A Theistic Approach to Therapeutic Community:

Non-Naturalism and the Alldredge Academy

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Although the short tradition of theistic therapy has emphasized the individual client, the long tradition of theism itself has often emphasized the community. The Hebrew tradition of theism, for instance, emphasizes community almost exclusively (Boman, 1960; Dueck, 1995, Lohfink, 1984). It includes not only community-based "interventions" – divine and mortal – but also community discernment of the Spirit, and even community salvation. Consequently, the formulation of a theistic approach to therapeutic communities, as described herein, is an obvious and a necessary extension of this long theistic tradition (a tradition that says God is actively involved in the events of the world).

The problem is that most therapeutic communities have been founded on the secular philosophy of naturalism. The popularity of this philosophy is understandable. Many psychotherapists view it as an advance over the mystical and magical paradigms of the premodern era, and many view it as a relatively nonpartisan and objective philosophy regarding religion. While we agree, in some sense, with the first view, we cannot agree with the second. Indeed, we agree with the editors of the present volume that the philosophy of naturalism is incompatible with theism (Richards & Bergin, 1997; this volume). If this is true, then a theistic approach to therapeutic communities cannot be naturalistic.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe a particular client's therapeutic path through a <u>non</u>-naturalistic therapeutic community. We begin by outlining briefly the problematic nature of naturalism for theistic therapy. We next compare and contrast five of the major assumptions of naturalism to a non-naturalistic philosophy – one that we believe clears a conceptual space for a true theism to be practiced. As an illustration of this non-naturalistic philosophy, we then describe a particular theistic therapeutic community – the Alldredge Academy – and report one client's therapeutic journey through the Academy.

<u>Naturalism and Therapeutic Community</u>

Several scholars and therapists have recently noted how problematic the philosophy of naturalism is for psychology, especially as the field attempts to incorporate theistic interventions (Collins, 1977; Gunton, 1993; Leahey, 1991; Richards & Bergin, 1997; Richards & Bergin, this volume; Slife, in press; Slife, Hope, & Nebeker, 1999; Smith, 2001). However, this philosophy is increasingly fueled by the perceived need to make the field more scientific and biological. As Leahey (1991) notes, naturalism is "science's central dogma" (p. 379). Consequently, as psychotherapy has moved increasingly toward natural sciences, such as medicine, this "central dogma" has become increasingly influential. Indeed, this dogma has, like many other dogmas, foreclosed many conceptual and clinical options that were once open to exploration (Slife, in press), including theistic options. What is this foreclosing philosophical "dogma?"

The philosophy of naturalism essentially postulates that laws and/or principles ultimately govern the events of nature, including human nature (cf. Griffin, 2000; Honer & Hunt, 1987; Leahey, 1991; Richards & Bergin, 1997; Slife, in press; Smith, 2001;

Viney & King, 1998). From laws of gravity to principles of pleasure (psychoanalysis), reinforcement (behaviorism), and organismic enhancement (humanism), these types of natural laws and principles supposedly govern all aspects of human beings, including our bodies, minds, and even spirits. Unfortunately for theism, this secular philosophy implies that other entities, such as God, do not govern these aspects of humanity. Natural laws and theoretical principles essentially fill up the conceptual space where God might be, explaining human behavior and cognition without requiring a God of any kind. Because theism does require a God, by definition, naturalism and theism are often viewed as incompatible philosophies, in principle (cf. Griffin, 2000).

Naturalism is so prevalent, however, that many theists attempt to make naturalism compatible with theism. The most popular attempt at compatibility is deism – the claim that God created the natural laws. However, naturalism assumes that the operation of these laws is independent of any deity or Supreme Being. Although a deity may have originally created the laws, the laws now operate on their own. Moreover, the laws and principles must be universal and unchangeable in order to be lawful. If a deity is assumed to exist at all, it cannot disrupt or suspend these laws on any particular or regular basis, or the laws would no longer be lawful (Griffin, 2000). Most theisms are thus impossible in this naturalistic account. A deity may exist, to be sure, but it is rendered passive and effectively nonexistent because naturalism does not permit it to actively change or disrupt the regular, autonomous operation of these laws. The universe is assumed to work as it always has, whether or not this god exists.

Comparing Naturalistic and Non-naturalistic Assumptions

We believe that the best way to make these issues clear, particularly for therapeutic communities, is to explicate the assumptions involved. Assumptions are taken-for-granted beliefs about the world. All therapists make assumptions because they postulate a world in which their techniques are effective. Slife (in press) has described the role of five of naturalism's major assumptions in individual psychotherapy (as well as each assumption's problems and alternatives): objectivism, materialism, hedonism, atomism, and universalism. Although the labels have sometimes differed, other scholars have concurred with these five assumptions and noted others: determinism (Richards & Bergin, 1997; Baldwin & Slife, in press), rational order (Rychlak, 1988; Slife, 2001), reductionism (Griffin, 2000; Slife & Williams, 1995), and empiricism (Collins, 1977; Viney & King, 1999).

Unfortunately, the implicit status of these assumptions means that few therapists explicitly claim or acknowledge them in their practices. Many therapists are unfamiliar with the subtle nature of assumptions and often do not recognize their own assumptions or the assumptions of therapeutic practices across the field. These therapists will undoubtedly need more explanation (and space) than is permitted in this chapter. We ask the reader's indulgence here and refer them to the references provided as well as the introductory chapter of this volume. Our purpose here is to briefly compare and contrast five naturalistic and five non-naturalistic assumptions that specifically pertain to therapeutic community (see Table 1). As we shall show, these assumptions are pivotal to the formulation and practice of therapeutic community.

Naturalistic Assumptions	**Non-Naturalistic Assumptions**
<u>Objective</u> – To obtain a true understanding of natural objects, including humans, therapeutic and scientific methods should strive for and can be value-free.	<u>Value-laden</u> – To obtain a true understanding of humans, therapeutic and scientific methods should embrace the inescapability of values.
<u>Hedonic</u> – The chief good and *ultimate,* constant motivation of all natural beings, including humans, is self-benefit.	<u>Altruistic</u> – The chief good and *ultimate* motivation of all humans can and should be the benefit of others.
<u>Determined</u> – Natural laws and/or principles govern the actions of humans, preventing them from acting otherwise.	<u>Agentic</u> – Natural laws and/or principles do not govern human action, allowing them to act otherwise than they did.
<u>Rational</u> – The order of natural events and human understanding is rational and thus evidences logical consistency.	<u>Dialectic</u> – The order of human events and understanding is not solely rational but also inconsistent and even paradoxical.
<u>Atomistic</u> – The qualities of all natural objects, including humans, are self-contained within the objects themselves.	<u>Holistic</u> – The qualities of humans are not self-contained, but instead stem from their relationships to other humans.

We anticipate that many mental health professionals will resist the implied "versus" (either/or) of this Table, which is rendered more explicit in our narrative description of the comparison (below). However, assumptions are peculiar beasts. They are not factors that can be combined, nor are they variables that interact; they are foundational philosophical conceptions that rule out, in principle, other foundational philosophical conceptions. This is not to say that some assumptions are not compatible with other assumptions. It is only to say that all assumptions rule out, and are incompatible with, <u>some</u> other assumptions. In the case of the naturalistic assumptions of Table 1, the <u>ideas</u> of their non-naturalistic counterparts (and not the <u>labels</u> per se) are disjunctive – incompatible by definition (Slife, in press; Slife & Williams, 1995). Consequently, we compare each pair of assumptions, in turn, and then describe a therapy case in which the non-naturalistic assumptions were applied successfully at the Alldredge Academy.

Objective versus Value-laden. Objectivism is the naturalistic notion that all worthy methods, including therapeutic techniques and scientific methods, should strive to be objective and value-free (Bernstein, 1983; Richardson et al., 1999; Slife, in press). If they were not relatively free of values, they would be "biased" and distort our knowledge of the natural world, including the therapeutic natural world. As applied to therapeutic communities, therapeutic techniques should be derived from value-free scientific methods as much as possible. Also, such techniques should not themselves have implicit values that bias them against the value systems of clients (e.g., religions, traditions, ethnicity, gender).

The position of the Alldredge Academy, by contrast, is that values are inescapable. All therapeutic communities (including the naturalistic) accept and reject, promote and discourage, particular values, whether or not they acknowledge it. This position implies that the therapists of such communities should identify and prominently present their values (and assumptions) for the purposes of informed consent – especially regarding their methods and strategies (Slife & Richards, 2001). Another crucial task (value) of any such community is helping clients to discern the values that are best suited for them and their circumstances. Therapists will purvey values, and clients will adopt them, regardless of the therapeutic system, so this process of purveying and adopting should occur deliberately rather than by default.

Hedonic versus Altruistic. Hedonism is the notion that the chief good and ultimate motivation of all natural beings is self-preservation and self-benefit (Merriam-Webster, 1998; Slife, in press). If a species consistently seeks pain instead of pleasure, then this pain seeking invites evolutionary extinction. As applied to a therapeutic

community, this assumption implies that the chief good and most important motivator for therapeutic communities is client benefits (in exchange for therapist benefits) (Fisher-Smith, 2000). Client self-benefit is the primary goal (even if helping others is the means) and self-benefit is the primary client motivator (e.g., self-actualization) for achieving this goal.

The altruistic position of the Alldredge Academy, however, assumes that all people can be ultimately motivated by and for others (e.g., other-actualization). The "can" here is important because this particular altruistic position focuses on capability. It does not obviate the possibility of self as a motivator; it merely claims that self-benefit is not the most natural (fundamental) or only motivator. As applied to therapeutic communities, the end of any action (by therapist or client) should not be the self, with the means being other people (as with hedonism). The end must be others, with the means being the self. Benefits can ensue from the caring of others, but true self-benefit cannot be pursued (Slife, 1999; Yalom, 1980).

Determined versus Agentic. Because naturalism assumes that physical laws and principles govern the real world – including the human world – human behavior and cognition are determined (Richards & Bergin, 1997). We may not yet know the principles that are responsible for determining behavior (e.g., biological and/or social principles), but they determine it nevertheless. Determinism is not about limits here but about what is responsible for things and events. As applied to therapeutic communities, physical and social laws are responsible for human behavior. Therefore, the psychotherapist's job is to discern those laws (or postulate them through theory), as much

as possible, and manipulate them in instrumental ways that benefit the client

(determinism + hedonism) (Richardson & Bishop, 2002).

The Alldredge Academy assumes that the clients themselves contribute

intentionally to their own behavior (agency) (Howard, 1994; Rychlak, 1994). This

assumption does not preclude the contextual importance of the environment and biology,

but it does reorient the notion of ultimate responsibility and thus modifies conceptions of

causality and intervention (Slife, 2002; Slife & Fisher, 2000). As applied to therapeutic

community, it means that clients can and should be held responsible for their own

actions, and interventions can only facilitate healing experiences (an introspective

perspective) and not cause behavior change (an extraspective perspective) (Rychlak,

1994).

Rational versus Dialectical. The lawfulness of natural laws is thought to imply

their rational consistency (Gunton, 1993; Rychlak, 1988; Smith, 2001). The laws and

principles of a therapeutic community must also occur in an orderly and even logical

fashion. They are not disorderly or irrational. They are consistent and rational, implying

that the most effective therapeutic interventions are themselves logical and consistent.

For example, interventions should be consistent, rather than inconsistent, with the stated

goals of therapy. Because clients are typically encouraged to frame their goals

hedonistically (e.g., self-benefit), the assumption of rational consistency is often

confounded with hedonism to mean "consistent with self-benefit" (Shaver, 1999).

At the Alldredge Academy, however, rational consistency, in this sense, is

sometimes intentionally violated to enhance dialectical relations (and altruistic relations).

Instead of assuming that the primary relations among therapeutic events are (or should

be) relations of rational consistency (Rychlak, 1988), this position implies that "inconsistency" and paradox are just as important as consistency and rationality, particularly in a therapeutic community. For example, particular learning opportunities are facilitated through paradoxical interventions where clients are jolted from their typical ways of thinking and reasoning.

Atomistic versus Holistic. The philosophy of naturalism assumes that the qualities of all objects (e.g., the atom) are inherent in the objects themselves. That is, if we want to understand a particular object, we must study the object itself and not the objects that surround it (atomism). In the behavioral sciences, atomism has implied that the basic unit of study is the self-contained individual, not the group or culture (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999). If a therapeutic group or community is studied at all, it is viewed as a collection of individuals, each with his or her own self-contained qualities (e.g., reinforcement history, cognitive schema, intrapsychic structure).

The Alldredge Academy, on the other hand, believes the focus should be the relationships among the individuals of a therapeutic community (i.e., the community itself). This focus was, in fact, the original impetus for healing theistic communities. Just as any part of a whole gets many of its qualities from its relation to other parts, so too individuals of a community get many of their qualities from their relationships to other individuals (Slife, Hope, & Nebeker, 1999). As applied to a theistic therapeutic community, the group or team is as important as the individual, and meaningful relationships are more important than individual self-benefits.

Treatment Process and Outcome

Therapeutic Setting. The Alldredge Academy is a rare example of an authentically non-naturalistic treatment philosophy that is compatible with theism. As discussed above, naturalistic assumptions do not require divine beings. They supposedly operate much like natural laws – autonomously and automatically (mechanistically). The Alldredge Academy, by contrast, assumes that none of the assumptions of non-naturalism are helpful or realizable without the Source – the Academy's term for God or Spirit. True altruism, for example, is not attainable without the inspiration of this divine entity. Although this philosophy/theology is obviously compatible with theism, the Academy is not typically viewed as a religiously based community per se. It is, instead, more ecumenical, accommodating several widely varying theistic traditions and worldviews, from Christian to Jew to Moslem.

The Alldredge Academy is located in the mountains of West Virginia, where rugged terrain and beautiful vistas are commonplace. Alldredge is an accredited school with over 500 graduates, typically of the one-semester (three month) program. At full capacity, the Academy can accommodate 72 students along with 71 staff members. All counselors receive an initial four-week, ten-hour per day training in the non-naturalistic Alldredge model. In addition to regular weekly supervision, they receive another five-hour training session every second week, with another four-week training stint every year. The owner/director of the Alldredge Academy (the second author of this chapter) developed the SUWS Adolescent Program and has 20 years of experience in educational programs.

Client Background. To bring the Academy alive, we follow the experiences of a recent resident and "student" – Laura (a pseudonym). We reconstruct salient aspects of her therapeutic journey through Alldredge with the help of extensive treatment notes and a three-inch pile of Laura's own journal entries. Laura is a 16-year-old Caucasian girl with no particular denominational affiliation and custodial grandparents. Both her birth mother and father were drug addicted, with neither currently active in Laura's life. Prior to attending Alldredge, Laura was admitted to an inpatient psychiatric ward for a series of incidents, including running away, heavy drug use, and misdemeanor convictions for shoplifting and truancy. She was diagnosed in this hospital as ADHD (with secondary depression) and placed on Prozac, but her problematic behaviors continued. Therefore, an educational consultant, with expertise in the special needs of youth, referred her to the Alldredge Academy.

Laura arrived at the Academy in May and joined a group of eight other adolescent students for at least a three-month (semester) experience, including at least a month in "mountain search and rescue," a month in the "village," and a month in the "school." Her custodians asked that Alldredge help her to stop the drug and antisocial behavior, develop new learning strategies, and diminish her depression. The other adolescents of her group had similar profiles, with the group moving together through the three-month journey and sharing experiences with similar sized groups along the way.

Mountain Search and Rescue Phase. Upon arrival, members of the group were taken to the Canaan Valley, which consists of high elevation mountainous terrain. They were outfitted for continuous camping and told they would be trained as a search and rescue team, with all the technical, emotional, and physical skills necessary to save

someone's life. Laura was "absolutely shocked," as she writes in her journal, by the notion that she was not there primarily for herself. In fact, this was her first exposure to the concept of true altruism, real teamwork, and a life based on service (though initially the staff never mentioned these concepts). Even at this early stage, the instructional staff is clearly led by two violations of the philosophy of naturalism. First, students are not there for their own benefit (hedonism); they are there for someone else's benefit entirely (altruism). Second, as Laura will learn, she is not there to cultivate her individuality (atomism); she is there to cultivate the team (holism).

These concepts are foreign to Laura, so she resists them. However, the "instructors" do not attempt to convince or persuade her of anything (except that she will successfully complete the program). Indeed, this is one of the salient features of Alldredge. Although the instructors are committed to an explicit set of broad values, such as love, integrity, hope, and valor, there is no preaching or proselytizing. Instead, the instructors model these values and facilitate experiences that aid the students in coming to their own values by and through the Source. In fact, there is considerable evidence that the Mountain Search and Rescue phase facilitates the students' desire to explore different values and seek inspiration in order to come to their own value systems.

How do the instructors facilitate such experiences? Two of the main guiding principles are themselves violations of naturalism: agency and the dialectic. In the case of agency, Laura is expected to be responsible for herself, because she is the agent of her own actions. She learns quickly that important wilderness skills are required to care for others (as a member of the rescue team) and herself. For the first time in many years, she seeks the advice of adults (because they volunteer very little) – and she listens. Hedonists

may assume that progress here is the result of natural reinforcement contingencies, but the entire thrust of the group is precisely the opposite. While it is true that the staff is supportive of Laura taking responsibility for her needs, her needs are only important insofar as she can be trusted as a team member to save the life of another. In other words, even her responsibility (and agency) is holistic and altruistic. She is not the individualistic end; she is the relational means to serving others.

Of course, Laura has many old thought and behavioral patterns that help her avoid personal responsibility and meaningful relationships. Again, however, the instructors never cajole or preach. They instead help her to generate her own lessons, dialectically. That is, they act inconsistently with Laura's "logic," even (seemingly) the logic of the program itself. At one point, for example, Laura became frustrated with "doing all the stupid stuff everyone else is doing," because she was "not like them." Rather than the instructors urging her to "stay with the program" or "take care of herself" (consistent with the logic of their seeming purpose), they apologized for not recognizing her uniqueness, moved her bedroll away from the group, and had her turn her sweater inside out to honor her uniqueness. After all, she could not be part of a group to which she did not belong. After three days, Laura tearfully requested that the group accept her back, but there were tense moments as the group sincerely considered her request. Laura responded to their eventual acceptance with cheerful enthusiasm for all her personal and team duties.

Such dialectical interventions have sometimes been labeled "paradoxical" (e.g., Becvar & Becvar, 1988). However, they are only paradoxical from a deterministic, naturalistic perspective. When agency is truly incorporated into the philosophy of treatment, dialectical interventions are a logical consequence. In other words, the

dialectic does not tell the instructors to be inconsistent with their values; the dialectic merely recognizes that contrasting meanings are intimately related. When clients have agency, especially adolescents, therapists will rarely persuade them with logic and rationality, particularly if their patterns of decision-making are ingrained and longstanding. Therapists must therefore help clients to experience the contrast of their treatment goals, so they can truly understand and <u>desire</u> the goals for themselves.

Consider another of the many small and large dialectical interventions with Laura. Although Laura worked more responsibly and cooperatively, she resisted the search and rescue training in other ways. For instance, she constantly interrupted instructors with wisecracks and invited other students to join in. Instead of the instructors chastising or attempting to extinguish this behavior, they "reinforced" it. They lauded Laura for her comedy and gave her the team responsibility for being funny, an "important responsibility" when the "going gets tough" (e.g., in a steady rain). This reframed her individualistic (and thus atomistic) behavior as a service to the team (holism) and their altruistic tasks, and Laura rapidly tired of her responsibility. Not only did she find it hard to crack wise during these tough times, she also found very few people laughing with her. She solemnly asked the group for a release from her responsibilities, abandoned her "clown" pattern, and never interrupted anyone again.

Laura generally found herself "confused" by these experiences, as she wrote in her journal. For some reason, her usual "games" were not getting their usual result. In addition, she was experiencing other feelings that seemed odd yet positive – feelings of belonging, camaraderie, caring, and a willingness to be taught. As she reports, a particular incident helped these positive feelings overcome her negative confusion. The

local Sheriff asked the team to find a battered woman who had apparently taken refuge in the mountains from her drunken husband. The woman's relatives were convinced that she was lost and afraid her husband would find her before anyone else and abuse her again. Laura and her team worked like a well-oiled machine, not only locating the woman and providing first aid but also shielding her at one point from her threatening husband.

Laura recalls being completely unafraid for herself during this incident, though she was voluntarily taking personal risks. She was so involved in caring for and protecting the woman that she now believes she found herself through this service. In other words, she found herself in a moral (value-laden) situation that led her to choose (agentically) to cooperate with the team (holistically) and give of herself (altruistically) for the sake of another. The paradox (dialectic) of the situation is that Laura may have benefited most from an incident that was not, ostensibly, for her sake at all.

The Village Phase. There is, of course, much more to the wilderness experience. However, the net effect for Laura, like so many other students, was that she now yearned for something more substantive than her "silly games," as she came to call them. After an emotional, but productive visit with her family (during the Alldredge parent/student program), her journal indicates that she wanted to know how to be a good friend, how to best help others, how to be respectful, and how to love (altruism).

In the village phase of her journey, she often turned to her instructors for easy answers. However, the village is not set up to provide easy answers; it is set up dialectically for Laura to experientially discover these answers for herself. Although specific virtues are extolled and discussed in the village, such as love, hope, integrity, and

forgiveness, these virtues are not viewed as ends in themselves; they are viewed as the means for Laura to arrive at her own answers and own moral system in relation to her community (value-ladenness). In short, she found a more productive and loving identity. The village helped her choose to change her irresponsible victim image by connecting to the Source, discovering a sense of mission and life purpose, and living more virtuously.

The village is a group of primitive hut-like structures nestled between two rivers. Yet, the village was "luxury" to Laura after her month-long camping and hiking experiences (a dialectic appreciation for "what I usually take for granted"). Village experiences are divided into four "Journeys," with each journey essentially representing a different system of theistic values from a particular primitive culture. The four Journeys together form a dialectic, through contrasts and opposition, bringing hidden life meanings to each student's awareness.

As the students enter each Journey, they enter a culture – living like, thinking like, and basically trying on the values and "spirit" of each "culture." For Laura (as she reports in her journal), this dialectic helped her to gain a "perspective" on her teenage culture, beliefs, and spirit. Relationship issues are a main focus (holism), with students counseling each other to trod the "path of virtue" (value-ladenness). Each night there is a truth circle where a truth stick is passed to each student and feelings are expressed. As problems are identified, students must take personal responsibility for solving their problems rather than blaming others (agency).

The Journeys also provide students with value-clarifying experiences. For example, part of the South Journey is the theme of the Shadow (a somewhat Jungian conception). Laura learned that her greatest fear and pain came from her Shadow. On

one occasion, she made a list of three people whom she "most hated," listing two characteristics of each that were particularly disgusting. As she described these characteristics and her loathing for them in the group, her peers and instructors began to help her see her loathing for these characteristics in herself. She began to see these characteristics as part of herself, her Shadow, in relation to the community (holism). She learned as she reclaimed, examined, and released them that she was less harsh with herself and others.

The students spent the entire week of the South Journey noting how each other's shadows waxed or waned. One of the wonders of the village is one of the missing elements of our society – constant, loving, but brutally honest, feedback to one another. Students and instructors can deliver this type of feedback because the students themselves invite it. Indeed, they hunger for it. As a culminating South Journey experience, Laura vividly reports that she and her group entered a "deep and mysterious" cave called the "den of the serpent." One by one, the members of her group shared their shadows, discussed how they affected their friendships, and then "left" them in the cave chamber. Laura was "deeply moved" by this experience and felt considerable relief from "unloading my 'shadowy' burdens." More importantly, she found herself "a better friend," a "better leader," and a "better listener" – again, the Alldredge emphasis on altruistic relationships rather than self.

Uniting all the Journeys is the Source. Indeed, the Alldredge instructors see the Source as uniting all their therapeutic interventions, from the Mountain Search and Rescue phase on (holism). However, the notion of a Source is made less explicit in the wilderness, because the students are typically not ready, i.e., they do not initially <u>desire</u>

the guidance the Source can bring. Still, the instructors attempt to facilitate student experiences of the Source. They assume the Source is already present; their only job is to facilitate "spiritual" experiences and loving relationships that help the students to sense and acknowledge the Source (however they might conceive of it).

Before leaving a campsite, for example, the instructors routinely assemble the group for a moment of silence – a silence that can only be appreciated if one has been in the mountains of West Virginia. Students are also asked to go "solo," camping (under the watchful eye of the instructor) alone. The hunger here for any mind-occupying activity is deep, so students are given short novels that bristle with "Source" themes. As Laura says in her journal, "I was pulled into the book at the start – the love, the conflict, the caring. I had forgotten the awesome feeling books had always given me." Laura also discussed the "religious" experience of her "team" rescuing the woman (both in group discussion and her journal) – how she felt empowered by "something," how she felt prompted by "something," how "something" helped her "to care more about her than me."

In the Village, the Source is discussed more explicitly and directly. If students show an interest in the Source, they are directed to consider their own experiences. Spiritual experiences are described and students are asked if they have ever felt anything like these. Without exception (particularly when students have already shown an interest), they reply that they have experienced similar "communications" with the Source. The students are then asked if they would like to enhance and deepen these communications. For example, the North Journey – the Finder of the Truth – is a series of exercises/experiences to accomplish this enhancement, including (for Laura) a

realization of her history with the Source, an acknowledgment of the Source's reliability, and some skills in distinguishing counterfeit sources. She eventually learned that deepening this communication meant letting go of the "image management" and "personal agenda" that she believed originally led to her addiction.

At one point, Laura asked her instructors for advice about "praying." In keeping with the Alldredge lack of explicit direction, the instructors offered several options (dialectic), with Laura choosing one (agency). As she put the experience in her journal, "I asked Carrie [the instructor] to show me, Brad, and Julie how to create Indian prayer ties. She gave each of us five squares of fabric and a string. We picked a pinch of ashes out of bowl, held it up, silently thought our prayer, held it to our hearts, then wrapped it and tied it to our strings. It was one of the coolest things I'd ever done. I told Julie I was glad we shared this together and gave Brad and her hugs." Laura later connects these good feelings to the wholeness and relationships she felt, which "could only have come from the Source."

Well known to all present and former students of the Alldredge Academy is that no one, but no one, ever wants to leave the village. Its soil is considered almost sacred and holy. It is viewed as a place of vital discoveries as well as a location of deep security and incredible relatedness to the instructors, the other students, the land, and perhaps most of all, the Source who unites them all. Laura reported the same feelings in her journal. However, she also admitted considerable fear and anxiety. How was she going to leave this "womb?" How could she face "school" and all the "crap" that this might bring with it? She felt she had "new wings," but now they would really be tested. Could she fly?

The School Phase. The school phase is intentionally more "school" oriented to provide a more realistic transition from the Academy. After another four-day round of family therapy, more traditional coursework is studied and more conventional schedules are kept. However, school counselors are plentiful, and considerable time is allotted for "conversation" and the "future." Here, the goal is to consolidate the often incredible emotional and relational gains made and provide a means by which these gains can be translated into a life of service "on the outside" (altruism). Although this transition is a familiar problem to any counselor in a therapeutic community, the main Academy tool for solving this problem is perhaps less familiar, at least less professionally familiar – the Source.

As an explicitly nonnaturalistic, theistic model, the Alldredge Academy has realized that the only part of the students' therapeutic context that they will always be able to take with them is the Source (along with the sense of life purpose and virtue that accompanies the Source). Few, if any, students will end up in a place as beautiful as the mountains of West Virginia. Few, if any, students will ever experience again the magic associated with saving a life. Few, if any, students will experience another "village," with its loving relationships, mysterious caves, and constant personal feedback. Still, from the perspective of the instructors of the Alldredge Academy, all these things were produced by and are presently available in the Source (holism). Moreover, the Source can never be stolen, mutilated, or deceived. It can only be rejected, in spite of its imminent and universal accessibility.

Consequently, the mission of the "school" is to transfer and consolidate the experiences and insights related to the Source. Instructors accomplish this task by

continuing the spiritual scaffolding and dialectic begun by the Journeys (and the dialectic). What lessons did you learn? How are you applying them in this new context? How are they fading, conflicting, hurting you? How can they be enhanced? With Laura, the West Journey had always been her Achilles heel. Reasoning dialectically, she also knew that this was her greatest opportunity for relational growth. She also had the fervent wish to serve the Source and somehow this challenge was her best way to effect this service (altruism). Therefore, she and her counselor set their sights on understanding and overcoming her struggles with the West Journey.

Although the West Journey is adorned with important symbols of primitive cultures, such as the Invisible Warrior, its main theme (or virtue) is forgiveness (value-ladenness). Laura admitted to having many problems with this virtue, problems in forgiving herself and problems in forgiving others. She knew and endorsed the concept intellectually, but she also knew that she did not "know it in my heart." She also knew that the Source would not be wholly available to her when she left the Alldredge Academy if she did not work through her struggles with this virtue. Rather than her usual "games" with such struggles – isolating herself and avoiding the things that really mattered – she turned to the members of her group (along with the school counselors) and made a point of asking their help in investigating her problems with forgiveness (agency, holism).

Through an honest, forthright, and courageous give-and-take with her peers and instructors, Laura realized that she had several preconceptions about the notion of forgiveness from her journal:

1. Forgiveness means giving someone permission to continue their wrong behavior.
2. Forgiveness is only a verbal statement, which cannot be trusted.
3. Forgiveness can only come after forgetting.
4. Forgiveness can only be given when someone deserves to be forgiven.

Of course, to recognize these preconceptions as faulty is to realize at some level what is true (the dialectic). However, Laura knew that she was still struggling with the heartfelt forgiveness of someone. Her instructors then provided her with empathy exercises, allowing her to step into the identity, beliefs, and history of another person. At the same time, she asked the Source for the "spirit of forgiveness," and to her utter surprise, she realized her request had been granted. She learned that she had always had a gift for understanding what people were going through, though this gift had somehow been blocked. As she developed this gift, however, she found compassion for others and the desire to forgive, even people who had wronged her, like her parents (holism). By empathically understanding the vulnerability of another, even when they seemed strong, she found she wanted to forgive, indeed forgive herself.

She realized that the Source had provided; the Source had granted her request. Indeed, her discovery of the forgiveness virtue and all that she gained through more fulfilling relationships indicated to her that the Source would always provide. Suddenly, her fears about leaving the village "womb" were gone, and her hopes for the future "outside" brightened considerably. She realized that she would have to give up much of what she once thought she had, including her old druggie friends, her old images of her grandparents (and parents), and her need for approval. However, she knew that with the help of the Source she could belong somewhere else, minister to others somewhere else, and continue to grow somewhere else.

As of this writing – two years after her Alldredge experience – Laura's parents report that she is doing well in college, with no drug abuse or bouts of serious depression. They also report that she is also searching for a major that will maximize her service to others.

Therapist/Author Commentary

How would a naturalistic, and thus nontheistic, treatment have led Laura on a different therapeutic journey from the one above? How would the five assumptions of naturalism have coalesced into a different experience for Laura? In answering these questions, we would first contend that naturalistic assumptions are not only employed in many systems of treatment but also frequently considered axiomatic across the field. Many familiar notions of mental health care owe their existence and widespread endorsement to these assumptions. We realize that some researchers would claim empirical support for many of these assumptions (e.g., Higgins, 1997), but the fact is that their efficacy and effectiveness have rarely, if ever, been directly compared to non-naturalistic assumptions. Consider the following common notions of therapeutic community (with the main naturalistic assumption in italics) along with their comparison to Laura's actual treatment:

1. The best or ultimate motivator of clients is their own self-benefit (e.g., reinforcement, happiness, satisfaction, well-being). Because the human nature of clients is ultimately *hedonistic*, all strategies for motivating clients should take advantage of this nature. Even the helping of other people should not be encouraged unless it results in client fulfillment and thus self-benefit. However, this common understanding of motivation is belied by perhaps the primary turning point in Laura's treatment – her

risking her life (and perhaps suffering) for the sake of someone she barely knew. Laura believed that the altruism of the Source, as learned through her interactions with the team, led to her altruism with the rescued woman. This altruism, in turn, resulted in her service orientation toward the team and her counselors.

2. <u>The core therapeutic principles of a mental health community should be objective – as free from bias as humanly possible</u>. This *objectivity* usually has two implications for therapeutic communities. First, only therapy strategies that are supported by supposedly bias-free research are permitted (e.g., empirically supported treatments; Nathan & Gorman, 1998). Second, all residents – regardless of their value systems – are thought to be treatable by the objective techniques and strategies of the community. With Laura, however, the Alldredge Academy was up front and constant in their promotion of her virtue and character. (The Academy also holds that no research is bias-free; see Slife & Williams, 1995.) Laura was encouraged to arrive at her own values, through the value-laden experiences of the three phases of the Academy. However, not all values are considered equal or correct, so she was gently guided by her counselors to consult the Source as she did so.

3. <u>Changes in environmental and/or biological factors are responsible for changes in client behavioral patterns</u>. In other words, the setting, structure, and interventions of the therapeutic community itself, along with medications, are responsible for client changes. However, if these factors are responsible for these changes – factors that are, for the most part, outside the personal control of clients – then the clients themselves are not responsible for them; the intervention is *deterministic*. The Alldredge Academy, by contrast, did not view Laura's biology or her environment in this fashion. Although these

factors undoubtedly play a role in Laura's behavior, she is also the agent of her actions, permitting her to do otherwise than her nature and nurture would dictate. In this sense, Laura was helped to <u>desire</u> change. Although nothing can force her to desire change, dialectical and relational experiences with the Source can facilitate her evaluation of her current desires and offer options she did not have before.

4. <u>Therapeutic systems and interventions should be applied rationally and consistently</u>. Clients should be taught how each portion of the healing process is *consistent* with the treatment goals of long-term, hedonistic self-benefit. Laura, on the other hand, was not motivated by her long-term self-benefit; she was motivated by the benefit of others (e.g., her team, the woman she rescued). Moreover, many interventions seemed quite paradoxical to Laura, and thus inconsistent with her long-term self-benefit. That is, her usual patterns or "games," as the Alldredge Academy calls them, were challenged in such a way that she sincerely began to give up the selfish ends of her games (using others for pleasure or power). She gave up these games because they were incompatible with the relationship she discovered with the Source (and others).

5. <u>The individual is the primary unit and concern of a therapeutic community</u>. Because individuals supposedly carry around with them their unique, self-contained qualities (e.g., intrapsychic conflicts, reinforcement histories, cognitive schemas), these *atomistic* qualities are the primary reason for client problems and the primary focus of client treatment. This focus does not preclude interactions with others, but it does fundamentally isolate the individual. The therapeutic community becomes a collection of autonomous individuals with their own self-contained problems. Therapeutic strategies are limited to the impact of "outside" factors (e.g., people, environment) on the

individual's self-contained problem. By contrast, the primary unit and concern of the Alldredge Academy is the relationship, including relationships between people, between people and nature, and most importantly between people and the Source. Consequently, relationships, not individuals, are nurtured and guided. Treatment goals are not so much about individual fulfillment as they are about relational caring and true intimacy.

Conclusion

At this point, we should reunite important aspects of the "case" presented here. Our case is, in some sense, the field of therapeutic communities, with its emphasis upon a secular and naturalistic philosophy. Without some non-naturalistic philosophy, we contend that it will be difficult to formalize theistic interventions. Our case is also a particular therapeutic community, the Alldredge Academy. This unique institution has pioneered not only a relatively unfamiliar philosophy (for therapy) but also many of the practices that would seem to follow from it. We believe that secular psychotherapy – restricted as it is by its naturalistic "dogma" – can learn a great deal from a therapeutic community such as the Alldredge Academy. Finally, our case is Laura, who was privileged not only to solve her problems and reconstitute her relationships but also to discover the greatest gift of all – the fellowship of the Source.

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