John G Bell
Global Pluralism
Summer '04 - Boga

Fixes that Fail – "The Enemy of my Enemy is not my Friend"

Common perception

There is a cliché that turns out to be a basic premise of international relations. This is the notion that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Adherence to this premise results in a system dynamic that is a textbook example of a fix that fails. I have called this expression of the archetype "The Enemy of my Enemy is not my Friend." The common perception from the frame used by adherents is that If one supports the enemy of one's enemy, then the defeat of one's enemy will occur that much quicker. The initial state is that there is an enemy. The perceived gap in a sense of security due to the presence of the enemy leads one to the action of supporting the enemy of the enemy. The common perception is that this will decrease the impact of the enemy. Since the impact of the enemy is reduced, the perceived threat to sense of security also decreases.

Unintended consequences

What the common belief misses is that there is a delayed unintended consequence that the 3rd party is now supplied, trained and has intimate knowledge of the primary actor's strengths and weaknesses. In an attempt to ignore the evidence of the growing threat of the 3rd party, the unintended consequences are also that the primary actor is turning a blind eye to dangerous or unethical behaviour of the 3rd party allies which in turn helps motivate opposition to the primary actor. By attempting to defeat the primary enemy, the primary actor is instead supporting and perpetuating the existence of an otherwise unfriendly forces, and continuing the provenance of those forces and increasing the motivation of the primary enemy to resist.

This pattern recurs both in the present day and historically. The Roman Empire extensively used mercenaries within the military to fill the ranks that were not being filled by Roman citizens. This provided training and equipment to the Goths, who developed an

awareness of how much wealth was accumulated within the cities of the Empire. The use of the mercenaries, as enemies of the enemy, became one of the key turning points in the history of the Roman Empire.

The US initially supported many of the enemies that it fights later. As a single example, the US supported the fighters in Afghanistan in an attempt to resist the Russian occupation. Put into motion the forces that developed into the Taliban, but the development of the Jihad as a holy war. Original support for the development of the Jihad as a fight against the Russian occupation developed the modern conception that was later turned against the US. The Washington Post, on March 23, 2002, points out that "the United States spent millions of dollars to supply Afghan schoolchildren with textbooks filled with violent images and militant Islamic teachings, part of covert attempts to spur resistance to the Soviet occupation." (Stephens & Ottaway) The article continues that there were unintended consequences to this policy, namely that this has "steeped a generation in violence." (ibid.) These unintended consequences create more problems in the long-term than the short-term solutions address.

Polarity - "Illusion and Truth"

There is a polarity that is intrinsic to the political arena. This polarity is that between illusion and truth. On one level, there is no truth, but this does not imply, as this polarity would suggest, that there is only illusion. On a superficial level, relativism becomes an excuse for excess and pursuit of self-interest. This level assumes that truths have boundaries beyond which they become false and is therefore limited in both scope and application. On a more profound level, recognizing that multiple truths exist implies that one must re-humanize the truths of others as being from some shared source of experience. This level of interpretation would emphatically deny that a single truth is the illusion, whereas the validation of many truths is essentially affirming of the human experience.

Polarity - "Self-Interest and Public Interest"

The polarity between self-interest and public interest creates a false dichotomy between the self and the community. To be sure, there are cases where self-interests conflict with those of

a community or the systemic environment of the community, but the false dichotomy is that the interests of the systemic environment or my community cannot be beneficial to myself. There is a difference between what I want and what I need. On one level of interpretation, there is a certain ethical egoism which is a claim that what is ethical is what the self demands. Another level of interpretation sees the relationship between self and community as an essential matrix of both balancing and reinforcing loops.

Polarity - "Us versus Them"

By viewing the world within the context of a polarized delineation between those that support particular agendas and those that oppose them, it becomes impossible to signify that there are those that might not fit within these opposites. For example, viewing the enemy of my enemy as my friend ignores the fact that the enemy of my enemies may also oppose me. The polarity between my enemy and myself does not signify that there can be a complicated web of conflict.

Polarity - "Pirates versus Emperors"

The polarization of actors in an event also leads to projection of all . Berg and Smith point out that sub-groups of the larger group can become the containers for those qualities that the larger group is unable to recognize in itself. This is a function of scapegoating. However, there's a more sinister function of not only hypocrisy but *ad hominem* involved in the claim that similar acts are good or evil because of the agent's relative goodness or badness. This is especially true with there is a singular lack of self-criticism in the claim.

Paradox - "We are our own enemy"

From the archetype, the actions of the primary actor are attempts to seek security, which in fact, creates increasingly less and less actual security. This self-defeating movement is on one level a simple paradox. On another deeper level, the "we" and the "enemy" have to be recognized as diverse and complex organizations which collectively work against themselves as pluralities of opinion and motives. On a more rarified level, the actors in this paradox must be recognized as only being artificially distinct from themselves. When the paradox collapses the actors are all re-

humanized from the alienation and illusion of isolated pain, and come to realize that hurting the other is a collective act that hurts everyone. In the famous words of Walt Kelly's Pogo, "We have met the enemy and he is us." (White) (*Walt Kelly Biography*)

Suggestions for 2nd Order Change

There are some points of leverage that can be suggested from the archetype and the "Enemy of my Enemy is not my Friend" model.

1) Recognize that short-term solutions are merely stop-gaps

Short-term solutions are the tools in the activist's long-term toolbox. The tools are not the point of the activism, and amelioration of the symptoms of deep social conflicts is not an ultimate goal. However, short-term solutions address immediate issues and make it possible for parties in conflict to come together and address long-term issues.

2) Anticipate delays that mask unintended consequences

The essential nature of the archetype is that the unintended consequences generally are delayed. This creates a situation where those consequences can be unintentionally or willfully missed. By keeping an awareness that delayed effects undermine long-term goals it may be possible to better address fundamental causes of conflict.

3) Address the root conflict instead of trying to win it

One possible way to encourage 2nd order change is to focus on existential sources for the nodes in the archetype. For example, why is the enemy and enemy? Why are the enemies in conflict? What are the authentic needs of the people in this conflict and is it possible to address those fundamental issues without perpetuating the conflict itself?

4) Focus on long-term solutions

By maintaining a focus on the long-term, one can keep in focus the ultimate goal. Whether specific short-term actions perfectly align with the long-term goal is not as important as an eventual design goal. One good way to develop this kind of focus is to create a statement of the design goal. For example, Atlee states his design goal as an inquiry question, "What would intelligence look like if we took wholeness, interconnectedness and co-creativity seriously?"

(Atlee, 2003, p. 4) McDonough's design goal is to ask "[h]ow can we love the children of all

species ... for all time." (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, p. 189)

5) Move from debate to Dialogue

I use 'debate' to mean any style of conflict resolution which is intended to create a win for

some and a loss for others. I use 'dialogue' to mean any style of conflict resolution which is

intended to create a new answer from the possibilities presented by conflict, fundamentally one

step beyond a win-win to a new solution that collapses the conflict into collaboration.

Bibliography

Atlee, T. (2003). *The Tao of Democracy: Using Co-Intelligence to create a world that works for all*. Cranston, RI: The Writers' Collective.

Chomsky, N. (2002). *Pirates and Emperors, Old and New: International Terrorism in the Real World*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Gibbon, E. (2001). *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. New York: Penguin Books.

McDonough, W. & Braungart, M. (2002), *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Thing*s. New York: North Point Press.

Stephens, J. & Ottaway, D. B. (2002, March 23). From U.S., the ABC's of Jihad: Violent Soviet-Era Textbooks Complicate Afghan Education Efforts. *The Washington Post*, p. A01 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A5339-2002Mar22?language=printer>

Vidal, G. (1962). *Romulus*. New York, NY: Dramatist Play Service.

Walt Kelly Biography. (n.d.) Retrieved Sept 6, 2004, from the Bud Plant Illustrated Books site: <http://www.bpib.com/kelly.htm>.

White, Marilyn. (n.d.). *Final Authority*. Retrieved Sept 6, 2004, from <http://www.igopogo.com/final_authority.htm>.