

SELF REGULATION, LABOR AND DEMOCRACY

by

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When I was first asked to choose two panels to participate in for this conference, I chose this as the second one, not knowing exactly what it meant, but the title intrigued me. I thought I would first listen to what the other panel members would say and then join in when I got the gist of what it was all about. Imagine my surprise when I learned that I had to give a 20 minute talk on the subject.

So here goes. I will say what I know about self regulation, labor and democracy as it relates to my understanding of human nature. Following that I will attempt to speculate how individual body psychotherapists or even the entire field of body psychotherapy can interface with social and political forces to influence the culture and society in general in a positive direction, if at all.

First self regulation. The notion of self organizing systems is a lively topic these days. It seems that it is inherent in the foundational stuff of matter itself that some form of organization is likely to regularly occur. Matter is so arranged on the molecular level that the possibilities of molecules combining and creating ordered and repetitive patterns is very likely.

Beyond the molecular level, crystals form, sediments collect, heavy things fall, heat rises, water evaporates, the earth's magnetic fields affect the atmosphere -- these factors result in ordered rhythms of climate and geological changes, creating self stabilizing outcomes without outside intervention.

It is in living organisms that self regulation is most apparent. We need only look at single cell organisms to be in awe of the incredible self regulation it displays. It seemingly feels, adapts and responds to external conditions in ways that allow it to maintain itself over time. And then it has the astonishing and breathtaking capacity to perpetuate its form by creating replicas of itself producing countless generations through millennia. The most primitive cells needs no intervention from us or other "intelligent" agents to do the job they have done since the beginning of time. We can take a moment to stop and wonder about the relationship between non-living systems and their inherent order and living systems and their exquisitely complex examples of order, self regulation and self replication, which should leave us with no doubt to have every right to profoundly and fundamentally trust in the wisdom of nature.

Because of these observations one could be tempted to take a simplistic position and decide to just let "natural" things go their own way without any external or human intervention and that would produce optimum order -- that our task as humans is to just get out of nature's way. Nature certainly does have

its own very complex way of working, but we humans are the most complex products of nature and both we and nature will be the better for it when we learn to be a natural, creative contributor to the order and seeming goals of evolution.

Let us look now at the self regulating systems in humans and see what conclusions we can come to regarding humans' place in nature and their contribution to human well being and, to jump into the cosmic level, planetary well being.

As a PBSP therapist, I have trained myself to track and attend to two relatively trustful self regulating factors in my clients. I say relatively trustful because both can become distorted by negative external events. Let me clarify. At the very core of my belief system is my trust that the evolutionary, genetic forces in our neuromuscular systems have information and tendencies embedded in them that will lead to the optimum of pleasure, satisfaction, meaning and connectedness, not only for ourselves but for all of humans and the very planet itself. As an aside, I believe that we humans are born with a capacity for planetary consciousness and planetary responsibility. This capacity has to be nurtured – which means it does not simply come about by itself, though the tendencies are there.

Humans are quite different than most other animals since we have the capacity to stop our instinctive behavior and to replace it with controlled behavior, as I described in my first lecture. Let me not repeat myself or go into a long theoretical explanation now, but we who practice PBSP believe that in order for our genetic and natural tendencies to come to their natural fulfillment, we must be raised, nurtured and brought up by our parents in ways that satisfy our basic developmental needs, help us to integrate and unify the polarities of our being, help us to become conscious, help us to develop our Pilot - by the way, the second factor I have relative trust of – and help us to fulfill our personal uniqueness and potentiality.

If those tasks are not successfully completed at the right age and with the right figures or later in the right therapeutic processes, then that person will not be a trustworthy agent of nature. That person will more likely harbor great resentment at the treatment they received at the hands of their parents and society and may well be hostile to those close to them and to society.

Humans can only become "natural" humans when they have been treated "naturally". Naturalness is a possibility for all humans but it will not develop of itself without human interaction. Feral children raised by animals are neither "natural" or fully human. I would like to dispel the notion that we should be more like animals and less like humans.

Horses learn to be horses instinctively. There is very little training they need for that. New born horses run and gallop days after they are born. Humans have a long helpless period during which time external learning supports and cultivates their naturalness.

I do not look at so called "id" forces the way Freud taught. His notion of nature was unruly and wild and it took his notion of the ego and interaction with the outside world to "tame" the dark and dangerous unconscious.

In this regard I am more of a Reichian and Jungian in that I place my faith and trust in nature and see it as intelligent and organized, but in the human it needs human cultivation and support for it to come to full flower.

Reich emphasized sexual health as the core principle in raising children. I would like to add to sexual health all the notions I mentioned above, for if they were not attended to and only sexual health were attended to that human would not be as socially trustworthy as one who was also blessed with what I might call "natural" parenting.

So when I work with clients who have not had a good history of rearing and I look to their bodies for answers, I attend to the impulses that arise in them knowing that some of those impulses rise from emotional distortions coming from frustration and ill treatment and some of those impulses are vestiges of innocent longings for the treatment their souls are still pining for that would lead to their fulfillment. I call those longings, evolutionary memory, for I assume that within us is some evolutionary based innate knowledge of what we need to become fully realized individuals and who should provide those needs.

Perhaps now it is clear why I said earlier, that I relatively trust what is to be found in the body. Some of what comes out of the body may be contaminated by poor histories. I totally trust what I call evolutionary memory and strive to be alert to its appearance and expression.

Now I would like to attend to the other relatively trustworthy factor I touched on earlier – that which I call the Pilot. The pilot is that part of our psyche that is at the center of control. It is not simply a cognitive process for what I call the pilot is a kind of center for all inputs from the inside and outside. From that vantage point that part of us decides what actions to take or allow. When Reich speaks about surrendering to natural processes, I see that as a pilot choice. For the pilot should be aware of unconscious and trustworthy natural forces within the self and be prepared to let them be freely expressed, not only in orgasm, but in eating, defecating, laughing, crying, being joyous, giving birth, grieving, breathing, and all other natural functions that know their own pathways and need little if any voluntary motor cortex modification or inhibition.

The pilot part of ourselves also attends to conscious knowledge, meaning, values and attitudes and chooses which of them to accept or reject at any given moment. The pilot exercises choice, sees that it is implemented and takes responsibility for its consequences. The pilot can be described as the president of the united states of consciousness.

So when I think of self regulation I think of these two factors, the naturalness and trustworthiness of the living, instinctual nature of the well reared individual and the trustworthiness of a well supported and well developed pilot, well aware of and respectful of one's natural tendencies.

Now let us go on to the topic of labor or work. Work should not only be a way to make money, or survive or be a means of getting some things we want out of life, but work at its best and highest should be "life work". Work should include meaning and an expression of our personal uniqueness and potentiality. It should certainly not be meaningless for then we are spending our precious living time divorced from meaning. If we have not found our life work then we live in despair -- aching because we have not find our calling, our gift of service to the universe. I believe our genes include a drive to serve humanity and the planet, and if that is not fulfilled then we are driven meaningless or mad unless we soothe ourselves with the expectation of other chances to fulfill our karma -- to become who we truly are in other incarnations, in other dimensions.

But if we have not had that special part of ourselves recognized when we are growing up, our uniqueness, our special gifts our worth, then we are more likely to fall prey to those who are willing to use us as pawns and robots in the service of bringing them and others their own fulfillment.

A person who has been treated with respect in their lifetime would not submit to inhuman labor or work, and a person who has been raised knowing that they have social responsibility would never ask another to be debased on their behalf.

Now that brings us to democracy or at least to social and political forces that influence and shape how we are treated as human beings. I have never formulated for myself what I mean when I use the word democracy or understand when I hear the word democracy. Let me ruminate now and see what thoughts and associations come to mind. Democratic mean that each person has a say, or at least a vote in what is planned that will impinge on their life or fate. Democratic means that all have equal rights and by definition all have equal value as humans. In that notion rests the germ of the idea of respect. When I think of respect I naturally turn to the notion of having a soul. Having a soul means we each have incalculable and immeasurable value. That we are living, conscious carriers of evolution and be recognized as such. We should never be treated as a commodity or a thing.

But even were there laws that proclaimed perfect democracy, there would still not be perfect democracy, because those individuals who were maltreated and insufficiently reared in their childhood would cause the democratic laws to become meaningless. For they would readily submit to injustice as adults as that would simply be a continuation of how they were treated as children. Or, having been treated poorly as children and not having had their capacity for love and respect be fully matured, such adults who achieved power would find other victim/ready adults to manipulate and make use of.

Democracy then can only happen one person at a time. How is that to be done? What can we do as body psychotherapists to foster a society where conscious and natural self regulation, meaningful work and democracy for all are a possibility? If we think of ourselves as therapists in the traditional sense then we can only work with individuals when they consider themselves ill or have troubles. Many people who are in power and have the will and resources to force others to taste the bitter fruit of their distorted histories may not necessarily consider themselves as candidates for therapy. What can be done about them? Only a conscious and well educated electorate could block their depredations. And how to cultivate a conscious and well educated electorate?

Education and not traditional therapy would seem to be the answer. What are the ways we can bring to public awareness the values we hold dear regarding meaning and mutual respect? Can there be schools where children can receive the rearing that should have come from their parents?

My wife and I have often thought of what it would be like to offer PBSP programs and courses in all levels of education. We imagine teaching tools where children can first learn to experience their bodies and their emotional impulses in a safe and respectful environment. That would be a beginning. What would be more in line with what we think would be optimum would be to have group sessions as part of the education system where young adults, long before they made marriage choices and raised children, could experience what it would have been like to have their basic needs be met, and all the other requirements we think are necessary for optimal human rearing.

Then those young adults would not repeat in their future and in their children's future the misuse and rearing deficits they experienced. Then the cycle could be broken. What a different world that would be. Conscious young people, with a love of life and a capacity to be respectful of nature in themselves, in others and in all of life. They would be true stewards of this planet. Such generations to come would neither despoil nature nor allow themselves to be despoiled as a child of nature. They would be self regulating, not in isolation, but in loving and respectful interaction with other self regulating individuals. A democracy consisting of such enlightened and fulfilled individuals democracy would not be a democracy imposed from the outside but a democracy that would be a natural organismic consequence of each individual's loving participation and contribution to the fabric of society. A society which they knew consisted of themselves and other respectable souls like themselves.

As I write these words I feel a combination of hope, elation and a bit of embarrassment at the utopian tone I strike. I wonder as I write this and imagine you hearing what I say, whether you will smile condescendingly at my innocence or whether I have struck a similar chord in you which would lead you cheer me on as I go forward lance in hand to tilt at the windmills of despair and the status quo as I try to fight the good fight for hope and fulfillment in the future.

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