

Psychotherapy and the Language about Language - Part I

by

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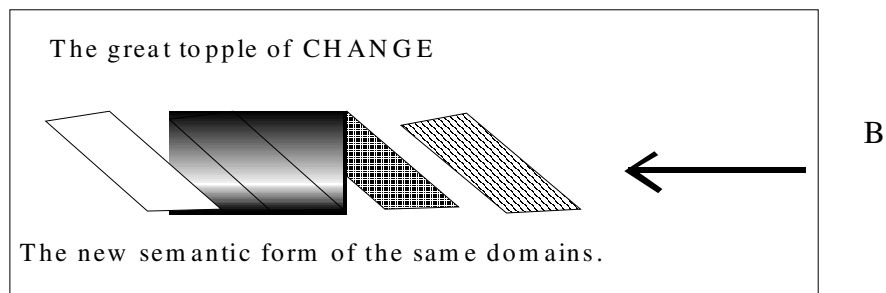
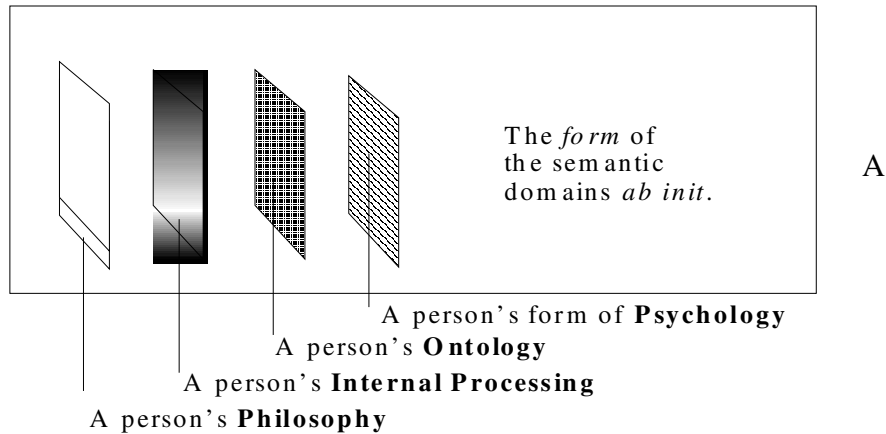
In this paper the male pronoun will apply to either gender.
The nominal pronoun will apply to the first author.
The plural pronoun will apply to both authors.

In their seminal work, *CHANGE*, Paul Watzlawick, John Weakland and Richard Fisch proposed the concept of 2nd order change:

To summarize what has been said so far: Group Theory gives us a framework for thinking about the kind of change that can occur within a system that always stays invariant; the Theory of Logical Types is not concerned with what goes on inside a class, i.e., between its members, but gives us a frame for considering the relationship between member and class and the peculiar metamorphosis which is in the nature of the shifts from one logical level to the next higher. If we accept this basic distinction between the two theories, it follows that there two different types of change: one that occurs within a given system which itself remains unchanged, and one whose occurrence changes the system itself.⁷ To exemplify this distinction in more behavioural terms: a person having a nightmare can do many things *in* his dream – run, hide, fight, scream, jump off a cliff, etc. – but no change from any of these behaviours to another would terminate the nightmare. *We shall henceforth refer to this kind of change as first order change.* The one way out of a dream involves a change from dreaming to waking. Waking, obviously, is no longer a part of the dream, but a change to an altogether different state. *This kind of change will from now on be referred to as second-order change.* (The equivalence of this distinction with Ashby's cybernetic definition of the two kinds of change, quoted earlier, is evident.) Second order change is *change of change* – the very phenomenon whose existence Aristotle denied so categorically.

Paul Watzlawick, John Weakland & Richard Fisch: *CHANGE* Principles of Problem Formation and Problem Resolution W. W. Norton & Co. 1974 page 10 - 11

These concerns about 2nd order change were examined further in a paper that was posted in the web site, www.neurosemantics.com in 1999. 2nd order change in the case of a human being relates to the scan of his psychology, ontology, internal processing and his philosophy. It is about how the semantic form of these domains change as intimated by the diagram below:



2nd Order Change means transformation, i.e. change in form from cis¹-form to trans²-form. This has to encompass a person's ontology, internal processing and philosophy as suggested in the above diagram.

The belief that a new insight, regardless of how awe inspiring it might be will entail a 2nd order change is not true. There are too many exceptions that question the accuracy of this belief.

Dennis K. Chong & Jennifer K. Smith Chong: Personal Growth, Development and Evolution www.neurosemantics.com 1999 page 2 -3.

The work of a psychotherapist is about 2nd order change. Talking about a problem will not solve a problem. The proof of this lies in the total failure of 2000 years of preaching and sermonizing from the pulpits of Christian Churches to evince change in human beings. We continue in our ways of lies, deceits, covetousness, avarice, violence and war. If there is a difference, then it is that we do it so much better and in such a grander scale. For this, we are more a horror than we ever were.

There are some therapies in which a patient is are in verbal interaction with his therapist for over 20 years. To see a patient for one whole year with no results is a

¹ **Error! Main Document Only.**cis is a Latin word meaning 'on this side.' So there was cisalpine Gaul (France) which referred to Gaul that was 'on this side' of the Alps and hence closer to Rome.

² **Error! Main Document Only.**trans is a Latin word meaning 'on the other side.' There was, therefore, a transalpine Gaul (France) which referred to Gaul that was on the other side of the Alps. In this instance, the word transformation means that one side, the trans is completely different from the other cis side.

disaster. To see a patient for two years with no results is utter carelessness. To see a patient for 20 years with no results is a comedy of Wagnerian proportions.

Tied in with the matter of 2nd order change is the critical matter of a metalanguage:

Eventually we realized that this state of affairs was directly linked to the hierarchical structure of all language, communication, learning, etc (our underline). As we pointed out in Chapter 1, to express or explain something requires a shift to one logical level above what is to be expressed or explained. No explaining can be accomplished on the same level, a metalanguage (our underline) has to be used, but this metalanguage is not necessarily available (our underline). To effect change is one thing: to communicate *about* this change is something else: above all (our underline), a problem of correct logical typing and of creating an adequate metalanguage. In psychotherapeutic research, it is very common to find that particularly gifted and intuitive therapists think they know why they are doing what they are doing, but their explanations simply do not hold water. Conversely many gifted writers are astounded and even annoyed at the deeper meanings that others read into their works. Thus, while the former believe they know, but apparently do not, the latter seem to know more than they are willing to acknowledge - which brings us back to Laing: “If I don’t know I don’t know, I think I know; if I don’t know I know, I think I don’t know.”

Paul Watzlawick, John Weakland & Richard Fisch: *CHANGE*, Principles of Problem Formation and Problem Resolution, W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1974, page 79.

What Paul Watzlawick, John Weakland and Richard Fisch are saying is that to understand what two people are uttering you have to have a language about language. A language about language is by definition a metalanguage. Thus, if you read this sentence:

I was standing by a beautiful stretch of blue water and it felt so good.

you will say:

Yes, I understand this sentence.

However, a person with a metalanguage will know that your claim may not be accurate to the speaker's experience. He will ask, “When you read the sentence, what time of day did you think of the stretch of blue water.” Your answer may be, “At high noon.” The speaker replies, “No! I was thinking of it at sunset.” This example shows clearly how potentially we, more often than not, fail to understand each other when we communicate. It is for this that to have a language about language is useful in life and critical in Psychotherapy, Law, Politics, Medicine, Psychiatry, Business, Sociology, Philosophy, Religion *et alia*. Those who do not have a language about language will face unnecessary problems. Without it, you can now understand how in some therapies a patient can be in TALK^N with his clinician for 20 years with no results of any note. We wonder if the two are locked into a cybernetic loop of mutually delightful hallucinations. How else can two people keep up a conversation over 20 years?!

Every psychotherapist and Neuro-Linguistic Programmer knows that we do not directly impact on this world. Each of us creates our perception of it. It is this representation that we impact on.

It is the orthodox proposition of Neurology that the dispersed light of the sun will bounce off me to you. It is the relevant cone of light from me that goes into your pupil and eventually impacts on your retina. The photons excite changes in the eye pigments that result in an electrical impulse that travels via the optic nerve to register eventually at the back of the brain in the visual cortex. This being so, do you see me inside your head or out in the world. The answer is – out in the world. Therefore, what you see is a perception of me, not me. This applies to all other sensory information, hearing, touch, smell and taste.

Our perception as a whole constitutes our virtual reality.

However, we do not impact on the map or our virtual reality either. Whatever is the map, we apply our evaluation to it. This evaluation, judgement, opinion, conclusion, determination is always linguistic. Thus, in the above example, A's evaluation of B may be, "He is an idiot." Now it is this verbal determination that he will respond and react to.

Then, we can apply other evaluations upon our primary evaluations. Thus, a meta evaluation may be, He is a useless idiot." So we then end up with meta judgements, meta opinions, meta conclusions, meta determinations. It is for this that we are all trapped in our world of words.

It is for this that a whole and well-formed metalanguage is such a crucial instrument in life and especially in Psychotherapy.

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