The Psychotherapy of Automobile Repair
Dialogues on Overextended Paradigms

Part One

Introduction

It is a common enough experience. You are talking to an otherwise sensible friend or colleague concerning subjects of mutual interest. After a few dozen characterisations that sound false, implausible, or just plain ludicrous, you realise you friend is talking to (at) you from within a 'system.' He may be a fundamentalist Christian, a health food advocate, a Marxist. He may have 'caught' psychotherapy jargon like the flu when he was in therapy. Your attempts to bring your friend back to reality, listen to reason or consider the evidence, fail; and the two of you find yourselves at an impasse.

If you are a cultural relativist, you might deal with an encounter like this by mumbling something about 'multiple realities,' 'belief systems,' or 'competing paradigms.' If you take your relativism seriously, you problems do not stop there. You are forced or dragged into an expanding abyss of contradictions, paradoxes, and epistemological nightmares.[1] When you are satiated from reading the relevant literature, and pondering the imponderables, you may well decide to reconsider your position.[2]

If you are a believer in reality, your problem is even deeper. You might have hoped that systems of belief provided human beings with some degree of evolutionary advantage. If so, there should be something about human's raw, pre-linguistic contact with reality, something perhaps built into our species—that placed some kind of reasonable limits on what homo-sapiens could believe. But alas, there seems to be set of beliefs, so bizarre and contrary to brute reality, that some individual or group has not managed to believe them.

The sheer lack of agreement of millions of people, over history, presumably confronting the 'same' real world provides a major challenge to socio-biology: Systems of belief are made possible by language. And language is touted as the premier, unique achievement of our species.[3] Yet, how much evolutionary survival value can language-mediated knowledge have, if it allows us to be so wrong about so many things, so often.[4]

Actually, there are those that think language-mediated thinking is one of mistakes of nature. For once you go down that road—once you unabashedly announce that you are after 'reality' you must confront the

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1 See Pollner, Melvin. (1987) *Mundane Reason: The Reality in Everyday and Sociological Discourse.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. for one version of these problems.

2 Pollner describes how, in one field, most manage, in one way or another, to exempt their own beliefs and activities from the invalidating implications of relativity and reflexivity. Pollner, Melvin. 1991. Left of ethnomethodology: The rise and decline of radical reflexivity. *American Sociological Review* (29) 56: 370 – 80.

3 Chomsky, N. *Cartesian Linguistics*. New York: Harper & Row. 1966. Chomsky's view of linguistic universals and deep structure being innate to humanity is stated here and elaborated in later books and articles.

4 'Wrong' of course, presupposes a perspective in which there is an objective reality that one can be wrong about.

full spectrum of human traits and tendencies towards distorted thinking.

Ellis is appalled at how badly we do it, and how predisposed we are to doing it badly. Except under special (social) circumstances, what is endemic to most human beings, in his view, is a propensity to think loosely, and irrationally. Indeed, Ellis devised an entire form of psychotherapy to treat ailing individuals whose inherent irrational tendencies get out of hand.[5]

Sociology's Talcott Parsons, was equally pessimistic about the possibility of individual clarity of thought. But he had a save that was easier to believe in the 1900's than now: He believed the special, social organisation of the sciences, in particular the exposure of ideas to continual re-evaluation and critique, made scientists as a group, more likely than the rest of us to get things right 'in the long run.'[6]

Even if we manage to get things conceptually right, Kelleman warns that we do far to much thinking for our own good. The organisms he studied spent most of their lives somatically, doing what they do. They used problem solving tools like conceptual thought, occasionally, when other natural coping strategies were insufficient. Instead, we developed literature, radio talk shows, recreational conversation, scrabble, and an endless variety of other symbol-manipulating activities. At this point, conceptual thinking has become the constant companion of most waking adults. They cannot stop it, even if they wish to; and a tool that could have sharpened our grasp of life, now prevents us from innocently, living it, and from experiencing very much of it directly.[7] Indeed, because of our obsession with conceptualisation it a competes with other cognitive, apprehending abilities, instead of existing as a synergistic, compliment to them.[8]

The Problem of Extension

It is not surprising that researcher/therapists like Kelleman and Ellis evaluate conceptual knowledge in a diagnostic way. For, ever since Freud and the 'reality' principle, psychotherapists have been handed the unenviable task of trying to distinguish normal and healthy thinking, from pathology and dysfunction. Clinical practice all but requires judging patient's assertions, not only as false,

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5 Ellis, A.. *Humanistic Psychotherapy: The Rational-Emotive Approach*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973.

6 Many of Parsons' views on science, are described in the Introduction to his seminal work, Parsons, Talcott. *The Structure of Social Action*. New York: The Free Press, 1937. For a description of 'scientific rationality' refer to 'The Professions and Social Structure' in Parsons, T., *Essays in Sociological Theory*. Glencoe IL; Free Press, 1954, ch. 2. His views render the dominant paradigm in a science somewhat analogous to William's James' 'habit': it resists change and is slow to change; but it does change in response to substantial and persistent countermovements.

7 Kelleman, Stanley. Unpublished lecture, University of California at Berkeley, 1983. Also see, Kelleman, Stanley. *Human Ground / Sexuality, Self and Survival*. Berkeley, CA: The Center Press, 1971 Kelleman is an internationally recognised somatic researcher and therapist.

8 In this regard, a cartoon in the Harvard Lampoon showed theorist Talcott Parsons looking at a light bulb. An indistinct 'idea' of the light bulb is shown in a caption box pointing to his mind. As the cartoon proceeds, the real light bulb gets more and more faint and the idea of a light bulb is shown more sharply. At the end the real light bulb is completely gone, and Parsons is aware, only of the remaining, vivid idea of a light bulb.

but as diagnostic of one illness or another.

Interestingly, what sounds 'wrong' as one listens to the talk of many patients, is no t so much general beliefs that are false, but concepts that are consistently misapplied. For instance, a hysteric might be afraid that all sorts of foods and materials are poisons, toxins, or hazards of some sort. A paranoid-schizophrenic might find the entire world of communication filled with threatening, personal communiqués to him. Heads of state on television chastise him publicly, as do the words in the Bible, etc.

In the hands of these people, a few ideas like 'poison' or 'communication' seem to have lost all semantic sense of their own limits and limitations.[9] It is as if these concepts escaped the bounds of the realm they were originally designed to describe. Now, they are used to characterise things they have no business talking about; and in situations where they are out of place and do not belong.[10]

We could say these ideas have been overextended; except that 'overextended' is a prejudicial term—inevitably the judgement call of an outsider.[11] Yet, this is exactly, how overextension is recognised: One individual or group extends an idea to subject areas, or situations where others believe it does not belong. 'Does not belong' can take of form of one person (or patient) who sees himself as talking literally, while those outside his thought system, lay or professional, hear the same words as fanciful, metaphorical, or as descriptions that are not real.[12]

Sometimes the outsider may have a hard time articulating exactly what is 'wrong' about the talk he or she is hearing. Partly, this can happen because conversation permits a great deal of misunderstanding, without the involved parties having to recognise or dealing with it, as such.[13] Partially, this can happen, as Russell points out, because names and descriptions can function as beliefs and hypotheses hiding in a different type of syntactic package:

> See that man over there who is staring at you?
> Yes.
> Well he isn't.
> What?

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[9] The therapeutic literature summarises this kind of talk by saying that patients treat things that are possible instances of a concept, as if they were actual instances of it. It is noteworthy, that this formulation grants that the mentally ill respect the cultural logic of what is possible.

[10] Goffman had much to say about how the mentally ill 'mix and match' behaviours and social situations, so as to bring behaviours to situations where they did not belong. Refer to Goffman, Erving. *The Insanity of Place*.

[11] For an axiomatically defined idea, mathematicians speak of the 'extension' of the idea as the set of all and only those objects that satisfy its axioms.

[12] Lakoff believes that all conceptual understanding is metaphorical, and he has spawned a considerable body of work based on that premise. For example, refer to Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1980. Yet those of us in the midst of live regard some talk as literal and other talk as metaphor. For a stab at what makes a description, on the face of it, sound 'literal' see Sacks, Harvey 'On the Analysability of Stories by Children.' in Roy Turner (ed.). *Ethnomethodology*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1974.

[13] For some technical reasons why misunderstandings do not, generally, make it more difficult to converse, and do not become visible during conversation, see, Schwartz, Howard 'Understanding Misunderstanding' *Analytic Sociology*, Vol. 2, 1978.

Oh,—and he's not over there, and he is a woman.[14]

Individuals or groups tend to veer this far away from common language use, only after a protracted sequence of actions and experiences. This author, has done his own research on 'how' concepts can become extended over time.[15]

For the 'why' of concept extension, he prefers the work of Silvan Tomkins who studied the evolution of what he calls, scripts. These are collections of interrelated ideas that name and define the dramatic structure of everyday situations.[16] Unsurprisingly, he identifies emotion, as a major feedback mechanism in the evolution of scripts. But this is far from a casual remark. Tomkins was a pioneer in the research that established a dozen or so basic emotions as innate, hard-wired into us, and thus inescapable parts of human cognition for the next foreseeable few centuries. His specific claims about emotion, have been backed and tested by a large, and still ongoing, literature of research; and by one of the most complex theoretical frameworks in 20th century psychology.[17]

He views emotion as a, possibly ancient, catalytic mechanism, existing prior to and independent of truth, whose general effect is to amplify the size, strength, or valance (i.e., positive/negative) of meaningful events.[18] What we called the extension of concepts he calls, the magnification of scripts—dynamic sequences of events where coping strategies, emotional responses, and situated conceptualisation interact so as to mutually escalate. In sequences that 'magnify,' specific emotions both positive and negative, act as generalised signals to a person, to think of a problem or event as, somehow, cognitively 'bigger.'

Magnification is by no means the only fate of a script, which can evolve in innumerable ways.[19] However, given the right sequences of events, one can start with a person who is genuinely discriminated against at work,[20] and

[14] Made-up example to illustrate implicit hypotheses hidden in names and descriptive phrases. For a more literal exposition, see the famous essay: Russell, Bertrand. 1905. 'On Denoting.' Reprinted in R. C. Marsh, ed., *Logic and Knowledge*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956.

[15] For an analysis of some of the social prerequisites and language techniques for extending concepts, see Schwartz, Howard 'General Features' in Schenkein (ed.) Berlin: Shurkamp Publishers (published in English and German). 1976.

[16] Tomkins uses the terms, script and dramatic, in a similar way to Goffman's analogy's to the theatre. However, the actor/author of the script is not presenting self or pretending; he lives the drama depicted by the script. Also, his scripts are truly psychological since they are the product of one individual's life history, and are not known or used by diverse individuals in similar social situations.

[17] Tomkins, Silvan. *Affect, Imagery, and Consciousness*, Vol. I, II, III. New York: Springer, 1979. This seminal work reviews a diverse body of research and contains a huge theory that was refined in later papers.

[18] In unpublished research on emotion, the author's ethnographic data appear to reveal a converse principle: To evoke emotions, complex details must be mapped into relatively simple cognitive structures. For example, the mother of a student was given a complex, lengthy explanation of why the student wanted to become a sociologist. The mother then replied, 'You mean,—you are not going to medical school now?' Instantly, the student experienced depression.

[19] Tomkins viewed the fate of a script as severely dependent on the sequence of events/experiences that occurred in connection with it. Some might expand, others might stabilise or shrink and so on.

[20] Edwin Lemert showed that the road to paranoia frequently starts with real

end up much later with someone in possession of a 'monopolistic humiliation theory.' Eventually, all events in his life fit into two categories: his humiliation, and everything else.

Tomkins did not study the effect of emotional dynamics on systems of thought created by groups, but he points the way with an intriguing psychological definition: 'Ideology' is an organised set of ideas that a) produces enduring controversy over long periods of time b) invokes passionate partisanship and c) about which humans are the least certain.[21]

The extension of interrelated concepts deserves attention because it is a major way in which individuals and groups diverge from their parent speech community and enter a conceptual world that is not reciprocally accessible to their fellow human beings.[22]

Concept Extension and the Professions

In this regard, conceptual overextension is by no means limited to the semantics of the mentally ill. It is enthusiastically embraced by both the populace at large and all sorts of professional specialists. Social scientists endure it, in the form of reductionism, when they talk to those they regard as colleagues: The Marxist finds the work of the ruling class and the class struggle behind the most personal and seemingly individual events. The psychotherapist is confident that the President of the United States invaded Iraq because of childhood experiences, personal motives, and 'secondary gain.' The behaviourist finds stimulus-and-response sufficient to understand almost all human issues—God, music, poetry, play, and the deepest subjective feelings:

> Why are you two getting married?
> Uh—because we love each other.
> No you're not, you are doing it because of stimulus-and response.[23]

Indeed, in a strange parallel to paranoia, many experts find that they need, as well, to extend their ideas so as to escape their limited speciality and become experts on everything whatsoever. For example, 'Studies have shown' has become a major source of legitimating, authoritative knowledge for governments, courts, educational institutions, the police, advertisers, other institutions that need to justify a selections, funding, and courses of action. Consequently, social scientists find more and more clients who wish to commission studies on every conceivable human topic. But how does one go about authoritatively studying every conceivable topic? One way is to study any and all of them scientifically and mathematically.

The physical sciences normally use different forms of mathematics to

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discrimination, and snowballs from there. E. Lemert, 'Paranoia and the Dynamics of Exclusion.' *Sociometry*. XXV, 1962, 2 – 20.

[21] Tomkins, Silvan. 'Aspects of Consciousness and Personality in Terms of Differential Emotions Theory' in Robert Plutchik & Henry Kellerman (editors) *Emotion: Theory, Research and Experience*. New York: Academic Press, 1980, p. 154.

[22] Schütz, Alfred . *Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff. 1971. pp.11 – 12. Here Schütz identifies the Reciprocity of Perspectives as a set of basic, tacit, working assumptions that allows diverse individuals to co-ordinate their everyday encounters.

[23] Made-up example.

study different kinds of phenomena. Thus, calculus works brilliantly, and was in large part designed, for studying the motion of objects.[24] But it does not work, and is not used to describe the bonding of chemical compounds. Indeed, it is not used in other kinds of physics, in biology, in most neurology, etc.

However, in the social sciences, a single kind of statistics is used to study extremely different kinds of phenomena.[25] Statistical procedures are based on a few, basic ideas: characterise anything you need to study as a 'variable' and then explore the (statistical) associations between the variables you have measured. If you torture the language enough, almost, anything can be described as a variable (e.g., 'middle sibling's degree of agreement with President Bush's tax cut') voila! One has a way to math-e-matise and thus, produce a 'scientific' study of virtually any social, economic, political, or psychological phenomenon. The same techniques can be used to measure (assign numbers to) diverse topics, independent of their different structures and, without having to know or learn anything special about each topic.[26]

The professionalisation of normal, natural troubles not only created a market for studying all kinds of problems, it created a need for credentialled experts that could solve them. Psychotherapy was hit particularly hard, in this regard. Clinically, psychology had its beginnings in the treatment of pseudo-physical illnesses such as hysteria, and auditory/visual hallucinations.[27] Several authors have chronicled its political victory over the physicians and the clergy in a battle for custody of the English Mad-houses and those within them.

But gradually therapists found themselves called upon to 'treat' such things as violence, loneliness, juvenile delinquency, crime, sexual dissatisfaction, over/under eating, child rearing, low self esteem, addictions—and an ever increasing array of other 'problem in living.'[28] Again, one skill

[24] Newton, I. *Principia Mathematica*, Bk. 1 (1689). The translation is by Andrew Motte (1729) as revised by Florian Cajori. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1934.

[25] Most social sciences use statistical procedures based on the 'relative frequency' interpretation of probability. Metaphorically, the probability of a certain outcome is thought of as the proportion of times this outcome will occur, in an experiment repeated many times. Mathematically, relative frequency does not actually converge to probability for many repetitions; it just becomes 'more probable' that it will. Other widely used, but not necessarily correct, simplifying statistical assumptions include: the statistical independence of all observations, the relationships between variables being linear, and measuring goodness of fit by the variance—the square of the difference between predicted and actual outcomes.

[26] While physical scientists are more careful with mathematical notations, this does not immunise them from overextending ideas. Examples include the view of the universe as a mechanism, the view of the brain as a computer, etc. Refer to the popular monograph Kuhn, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1970.

[27] Szasz discusses some of this history in parts I and II of Szasz, Thomas. *The Myth of Mental Illness*. New York: Harper and Row. 1974 See also, Joseph Melling and Bill Forsythe (eds) *Insanity, Institutions and Society 1800 – 1914*. London and New York: Routledge 1999 Andrew Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain 1700 – 1900*, Yale University Press, 1993.

[28] op. cit., Szasz, p 262 – 263. This conclusion is a crisp summary of Szasz's famous characterisation of psychiatry as dealing with personal, ethical, and social problems in living. As Emerson et. al. point

set needed to become adequate to tackle widely divergent troubles.

With this context in mind, I invite the reader to listen in on a therapy session given to a man whose automobile will not start. What follows is a demonstration of the versatility that has been achieved. An average therapist with moderate skill, using well known concepts, procedures and tricks of the trade—will probably never encounter a human problem he can not 'treat.' Nothing from within his system will automatically signal a sense of humility and constraint.

Hopefully, the dialogue may serve as a warning, concerning the power of description to mask ignorance with apparent competence and certainty.

Part Two: The Psychotherapy of Automobile Repair

An ordinary man, leading life with ordinary perspectives, finds one day as he prepares to drive to work, that his car won't start. Instead of going to a mechanic, the ordinary thing one might do, this man has read a book by Thomas Szasz describing experts called humanistic psychologists whose speciality is to help people with all manner of 'problems in living.' Thinking that he certainly has a problem in living, and wouldn't it be expansive to try a different kind of solution than the ones he usually employs in daily life, he seeks help from a 'psychologist.' After all he thinks—for years I've gone to mechanics without thinking about it whenever there was something wrong with my car. Sure it worked for a while, but my car just kept getting worse and worse things wrong with it. Maybe there is something wrong with my approach. This then is a record of this man's introduction to the use of higher perspectives in solving ordinary problems:

P: How do you do, could you tell me a little about what brought you here—a little background about yourself and your life up until this point?
M: Well, my car won't start. I want it to start. I mean I can't get to work, I can't go shopping— . I need to get it to run.
P: Is that all you want to relate?
M: Yeah, that's the beginning and end of it. If you just get it running I'll be very happy with the outcome, and that will about do it.
P: Well I wonder if you could notice something. You came in with a problem and immediately wanted me to solve it for you—some expert, somebody other than yourself, as if you somehow had nothing to do with the matter, as if you were powerless to affect the remedy yourself, totally at the mercy of some problem bigger than you were, that was creating pain and suffering in your life, troubles, and problems, all of which you had to endure. So you came to me to complain about these problems and to have me make them go away—you see what I'm getting at?
M: Well—I mean look, I don't know about cars, I mean I'd be glad to fix it myself if I knew how but I don't. And besides I've got some money and I'd rather have an expert do it right than fool around and waste time and energy monkeying with it myself, you know what I mean?
P: Wait a minute—let's back up here a little. It's your car, isn't it? I mean it's the car you drive in, the one you bought, the one you've been living in for years now. And you think you don't know about it and I do? Who could

out, the problems may be those of the client and/or those of other people that have been dealing with the client. Emerson, R.M., and Messinger, S.L. The micro-politics of trouble. *Social Problems*, 25, 1977, 121 – 134.

better know about your car than its one and only owner?

M: Well I mean I can change a light or something but I don't really know why the damn thing isn't starting.

P: You see often when people come to us and say they 'can't do something' what they really mean is they 'won't.' You betrayed your feeling a bit already when you referred to your car as 'that damn thing,' you even talked about not wanting to waste time and energy trying to fix it even if you could. Now with an attitude like that about your car, no wonder you don't have it running—it's a wonder it ever ran at all. You apparently don't like your car, you're in fact quite angry at your car for not starting and causing you all these problems. You don't even think it's worth 'wasting time and energy on.' But what more important things could there be to do in this world than getting to know your very own car? So you make a few mistakes that some expert might not make. What's wrong with that? I mean that's the way you learn. Then you would know about your car and how to start it—not some mysterious guru out there whose advice you have to take on faith. Would you like me to help you get to know your very own car?

M: Well I guess I see what you mean, if I learned how to fix it then I wouldn't have to depend on somebody else—I guess that would be a better approach in the long run all right. But I mean wouldn't I have to buy hundreds of dollars' worth of tools and have a garage and spend all kinds of time on weekends doing this stuff—I mean wouldn't it be better even in the long run to just let somebody else mess with it?

P: You see how you avoid responsibility for your car—looking for all kinds of 'good' reasons not to learn about it? We have a saying in psychology. When somebody gives 'reasons' why they don't know about their car it's always a lie. The only true reason why they don't know about their car is that they don't want to know.

M: Okay, so why don't I want to know?

P: Now I think we are starting to get somewhere. Consider that you have been using words like 'bother with,' 'damn,' 'mess around with'—in connection with your car. There's two things we can notice from this. First, people, by and large, don't want to really know about their cars when they come to us. They just want their troubles to go away so they can live a carefree life. They don't really want to learn.

M: You mean I'm like a lot of people—most people don't want to learn?

P: That's right, and like most people you probably are afraid to find out why your car won't start—that's why you would rather have me fix it—so it will run and you will never know why it wouldn't take you places. But let me tell you that if you don't know why it wouldn't take you places, it might start for a while but the problem will come back again and again until you dare to understand it.

M: Why in the world would I be afraid of learning about distributors or batteries?

P: Because you are afraid your car is a *bad* car—a lemon, a konker. You really don't like your car, you're clearly angry at it, mad—you want to push it away, get on with other things—not look at it. The last thing you ever dreamed you could do was really enjoy it—enjoy exploring it and being with it. You believe your car is a bad car and as long as you believe that, you will be afraid to look under the hood. And if you are afraid, you will make up reasons why you can't—you will get whiplash of the neck so you can't bend down. Other things will be more important—you probably won't even notice that at bottom there is fear.

M: But I don't understand. So I found out that my car was a mess and the radiator was bad and the engine needed a valve job and so on. At worst I would have to get a new car. I mean that's no picnic—but it's better than spending lot of money for nothing on repairs only to junk it later.

P: Exactly—but that's your intellect talking. Of course it is rational to want to know the car for better or worse. But

your emotions aren't rational. When your emotional self is confronted with 'let's look under the hood,' it's like a little child or a pet—all it knows, all it can respond with, is 'I don't want to; I'm afraid; I hate that old car.' Your emotional self doesn't know about reasons and it can't think about long term results—it just knows how it feels about doing something in the moment.

M: So how did I get to be afraid of my car and why do I secretly believe my car is bad?

P: Well before we tackle those good questions let's back up a bit. The reason you are afraid to find out, the reason you don't want to find out that your car is bad is that you, like most of us, identify with your car. You see you live with it, you sit in it, it takes you everywhere, it's your constant companion. So quite naturally you come to feel that you are your car—that it is part of WHAT YOU ARE. So if your car is bad that means you are bad—there's something wrong with you—*you* won't start—you see?

M: Yeah I get it—the car sort of reflects on me, so I don't want it to be a lemon 'cause that makes me look bad right?

P: Exactly, so the first step in daring to examine your own car is to see very clearly that you are not your car. Your car is just a car—something that you ride in, a box of steel and plastic. Without you, your car does not run, however without your car YOU still run. Cars may come and go—they aren't permanent, but their owner remains. Just because a car doesn't start—you're still basically a beautiful, loveable, owner. If you see that—I mean really see it—then you've taken a giant step towards being able to accept your car not running—instead of condemning it.

M: Okay, I think I've got that—it's not running. I'm okay, you're okay, but the car's not running—that's just the way it is.

P: Fine, now we can go further. Now you're at the point where you can accept your experience of the car, without condemnation, without denying it, and you're willing to learn—you're not running to external authority figures.

M: Right—so why doesn't it run?

P: Uh not so fast—there's that defensiveness again. Let me assure you that the answer to your question is in you, yourself. You came to me, seemingly unable to discover why your car didn't start. But the truth is that you already know why your car doesn't start. The answer to all questions is always within ourselves, not somewhere outside of us—if we are only willing to give up our resistance and look—the answer will be found to be in us all along.

M: All right already, so I know how to fix it—how do I find out what I already know but I don't know I know it 'cause I don't want to look at myself or my car?

P: Well, once you are prepared to look then the way in—astonishingly enough—is to make a complete about face, and take the exact opposite attitude of your former one. You think you are trying to find out how to fix something. So you think you should look for something that's wrong. The first step is to give up that attitude entirely. How can you learn or be open when all your looking and listening is controlled by a rigid preconception of what the problem is?

M: I shouldn't try to find out how to fix it—if anything's wrong?

P: Did it ever occur to you that there's nothing to fix, that nothing is in fact wrong with your car? If you examined a car in perfect shape looking for something wrong, you wouldn't find out much about how it works would you?

M: What in the hell are you talking about? Do you expect me to believe it really will start? I'm not hallucinating doc—I'm telling you it doesn't go!

P: I know this is a hard thing for you to accept. And it's true in terms of your own experience the car won't start and that means, to you, that something must be wrong with it. And of course since that's your experience, it is real to you.

M: You mean if you tried to start the damn thing it would go?

P: No, no you don't understand. I'm sure that if I started it, as far as you were concerned it wouldn't go—nobody could make it go now, as far as you can see. That's not the point.

M: Well then, damn it, what is the point?

P: Perhaps it is best to look at this way—we want you to look at your car with fresh eyes—not with motives, categories and goals that were conditioned in you from the past. We want this because we want you to learn things that are genuinely new, not just extensions of the past. Perhaps when you look without goals, and motives, and problems to solve, you will find out something that will let you start your car—perhaps not. Maybe you will find out your car is better off not starting—who knows. There's no anticipating the results when you really look with an open mind. As long as you are controlled by results you can't really look.

M: Are you crazy, or am I crazy—you mean you're going to show me how to learn about my car but I might not learn anything that will make it go?

P: Well I see that possibility upsets you greatly—you might take that as a clue about your hidden attributes. Perhaps I can make this journey seem a little more reasonable to your intellect: you start with a problem and the solution is unknown. It could be, paradoxically, that to arrive at the solution you need to start the car can never be found by looking for things that are wrong. It might be you need to notice something that can only come into view if you freely, without motive, examine what is going on.

M: Okay—that's a little better—I mean you had me worried for a minute. So I shouldn't be so goal-orientated at first or I might not notice something important—okay?

P: Yes—so we solve the problem by, first, forgetting the problem and just examining ourselves and our car. One of the tricks we use in psychology is to follow the threads of the original problem—not as a problem—but just as something that happened—and see where they lead.

M: What do you mean by 'threads?'

P: Well, for example—you come in here with a car that is not working, that you experience as causing you troubles, that you apparently are incapable of fixing. This situation makes you very mad, you are angry, frustrated, you want to change it—you go to an expert to alter the whole thing. Let's just take these as a set of your experiences and try to find out what caused them.

M: Okay.

P: Let me throw something out to you and you can try it on and see if it fits.

M: Okay.

P: Did your parents own a car when you were little?

M: Well—yeah.

P: Did their car stall sometimes?

M: Yeah—it was a real lemon—Cal Worthington sold it to them and did they get taken.

P: I see, and what kind of times did the car not go—I mean—did it not take you places you wanted to go, for instance?

M: My God it didn't take anybody anywhere they wanted to go—sure I was late for a baseball game once 'cause the neighbours had to drive me, and I was late for class a few times.

P: And how did that make you feel?

M: Well I felt shitty, you know I mean why did this have to happen for me—I ended up getting a tardy slip for being late and it wasn't even my fault.

P: Would you say that made you mad?

M: Sure it made me mad.

P: At the car?

M: Well, not exactly at the car—more the asshole teacher for not being fair.

P: Did the car ever cause trouble in the family?

M: Sure I mean dad was bitching about how much money he had to put into it, and how it never worked anyway.

P: I suppose you didn't like all that bitching and bad atmosphere, huh?

M: It was a drag all right.

P: The car was almost a bit like you to them maybe—put lots of time and money into it but didn't work well?

M: What?

P: Never mind—in other words there was a car very much like this one, that

caused a lot of trouble in your family when you were little, right?

M: Right—except that it was a Ford and mine is a Plymouth, and Fords are a lot worse than Plymouths let me tell you.

P: Fine, we have a concept in psychology called transference. It means that sometimes we react to people and things in the present as if they were people and things that existed in the past.

M: Yeah I know about that—projection or something, right?

P: Right—in essence. So it seems to me that your dislike for your car, your anger at it—may not really be because it won't start—although that might have triggered it.

M: Yeah—you implied that before as if, if I could face it, it was really upset for some other reason—so what reason?

P: You see you really weren't mad at *your* car, you were mad at your parents' car. You were treating your own vehicle as if it were an object from the past, and expressing all the things you never were able to express in the past about this object, to the object in the present.

M: Come again?

P: You sir had an object in your family—a car—that caused all kinds of pain and troubles for you and your parents at a tender age. Your parents treated it as intrinsically 'bad,' so you, as children tend to do, adopted the attitude of your parents—you blamed it for all the troubles, and disliked it as they disliked it. For so young a child you probably didn't even understand the concept of 'a lemon' or 'having been taken,' or what was so bad about dad missing work. But you felt their emotions and understood that this object was blamed and disliked.

M: Okay, maybe so—maybe I really didn't know if the car was really fucked up—I just took their word for it.

P: To you, cars were always your parents' car—every car or most cars probably reminded you of your parents' car—irrationally, emotionally, you made the connection 'something bad,' 'something that causes troubles.' You see you never really disliked your car at all—it was your parents' car—a car you saw in innumerable cars in the present that was the real object of your hatred. This hatred probably never got expressed at the time because to hate a lemon that your father bought was to openly show disgust for your father and his buying such a thing—after all if dad's lemon was bad, dad was bad for buying it—huh? So this hatred was repressed.

M: You mean that's why I secretly was afraid that if I looked under the hood my car would be a lemon—because my dad's was a lemon and I though this one was like dad's?

P: Exactly.

M: So this one may very well not be a lemon, right?

P: Precisely, you need not be afraid of finding out the terrible truth any more—that secret belief of yours was always a lie—even your dad's might have been all right—but you didn't know that at the time—all you heard was him saying angrily 'lemon,' 'lemon.' Once you are free of the lie, then it becomes possible for you to really see and appreciate *your* car—not some phantom from the past.

M: That's a relief—and here I thought all along I'd have to buy a new one after you showed me how to examine the thing.

P: It's always freeing when you disburden yourself of something that is false.

M: But one thing still bothers me.

P: What's that?

M: It still doesn't start—I mean it's not a lemon or anything but how come I have one that don't start?

P: Ah, you're starting to get some insight into yourself. That's a very important question. There's another idea we use in family therapy called 'negative love.' It refers to the fact that we want very much to love and be close to our parents. We have an essential need for this closeness. Now there are many negative situations in our family that occur. Paradoxically, to recreate this closeness we often recreate these very negative situations. That may have been the only situation you knew—but when you reproduce one of these negative family scenes, at least on an

emotional level, you feel close to mom and dad again.

M: So I might buy a car or arrange for it not to run and give me trouble, so it would be familiar—like a family situation—and I would feel part of the family again?

P: Tremendously, right—you are really starting to open up now.

M: But why troubles—why didn't I reproduce some positive scenes?

P: Tragically there is a greater tendency to indulge in the negativity. It's like this—if dad bought a bad car and you bought a good one then you would be outdoing him—you would be better than him. As a child you couldn't do that or you would risk losing his love. It's almost as if you were saying, 'See dad, I have a lemon just like you, I didn't outdo you—NOW WILL YOU LOVE ME?'

M: I see.

P: It's worse than that. We tend to take on the traits, and reproduce the situations that we actually hated as a child because we had to repress that hate. One way to conceal that you hate something is to become it yourself—you see? If you hate people that are sloppy but you want desperately to love them, then you might become sloppy too. Then, you see, you don't feel that bad about sloppy people any more, 'cause you know how it is to be that way yourself.

M: Well this is a lot to take in but I think I get the drift of it. There's just one thing about it though. I didn't ruin the thing, or purposely buy a bad one—how did I arrange for a car that would act just like dad's?

P: Interesting metaphysical question. I don't know how the details work but you actually create your own external reality from within. A man who thinks he is accident prone will have accidents: a person who believes he is lucky will win often in poker. Someone with a desire to be murdered, sooner or later will attract somebody who wants to kill him. But let me guarantee you one thing—if you change your inner programming the outer world will change automatically.

M: So how do I get it to start?

P: Once you really don't need to have a bad car around to feel close to the family, the car will start, or you will get another—I don't know how the details will work out—but it will change. And if the situation doesn't change—then you know that one some level you really haven't given up the desire to have a lemon.

M: So I couldn't have fixed it at first, 'cause I really didn't want it fixed?

P: Precisely—you were secretly delighted it didn't run. While you said you couldn't fix it—in fact you wouldn't. You might have even in some way used your knowledge of cars—the knowledge you claimed only I had—to have broken it to begin with—these things are insidious you know. Quick starting for a week, delaying tune-ups—who knows how you did it?

M: So now what do I do?

P: Well the way to let go of an attachment is to experience it from a different perspective.

M: How do I do that?

P: Remember I said that when we learned about you, your car, and the relationship you and it had together—we might not arrive at the idea that it should run?

M: I remember—it seemed goofy at the time.

P: Now wanting it to run and getting angry when it doesn't—you see—is all part of the programme—the script of feeling and acting just like dad and you did in that family scene that makes you feel so much a part of the family.

M: Got you.

P: So you might try enjoying *not starting the car*—this is your car not your dad's. Get in and unsuccessfully turn the starter a few times—don't treat it as a problem—just experience it as something to do—like playing tennis.

M: I don't think I'm going to like that.

P: Well then perhaps you'll like the sound—just turn the starter and enjoy the sheer energy—the sheer music of that 'whee, whee' sound it makes when the engine doesn't turn over. It's not as if turning that key always has to be looked on from two, limited, bleak

alternatives—start or not start. Turning the key can be an isometric exercise for your finger, it can make musical rhymes with the starter motor—who knows what other alternatives there are.

M: I don't want isometrics, I don't want car music—I want the damn thing to turn over.

P: Well this sometimes happens—you are very attached to a certain self-destructive way of working with your experience. Sometimes this can be overcome with humour—you might notice as you get mad and frustrated when it doesn't start, 'Well there I go again getting frustrated like always over this little key turning in this tiny, tiny slot—it's kind of funny how dramatic I get about it.'

M: Funny?

P: Yes, humour can often give us just enough distance from ourselves and our reactions that we can see our way to treating a solution in a more creative and loving way.

M: I don't think it's funny that my car hasn't started all week.

P: Well then treat it as tragic—you find it disappointing—okay blow it up—make it bigger—just how bad can you feel about it—you may never fix it—nobody may know what's wrong—perhaps you will starve to death for want of transportation to the market—perhaps you are furious at the car—so furious that you want to kick it—swear at it—pound it—show it how a beautiful human being responds to a trusted car that won't start.

M: Well that sounds more like how I feel all right.

P: You must be careful here not to condemn yourself for hating your car—accept your feelings, get them out and then go through them to understanding.

M: Understanding what, for Christ's sake?

P: I think if you try what I am suggesting that you will discover, not just intellectually but on an emotional level, that it's not your car but your father's that is making you angry, goal-orientated and consequently 'stuck'—once you see that, your reaction should subside.

M: You mean it will start?

P: No, but you will start to feel less angry and frustrated if it doesn't—you will gain some measure of objectivity about the situation.

M: What good will that do?

P: Well once you have vented your repressed anger and obtained some objectivity, then you will be ready to attempt to forgive your car.

M: Forgive my CAR?!

P: Exactly—remember I told you that inside and outside are not different but the same—that external events reflect inner programming?

M: How could I forget?

P: Well, many, many of my patients find that the moment they give up caring whether their car starts—the moment they forget their ego attachment—that moment and only that moment is the moment when their car will start.

M: Really?

P: Really—I could give you story after story—be they Chevrolet owner, or the owner of a Dodge Dart. What I am teaching you is one device that facilitates your letting go. First you vent your anger, then you understand the transference, and then you must forgive.

M: So how do I forgive my car?

P: Well it's not really your car you will forgive—remember your car is but an endless replay of the drama of your dad's car. So you have to really come to understand why your dad's car didn't start. Once you understand, you will have tears and compassion for that poor old lemon—it was just programmed like you and your father. It didn't want to make you trouble, to get you mad, to make you late for school—but it had to—it was following its programming.

M: You mean that car didn't do it on purpose?

P: Of course not—it was just a—

M: You mean cars have inner programming too?

P: My dear sir the whole universe is nothing more than different manifestations of consciousness. Everything from inert gases to the most intelligent forms of life are merely

different mediums and forms of consciousness.

M: So my dad's car didn't stall all the time on purpose?

P: That's right, it was following its programming. Cars are rather like children in a way. Just as children, out of trust and love, tend to follow the unspoken admonishments of their parents, so cars tend to act like their owners really want them to act—this might not always be the same as what the owner says he wants in a car. Cars are psychic you know—just like small children. They know what an owner really wants, they can feel it.

M: Well doc, I got to tell you you've handed me some stuff that was hard to swallow, but frankly this stuff about psychic cars sounds completely wacko to me—I mean do you really expect me to believe all this shit? The fact is the damn thing wouldn't start, it cost dad a lot of money and a lot of heartache. I don't car how 'psychic' it was, it was a shitty car.

P: I can see you are going to have a tough time with this phase of your treatment. Let me just say generally that we psychologists have a little maxim about this situation: Every car is guilty but no car is to blame.

M: Come again?

P: It is true that each car must take responsibility for its functioning, but it is no more to blame for this than the law of gravity is to blame when you fall down and hurt yourself.

M: Well, I'd have to admit that you showed me that I am mad at cars 'cause of what dad's car did to him, and that dad's car sure fucked him over. Now if you can get me to where I think dad's car was a good one, I guess you could get me to believe anything.

P: Really? Well that's encouraging, let me try. Let's forget the metaphysics about cars then, since that seems like a belief system that you have trouble with. Can you accept the idea that a car of a certain type can somehow get attracted to an owner that wants that type of car?

M: Well sure—like dad unconsciously picks a certain kind or something, right?

P: Right—fine. Now let's just assume that dad wanted a car that was good at not starting. Now he said the opposite, he said how much trouble it was, how much money it costs him, what a terrible lemon the car was. But let's just assume that on some level he really wanted that, and so he somehow arranged to have a car that would be a lemon for him.

M: Well why would he want a lemon—I mean why would anybody want a lemon?

P: To answer a question like that it is best to look for what we call the 'secondary gain'—I mean what did the car's not working do *for* your dad?

M: Well let me see, he really didn't like his job and he didn't have to go to work—at least he could get there late. Wait a minute, he didn't like shopping with mom much either. In fact he didn't like going out much at all, he was kind of a home body. Wait a minute, wait a MINUTE—the best thing in the whole world he loved was to potter around his wood shop and that's what he used to do when the car was at the garage getting fixed. He used to say that he might as well keep busy while he waited for the car—cause there wasn't anything else to do—why that asshole!

P: You're beginning to see the pattern. Your car wasn't a bad car at all—it was a very good car. It loved its owner very much and did just what he wanted it to do. You might say, paradoxically, it was a good car to him by being a bad car.

M: God damn it you're right. That car wasn't to blame at all for all the stuff that happened to me and the family. It was that lousy, hypocritical, lying father of mine. He was just lazy that's all. Hell for all I know he might have busted the car himself—why that lying creep.

P: So you and your father really didn't have a bad car, right?

M: Right, I don't have a bad car, I had a lousy father—why that sneaky, lazy, hypocritical bastard.

P: You know I think you've come a long way towards getting over your

emotional attachments to this car business.

M: I think you're right doc. It's really amazing how I see my problems with my car from a whole new perspective—I think I really understand the problem now. Wait 'til I get my hands on that no-good father of mine—wait 'til I tell mom—I mean all these years that creep has been making picture frames in that shop. 'I can't help it, the car won't start, I have to do something 'til it gets fixed'—that snake in the grass.

P: Well, yes you have a great deal of insight about the car, but I really think you should come back to deal with your feelings about your father.

M: I'm going to kill that creep, I'm going to break every one of those Goddamn chairs of his.

P: Could you come back next week for another appointment?

M: Well that's going to be hard. You see I live pretty far away and my car won't start—I'd have to take the bus.

P: You say the car won't start? Did you check the battery? How about the points? Sometimes it's worn points.

M: Yeah I did all that—that's about all I know about to check. It's not the battery and it's not the points. I don't know what's wrong with it.

P: Huh—sounds like something that isn't simple. Maybe you better take it to a mechanic then. They'll probably be able to figure it out.

M: Good idea doc, I'll do that right away.

P: Great. See you next week.