

Ethics: Opportunism and Sovereignty

by Debra Hurt

"When love rules, there is no will to power;
and where power predominates, there is love lacking.

The one is the shadow of the other." --C.G. Jung

Operating Definitions:

Opportunism n. the art, policy, or practice of taking advantage of opportunities or circumstances esp. with little regard for principles or consequences.

Sovereignty n. 1 obs: supreme excellence or an example of it. 2a: supreme power, esp. over a body politic. b: freedom from external control: AUTONOMY c: controlling influence. 3: one that is sovereign, esp.: an autonomous state.

Ethics n. 1 the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation. 2a: a set of moral principles or values b: a theory or system of moral values c: the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group.

Opportunism, Sovereignty and Ethics represent three crucial areas of concern in our work with clients. Opportunism, the danger of manipulation or abuse of power inherent in any interaction. Sovereignty, the goal of integration of the individual. Ethics, the code of conduct governing the process.

Opportunism is found in nature; in fact it is the backbone of the food chain. Simply stated, it is one organism's seizing a moment of advantage over another to feed itself and its young or to propagate. In other words, one organism's brother is another organism's dinner... or husband. No blame is assigned. Food supply, numbers, temperature, season, etc. dictate behaviors that are "hard-wired" into the organism. We accept this as "natural law."

Humans, generally, consider ourselves to be at the "top" of the food chain may not give this much thought. However, we are an integral part of this process at every level. For example, when we "catch a cold" it is simply the result of a micro-organism taking advantage of the physical, emotional and mental climate within the system to propagate itself. When such an advantageous climate doesn't exist, we don't "catch the cold" even after being closely exposed to someone who has. If we do provide the proper atmosphere for the organism to proliferate, our systems must then respond by recognizing the invasion and marshaling the inner forces that can combat it and so return our body systems to their normal integrity and proper functioning.

Opportunism exists in human behavior as well, though with added dimensions not found in other organisms: intention and choice. Food supply, numbers, temperature, etc. still dictate certain "hard-wired" behaviors, but we can generally choose how these drives are expressed. The power of intent is present in our daily interactions where it may be innocent or manipulative. It is certainly present in our work with clients "When two people meet, the totality of their psyches encounter each other, conscious and unconscious, spoken and unspoken, all have their effect upon the other...This concept of relationship is naturally very difficult to prove. But most interested observers of interpersonal relations...are repeatedly struck by how much more transpires and is exchanged between two people than is ever expressed in word or deed."¹

No area of life is free from these opportunistic influences: not education, not love, not religion, not the "New Age," not flower essences, not even Specialized Kinesiology. Why? Because we live on a planet of duality; a material reality in which polar opposites exert a dynamic force toward and against one another to keep the system from flying apart. The ancient Chinese philosophers gave these two polar forces names--yin and yang--and postulated that their harmonious and interdependent action was the underlying force from which all creation was derived. This polarity is also reflected in the "light" and "shadow" of our actions and choices.

We all have thoughts, fantasies, projections about our clients, agreements--spoken and unspoken--we have entered into with them. If we subjected each of these "contracts" to objective scrutiny we might be shocked to discover the true nature of some of them. "The awareness that human existence is both joy and woe is prerequisite to accepting responsibility for the effect of one's intentions. My intentions will sometimes be evil... but I ought to do my best to accept it as part of myself rather than to project it on you."²

We gain little by trying to suppress these thoughts, we lose everything by trying to deny them. "...Our capacity for evil hinges on our breaking through our pseudo-innocence. So long as we preserve our one-dimensional thinking, we can cover up our deeds by pleading innocent. This antediluvian escape from conscience is no longer possible. We are responsible for the effect of our actions, and we are also responsible for becoming as aware as we can of these effects."³ Our awareness of our lapses into self-serving opportunism or our falling prey to the less developed parts of our natures in part disarms the shadows looming over the client/practitioner relationship of much of their power. Power that is exerted not only on our verbal interactions but on non-verbal, energetic, sensual and sexual undercurrents as well. Clear intent requires a constant process of self-examination.

Opportunistic behavior in humans takes advantage of the physical, emotional, mental

or spiritual climate within an individual or a society in order to amass power and extend one's energy and influence. Opportunistic individuals especially prey upon those who lack confidence in their own inner authority. Your client may come to you precisely because her inner authority, her sense of sovereignty has been compromised. She must risk trusting you as a competent guide and fair witness to help her find her way back to it. We may well feel empathy for her based on our own experiences, but when we make assumptions or declarations that we UNDERSTAND what is going on for her or fall prey to the belief that we KNOW the way back to her point of balance, we trivialize her experience.

Considering the client has taken the step to ask for help with resolving the imbalance it falls to the practitioner to establish rapport and to create a safe environment for her. She deserves this regardless of how she got to her current state. Our job is not to pass judgment on the quality of her passage but to be a fair and attentive witness to the part of that passage into which we have been invited. To increase the drama of the situation or to inflate one's role as a practitioner is to distort the process for our own ends. We also do this by presenting an attractive package that answers all questions, meets all needs, cures all ills. Though an elegant and effective tool for the implementation of many innovative techniques, we must be careful not to offer kinesiology as a universal panacea. The exchange required for the acceptance of such a package is slavish adherence to its principles and dictates. We are, in affect, asking the client to surrender her sovereignty in exchange for guaranteed peace.

In every session constant choices must be made by both the client and practitioner. Conscious, subconscious, unconscious, and body level choices. We are responsible not only for choices that have impact only on ourselves (as if there WERE choices that did not reverberate past ourselves...) but even more accountable for those we make in interactions with others, especially those others that display their woundedness or vulnerability to us in hope of finding help.

In the recent film of Robin Hood, a Muslim--saved by Robin during his escape from prison--pledges to follow him until he can return the favor and save Robin's life. Only this could discharge the obligation that he owed for his salvation, only this could balance the energy. If we take credit for the successes of each and every client with whom we come into contact that's A LOT of energy that we're owed. That's a lot of people following us around. How can these people ever repay their debts to us? When we enable our clients in their process of unfoldment, they do not become indebted to us. We don't hold the imbalance of energy over them. They acknowledge that they've hired a guide to help them safely explore the uncharted worlds of their inner landscape. Once the expedition is complete, we are discharged and the client continues the ongoing process of evaluating the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual data collected during the expedition.

As we evolve as individuals during the arduous journey from birth, through childhood, adolescence, young adulthood to maturity and finally through our passage out of the realm of physical existence we transit myriad developmental stages. Passing through each stage we glean skills that ensure our survival in whatever environment in which we find ourselves during that stage. Along the way we develop discernment--the ability to evaluate incoming information and experiences in terms of how they affect our internal and external realities, support our basic nature, and relate to the system of mores that we've adopted. This contributes to both our survival and our quality of life.

In other words, as one interacts over time with external events and relationships, one's commitment to one's own internal responses (emotional, mental, spiritual, physiological...) generates the sense of "internal authority." This is the sovereign nature exerting itself in relation to outside forces. The definition of sovereignty above lists two aspects of this inner process: 1) the desire to express one's true nature in an harmonious (supremely excellent) way and 2) to experience freedom from external control: AUTONOMY, so as to embody and express one's uniqueness as an individual.

Unfortunately, not everyone's systems of evaluation are "equally created." Those who emerged from childhood with a badly damaged self concept, perhaps due to abuse or neglect, may not even be aware of the existence of this inner mechanism of discernment, allowing any strong personality to provide direction and opinions for them. Or the commitment to one's own inner responses is lacking, having been denied safe avenues of exploration and validation. They may not be not as likely to rely on the validity of inner authority as someone who emerged from childhood with a strong sense of self worth and accomplishment. Most of us probably fall somewhere in between these two extremes.

What is the remedy? To progress, to commit ourselves unceasingly to the exhilarating process of our own unfoldment. To experience and express our unique vision, to strive to arrive at the embodiment of the Divine (or whatever you know it as...) as we have come to uniquely express it. Many tools are available to us in this process. One of the most important of these is the development of inner authority because in claiming our inner authority we also embrace the responsibility for what we create with our thoughts, feelings, words and actions. It is a process basic to the balance of both client and practitioner. To provide a safe atmosphere for our clients to experience this same process and to consciously encourage them toward self-understanding and autonomy is the greatest gift that we have to offer. They will live with the choices they make, they will treasure or abdicate their sovereignty, they will carry the ultimate responsibility for their lives. And what awesome power that is!

You may be the agent of change in someone's life but seldom for reasons under your control. Often for what is not said, but done. We don't control how people have insight into their lives, we can only provide as much stimulation to that end as we can. People experience inner authority in many different ways, from the "voice of conscience" to "gut feelings." Some contact this inner knowing through the spiritual, some through the mental, some through the physical, some through the emotional--all paths are equally valid.

To develop a rapport with and trust in your own inner authority start with observation. When you encounter a new situation, a new person, new information--check in with all your systems, all your senses. What do you feel in your body about this new situation? What emotions arise spontaneously to it? What thoughts or fears come up immediately? Note your responses in as much detail as possible and observe how your relationship with this new situation or person or information unfolds. Commit these notes to paper while they are fresh in your mind. Try to remain as neutral as possible in your observation.

As you become more at ease with your initial responses, delve still further. In what way does this new situation echo one (or many) from your past? In what way does that limit you? Are you being asked to give up past limitations or future potential for growth in your interactions with this new person? In what ways or in what areas are you being asked to give up your autonomy in order to participate in this new information? These are just a few possible questions you might use to make your vision more and more precise. Refer back to your notes on your initial responses from time to time to compare them to the actual outcome.

The ultimate goal is greater self-understanding and clearer, more direct contact with both your internal and external worlds; greater confidence in your own internal authority. The ultimate benefits are being a better integrated, autonomous individual with expanded perception and greater tolerance of the infinite diversity offered by this fascinating planet.

When someone thrusts out a hand for help as they slip toward the gaping abyss of physical, emotional, mental or spiritual confusion, pain, exhaustion or fear as compassionate humans we have a moral obligation to reach for and clasp the hand as to slow the descent. As practitioners, we may also use whatever tools we have mastery of:--"ladders", "ropes", "safety harnesses"--to reverse the direction of movement. But

this help, these tools are no more than agents of the clients intent to change course. This change may require the exchange of energy such as money. You may spend most of every day engaged in grabbing the flailing hands of sliders. Show gratitude for the honor bestowed on you as people draw you, in confidence, into the intimacy of their inner world. Tread lightly there, without smugness, without judgment, without pride. Be grateful and utter a silent prayer that when YOU are the slider--and you will be--that you will be shown the same respect and deference.

But don't do any of this because I told you to...

"Life consists of achieving good not apart from evil but in spite of it."4

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Guggenbuhl-Craig, Adolf. Power and the Helping Professions. Spring Publications, Dallas, TX, 1971, page 10.
- 2 May, Rollo. The Dangers of Innocence. Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature. Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc. Los Angeles, CA, 1991 p.174.
- 3 *ibid.*, p. 175
- 4 *ibid.*, p. 175

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