

Interview with Julio Olalla

Interview Conducted by William Bergquist

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Bill. When I look at your work, obviously a key word is ontology, which has a long history, meaning many things. What a crazy thing to do to try to capture that word and revitalize it. Tell me, how did you pick this term, ontology?

Julio. Actually, it came from, I would say, a confusion in the beginning when we centered our work on language. We talked about the ontology of language specifically- that was the issue. We said that the ontology of language, from the Greek up to now, was fundamentally the ontology of description. Language was descriptive. But then we said we needed a new ontology of language. Language cannot be seen only as descriptive; language needs to be seen as generative.

So, we changed the ontology of language from the Greek tradition. I'm making a generalization, of course, but in a general sense, we moved to the ontology that was proposed by Wittgenstein and Searle and Austin. When we speak, we generate a new future, not just describe 'how things are', so the words we use, the story we tell, impact what is possible and not possible for us as human beings.

Bill. One of the philosophical traditions is that of defining ontology as something about the nature of being, and, in the Western tradition, being is a very static concept. I am this and I am not that. So, you're going right into the dragon of static philosophy and you're trying to make it generative. That's gutsy.

Julio. So, for anyone who doesn't know the term ontology, ontology means a theory of being, that's what it is. So, we were challenging the theory of being that we had engaged in as Western culture for 25 centuries. That is an extraordinary work of people like Wittgenstein, Searle and other philosophers.

Now, once we said ontology of language, people began to talk about ontology, forgetting to say ontology of language. But it was useful because it kept pointing to something--that actually, in our time, we need a new ontology of being, a new ontology of living. So, somehow the word began to demand more from us than just speaking of language.

To be precise, my dear Bill, we talk about three key elements impacting us as human beings today on this planet. Ontology is one of them. We talk about cosmology first, ontology second, and epistemology third. We challenge the three of them - the three of them from the traditions in which modernity has been established.

Cosmology, our relationship to the world and universe and cosmos, has fundamentally been held as a mechanistic phenomenon, and that defines everything. It's a presupposition we live with, and it's been held as a truth that the world is nothing but a human projection that is mechanistic, and that worldview has permeated everything including the ontology of ourselves and everything else.

And where it hits coaching directly is that it permeates our epistemology, our understanding of learning and knowing. And for us that has been a central focus of our work. We claim that the present epistemology will not give us the knowing that is needed to deal with the issues of our time. That, I will say, is a key claim that we work with here at Newfield.

Bill. For a moment, let's look at these three. First, cosmology. A colleague of mine (a doctoral student) is doing his work on astro-physics and the extraordinary breakthroughs that are coming. He is going back and looking at Rudolph Otto (1950) and the notion of the numinous. In 2009, we are going to have a new telescope that will actually allow us to go back to the big bang and witness it. He is saying that, at some level, we can never be the same again. It's a whole different conception of the universe. So, as you look at the new cosmology, is it shifting, in part, because we are forced to look at the universe in a different way?

Julio. Well, that definitely is forcing us to re-look at every- thing-at spiritual claims and religious claims; it's having us question everything. But let me go to the common sense of our times. In sixteenth-century science, Copernicus took a look and said, "Guys, this is a little bit different than what we have been saying so far." And he defined the role of the earth, etc. The universe that he defined, actually, was our solar system. In 1905, the universe where Einstein was placing himself was our galaxy; that was it. Today, we are talking 100 years after Einstein, and saying that there

are a hundred billion galaxies around, so we are talking about a little bit bigger world. But we have not changed, in our common sense, the Copernican perspective.

In other words, Newton was transcended, but Copernicus has not been transcended. We are still Copernican when we take a look. Regardless of the size of the whole thing, we are still in that paradigm. We have transcended Newton, and now we talk about other kinds of physics; we talk about quantum and so forth. But the universe, in our common sense, is still considered mechanistic—a no-purpose, no-meaning, no-direction thing that only has meaning if we assign some to it. And that permeates and informs every single thought of the common human being on the planet today. That for me is essential to realize, and I am quoting [Richard] Tarnas on this. Tarnas says there will not be any fundamental shift in human thinking unless we shift the cosmology on which we are basing our thinking.

Bill. It is part of the Copernican cosmology that one is a static being and that the universe is static. You're really moving toward a dynamic, fluid kind of a process in which the universe is becoming and is changing. Even the very fundamental laws of matter may themselves be in transition.

Julio. Yes, so that in itself breaks common sense. The laws are shifting themselves. Actually, we do know that the speed of light has changed through time. But the thing is, and I want to put my point on this, Bill, we are now permeating common sense, and this is what we do in the Newfield programs. I know there are people in the field of physics who now are very spiritual. I know there are people in the spiritual domain who begin to shift because of the recent claims of physics. But let's take a look at where political and corporate decisions are often made—these do not come from those places. We are still far from that.

And the other claim, and this has a lot to do with epistemology now, is that we have placed physics as our central science, not biology. According to Elisabet Sahtouris, a woman whom I admire very much, physics has defined very much the way of our cosmology because we are prone to mechanical perspectives. But we haven't understood life. Every metaphor in the corporate world is a mechanistic metaphor. We don't have living organizations, even when actually we are living beings having living relationships.

But this issue, that our common sense is informed by a cosmology, is Copernican, meaning individualistic, separated, reductionist, and by an epistemology that is unilateral. What I mean by

unilateral is that in our present epistemology we learn about the world, but we don't learn from the world. It's one-directional. And in our programs at Newfield, there is something we do which I think is our highest achievement - we create spaces where a different epistemology is actually lived by the participants, with what I would say are extraordinary results. And that epistemology, the epistemology of a living universe and, therefore, a universe that can teach you, is what we are claiming as the new common sense.

Bill. Let me ask this, going back to your cosmology but also epistemology. Here was Rudolph Otto (1950), back in the early twentieth century, describing the numinous-an undifferentiated, dynamic system that is becoming rather than being. Carl Jung (1960) picks this up.

Julio. Steiner (1995) did also.

Bill. What was remarkable about Jung is that he said the numinous is such a scary experience that we build structures to protect us from this undifferentiated phenomenon. And what he was describing at that time was the emergence during the 1930s of Nazi Germany. We'll desperately try to find structures to protect us from the numinous. We build these structures to protect us from the very acknowledgements that you're talking about here. In your work, how do you keep from scaring the living daylights out of people so that they turn to some sort of Fascism or dogmatism to protect themselves?

Julio. That probably is a question that could take us the rest of the interview, and I love your question. You have no idea how much I appreciate it because the point is that the center of many of the decisions we make does not come from conceptual achievement as we'd like to think, but rather from the emotional realm. Fear, in that case, defines more our epistemology than any conceptual achievement, and that for us is another key claim. Every epistemological step, every cosmological claim, every ontological claim, lives in some emotional context. And that is what modernity has not been able to deal with.

We say that as long as we do not place the epistemological role of emotions at the center of our learning experiences, what we are seeing - the fear, uncertainty, doubt - is what we generate. For humankind, fear has been the core emotional place for a long, long time. Our claim is that if we displace fear, and, in terms of fear, let's say now we have another emotional core- gratitude-- it will shift completely what we know, how we live, how we take action. I need to say that twice. It will not shift just the emotion from what we think; it will shift what we know also.

This is a hard claim to listen for. People say, well, but I could continue knowing physics. Yes, but a human being thinking from fear and a human being thinking from gratitude does not go to the same place, even if the information on which their thinking is based may be the same.

Bill. You also talk a lot about suffering.

Julio. Yes.

Bill. In that sense, it seems in many ways to be very Jungian. Jungians would say that individuation comes not out of the escape from suffering but is within the context of suffering itself.

Julio. I would say that suffering fulfills a role. It's a key element of human experience. The illusion of a life without suffering produces, in itself, a lot of suffering. Let me work with an example. Suffering is to the soul, for me, as pain is to the body. It's a warning system. When we grow, we have a little pain. We have pain like an announcement of danger in our physiological being. It's the same thing with suffering. Our soul is being threatened by new possibilities or concerns, and we suffer a little bit. I think learning to suffer, in a way, is learning to live. Now, unfortunately, particularly with the New Age movement, there came this idea of a life without suffering. I think this is a narcissistic idea which equates to death. Suffering fulfills a role.

Now, are we aiming for suffering? No, we are not. Are we aiming for lack of suffering? No, we are not. We say any serious process of reflection, any serious process of building your biology, any serious process of learning emotionally will produce moments of suffering, and I think this is perfectly okay. In that sense, what Jung was pointing to, for me, is right on.

Bill. So, how would you translate that into an organization's suffering?

Julio. Well, for example, if you physically live in pain, it doesn't mean transformation; it means that you are living in pain. If an organization lives in suffering, it doesn't mean anything. If the suffering is brought to a context of reflection and practice, it can generate a new future. So, in other words, if suffering is used as a revealing force, it's enormously powerful. You may have organizations where people are suffering, for instance, because they're not listened to. Now, they can keep suffering because nobody is willing to listen, and in that case, suffering is not doing its job. But if we are willing to listen to it, it can be enormously revealing and get us into new and different actions.

Suffering could be a sign the same way that a pain in our body is a sign.

Bill. So, you have these wonderful Newfield graduates. They go into organizations that desperately want them to reduce the pain in the organization, make it so we don't hurt as much. And part of what you're doing is you're saying to your people, when you're going in initially at least, there's probably going to be more pain, more suffering.

Julio. There will be a moment in which that will happen. Now, what I want to mention is that it's not by design that we look for it. For instance, I had an experience with the CEO of an international company in Latin America. When we met with all the executives, we achieved enormous things, but we hit a point at which we couldn't go any further. I felt, clearly, the conversations didn't move on. So I took a risk, and I put all the people together, and I put this man in front of them, and I said, "There's something that we are hiding here; something's happening underneath all this great work." There was complete silence in the room. And I said, "I want to know what it is." There was enough trust already built to do that. So, after painful moments of silence, a woman raised her hand. She was the boss of some particular division, and she said what happened was that she had the assessment that her boss didn't listen to them. She said that he visited her area and offered a lot of great ideas. He was very charming but did not listen one bit to what she had to tell him. And she said that this is what she had never said. And then there was long silence again.

So, after a little while, seven people stood to say the same thing. The eighth person however said, "Wow, it's easy to shoot at this man, but it's not easy to say why we haven't told him that before. Why do we need to come to this moment to tell him?" Then he said it was because they were too cowardly to have that conversation. Well, from that moment on, that group of people talked about anything. They broke through a conversational black hole. Was it a tough conversation? Was there suffering in the room? No doubt. You should have seen the faces of those people. But if we didn't risk going to that moment, if we didn't acknowledge that some conversations are very hard to have for whatever reason but absolutely critical to achieve our dreams, if we had avoided that moment the learning would not have come. Everybody, including the boss, was profoundly grateful that we crossed that threshold. Was I looking for pain and suffering? Of course not.

Bill. It sounds like it's about trust, but it's also about courage.

Julio. Both are needed.

Bill. I want to look at some philosophical foundations. You're sounding very Danish.

Julio. Danish?

Bill. You are a bit Kierkegaardian, like somebody who just moved from Chile to Denmark by way of Switzerland, with a little bit of Carl Jung. Are there Kierkegaardian or some other existential pieces within your work?

Julio. Not only Danish, in that sense. There was a Portuguese man, Spinoza (2006), who lived in Holland who also has an influence on our work. Spinoza dared, when very few people spoke, to talk about emotions and to question some spiritual traditions. He was really hit by that, as you know. But I will go even further if we go into the philosophical realm. Even Socrates said that if we don't dare to have some conversation, we never dare to think anything. And he knew that to cross the thresholds of conversation, you need to deal with fear, and you need to create courage.

So, whatever the context of those conversations, many philosophers have pointed to that. In order to produce reflection, we will have to deal with suffering. We will have to deal with courage; we will have to deal with fear. But it was not a manipulation of fear. Fear was a necessary phenomenon.

Bill. It seems to me in your work you're not just talking about the conversations that have not occurred. You're also talking, in a sense, about what might be called the meta-conversations (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Bateson, 1979; Commons, Richards & Armon, 1984; Kegan, 1994). The woman saying the problem is that our boss doesn't listen- that would be kind of a first order. Second order is that issue of why haven't we told him about this? That's a meta-level conversation which seems to me is very much a part of the work of Newfield. So, it's not just the courage to say what we haven't said; it is the courage and the capacity to have those conversations about the conversations that have or have not occurred. In that tradition of meta-cognition and the new blending of philosophy and psychology, how do you situate yourself regarding these conversations about conversations?

Julio. Well, I think I need to speak a little about phenomenology here. What we say in our programs is that every time that we are able to openly experience a phenomenon without aiming to explain it, it is an enormous learning experience. But we rarely look at phenomena; we are hooked in the assessment or explanation of phenomena. That step is very seldom broken because we confuse the assessment of the experience with the experience itself, or the explanation of the

experience with the experience itself. So, when we go to a program and we talk with people, we say, "What is the experience of that?" For example, the woman I spoke of earlier said that the challenge for her was not being listened to. That was her experience. Now, the other man may point to another experience-why didn't he tell the boss his experience of him? Because he was scared to death to tell him. If we run too quickly to explain it or assess it, we don't reveal it.

So, when I remember beginning to take a look at all phenom- enologists, one of the things was to discover the power of the experience itself. In daily conversation, we do not talk about experience. We try to explain the experience; we assess the experience. In our programs, we challenge the need to assess and explain in every interaction we have.

Bill. Let me ask this philosophically. You talk about phenom- enology and the assessment of the experience rather than the experience itself That, in turn, goes back to Whitehead and Russell (Bateson, 1972). So, in some sense, speaking of the language about language, you are doing a wild thing here. You're bridging these two philosophical traditions. How can you do that? Is that allowed?

Julio. Well, yes, and for one reason. It is because I am ignorant, and by that I mean that I've never had formal philosophical training. I studied law and there were philosophical studies around law, but I never studied philosophy formally. But many times, I have discovered by reading a philosopher what we have been doing in our programs. I remember how tremendously powerful it was to discover the second book of Mr. Darwin (1990), for instance, by looking at this issue. You know that Darwin has a second book that deals with emotions?

Bill. Yes, on the expression of emotions. It's a great book.

Julio. But you know what? In our everyday, common -sense life, it doesn't exist. So how come we have a great man, Darwin, who wrote two books, yet nobody knows that there's a second book? Very simple- because it doesn't fit in our traditional paradigm. Therefore, it doesn't exist.

That's another important point in our programs. There's a conspiracy of silence in every experience that we cannot explain, and therefore it looks like the world is already explained. We are hiding all the experiences that we can't explain. When we look at experience without explanation, without assessing it, and we just look at the experience, what happens is that we are now allowed to visit experiences that we purposely hide. Regardless of any way of explaining them, the power of revealing the experience is enormous because it allows us to visit the edge. All

of us have extraordinary experiences that we never reveal. We are afraid that if people listen, they will think that we are nuts. That's because experience doesn't have explanation, but the experience happened.

So, in corporate life and in any other realm where the expression of experience is not allowed, we are paralyzed. To give expression to the experience is healing, but it is not allowed. So, bringing people to the ability to look at basic experiences is transformational.

Bill. So, hidden experiences do not teach.

Julio. They do not.

Bill. That's very powerful.

Julio. Revealing them is part of the work we are doing.

Bill. The answers we give, once again, usually are the assessment of the experience rather than the experience itself

Julio. Exactly. And, by the way, one question can have multiple answers. One experience can have multiple explanations. In which domain do you want to explain this- spiritually, physiologically, aesthetically, archetypically?

Bill. I was thinking of John Dewey (1929) and the American perspective that if you want to understand some system or phenomenon, give it a kick; try to change it. Its reaction back to you teaches you more about that. That's raw experience.

You're in this business of trying to change things, kick things, transform them, and be a troublemaker. At a wonderful symposium we just held, one of the participants gained an important insight. He had been told all his life that he was in trouble. At this symposium, he discovered that there's a difference between "being in trouble" and "making trouble." It's all right to make trouble; just don't be in trouble.

So, what part of you is that American kick-it-and-understand-it- from-that? To what extent is Newfield in the business of change, and what are your assumptions about how change and transformation occur?

Julio. Well, that opens a whole new chapter here. I remember since my early days in school, I had a compelling call to go for justice and not to be indifferent to what was happening in the world. I

remember from early ages that I had this compelling thing about freedom, justice, and maybe that came from the fact that I lived in little towns in Chile where I was directly in touch with poverty, misery at different levels, lack of education, alcoholism, etc. Also, there was a constant message from my father, even when it wasn't articulated as a message from him but rather came from his presence. He came from Spain to Chile as a refugee after the civil war in Spain. So, my father's presence was a statement of persecution and lack of freedom. My father never talked too much about the war, but when he did refer to the war, I remember him saying, "I hope that you never have in your life anything like that."

So, he was a refugee, and I became a refugee a little later in my life. The fact that we had this common experience, for sure, is in the background of this driving force for change. But I think there's another issue that lies behind my historical circumstances. This is the fact that modernity has exhausted its ways. Humankind is facing three or four major crises today, and I want to point to them briefly. One is the loss of biodiversity and another is the change of climate. Today there's no question about that. There may be discussion about how it's produced, but little discussion concerning its existence.

The other one is the energy crisis. It's well known that we are now using the second half of the endowment of oil on this planet. China is coming into the market to buy; the prices of oil are going up. Our economies, our transportation, our agriculture, our pharmaceutical industry, all are based on oil. So, there's no question we are heading into trouble.

The other crisis is the monetary crisis. The USA today has an external debt as it has never had before. The trade deficit is huge. We are also facing a complete lack of savings in this country. Day by day, we are facing the fall of the dollar against any other currency on the planet. Clearly, we are facing an issue manifesting in the economy here with the crisis of real estate, but this is only one manifestation, and I think we are going to see more of it.

We are also dealing with other crises. In most countries on earth, we have a healthcare crisis. We are also experiencing in most countries a serious and profound educational crisis. So, no matter where we look, we are attending to the limits of what modernity can offer. There's no doubt that modernity offers a lot to humankind, but as has happened over and over in human history, you arrive at a point where that doesn't give you the resources for what is next. We need to now revise the fundamental dispositions of modernity in every single aspect to live after modernity. And if

we don't do the job--and here I have a lot of very well-renowned people with me-we are going to face enormous pain for the species as a species.

Now, can this work resolve the whole issue? Of course not. But I will not forgive myself if I don't act in the face of those challenges.

Bill. So, it's like your father in that sense. One of my colleagues, Walter Truett Anderson (1990), has written a lot about post-modernity. He writes about our responses to post-modernity. One is nativism- that we can somehow return to some native style and all live off the land. Second would be some sort of escape- we can take our money and run (and there's a fair amount of this here in Colorado). A third piece is to fight the battle, and you've chosen to fight the battle. How does this link with your statement that it's in the experience itself? It sounds like the very meaning and purpose for you is in the experience itself—not in the outcome but in the experience.

Julio. Of course, I'm interested in the outcome, but there's something more here. I don't believe that coaching was born just because a couple of guys one day had an insight. I believe that coaching is here today out of a dramatic breakdown of our times. So, I'll articulate that to go to your question.

I have said that we invent a new practice only when old practices do not address emerging concerns. So, people said, "I understand that. What are the emerging concerns that coaching was born to address?" For me, it is the crisis of our epistemology. Coaching wants to connect the fullness of human experience, instead of only dealing with an aspect of it. Here I'm going to quote a contemporary philosopher, Ken Wilber (1996). Ken speaks about the fact that basically from the Middle Ages, when modernity was born, we divided the world between what he calls the "interior" and "exterior." He uses that to say that we focus so much on the exterior aspect of things - knowing as materialistic, positivistic, and reductionist - that we've left completely out all inner aspect of our experience- the emotional, the archetypal, the spiritual, etc. And we create (and this is my word, not his) what I will call "cognitive schizophrenia." We haven't been able to put these two worlds, our interior life and our exterior life, together.

So, you have, on one side, a phone like I'm holding in my hand that can connect me with China, Chile, or Romania right now. And at the same time, I have a hard time communicating with my son or my wife. That profound dichotomy is not just an anecdote; it is a description somehow of the issues of our time. The world for us became raw material. It lost its sacredness; it lost its

divinity. So, we have no respect for woods, for the oceans, for anything. Animals and everything else are just raw materials to be consumed, and all the crises that we are facing definitely have to do with that.

A recent report from the United Nations about oceans shows that out of, I think, 18 areas in the ocean, 17 are about to collapse in terms of the capacity for fishing. But every day we have better ships, technologically equipped to do better fishing. So, something is off in the whole process.

That lack of balance or better yet, integration, is so present in everydayness, for you, for me, for everyone, and we have no idea how to deal with that. Now, where do we go to resolve it?

Typically, we go to more technology, which produces more of the same. So, for me, dealing with those crises requires a very profound transformation, and that's what we are dedicated to at Newfield. And the profound transformation is not just to accumulate more information about the world; it's not about gathering more stuff; it's not about more technology. It's actually about creating a new inhabitant of this planet. That, for me, would be what comes after modernity, if we survive in the process. That is what we are dedicated to. And, please, just to make sure that I don't sound grandiose here, I'm not saying that Newfield is going to do the job. We are part of an enormous number of people on this planet who are concerned with looking for ways to deal with the crises I've been talking about.

Bill. You mentioned Wilber earlier. How would you position your own perspective, your own work, with, say, Don Beck and Spiral Dynamics (Beck and Cowan, 2005)? Are there ways in which what you're talking about has to do with transitions between different levels of consciousness?

Julio: In this context, I would refer more to the work of Clare Graves, on whom Don Beck bases his work. Clare Graves was a brilliant man who articulated something important-regardless of the fact that you may have some agreements or disagreements with how he divided this or that. The fact that he articulated a transit for human consciousness is extraordinary and, for me, enormously helpful. When Graves talked about different levels of consciousness and how we move between levels, he took away the idea that it's just about being brilliant. Brilliance lives in all levels of consciousness, but it lives very differently, and it produces very different phenomena.

Now, for me, his thinking allows for some guidance in terms of our work. I believe, and I said this very respectfully to Clare Graves because I respect his work, that something was missing in his work, and that is the emotional territory. I believe that every one of the stages, the beige, the

purple, the red, the orange, etc., is characterized by a particular emotional setting. If you miss that, then it looks like the transformation is just an intellectual process which I don't think is the case. Most crises that we have, in order to move to the next level or to regress to the previous one, are emotional crises, at least in my experience of teaching.

Bill. Where he would capture some of the things you're talking about is the movement through those stages where there's a loss of the sacred and the movement toward secularization. There's a point you made earlier which I think also is quite profound, which is the loss of the biological and the notion of the earth as being mechanistic rather than biological. Tell me something about biological and spiritual because there seems to be the ghost of Teilhard de Chardin (1959) all over the place regarding the interplay between the biological and sacred.

Julio. That, I think, opens the field for further thinking, and it's interesting that these ideas came from a Catholic thinker, which is very unusual.

Bill. And Teilhard de Chardin got drummed out and his work couldn't be published for about 20 years.

Julio. Exactly. Remember that we haven't seen much concern for ecological issues from the official church, for whatever reason. But not only did Teilhard de Chardin speak of it, I think there are two or three people that opened new territory with their thinking. One was a woman that we tend to miss in history—the woman who wrote *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson (1962). By speaking the way she did, Rachel Carson challenged the status quo of science that was, at that moment, absolutely unchallenged.

Second, you have the British thinker, James Lovelock (2000), who spoke about Gaia. When Lovelock spoke about Gaia, he made a very simple statement. He said that life, that Earth, can be understood as a living entity. There are signs everywhere pointing to that and yet people say—how can you think that the planet is alive? Again, any interpretation that challenges the status quo, in this case the mechanistic interpretation, is ignored. But he kept pointing to that. From another perspective, he said that there are trends that point to us heading into a serious crisis, and we need to pay attention. So, you have two, Rachel Carson and James Lovelock, offering big paradigm shifts.

Then you have people from other fields that begin to question thinking. There's a group of economists that say economic thinking is completely off; it is based in the early centuries of

science. We need to reframe economic thinking. Economic thinking is not holistic. The new economics has not yet arrived in the mainstream. Our role is to learn from all of that, to articulate that, and to put it in the frame of learning that I believe is missing—in a context where the new epistemology is alive.

So, our Newfield students walk into a context where they experience a new epistemological possibility rather than referring to it. We don't want people to talk about a new possible epistemology or cosmology. We want them to Live it. And I believe that for us the practice of coaching and the practice of our ways of teaching aim to create an experience of it because this is another issue that is traditionally missing. Context informs text. We tend to believe that the meaning is in the words. That is another aspect of our epistemological claim. If we don't create context of a new epistemological life, a new cosmology, we refer to this phenomenon, but there is no transformation really.

Bill. It is interesting to observe that most languages of the world are context-based. I just spent the last week with colleagues from China. Their language (Mandarin) is one where the very same word can mean quite different things in differing contexts. The other theme that seems important concerns attention. If we think about what you and your students attend to, they don't attend to a discipline; they attend to a problem or they attend to an experience. This means they're attending to what you said in the last 20 minutes. They're attending from multiple perspectives, multiple disciplines. So, it becomes very interesting for me to listen to you. Newfield is profoundly interdisciplinary. Apparently, you just refuse to get into a nice, little box. No one can call you a psychologist, a philosopher, or an economist.

It becomes very interesting to me that once you focus on an experience, then what you've just done is open it up for a wide set of disciplines. I was thinking of Kurt Lewin (1999) and John Dewey (1929).

Julio. The idea of discipline itself belongs to modernity. You specialize here; there's a discipline; and you miss the connection with everything outside of it. That's part of reductionism which is a core aspect of the way we know, the scientific way of knowing, at least in nineteenth-century science. But our claim is that we need to move into holistic learning and holistic thinking. And I want to take away any New Age connotation. I'm talking about the capacity to think in a connected manner instead of thinking by separating.

Bill. Let me ask this then. There is the challenge of a philosopher like Richard Rorty (1989), who indicates that when you begin to think holistically you have to confront ironies.

Julio. Yes, plenty of them.

Bill. You mentioned one irony earlier-- one can connect easily with new technologies to colleagues in China but might not be able to connect easily to one's son or wife. So, how do we live in this world of irony? How do you prepare your coaches to help people face the irony?

Julio. Well, first of all, by allowing some messiness into it. We're not going to have the whole thing organized and precise. Life came from messiness. We are originated in chaos; we are not just all organized. I think we need a little bit of that. The illusion of organization within a discipline is nothing but an illusion. It's very easy to think that this is organized because I don't connect it with anything else; at least I think I'm not connecting it. But at the moment you realize that every action of ours is influenced by infinite causality. What is allowing this conversation between you and me? From the food we were having to the traditions that you belong to, to the discourses that you embrace, to the weather-- who knows what is here and to what degree? Any time that we want to think in a holistic way, of course we allow some messiness in it.

Bill. Let me push a bit. I don't think it's just messiness. The irony would be that I end up having two belief systems, two things I'm committed to, and they're completely counter to each other.

Julio. Yes, and the opposite of a great truth, as you know, is another great truth. That doesn't come from me; that comes from a Danish man. But the thing is, we are so used to believing that when one truth is in place, the opposite truth cannot fit.

Bill. So, you're working with leaders of a major corporation. How do you coach them? How do you sit with them? How do you have conversations with them in acknowledging not just the messiness but the fact that they can probably embrace two or three contradictory beliefs at the same time and not betray one or both of those beliefs?

I recently interviewed Susana Isaacson (2008) regarding her coaching of people in government. The people she coaches indicate that they must simultaneously build trust with other people and must betray this trust. They have to hold both truths at the same moment. At times, it must rip them apart.

Julio. Let's say I'm working with an executive. Usually, if I work with an executive, the conversation begins where we have some issues in the company. But pretty soon into the conversation that person is telling me things like: "The truth of the matter is I'm lost. I don't know where to go. I see so many signs in the market; I see so many signs in government policies; I see the real estate thing; and I see the rising price of energy." But then I say to him or her: "Surely from the perspective of business you have a lot more possibilities to answer those challenges than I." "But wait," he says, "what do I do with the fact that I've got these situations?"

One of my clients comes from a very high level in a big corporation in America. He told me, "In two years I am retiring. And you know what I realized? Since I announced that I am retiring, I have sharks around me, all day, swimming, waiting for me to go. How do I deal with that? I have no idea. I thought the people were loyal to me, but I begin to see they were having expectations of...." My client was dealing with the rest of his life, with the meaning of what he did- with the issues of loyalty, with the level of trust. He was navigating, but not in the business tradition—for as a businessman, he has all the experience that I can never challenge. He was dealing with the simplest, deepest human issues that you can imagine. And through our conversation, what he found was a way to look at these issues.

For instance, I'm going to be specific here just to frame it in the way that we have been talking. I presented to him a new ontology of emotions, the role of emotions, and the power in learning new emotions. This, for him, was like an absolutely new territory that he never even imagined. Previously for him, talking about emotions belonged in the territory of therapy. That was his background.

Secondly, he dared, for the first time in his life, to open some conversations he never opened to anyone. Just the experience of engaging in those conversations, regardless of the outcome, was in itself liberating for him. He thought that in order to make a decision, he needed to be clear. We replaced that. So, he began to place trust in places where he never placed it before. He began to navigate with a kind of trust that was not available to him before. Clarity sometimes is simply impossible. Sometimes, the best you have is your intuitive capacities- grounding them, of course. But you may have to start there. And he discovered that the best decisions in his life were very intuitive. They were not learned in the business school.

Bill. It sounds like in some ways you had a very sacred conversation.

Julio. Very, and as a matter of fact, he told me things that I am sure he never said before and probably will never say again. I insist that when we reveal, it's not just an act of revelation in terms of "look at that;" it's an act of transformation. Very often, we believe that transformation happens by what I am told. I would say that very often transformation happens by saying something in a context that is transformational.

Bill. And you're being the witness to that revelation or that disclosure.

Julio. That moment has sacredness to it, and the only way is to live it.

Bill. So, when you look at coaching as being a practice that only emerges because the old practices aren't there, it points to us needing sanctuaries. All we have to do is dust off old words (like "sacred") and old settings (such as sanctuaries). They are still profound. You seem to be saying that coaching is itself a sacred conversation. It's the kind of conversation that comes with trust; it comes with an assumption, or at least with the expectation, of some honesty.

Julio. Yes, if you look at even the etymology of the word conversation, it is beautiful, because conversation means changing together.

Bill. I didn't know that. So, it comes from the same source as the word conversion?

Julio. Yes, conversion and version. If you take a look, we have lost in our society our conversational capabilities, or the art of conversing, and we have replaced it with a kind of utilitarian dialogue. So, I can tell you to 'do this' and you can say 'do that', and that's important---- some articulation to coordinate action is needed. But there's a coordination of action that is not at the traditional level of action we think of—which is reflection. For instance (I am quoting Proust now): "The real voyage of discovery is not to visit new lands; it's to have new eyes." That's what I'm talking about. When a good conversation takes you to a place that you never thought about before- wow, I never considered.

"The real voyage of discovery is not to visit new lands; it's to have new eyes.)) that; I never looked at that that moment is so critical and is, for me, what a good conversation is all about.

But look at the practices, particularly from childhood, in the last 40 years. We spend hours and hours entertaining ourselves in front of a TV. Conversations have become secondhand phenomena. Coaching can be interpreted as the recovery of the ability to have conversations.

Bill. Is it therefore not random that you come from a culture in which conversation is valued, and here you are in the United States?

Julio. Oh, I don't think it's an accident.

Bill. One of the fascinating things is that in the United States, we once had rooms called parlors (or parlours). There was a tradition on Sunday of visitations, extended conversations with neighbors. We've lost that tradition. I don't know any home that still has a parlor. So, here you are, wandering in from another culture, one in which conversation is still valued.

Julio. And let me tell you that in countries like Chile, we are losing it, too, because we are so busy imitating the USA. I remember reading Bryan Swimme (1996), the cosmologist. In one of the introductions to his books, he speaks about this precise issue. He indicates that one of the biggest dramas we are living is that our children are deprived of conversation. They spend an amazing amount of hours per year watching TV And he said there are people with high studies who look at minds as marketing fields and deliver the messages for people to act and buy and pursue things. He said that kind of atrocity is committed every day, and we have no way to rebel against it. That's the way he begins a book on cosmology. But he comes from a place of indignation. If we lose our capacity to engage in conversation, how do we live? How do we bring satisfaction, creativity, thinking? How do we deal with our breakdowns in life? How do we have our tears and how do we laugh if conversation doesn't exist?

I claim that tolerance is postponed rejection. Acceptance is a very different game.

Bill. So, if we are living in a world filled with personal and collective irony, part of the way to be able to live with that irony is through the conversation that is, to recognize that we're not alone and that we're all living with these profound contradictions in our own lives. You seem to be saying: "I'm living with this contradiction between having these wonderful conversations with China, and I'm still trying to figure out how to talk with my kid and my wife."

Julio. Exactly. How do we begin to visit a place of balance? For me, one of the most extraordinary things of any world view, any cultural perspective, is that it's so transparent to the one living in it. We don't say, "This is my cultural perspective"; we say, "This is the way it is." Culture? What culture are you talking about? We need to make a huge effort to observe how we observe. Observation, for us, is transparent. We don't claim this is the way I see; we claim this is the way that it is. Every time that we bring the modesty, the humbleness, and the power of saying this is

the way I see it versus this is the way it is, we have immediately an ethical creation. You now are legitimate with your perspective that is different from mine, instead of your saying to me, "You're wrong." And when we have that possibility, dance ignites again. Celebration ignites again. Diversity is magnificent. But diversity, when there's one truth, means a lot of people are wrong already because there's only one. How do we talk about diversity, claiming one truth? The acceptance of your different perspective is accepted by me, not just tolerated. This is essential to distinguish.

I claim that tolerance is postponed rejection. Acceptance is a very different game. Let's discuss our differences, but I am not tolerating you. I accept that we have different perspectives and that they enrich our lives. Lend me your eyes and let me lend you mine so that we see a bigger picture.

Bill. It was interesting in Susana's Isaacson's (2008) interview where she doesn't talk about acceptance of, but instead about celebration of, diversity. If we look back at philosophical foundations, your work seems to come so much out of that concept of social constructions. You're talking about the different social constructions people come in with and the way in which language not only represents the different social constructions but is itself one of the building blocks for this construction. You're honoring different social constructions. But in the midst of that, you're helping people recognize the nature and impact of their own construction.

Julio. And the social construction claim for me has an aspect that is needed. It is true that we belong to historical discourses and traditions out of which we build whatever reality we build, but it's also true that the way we build it comes with some innate capabilities and trends. It also comes with some particular historical circumstances of yours. So, if we say social construction, I don't want to leave aside multiple other forces that are working on you at the same time.

When we say social construction, we are privileging one aspect, but it's not the only aspect, which is the tendency into which we fall. Why wouldn't the structure of the sky affect our conversation, if everything is connected? Why wouldn't the issues that you experienced yesterday affect this conversation today? Why wouldn't the fact that you belong to a long tradition of ancestors in a particular cultural branch also have effect on today? We are constituted from multiple sources. If we don't bring the multiplicity of elements that constitute us, coaching can fall into arrogance-"I know you; so let me tell you," rather than having awe for the mystery that the other person is.

So, can I coach you? Yes. Could my coaching be effective? Yes, it can be very effective. But don't believe that the effectiveness came because I reached the essence of you. That is not true. I can dance with you—but reaching your essence will be too much of a claim from me. I can have good insights; I can get to know you somehow. But more than that? No.

Bill. I want to go back to Teilhard de Chardin and how he writes about the whole universe being contained in every grain of sand, and that fragment of my entity, who I am, is contained at the very moment of my own conception- all the different possibilities, all the different ways of what I could be. It's interesting, too, that 50 years ago we had the notion of fractals—that we are a replication of some fundamental entity that flourishes over time.

There's a piece of what you've written or at least talked about—that all elements of the organism are contained in its origins- which is strange stuff Is there some truth in that? Are there ways in which your own work goes back to systems theory and, in other ways, it's the opposite of systems theory? It's as if all the elements are contained in the system right from the first, but it's a matter of what flourishes and what remains dormant, not what is added to the system.

Julio. The word being is pretty good in the sense that it refers to a noun, but it's a verb: being. In Spanish, that's a problem. We say *ser*, which does not appear to refer to unfolding. It looks like a fixed thing, *ser*, instead of being. That's an advantage in the English language and also in German. We are never it; we are unfolding. Now, maybe another interpretation of coaching is that I will support you in unfolding in the way that you want to unfold. I will be part of the dance in which what wants to happen will happen. It takes away the idea of effort, of control and prediction, of Let's do it- which is the scientific approach and tradition. What if coaching is nothing but helping the human being align with him or herself so that what wants to happen will happen? That could be another way to interpret coaching.

Let me help your unfolding to continue. Maybe you are a little bit stuck right now, and let's recover the flexibility and the unfolding Coaching, in that case, looks more like a dance. As a matter of fact, the reason I'm referring to this is because in my experience that happens in many cultures.

Bill. That kind of approach calls into question the traditional personality typologies- the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Briggs Myers, 1998) or the Enneagram (Palmer, 1988). You seem to be saying that we have all of it within us (which was certainly what Jung originally asserted) (Jung,

1923). Part of your dance of coaching is to ask, in this moment, which of these do you wish to explore or to unfold?

Julio. I would say that those tests, instead of revealing what is so, only provide some judgment of what has been. I wouldn't dismiss them because they can provide something valuable, but at the moment that you say you are type whatever and you are this sign and that's it, I think we are doing a disservice to that person. If I make an assessment about the way that you are, there can be no learning and, therefore, no transformation.

Bill. So, another version of what you're saying is that if we are assessing the experience- for example, that's a Type 5 experience or that's a clear sign of your introversion could have just limited the experience and essentially distanced people from it.

Julio. It can be a dangerous game. I've seen people destroyed by assessments made of them. As a matter of fact, I had a conversation with a man yesterday about how he was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). Now the psychiatrist has changed his mind. He said, no, it's not ADD; it's something else.

What do you mean something else? I have ADD. The man was living that as a way of being--like the same thing as his gender or the color of his eyes.

There are so many things in life that we assess, but we don't call them assessments. We live assessments as if they were properties of ours. We create a lot of pain around that.

Bill. In Europe emphasis is often placed on a feminine epistemology. This perspective shows up in the United States in the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) and the Stone Center (Jordan et al., 1991), a notion that knowledge is contained within the context; that there's a self within the context of who I am with you at this moment that is more than the enduring self.

The way I am being right now is not just defined by history. It is defined by your presence. What you allow me to be probably also means what you do not allow me to be.

Julio. I love that perspective from Carol Gilligan for a very simple reason: it challenges the ontology that you are you. Actually, you can never exist without me. We are a dance. Now, of course, we have a biology, but even from that perspective we're not as independent as we think we are. The way I am being right now is not just defined by history. It is defined by your presence. What you allow me to be probably also means what you do not allow me to be. The dance

constitutes the dancers as much as the dancers constitute the dance. The moment that we hold the notion that we are interdependent, we begin to understand the phenomena of love and care in a very powerful territory. You allow me to unfold in ways that no one else does. The man that I am with you is just the man I can be with you. There's a continuity, of course, but the unfolding that you allow me, the reflection I get from your questions, your presence, your physical attitude, etc., is all part of it. What Carol Gilligan is saying challenges the epistemology of the individual, and that is a very ontological, and interesting perspective.

Bill. And it becomes extraordinary in terms of the implications for coaching.

Julio. Enormous.

Bill. So, there is a paradox embedded all this. In some sense, every aspect of who I am is there in the seed, but that which unfolds with you is different from that which unfolds with anyone else.

Julio. Yes, I water you, and I nurture you, and vice versa, in ways that nobody else does in exactly the same way. I quote very often, Bill, that the best compliment a woman ever gave me is I love the woman I am when I am with you. But that compliment, if you look at it, is simply a realization of living together, and that's what it is. I realize that when I am with different people, my unfolding takes different directions.

Bill. There's a wonderful scene in the movie, *As Good as It Gets*, with Jack Nicholson and Helen Hunt, in which he plays a horribly constrained man. There's a scene in which he says to her, "I'm a better man with you than I am with anyone else." That's quite a powerful statement.

Julio. If you take coaching from this perspective, look at what happens. Coaching is not about the moves I make but about the presence I am and what my presence permits, allows, gives room to, and that cannot be translated into tips and recommendations. That comes from the place where I come from. In our school of coaching, when we tell people we have tips and recommendations, this only comes at the last moment. What's more important and must come first is the capacity to engage with a human being in such a way that your engagement allows that person to unfold in the way that person has not been able to.

Bill. So, you're not going to give me the ten steps to successful coaching?

Julio. No, I won't. One of the things about which we just talked is often heard as a metaphorical way of speaking, and I'm not speaking metaphorically about it. I do believe that we become in a

dance with other people. The poorer the dance, the poorer my becoming. So, we need to ask questions, not only as individuals but as part of humankind. What has impoverished our becoming? What has brought us to the place where we are? What wants to manifest that we are not allowing? These questions take me to reflecting in a different direction than if I go to solving problems which is a secondary territory. Coaching is never about solving problems.

Bill. We just published an interview in IJCO with Gervase Bush (2007), who's an extraordinary contributor to the field of Appreciate Inquiry (AI). Gervase is very critical of the approach often being taken now in the field of appreciative inquiry. He indicates that the key concept in this field is not the appreciative conversation, per se. It's the generativity in the conversation that comes out of the appreciation. That's what AI is all about. The appreciation is only meant to begin the generation.

Let me conclude this interview by pointing to some recent neuro- science research , suggesting that I "light up" (neurologically respond) to someone in a quite different way if it is a person that I love than if it is a person who is my friend. The way in which I light up in my brain and in my body is entirely different with you than it is with anyone else.

In the field of psychotherapy, the patient and the therapist light up like lovers, which means that the transference process is quite real and based at least in part on the therapist's and patient's neurological responses to one another. We can begin to realize the extraordinary discipline required of the therapist because what's lighting up for them and their patients resembles that found in a love relationship. So, it becomes interesting to look at coaching. We haven't done the research yet, but is it going to look more like a love relationship or a friendship relationship or something completely different, knowing that in each case it could be different?

Every gesture of your body when you are tender to a human being is to help to produce safety.

Julio. I will not use the word love for only one reason, because it's so heavily loaded in our times, but I will use the word care. Don't even initiate coaching if you don't care, if it is only because you have to do it professionally. When I coach, I do use the expression, I fall in love, and the reason I use it is that I deeply care. It's impossible for me to engage with someone if I don't care. What kind of conversation could we have if I don't care? What happens is that caring is a force in the conversation. It's not just simply a feeling of mine. Care is informing my intuition. Care makes me

sharp in my observation. Care brings commitment to a higher degree than ever before. Care allows me to create a field of safety for you that otherwise wouldn't exist. Care is a force.

Very often, if care is well established, you will see that the conversation goes in spite of yourself. Really, the conversation escapes you; it goes ahead of yourself. But if you believe that coaching is an intelligent conversation, you are in trouble because, in that case, you will have to be "informed, educated, thoughtful," and so forth. You can be all of that, but if you don't care, it's irrelevant.

Bill. I love your phrase, "in spite of yourself." You seem to be saying that, in effective coaching conversations, you abandon that sense you have of self because the self just got shifted because of this specific conversation. So, the formal, stiff, coaching conversation that goes nowhere is one where I need to preserve my sense of self and not let you screw around with it.

Julio. This issue of caring precedes commitment. Caring is a very fundamental, and, I think, a very basic human issue. If the relationship is purely utilitarian and only a professional one where I don't care about anything but my own issues and how I'm doing or looking to you, then I am betraying the client. We are in territory where we cannot fly together. But caring deeply for the person I have in front of me informs that person. It produces a realm of possibilities that otherwise simply will not be there. We use different expressions to refer to that. But, for instance, when I do care, care also is an invocation. The exercise of caring is an invocation to other forces, to other realms. When I care, and I'm in a conversation with you and coaching you, my caring literally is an invocation. I am inviting gods and goddesses to come to support us.

Bill. In some ways, it's *agape*. I just conducted a Socrates Cafe that focused on love. One of the things we explored was the issue of *agape*. This term has been misunderstood. *Agape* is often not just about God, but also about our relationship with our children and with others because that relationship is about a greater purpose. We love our child not just for the child but also for what that child and we can be in our world. It sounds like that's the kind of love you're talking about.

Julio. Yes, I have translated that as tenderness, in the best use of the word, and tenderness is safety. This is very interesting. Every gesture of your body when you are tender to a human being is to help to produce safety. No wonder you talk about *agape* immediately, because that's the point. How could you speak about the dearest thing in your soul if you are not safe, if *agape* is not present? How could you? Why would you? But if you know that *agape* is there- tenderness, love, care; translate it the way you want- you will dare to speak what's in your soul.

Bill. The word tender in English is not just about gentleness; it's also about tendering something, holding it true or safe.

Julio. Right. So, among the three words that the Greeks have for love, *agape* is, for me, the one that most closely deals with the phenomenon of coaching.

Bill. *Agape* also seems to relate directly to the concept of "I-Thou" that is offered by another philosopher and theologian, Martin Buber (1958).

Julio. Buber is the one that inaugurated an ontology of "we unfold in each other," and I think he was masterful in that sense.

Bill. It's required reading.

Julio. Yes, required reading.

Julio Olalla

Julio Olalla, founder of Newfield, one of the world's foremost learning companies, and author of *From Knowledge to Wisdom: Essays on the Crisis in Contemporary Learning*, is regarded as a master at creating environments that establish the trust, safety, respect, fun and well-being that accelerate people's potential to learn. Julio is also a master executive coach and considered one of the founders and pioneers of the coaching profession. A powerful keynote speaker, Julio addresses audiences on leadership, organizational learning, education and coaching. He teaches that the traditional and accepted approach of what it is "to know" and "to learn" is insufficient to address the concerns we are facing as a global community. His message compels each individual to consciously evaluate not only the content of what he or she is thinking and learning, but also his or her interpretation of learning and its practice.

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KEY QUOTES FROM JULIO OLALLA

"Life is bigger than our explanations of it. To be in touch with life, go beyond your explanations."

---The Ritual Side of Coaching

"When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds; your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be."

--- From Knowledge to Wisdom: Essays on the Crisis in Contemporary Learning

SUGGESTED READINGS

Organizations

- Age of Unreason, Charles Handy
- Rethinking the Future, Rowan Gibson
- An Unused Intelligence, Andy Bryner and Dawna Markova
- Presence, Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski and Betty Sue Flowers

Philosophy

- Philosophical Hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer
- Reality Isn't What it Used to Be, Walter T. Anderson
- Quantum Questions, Ken Wilber (Editor)
- Passion of the Western Mind, Richard Tamas
- Global Mind Change, Willis Harman
- A Theory of Everything, Ken Wilber
- Boomeritis, Ken Wilber
- From Knowledge to Wisdom, Julio Olalla

Science

- The Tree of Knowledge, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela
- The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Thomas Kuhn
- The Holographic Universe, Michael Talbot
- Biology as Ideology, R.C. Levontin
- Cosmos and Psyche, Richard Tamas

Nature

- The Spell of the Sensuous, David Abram
- The Secret Life of Plants, Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird
- The Secret Life of Nature, Peter Tompkins

Body /Movement Learning

- The Body Has Its Reasons, Therese Bertherat
- Elusive Obvious, Moshe Feldenkrais
- Awakening Intuition, Francis Vaughn
- Holding the Center, Richard Strozzi Heckler
- The Anatomy of Change, Richard Strozzi Heckler
- Retooling on the Run, Stuart Heller and David Surrenda

Moods and Emotions

- A General Theory of Love, Fari Amini, Thomas Lewis and Richard Lannon
- Destructive Emotions: A Scientific Dialogue with the Dalai Lama, Daniel Goleman
- Molecules of Emotion: Why You Feel the Way You Feel, Candace B. Pert and Deepak Chopra
- Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life, Martin Seligman
- Emotional Intelligence, Daniel Goleman

Historic Essays

- The Buried Mirror, Carlos Fuentes

- The Chalice and the Blade: Our History Our Future, Riane Eisler
- A world Lit Only by Fire, William Manchester

Cultural Discourses

- My Invented Country, Isabel Allende
- Third Culture Kids, David Pollock
- The Geography of "Time, Robert Levine

Miscellaneous

- Descarte's Error: Emotions, Reason and the Human Brain, Antonio Damasio
- Man and his Symbols, Carl Jung
- The Life We Are Given, George Leonard and Michael Murphy
- BOBOS in Paradise, David Brooks
- Spiral Dynamics, Don Beck and Chris Cowan
- The Soul of Capitalism, William Greider
- The Power of Myth, Joseph Campbell