels while being aware that it is not your feeling. To do that would be in Arnett’s terms, *not* leaving one’s ground.

Finally, I will end these examples with two short quotes. First, Richard Johannesen (1971, 375) who wrote about the sources of the concept of dialogue, states that for Buber, “...a basic element in dialogue is ‘seeing the other’ or ‘experiencing the other side.’ One also does not forego his own convictions or views...”. John Poulakos (1974, 212), describing what he sees as the implications of Buber’s distinction between being and seeming, makes an interesting claim about actors which is meant to apply to the ordinary lives of people and the roles they play: “To consider then, the actor and his role as one and the same implies no distinction between being and seeming. This, in turn, implies no distinction between sincerity and pretentiousness, superficiality and substantiality, rhetoric and dialectic, illness and health, or falsity and truth”. These consequences are the result of identification.

We saw that Arnett and Nakagawa describe identification as a confusing of identities. Arthur Bohart and Leslie Greenberg (1997, 427) both psychotherapists, see the warning against identification in terms of a confusion of *experience*.

...the therapist must be careful not to confuse his or her *experience* with that of the client’s or get lost in the client’s experience. One is to enter the client’s experience on an “as if” basis but never to lose the sense of distinction between self and client. (My italics.)

The concept of experience is more limited than the concept of identity, so presumably one could become confused over whether or not an experience belongs to oneself or another, while not being confused about one’s identity.

This quote by Bohart and Greenberg also mentioned the notion of getting *lost* in the client's experience. Being lost is different from being confused about ownership of experience. In Rogers' (1975, 4) new definition of 'empathy' he also warns us of this danger. The definition is long so I will excerpt the relevant parts of it.

You are a confident companion to the person in his/ her inner world. ... In some sense it means that you lay aside your self and this can only be done by a person who is secure enough in himself that he knows he will not get lost in what may turn out to be the strange or bizarre world of the other, and can comfortably return to his own world when he wishes.

There is no mention of the influential 'as if' statement; rather the image is one of a companion exploring the world of another and always being capable of returning to his own.

Bohart and Greenberg (1997, 433) also link the danger of getting lost in the client's experience to feelings.

A third objection is that the therapist may get "lost" in the client's experience and lose the advantage of offering an "objective" perspective. This is also indeed a danger. The therapist could get so immersed in the client's feelings that negative attitudes and ways of being and behaving inadvertently get reinforced.

This quote is instructive in that it makes it explicit that it is not just feelings that are the potential gateway to negative attitudes, ways of being, and behaving, but getting lost in them.

### ***Martin Buber***

At this point it might be helpful to look at what Buber says about empathy and feeling. Buber (1985, 97) doesn't have much to say about empathy except to contrast it with his notion of inclusion. Here is one description of inclusion.

A man belabours another, who remains quite still. Then let us assume that the striker suddenly receives in his soul the blow which he strikes: the same blow; that he receives it as the other who remains still. For the space of a moment he experiences the situation from the other side. Reality imposes itself on him. What will he do? Either he will overwhelm the voice of the soul, or his impulse will be reversed.

The idea of "experiencing from the other side" seems similar to the internal perspective of empathy. However, Buber (1985, 97) denies this in the following quote.

It would be wrong to identify what is meant here with the familiar but not very significant term "empathy". Empathy means, if anything, to glide with one's own feeling into the dynamic structure of an object, a pillar or a crystal or the branch of a tree, or even of an animal or a man, and as it were to trace it from within, understanding the formation and motoriality of the object with the perceptions of one's own muscles; it means to "transpose" oneself over there and in there. Thus it means the exclusion of one's own concreteness, the extinguishing of the actual situation of life, the absorption in pure aestheticism of the reality in which one participates.



This is a very interesting passage because of the difference between it and the interpretations of the warning against identification we have been considering. We can begin to see the difference if we list the various versions of the warning in short form: don't emotionally identify (Rogers), maintain separate identities (Arnett and Nakagawa), don't confuse your experience with the client's (Bohart and Greenberg), don't get lost in the client's world (Rogers), don't leave your ground and blindly follow the other's understanding (Arnett), and finally, don't get lost in the client's experience (Bohart and Greenberg). I don't believe that any of these interpretations is similar to Buber's warning. Buber doesn't mention identification, identity, confusion, or following another's experience.

I think the key to Buber's warning is to recognize its aesthetic context. It is generally recognized that Theodor Lipps and Edward Titchener are important figures in the history of the coining of the term empathy. (Parrella 1971, 210). Lipps was an aesthete and a psychologist, who believed that we "ascribe beauty to all things into which we can read a spirit analogous to our own" (Parrella 1971, 210). The important point here is that empathy for Lipps was an *active* attempt to project ourselves into something else. I believe active projection is what Buber is concerned with in our quote. He says empathy means to "glide with one's own feeling into the dynamic structure of an object". The word *glide* suggests an ease of movement that is reminiscent of playful confidence. And it is one's *own* feeling with which one glides. This means that one is taking one's feeling and projecting it into something else. This is not passively following another's understanding, nor is this confusing one's identity or experience with another; rather, it is knowing what one's identity and experience is, knowing what one's feeling is, and projecting it into another. If this is Buber's position then his worry is not that one will "get lost" at all. In order for one to get lost in another's experience one has to take a rather serious attitude toward mental exploration. This is true even of physical exploration, for imagine someone for whom home was wherever he happened to be at the moment. That kind of attitude is like the attitude of the person who feels into a work of art; there is no question of getting lost here, the person glides from experience to experience and if something doesn't seem right, he will just glide on to something else. I think this is a more plausible interpretation of the last sentence of the quote. The "exclusion of one's own concreteness" doesn't refer to getting lost in another, it refers to the act of leaving behind everything except one's feeling in order to play in the experience of something else. Buber says that this is the "extinguishing of the actual situation of life," which is true. The "pure aestheticism" of projection is a different experience from ordinary life.

This reading draws support from the personal experience of John Shlien. Shlien describes how he and Rogers were influenced by a passage of Buber's from *Between Man and Man*. The passages were about Buber's notion of inclusiveness, part of which I quoted above. I'll let Shlien (1997, 69-70) describe what happened next.

Three paragraphs from that work were circulated to the staff a few weeks later...What was not reproduced was Buber's statement on the page following these paragraphs, which contained his rather scornful dismissal of empathy. [This is the quote we have been considering] ... But I did not read this page until some years later, nor did Rogers. Buber was far ahead of us, closer to the original usage of the word empathy, and unlike psychologists, not in need of a "clinical" view of this term.

This shows that Buber's notion of empathy was aesthetic. This means that Buber's warning is different from what Rogers and others thought it was. For them, the warning was about confusing the other's identity, world, experience, with one's own.

### ***Predisposition and Vocation***

What are the reasons for the difference between Buber's warning against feeling into and how others thought about the danger of getting lost in another's feelings? While I don't know for sure, my hunch is that the difference has to do with the *vocation* of the therapist. Therapists want to help people, so there is much less chance of them treating their clients as objects for aesthetic experience. I would not think that therapists would need a warning against feeling into a client in pursuit of pure aestheticism. It appears that the danger is just the opposite, as we have seen from the quotations above. The danger of getting lost in feeling is a danger of *confusion*.

We have already seen one clear statement of the danger of getting lost in the client's experience from Bohart and Greenberg (1997, 433): "The therapist could get so immersed in the client's feelings that negative attitudes and ways of being and behaving inadvertently get reinforced". Just how would the client get inadvertent negative reinforcement? To follow the line of thought on confusion, negative reinforcement would result from the therapist's feeling the negative feelings of the client and becoming confused about whose feelings were whose. As Bohart and Greenberg state, the result could be a loss in objectivity. This loss of objectivity may then result in the therapist's not being in control enough in order to properly think about and carry out the practical tasks of therapy. Finally, this could give the client tacit permission to continue to feel and behave in negative ways.

I do not deny that this is a danger; but I want to say that it is a real danger only for therapists. Fusion is dangerous for therapists because of two things: their training and the demands of their vocation. Therapists receive training in empathic methods. While it is true that Rogers became dissatisfied with the way empathy became operationalized, these techniques do require some skill. If we think of empathy the way Rogers would have us do, then the skill required for empathic response is just increased.

As I mentioned earlier, Rogers (1961, 339) understood empathy to be intertwined with congruence and unconditional positive regard. Congruence occurs when there is "...an accurate matching of experience and awareness". Another word for congruency is 'transparency'. A congruent therapist is aware of what he is experiencing, so the situation in which a person is say, angry, but not aware of being angry, will not occur. Now if a therapist is congruent and experiences fusion, he will not only experience the client's feelings, but he will be aware that he is not able to determine if the feeling is his or his client's. The requirement of therapist congruence combined with the demands of the vocation, paints a dim picture for the therapist's professional satisfaction if he experiences fusion regularly. If the client feels bad, the therapist will feel it, and the confusion over whose feeling it is will impede his therapeutic work. Just how much therapists become congruent is an important question; but the point is that it is a goal for therapists and they work to achieve it.

Unconditional positive regard is the other necessary concept. It may seem that this has less to do with training than with the job description of the therapist. Therapists are in a helping profession and are predisposed to have positive regard for their clients. However, being a

therapist and having positive regard for clients may be basic, but *unconditional* positive regard is not. When Rogers (1959, 208) proposed this point it was novel.

Putting this in simpler terms, to feel unconditional positive regard toward another is to “prize” him (to use Dewey’s term, recently used in this sense by Butler). This means to value the person, irrespective of the differential values which one might place on his specific behaviors. . . . In general, however, acceptance and prizing are synonymous with unconditional positive regard.

No doubt the predisposition of therapists plays a significant part in empathy, but it is by no means the only part. When therapists are working with difficult patients they can learn to become more accepting. However therapists achieve unconditional positive regard, it is clear that the more one accepts and prizes another the easier it becomes to feel as he feels. The same danger mentioned above applies here as well. In short, therapists are empathic people through a combination of natural predisposition and training. For therapists to emotionally fuse with their clients would be professionally dangerous.

### ***Openness***

Finally, we come to the implications of all this for the dialogue literature. The skills and attitudes that it is recommended that participants use in dialogue are based on a *therapist’s* view of empathic understanding, which in turn is based on a therapist’s vocational needs. The skills and attitudes can be summed up in one word: openness. Here are some examples.

Equally essential, yet more adequate than the above three is a fourth condition which describes an attitudinal disposition on the part of the participants. This disposition refers to the concept known as openness (Poulakos 1974, 209). The essential movement in dialogue is turning toward, outgoing to, and reaching for the other (Johannesen 1971, 375). The above comments point to two important components in a dialogical encounter. First, an individual needs to stand her own ground, while being open to the other’s view (Arnett 1986, 274). The second distinctive feature of dialogic listening is its open-ended, tentative, playful quality (Stewart & Thomas 1986, 184). We equate empathy with social perception. It involves a heightened sensitivity to the needs and values of other people (Bochner & Kelly 1974, 289). Buber contends that the act of trying to figure out the other’s perception of oneself, and vice versa, is the death of dialogue and the root of existential mistrust (Arnett 1981, 209).

And one final quote:

An interplay exists between two partners in dialogue such that when one partner is able to listen more sensitively to the other, to respond with greater caring and respect, or to be more careful in identifying and expressing his or her own feelings and needs, both parties and the relationship benefit (Cissna & Anderson 1990, 141).

The skill of openness and its related concepts are appropriate and useful for therapists given that they have to gain an emotional understanding of their clients. Since the therapist’s view of emotional understanding doesn’t include fusion, this limitation gets transferred into the notion of dialogue. Thus dialogue *means* no fusion.

Now if Arnett, Nakagawa, Stewart, and Thomas want to defend the idea that interlocutors should use therapeutic skills in order to be more effective communicators, fine. The problem arises when they place a limit on the intensity of identification and hence a limit on the possible techniques which could be used to achieve more intense identification, i.e. fusion. Such a limitation is unfortunate because it effectively erases the difference between types of argument. To ban fusion is to assume that interlocutors in general can be susceptible to the same occupational hazards as therapists. In order for that to be true, the kind of relationship between interlocutors would have to be analogous to the therapeutic relationship.

It seems obvious to me that interlocutors in deep disagreement and conflict do not have a relationship analogous to a therapeutic one. Parties to a deep disagreement are far less willing to be open to their interlocutor. Ultimately it is a matter of the will whether or not the parties will adopt a more open attitude. But again, there is a huge difference between the wills of therapists and the wills of parties in deep disagreement and conflict when it comes to being open towards another. The limit of willpower is much greater in the latter case. The skill of openness is appropriate for therapists because of their predisposition to help their clients. However, for parties engaged in deep disagreement and conflict, suggesting that they be more open mistakes the end for the means. For our purposes being open is the goal of dialogue, and we need a different way to get there.

The deeper and more serious the disagreement and conflict, the less likely it is that the parties will adopt the therapeutic skills of openness. My suggestion, which is rather intuitive and not at all new, is that a third party is needed. I believe that interlocutors in deep disagreement are more likely to be open to third parties *guiding them through* techniques intended to foster an open atmosphere, than inclined to adopt therapeutic skills of openness *directly*.

### ***Fusion***

Let us look at fusion again outside the therapist context. Recall that Rothman's first aspect of analytic empathy was the notion of an internal perspective. I hope it is clear by now that when it comes to understanding the emotions of another, the dialogue literature follows the therapist's view of empathy that excludes fusion. So an internal perspective on another's emotions amounts to an understanding of those emotions without fusion.

Rothman didn't believe that it was realistic to hope that parties in deep conflict could come to feel like each other, therefore he told us to forget about feeling. Like Rothman, I believe that we should be sensitive to context. While I'm not as pessimistic about the possibility that each party in a deep conflict could come to feel how the other feels, I don't think that fusion is very realistic either. However, unlike Rothman, I don't think that just because something is unrealistic, we should necessarily ignore it. In our context the fact that fusion is unrealistic is an excellent reason to focus on it and hold it up as our goal. Unrealistic goals are important because they force one to not be satisfied with lesser achievements. Rothman's goals are not set high enough. I think it is a real danger that a third party who adopts the goal of analytic empathy will become satisfied with even less than that. On the other hand, if our goal is fusion, then we won't be satisfied until we reach at least emotional empathy. The benefit of setting this high goal is that it forces us to focus intensely on emotions, for the confusion over whose feelings are whose results from strongly feeling another's feeling. Since the prohibition on fusion is not needed in our context, I propose that an internal perspective on another's emotions be conceptualized as

*trying* to fuse with another's emotions as far as that is possible. Another way of putting this is to say that in our context, achieving an internal perspective on emotions means *trying* to feel what another feels, *as he feels it*.

### **Techniques**

Focusing intently on emotions with the goal of fusion leads us in a different direction with respect to techniques. What are the relevant literatures? Due to space limitations I can only suggest that it would be fruitful for dialogue theory to investigate the following leads. One lead is contemporary experiential therapy. Some experiential therapists who have come out of the Rogerian tradition have tried to find a place for more directed techniques (Rice 1974). Directed techniques involving evocative language and imagery may help overcome the resistance that the parties may feel.

The experiential therapist Alvin R. Mahrer (1997, 194) has written about techniques which will achieve what he calls "therapist-client alignment". I believe this is really fusion by another name, for consider the consequence of this alignment: "When you are thoroughly aligned, you have essentially stepped outside your own continuing sense of self, your identity, the continuing person who you are.... Being aligned means that you have essentially let go of the usual stream of private thoughts". The techniques Mahrer (1997, 195) uses to achieve this however, are interesting in that they are in an important way, the opposite of Rogerian empathic techniques: "When you are aligned, almost all your attention is out there, and almost all of the patient's attention is out there. This means that there is little if any of the two of you attending mainly to each other. The vaunted therapist-patient 'relationship' is all but washed away." Dialogue theory should consider such techniques and any others that are intended to produce strong emotional sharing between people.

Another lead is roleplay, which came out of psychodrama. (Blatner 1989, 561). Jacob Moreno, the creator of psychodrama, thought that people could be taught to feel what others felt through roleplay. (Blatner 1989, 569). Unlike the techniques of openness, roleplay can involve the body and thus the potential for the body to influence a person's closed attitude. Roleplay can be linked to art, specifically, the theatre. (Duggan & Grainger 1997).

There is also the related lead of art and the imagination. Strong emotion and art are natural partners, and there has been a lively debate over the issue of whether or not feelings can occur through the imagination (Walton 1990). In a recent paper on this issue Richard Moran's (1994, 84) position has interesting implications for us: "Going from a straight, 'flat,' uninspiring description of some event to an emotionally charged one is typically *not* a matter of making the account more and more faithful to real life" (italics in original). Perhaps third parties should have a bit of the poet or the rhetorician in them.

An obvious objection to all of this is that in order for these different techniques to be effective the parties still need to accept them. People can go through the motions in roleplay just as they can in thought. The will of the parties has not been bypassed. This is true of course. However, the point is that certain techniques are easier to engage in than others. The "exercise" or "game" quality of roleplay and its related techniques may provide a safer space for the parties to take more risks than would be possible in a serious space, where everything has serious consequences (Duggan & Grainger 1997, 12).

Finally, there are some techniques of therapy that target biases. Leslie Greenberg has developed a theory of emotion that focuses on this. According to Greenberg & Safran (1981, 1980) some feelings are automatically encoded through perception such that they bypass rational thought. He suggests ways to get the client to become aware of these automatic feelings, with the intention of having the client change their perception to attend to things that were previously ignored. The hope is that this will lead to a new appreciation of other ways of thinking about the person.

### **Conclusion**

Essentially I am claiming that if we are interested in reducing deep disagreement and conflict, we should look for *directed* techniques which aim at providing people with an emotional experience of another's emotional experience of a situation. Directed techniques are needed to overcome the negative attitudes and biases of the parties involved. Because fusion is not likely to occur, we should examine different kinds of techniques of emotional experiencing to see if they can be adapted to our needs.

It seems to me that this is the real challenge. Using techniques that might involve people's bodies or appear to come straight out of psychoanalysis could be off-putting, for the parties *and* the facilitator. However, we shouldn't be afraid to move into new territory if our conceptual and social needs demand it.

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