



ETHICS, LOVE, and POWER RELATIONS

La MORALE, L'AMOUR, et Les RELATIONS du POUVOIR

This article is based on a seminar Philip gave in France towards the end of 2011 to therapists, trainers, coaches, and researchers in the French Clean and Emergent community. The occasion was a 3-day conference on 'Emergent Intelligence' facilitated by Jennifer de Gandt. Philip had been invited to analyse the process that led to the emergence of his forthcoming book on Clean Language, 'Trust Me, I'm The Patient' ('Faites-moi Confiance, C'est Moi le Patient').

There is a saying in English, "Trust me, I'm a doctor." My book aims to cast a new light on that old presumption. In this article, I want to introduce some of the ideas and values that are important to me which led to writing the book and which underlie every word.

As readers, I know that each of you has a book or an article in you, a thesis, a tweet, a leaflet, a lesson plan, a family newsletter. You will know then, as I do, that the satisfactions of writing are indistinguishable from its challenges. We are constantly brought up against our limitations, whether it's over the purpose and structure of what we are writing or agonizing over the placing of a comma. One of my limitations as a writer is the time it takes me to write, but that is also the source of one of my satisfactions. I had already spent a year planning a book on David Grove's Clean Language when David asked me to write about his latest work in Emergent Knowledge and the Power of Six. It was December 2006. David was not well. Looking back now, I think he had a sense that he had not long to live. He died, suddenly and sadly, in January 2008, not long after I had completed a first draft of 'The Power of Six', the book we had planned together on a mountain-top in his beloved North Island, New Zealand.

It took me two years in all to research, write, and publish 'The Power of Six'. It is dedicated to the remarkable man who inspired it. 'Trust Me, I'm The Patient' has taken another two years. It is dedicated to David and to another very important person in my life. Writing it called for another significant emotional and intellectual commitment.

A book is an emergent, systemic product. Like any result of the process of emergence, it does not pop up out of nowhere. 'Trust Me, I'm The Patient' came into being through the interaction over time of three (personal and universal) systems: PHILOSOPHY (La PHILOSOPHIE), RELATIONSHIPS (Les RELATIONS), and STRUCTURE (La STRUCTURE). One of these would not have been enough. Each needed the others. They are made up of several sub-systems. My version of PHILOSOPHY consists of aspects of **Ethics** (La Morale), **Love** (L'Amour), and **Power Relations** (Les Relations du Pouvoir). The RELATIONSHIPS that were significant to me before and during the writing of the book were with **Carol Thompson, David Grove, James Lawley, Caitlin Walker, Jennifer de Gandt, and Maurice Brasher**.

The need for STRUCTURE I identify here has three parts: **before the book; the substance of the book;** and **a post-script to the book.**

PHILOSOPHY (La Philosophie)

Ethics (La Morale)

“Qu’est-ce que la morale?” “What are ethics?” asks André Comte-Sponville in ‘Présentations de la Philosophie’ (2000). His answer is, “La morale répond à la question, ‘Que dois-je faire?’” “Ethics answers the question, ‘What should I do?’”

He asks “What should I do?”, not what should others do. As systems and emergence researcher Maurice Brasher has said, “Fine words butter no parsnips, it is necessary *to do something*.” Many years ago, I chose the path of Clean Language. My response to “What should I do?” has been on three levels: political, professional, and personal.

At a socio-political level, I see Clean Language as a counter to the westernization of mental illness: the bias by which health professionals diagnose conditions, attach labels, and prescribe treatments in accordance with predominantly western-originated standards. Clean processes allow that the cultural expectations and beliefs of the sufferer shape their suffering as much as their personal circumstances. *We all suffer differently and should be treated distinctively*. Clean treatments, unlike prescriptive or interpretative methods, are culturally neutral and wholly adaptive.

Professionally, I use Clean Language as an ethical alternative to methods that rely on outdated structures of authority and have little to say about the distressing lack of attention we give to educating the young in self- and other-awareness. Clean is a psychology of liberation. It takes its inspiration from the human quest to be free of ignorance, fear, and oppression in all its forms.

In my personal world, ignorance, fear, and oppression were the chains that bound the families in which I was raised. They linked generations of absent or silent fathers, anxious or thoughtless mothers, and deprived, disturbed, or traumatized children. I saw the psychological shock waves appear, often many years later, in a succession of aches, pains, behavioural problems, and mental disorders. And I despaired at the reluctance of the victims to break the chains and to acknowledge the reality of their lives and relationships. Deceit derived from denial of this kind begets shame and in the process reinforces itself – a circularity that causes huge discombobulation in individuals, families, and communities. How readily its effects are passed on and how narrow is the range of our knowledge of ourselves and others!

When I first trained as a psychotherapist, I was frustrated to find that the models of therapy I was studying were intent on interpreting and influencing people not very differently to the ways I had always interpreted and influenced them: ways that derived more from the myopia of own worldview than from the limitless prospects of theirs. Psychoanalysis relied too much on generic explanation and explicit suggestion for my liking. ‘Humanistic’ processes were not as equable as they sounded and could be confrontational and manipulative. Cognitive-behavioural techniques were short-term,

perfunctory, and rarely, if ever, got to the root of the problem. NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) taught me how to deconstruct my clients' subjective experience, but then obliged me to hallucinate what my clients required in order to lead them in the direction I chose.

David Grove and Clean Language were something of an oasis in this psychological desert. Every day I saw Clean processes help people resolve their problems and transform their lives in exemplary, uniquely individual ways that the old therapies would never have thought possible.

Yet every potential for good can be perverted. I have seen Clean Language advertised as a method for "revealing" a client's inner process in order to "persuade" them of things they have not freely chosen. This corruption of David Grove's original purpose serves to remind me of why I came into therapy – to help clients find and define their authentic selves without outside interference.

Love (L'Amour)

is the second of my sub-systems of philosophy that underlie the writing of the book. "What is philosophy?" asks Comte-Sponville. He reminds us that the meaning is in the word itself: philosophy is the love (*philos*) of wisdom (*sophia*). "And what other wisdom is there but to love?" he asks.

Aristotle said, "To love is to be joyful." Three kinds of joy energized the writing of the book: what the Greeks called *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*. You will have your own connections and relationships to these three kinds of joy.

Eros - passion or longing - was the beginning. Eros is the love of that which we do not have, of that which we lack. The French do not say 'I miss you'. They say '*Tu me manques*', 'You are missing in me'. The book was missing in me. I wanted to pursue it and own it.

Philia is the path. Philia is the love of that which we have, of that which we do not lack. It is the dispassionate, benevolent love of friends, supporters, ideas, and achievements for themselves. Philia eased the writing of the book, its explorations and discoveries.

Agape is the goal. Agape is neither the love of that which we lack nor that which we have. It is the deep, unconditional love of people and things *we do not know* - patients, clients, neighbours, outcomes, events, writers and readers unknown. As Comte-Sponville says, we must love them because they are. We must love them "for no reason". We must love them "uselessly".

Eros, philia, agape: the love that lacks and takes; the love that rejoices and shares; the love that welcomes and gives. These are not mutually exclusive. They are three stages of the same journey, eight vowels making a single sound. *Eros* (passion) is the beginning, *philia* (benevolence) is the path, *agape* (unconditionality) is the goal.

Power Relations (Les Relations du Pouvoir)

is my third sub-system of philosophy and it relates to both Ethics and Love. There are many references to power relations in the book.

The foreword by Jennifer de Gandt sets out the fundamental premise of Clean Language – the right of patients to be trusted; their right to be treated with integrity: to access, process, and learn from their subjective experience without expert interference. And she guides us to the wider view:

It is up to us as therapists, coaches, managers, and teachers to realize how important this challenge is at the present moment in evolution. We have daily reminders that populations are demonstrating for their rights to be trusted in the way their countries are governed. It is for us in the helping professions to ensure that every client who comes to us is facilitated in their own learning instead of being force-fed our learning.

Ideas and institutions that were once part of the given order of things are being questioned and tested as never before. The common theme is the yielding of power by arbitrary, hereditary, or military authority in favour of a cleaner kind of power relation – not sovereign, not autocratic, not bureaucratic, but shared, mutual, and independently exercised.

Chapter 4 of the book, 'Faith in Authority', considers the work of 20th century French philosopher Michel Foucault, who was concerned with the pervasive and insidious mechanisms by which external structures of power reach into the very grain of individuals and insert themselves into our everyday actions and attitudes. In order to be what we have been conditioned to be, we repress our true selves. Health professionals are both the subjects and instruments of this kind of power. We act with short term intentions and ignore the long term effects. What matters in individual cases is not what most people do, it is not the statistical average, but the individual's personal experience.

Two and a half thousand years ago, Socrates proposed a revolutionary idea we are still trying to come to terms with today: that true power lies not with the tutor, but the pupil; and that education, like scientific enquiry, is a matter of drawing out what is already there, not a shifting in of something that is missing.

RELATIONSHIPS (Les Relations)

Six relationships had a considerable effect on the book. In more or less chronological order, they are those with Carol Thompson, David Grove, James Lawley, Caitlin Walker, Jennifer de Gandt, and Maurice Brasher. What did I learn from them and how did that affect the writing?

Carol Thompson – partner, conscience, Inner Clown facilitator – helped me bridge the gap between *eros* and *philia*, passion and friendship. She helped me see beyond myself; to look past what I could take and towards what I could give. The book is a personal journey, but I believe it is one every reader can take.

David Grove – creator of Clean Language, mentor, friend – helped me bridge the gap between *philia* and *agape*, friendship and the love of others, particularly clients, for their own sake. With David I learnt to love without condition, to love uselessly. His (dis)passionate spirit infuses every page.

Carol and David were indispensable to both the purpose and content of the book. As I say in my dedication:

Many years ago, Carol suggested that she and I should go into therapy, which led to my becoming a psychotherapist, which led to my meeting David, which led to this book.

James Lawley – psychotherapist, enthusiast, co-creator of Symbolic Modelling – was responsible for my first experience of Clean as a client. The occasion was an NLP Conference in 1994, when James and his partner Penny Tompkins were running their first ever workshop on Grovian Clean Language and Therapeutic Metaphor. I came to it during the morning break, having absconded from a workshop on NLP and Writing, which I had decided did not interest me. James offered to demonstrate what I had missed. “Where would you like to be in the space?” he asked. I chose a chair. He continued: “And where would you like me to be?” I indicated a space directly in front of me. He sat beside and slightly behind me instead, and proceeded to ask “And what would you like to have happen?” and so on. I realized later that he had placed himself at an angle that was less about establishing a conventional therapist/patient relationship and more about what we would eventually come to call ‘facilitation’. Later we learnt that a Clean facilitator actually has no choice in the matter: they must position themselves where the client requires. Not many clients choose a space immediately in front of them from which to be facilitated, but the occasional awkward one does. Anyway, I was hooked, went on to James and Penny’s first Clean Language training in the UK in 1995 and have been inextricably involved with Clean ever since.

In Chapter 5, ‘New Science New Psychology’, James defines the essence of a Clean process. For the benefit of therapists who believe that they alone are the progenitors of change, he explains that:

Change emerges organically as the self-system learns from itself.

A deceptively simple insight that confirms what first alerted me to the subjective workings of Clean, as opposed to directive or suggestive, change. And in Chapter 6, ‘The Good Midwife’, he helped me clarify the distinction between influencing the content of a client’s process, which I am unable to do as a facilitator if I follow Clean rules, and influencing the process itself, which I acknowledge:

‘Influence’ originally meant a flowing in, as of water to land. I have some control over the inflow of my questions, but none whatsoever over the response of the land, which will adapt itself as one living thing to another, unpredictably.

Caitlin Walker – educationalist, innovator, author of Clean Language and Systemic Modelling. Caitlin describes Clean Language aptly as “a universal language of inquiry.” She was the first colleague I saw with the temerity to play David Grove at his own game. David had a tendency to lay down the law about Clean Language during our development seminars and Caitlin would challenge him to facilitate our learning by his own Clean criteria instead. I learnt to test my own relationship with him more critically and to be ready to challenge some of his wilder ideas.

Caitlin co-founded the first Clean Practise Group in the UK in 1996, a very special collective experience for the eight or nine of us who participated. The exercises Caitlin created helped further our knowledge not only of the techniques of Clean Language, but also of its feel and philosophy. It is really not possible to exaggerate the seminal influence this group had on the development and furtherance of Clean in Britain and beyond.

In Chapter 10, 'Abuses and Uses of Metaphor', Caitlin speaks passionately about the missed opportunities for pupil-generated metaphor in British primary schools as a result of what she describes as a huge failing of the 'SEAL' (Social and Emotive Aspects of Learning) initiative:

My daughter is being told to imagine herself as made up of a bouncy dog, an aggressive bear and a depressed donkey, and to control these metaphors as a means of controlling herself. It would be far more effective and less confusing to ask pupils, "When you are having fun / feeling angry / sad you are like what?"

A comment that points to the pivotal difference between self- and other-generated metaphors in Clean Language changework.

Jennifer de Gandt, *eminence grise* of the Clean community in France, didn't know she was writing the foreword to the book. She believed she was contributing a review, but as I was reading what she had written about Clean and the politics of liberation – "we have daily reminders that populations are demonstrating for their rights to be trusted in the way their countries are governed" – I knew that she was articulating a context for the book as a whole. Representative government is a critical first step to self-government and personal liberation. Jennifer is able to see the big picture. There are many things I didn't know I knew until she pointed them out. She is also an exceptional co-ordinator. She facilitated Grove's Clean and Emergent seminars in Paris and Normandy and brought him a little of the discipline he once lacked. Unpredictable though David was, I learnt that he could be kept within a frame as long as the frame was kept open.

Maurice Brasher – teacher, researcher, bilingual master of the three E's: epistemology, etymology, and emergence. The word that comes to mind when I consider Maurice's influence on the book is iteration, iteration, iteration. "Ah," he might say, "that is three words, but they describe a singular effect." Iteration is the means by which the result of one stage of a repetitive process becomes input for the next, which nicely describes the progress of some of the more difficult parts of the book as they passed between us. From Maurice I learnt not to take "No" for an answer. His "No, that is not right!" was the start of a negotiation. It signalled a disparity he had sensed between what I had intended to say and what I had actually written. He taught me to revisit the original inspiration for the point I was trying to make and to make it again more simply.

Maurice has a gift for arriving at the truth via *jeux de mots*, or wordplay. In Chapter 8, 'Drama Behind the Scenes', I was struggling to describe the way in which a well-timed Clean question inserts itself at just the right moment in the sensory processing operations of the client's mind. Maurice came up with this line:

Clean questioning intervenes precisely at the point where sense becomes sentences.

That is, before the client's conscious mind is obliged to think about what the answer to a question should be, the unconscious bodymind is able to communicate how it really is. Given that our cognitive functioning derives from our physical and emotional relationship with the world, a Clean question and its embodied response enable intuition to be heard before 'reason' intervenes.

Here is Monsieur Brasher again (in Chapter 19), less pithy but as practical, on the pitfalls of traditional counselling:

Most difficulties in life, in relationship, and understanding spring from our failure to understand that every individual is operating out of *their own individual epistemology*. This explains why people's systems are so resistant to conventional intervention, held together as they are in a structure composed of experience and perceptions glued together by beliefs and values.

In summary: from Carol (Clean conscience) I learnt about the need to work on problems, not to ignore them or wish them away; from David (Clean catalyst) I learnt how to resolve problems cleanly; from James (Clean modeller) how to learn from resolving problems; from Caitlin (Clean educator) how to consolidate and further what I had learnt; from Jennifer (Clean co-ordinator) how to celebrate and contextualize my learning; and from Maurice (Devil's advocate) how not to take any of the above for granted.

STRUCTURE (La Structure)

is the third of my three systems (Philosophy, Love, Structure) from whose interaction the book has emerged. In this context, it has three sub-systems: before the book, the substance of the book, and a post-script to the book.

Before the book

I studied architecture. I was particularly fascinated by the development of the Egyptian temple. One of the Egyptians' standard designs derives its form from a metaphor. The metaphor is a bundle of



papyrus – symbol of growth and fertility – tied together and standing upright. The columns represent this metaphor in stone. A flat slab at the base of the column prevents it from sinking into the ground. A lintel at the top of the column distributes the weight of the roof through column, base, and plinth to the earth. From the repetition of this combination many times over, the final form of the temple emerges. Thus – and this is the point – *form follows*

function. The design of the temple arises from the need for a huge iconic building that affords a transition between the internal and external worlds, physical and spiritual. Function does not follow form. The design of the temple is not the result of the whim of the designer.

This fundamental tenet of good architecture is the same for good therapy. The *form* of a Clean therapeutic process – non-suggestive questioning of client information – *follows*, not leads, its *function* – encouraging uncontaminated information from the unconscious to appear. As a result, the resolution of the client's problem emerges from within; it is neither shaped nor dictated from without.

The contrast is with traditional models of therapy, where the *form* of the work – interpreting the client's language, leading to direct or indirect suggestion and advice to the client – invariably shapes

and dictates its proper *function*, which in my submission should be, but in such a situation cannot be, for the client to resolve their uniquely constructed problem in their own unique way.

The substance of the book

Function comes before form again. The first requirement is to set the scene for the reader (*Dedication, Acknowledgments, Foreword*) and establish a base from which to build. The next requirement is to explain how the book came about and what it attempts to achieve (the *Introduction*). The aim then is to first pace, then lead, the reader's existing knowledge, understanding, and need for a coherent narrative. To this end, *Part One* of the book ('Trust Me, I'm The Patient') concerns itself with the basis and genesis of the new psychology of change, *Part Two* ('Inside Information') examines the central role of self-generated symbol and metaphor in Clean Language changework, *Part Three* ('Symptoms and Solutions') sets out the principles by which Clean healing and change are activated, and *Part Four* ('Coaxing into Consciousness') outlines a number of practical ways in which Clean healing and change are achieved.

A post-script to the book

takes the form of three appendices. The first anticipates the reader's need to go further (a universal exercise in Clean Language and Metaphor); the second offers examples of Clean Language and Metaphor in practice (transcripts of, and commentaries on, Clean case histories); and a third provides a reference for the future (a definitive set of Clean questions applicable to almost any situation).

Conclusion

Systems interact and iterate, and what emerges is something more than the sum of its parts. Three things came together in 'Trust Me, I'm The Patient' – a certain philosophy, a particular set of relationships, and the need for a coherent structure – and what emerges is a product that aims not just to inform and engage, but to persuade the reader of a simple proposition: that if the age of speculative analysis is long gone, as psychologist Oliver James maintains, and if the era of directive and suggestive changework is coming to an end, as I suspect that it is, then the exhilarating mix of ethics, love, and Socratic power relations at the heart of Clean Language is our best bet for the future.

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