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# TRANSFORMATIVE ENCOUNTERS WITH INTEGRATIVE ETHICS

Papers from a 1997 A.I.S. session

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*Abstract:* “Values” are like the air we breath: they can go unrecognized even though they are critical to our lives. We do become aware of received values, however, when they fail to provide wise guidance. Those are the times that ethical crises can arise, bringing on the emotional, personal, and spiritual impact of transformative experience. Indeed, a change in outlook or viewpoint is normally expressed as a change in or reinterpretation of given values. That is the case whether values are understood as a set of structured ethical norms (“It follows that one should not do...”) or as an aesthetic response (“I like...”), or anything on the continuum between these two extremes.

This package includes five papers, each of which describes encounters with received values. Each paper includes transformative experiences of its author, and places the transformative dynamics within a broader intellectual framework. Interestingly, each transformation challenges disciplinary categories within academia. Perhaps more significantly, each wrestles with the broader cultural categories that support disciplinary assumptions as well as life outside academia.

Earlier drafts were presented in a session of the 19th Annual Conference of the Association for Integrative Studies (A.I.S.) in October, 1997 at Appalachian State College in Boone, North Carolina. Critical feedback and suggestions from the audience and other A.I.S. colleagues were very helpful in rewriting the papers. We would also like to thank the Organizing Committee of that conference and particularly its Chair, Jay Wentworth. The inspiration for our papers was prompted by the conference topic: "Renewing Practices and Transforming Experiences in Integrative Studies." Jay encouraged participants to live, or at least give witness to, transformative experience rather than just talk about it. We hope these papers capture that spirit.

The substantive contents and contexts vary greatly from paper to paper. Below are comments on each particular paper and highlights of the shared themes of transformation and value.

Martin Schönfeld argues that interdisciplinary and integrative disciplines can run the danger of inadequate foundational support. That alone may shake up readers of *Issues*, most of whom are avid supporters of such disciplines. His example—environmental ethics—has arguably led to the most transformative public reconsideration of values in the past three decades. Martin reminds us that integrative approaches can require disciplinary elements, even for foundations. Not to do so is to relegate discussion—and policy—to ad hoc manipulation and inconsistency. In the longer run, that can be harmful and destructive to interdisciplinary and integrative efforts and to the application of those efforts.

Andrew Bergerson's research into the everyday habits of ordinary Germans during this century is already known to readers of *Issues in Integrative Studies*. His article "Integrating in the Accusative: the Daily Papers of Interwar Hildesheim" was published in No. 15 (1977), pp. 49-76. His paper in this volume explores the use of Alltagsgeschichte: the everyday history that falls somewhere on the margins of history and anthropology. The focus here is on the transformative effect of oral history on himself and on people whom he interviewed. The impacts have been dramatic and deeply personal, and certainly not predictable. The temptation to avoid or escape such responses to the Holocaust is perhaps his greatest concern for both himself and his interviewees and friends in Germany.

Debora Wood points out that many contemporary artists manipulate traditional imagery in order to challenge viewers' modes of perception. While the goal may be to shock the viewer into reconsidering received values, Debora raises a vital question: do such shocks constitute a

transformation in the audience? Through a number of examples, she argues that the transformative potential can vary widely, depending upon variety of conditions concerning the audience, the artist and the artistic medium. A lesson is that artists who intend to transform must be sensitive to a panorama of factors; ignoring even one can greatly lessen the effect.

Linda Handelman invokes a fundamental aspect of Buddhist ethical awareness: that all life is suffering. Combining this with the classical Greek view that suffering is necessary to become wise and John Dewey's exhortation to recreate life experiences in the classroom, Linda explores her use of potentially painful components in her philosophy classroom. The experiences are integrative and transformative in a way that would be impossible using standard methods of teaching philosophy.

My own paper grapples with a problem all too familiar in academia: dogmatic allegiance to a particular epistemology. Alternative standards of evidential support or interpretative argument often demarcate disciplines, and sometimes subdisciplines as well. I trace the historical and cultural roots of three different approaches to knowledge along with the ethic surrounding each. Overcoming dogma is transformative, and it begins with owning up to the weaknesses of one's favored approach and the strengths of the alternatives. At a more personal level, attempts to reconcile different epistemologies have been and continue to be deeply transformative in my own life.

As much as possible, we have tried to capture an authentic encounter in our professional lives. In spite of the fact that deeply personal transformations do not fit the structure of some disciplines, we believe they are possible in all disciplines and actually do occur in all disciplines. We hope to encourage you to encounter the same possibilities in your own personal and professional lives. We also hope you might go public with your process of self-questioning, for the sake of your friends, colleagues, and students as well as yourselves.

