Escalation and Mindfulness

Leo F. Smyth

Escalation of conflict, the use of progressively more contentious tactics, is not always intended. It may occur when parties become preoccupied with ideas or feelings that impair their ability to comprehend the situation and focus on the conflict issues. Action springing from such preoccupation can initiate a set of feedback loops that are self-amplifying. In this article, I suggest that by raising their present moment awareness through formal meditation and informal day-to-day mindfulness practice, parties may reduce preoccupation and thereby amplification. Drawing on Friedrich Glasl's stages of escalation and Magorah Maruyama's work on change-amplifying feedback loops, this article examines how mindfulness might contribute to a greater awareness of psychological and systemic factors that predispose disputants to escalation of their conflict.

Key words: conflict resolution, mindfulness, Buddhism, change-amplifying, escalation.

Introduction

Escalation — the use of progressively heavier contentious tactics — is by no means an inevitable outcome of conflict, but it is an important one because of the great human cost it often produces. Escalation is commonly accompanied by several other transformations: issues proliferate, parties become increasingly committed to the struggle, specific issues give way to general

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ones, the desire to succeed turns into a desire to win, which turns into a desire to hurt [the] other, positive feelings give way to negative feelings, and both sides grow by recruiting formerly neutral individuals and groups (Pruitt and Kim 2004: 99–100).

This quotation sets the scene for the subject of this article, which is an attempt to both understand more deeply the psychological processes that predispose people to escalate and to explore possibilities for counteracting those processes. In this regard, I note the work of Friedrich Glasl (1982, 1997, 2002).[1] Glasl detailed nine stages of escalation based on his research and professional conflict consultation. His goal was to identify the symptoms of conflict from a diagnostic point of view and to "understand the dynamic forces at work that intensify a conflict and make it more and more complex and 'poisonous' " (1982: 120). He observed that escalation of conflicts is a process that moves in steps or stages. There are thresholds between the stages, and parties may be able to restrain themselves from crossing these. Once crossed, however, the conflict is immediately more intense and harder to control. "Step by step the conflict enters the realm of more unconscious and subconscious forces in human beings and in social institutions and adds new, uncontrollable energy . . . to the existing conflict" (Glasl 1982: 123).

The reference to unconscious and subconscious forces suggests a psychoanalytic perspective that may well repay further investigation. In this article, however, I put forward the idea that escalation is driven by *preoccupation*, a taking over of psychological processing that limits people's perspectives and impairs their judgments, as a result of which there is "amplification" of the dispute. Using Glasl's description of the stages of escalation, I look for what might be typical preoccupations at each stage. I then ask if mindfulness, a set of practices derived from Buddhist traditions,[2] could counteract these preoccupations, enabling parties to bring their capacities of perception, cognition, and critical judgment fully to bear on comprehending the conflict situation.

Before proceeding, I will discuss briefly the following:

- the action–reaction cycle that is characteristic of escalation,

- change-amplifying feedback loops as a way of understanding the action–reaction cycle,

- the perceived and objective reduction of options that is characteristic of escalation,

- some aspects of preoccupation, and

- some aspects of mindfulness.

The Action–Reaction Cycle in Escalation

Many people think of escalation as a vicious circle by which a party's behavior evokes a reaction from the other party, to which the first party responds with further, often "heavier" behavior. There is indeed a tendency, as Morton Deutsch observed in his "crude law of social relations," that "characteristic processes and effects elicited by a given type of social relationship also tend to elicit that type of social relationship" (Deutsch 2000: 29). Simply put, if you believe someone is hostile you will behave in ways that may make them hostile.

So a circle of similar behaviors is likely to occur — but is it always an escalating circle? Not necessarily: some conflicts reach a plateau of hostility and remain there. Stories are legion of neighbors who maintain a sullen silence for twenty years without their quarrel coming to litigation or violence. Often, however, the other party does not react to Party A's behavior in terms of equal weight — push can come to shove and then to bloody noses (or worse, if weapons are available). Even without overt violence, parties may continue to react in more extreme or provocative ways, increasing the intensity of the conflict. To understand this process we need a concept of amplification.

Change-Amplifying Feedback Loops and the Action–Reaction Cycle

Magorah Maruyama (1963) noted that an initial change in one variable may cause variations in other variables that can eventually feedback to amplify the original change. An example is the theory that increased global warming can lead to melting of the polar icecaps, which means less white surface to reflect the sun's rays, which causes further global warming, and so on. More complex feedback loops can involve a string of less obviously connected variables.

Gareth Morgan (1997) offered the example of mad cow disease in Britain. The discovery of cows "dancing" and stumbling in the fields led to public fears about eating beef. When a connection was found to Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) in humans, media panic ensued. Although most scientific opinion believed it was not eating beef that caused CJD but actual *contact* with diseased animals, there was a dramatic collapse in beef consumption. McDonald's and other food retailers declared they were no longer using British beef. The European Union, anxious to contain the problem, banned the importation of beef from Britain. Although the scientific evidence showed that virtually all British cattle were by that stage disease free, the British government agreed to the slaughter of 4.7 million cows. The unintended feedback loops led to a drastic and costly conclusion.

In the context of conflict escalation, feedback loops of this kind may help to explain a drift toward increasingly heavy tactics. Thinking and action

based on preoccupation with certain aspects of a situation may set in motion a train of events that is difficult to stop. Curiously enough, feedback loops may also shed light on instances in which conflict episodes do *not* escalate. Countervailing feedback loops may exist — a strongly internalized norm against violence, for example — that inhibit the tendency toward more intense tactics.[3] I will draw on Maruyama's thinking to sketch diagrammatically the variables in each of Glasl's stages.[4] Illustrated in this way, I suggest that different preoccupations at each stage result in behaviors that amplify the action–reaction cycle, even though this may be unintended.

Reduction of Options and Escalation

People's perceptions of the options available to them often diminish during conflict escalation. The retort "you leave me no alternative but to . . ." is a cliché that often signals an end to communication, to the dismay of outsiders who can perceive unexplored options. Is it also possible that the range of alternatives "objectively" available is reduced? It may be that parties have stumbled into some kind of systemic trap that reduces their freedom of action. Just as in the prisoner's dilemma game, the two players rationally choose the safest option for themselves, but in doing so produce suboptimal outcomes for both—parties who perceive threat may feel compelled to issue counterthreats or engage in a preemptive strike. An ironic and sometimes tragic aspect of escalation is that all parties believe their actions are necessitated by the deteriorating situation, but paradoxically they risk producing the very outcomes they fear.

Preoccupation

Following Rein Van der Vegt, Roland Vandenberghe and myself (Van der Vegt, Smythe, and Vandenberghe 2001), I suggest that preoccupation occurs when cognitive and emotional attention are captured by a particular aspect of the situation and one's perceptions then organize around that idea, selecting and framing information that reinforces the preoccupation.

Being preoccupied is not, of itself, a negative condition: many scientific and artistic breakthroughs stem from preoccupation, and if the downside is a certain tendency to absentmindedness, the results may be worth it. In the context of conflict, however, preoccupation is much more problematic. Conflict situations involve people with differing interests different frames, meanings, and perceptions. When a person is preoccupied with a single idea or aspect of a situation she will have great difficulty engaging in the activities associated with constructive conflict resolution: reflecting deeply on interests, listening actively, seeking to balance assertiveness and cooperation while searching for solutions. These activities are impaired by the preemptive capturing of cognitive and emotional attention that is preoccupation.

The loss of a person's capacity to reflect on his or her thinking is particularly relevant in this context. By thinking, I mean both an emotional

as well as a cognitive activity. No thought exists without an *affective* dimension, no feeling exists in isolation from a thought.[5] To avoid unwieldiness, I will use "thinking" to refer to this complex experience.

For a person to become aware of and reflect on her thinking, some "separation of powers" is required. The "I" doing the thinking will be separate from the "I" that observes the thinking. The metaphor of distance conveys this awareness of thinking; the observer who is said to be sufficiently "removed" from the action is thought to be better able to observe. Another way to express this idea is that the person is not completely identified with her thinking: I am not my thoughts, there is an "I" who can choose to dwell on them or not, choose to act them out or not. But this capacity is not easily accessed in times of preoccupation.

A person's ability can be similarly impaired when it comes to awareness of systemic traps. One of Peter Senge's great contributions was to describe how people can become aware of the systemic nature of their interactions (Senge 1992; Senge, Scharmer, Jawarski, and Flowers 2004). A similar idea in the conflict resolution field is the idea of "contribution" rather than "blame" (Stone, Patton, and Heen 2000). These authors pointed out that "as a rule, when things go wrong in human relationships, everyone has contributed in some important way" (2000: 63). The actions and reactions of individuals are shaped by the system of which they are a part. Becoming aware of that requires reflection, which is not easy when parties become proccupied with allocating — or dodging — blame.

Aspects of Mindfulness

Mindfulness is, in the first instance, a form of meditation derived from Buddhist traditions that emphasizes present moment awareness. Much of the time we live unaware of the present moment, reviewing the past with pleasure or pain, thinking of the future with eagerness or dread. Thoughts wander, branch off, leap to associations, play old movies, and repeat snatches of songs. In meditation, present moment awareness is brought to all of these, without judgment: thoughts, emotions, impulses, whether attractive or repugnant, are simply attended to, neither banished nor automatically acted out. The practice of such formal meditation, often while sitting still, can be extended into ordinary daily life.

Deliberately raising awareness of what are usually automatic activities — for example, opening the car door, sitting in, and putting on the seat belt — creates some space around the actions and less use of "autopilot." With practice, a person can extend this skill to many different life situations: from dealing with illness, to social interactions, to making important decisions. He can disengage his autopilot and consider whether its programming is still appropriate for that situation. With increased awareness, he can choose action based on a more conscious and comprehensive appreciation of the situation. Informal mindfulness practices may include techniques such as

focusing awareness on bodily sensations: where is tension being felt, what emotions go along with it, what thoughts and actions are prompted — in short, what is putting me under pressure here?

Mindfulness has been applied to coping with pain (Kabat-Zinn 1991), to leadership (Carroll 2007), and to politics (McLeod 2006). Of particular relevance to this article are the applications to mediation (McConnell 2001; Kuttner 2010), to legal practice and dispute resolution (Riskin 2006, 2010), and to negotiation (Brach 2008).

> In a negotiation, for instance, when our counterpart issues a threat and we feel an impulse to retaliate, mindfulness helps us to insert a "wedge of awareness," which allows us to examine that impulse and decide whether retaliation is more appropriate than another move that would more likely foster value creation, understanding, and healing (Riskin 2006: 242).

This description is the opposite of preoccupation as I have described it above. If it can be shown that each stage of escalation results in typical preoccupations, then it may be possible to find in the mindfulness traditions some antidotes[6] that will temper the preoccupation, allowing for the more reflective examination that Leonard Riskin described in the quote above, which in turn may serve to attenuate the amplification processes of escalation. That is my quest in the remainder of this article.

While Buddhist mindfulness is the focus of this article, it is not the only way of combating escalation. Other religions and philosophies also offer countervailing forces of reflection or norms that can inhibit the tendency toward more aggressive tactics; examples include Aristotle's Golden Mean (the "happy medium" between two extremes), the Christian "Do unto others . . . ," and Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative (choose only those actions that would be morally justifiable if they were the rule for everyone). In addition, I note that the movement from Glasl's stage to stage of escalation is not inevitable: parties may be able to halt the progression, not least by becoming aware that such a progression is a risk. Further, by using knowledge about escalation to diagnose how a dispute has gotten to where it is, it may be possible to refocus on the original issues at stake and more effectively resolve them.

The Stages of Escalation

Stage One

Glasl's (1982) first stage of escalation can be summarized as follows: a difference over some issue proves impossible to resolve, but the issue remains, causing irritation to all parties. As progress continues to elude them, their positions on how the issue should be handled become fixed. Groups form around these standpoints and group members share a

common interpretation of the situation, "creating a common selective filter affecting the perception of all relevant information" (Jordan 2000: 1). Differences between the parties are emphasized, as well as negative information about the other party, leading each party to entertain doubts about the other's sincerity and ulterior motives. Each party develops increased awareness of their unavoidable mutual interdependence, leading to increased irritation and to questions as to whether further interaction is worthwhile.

Figure One illustrates this stage of escalation with positive feedback loops. Even at this early stage of the model, parties seem to start with an issue and then rapidly lose sight of it.[7] Feelings of irritation take over, dominating the consciousness (preoccupation), and crystallizing ideas into positions as parties lose their ability to focus on the issue. Social-psychological consequences (such as group identity formation) affect perception, eventually feeding back to more irritation (Glasl 1982).
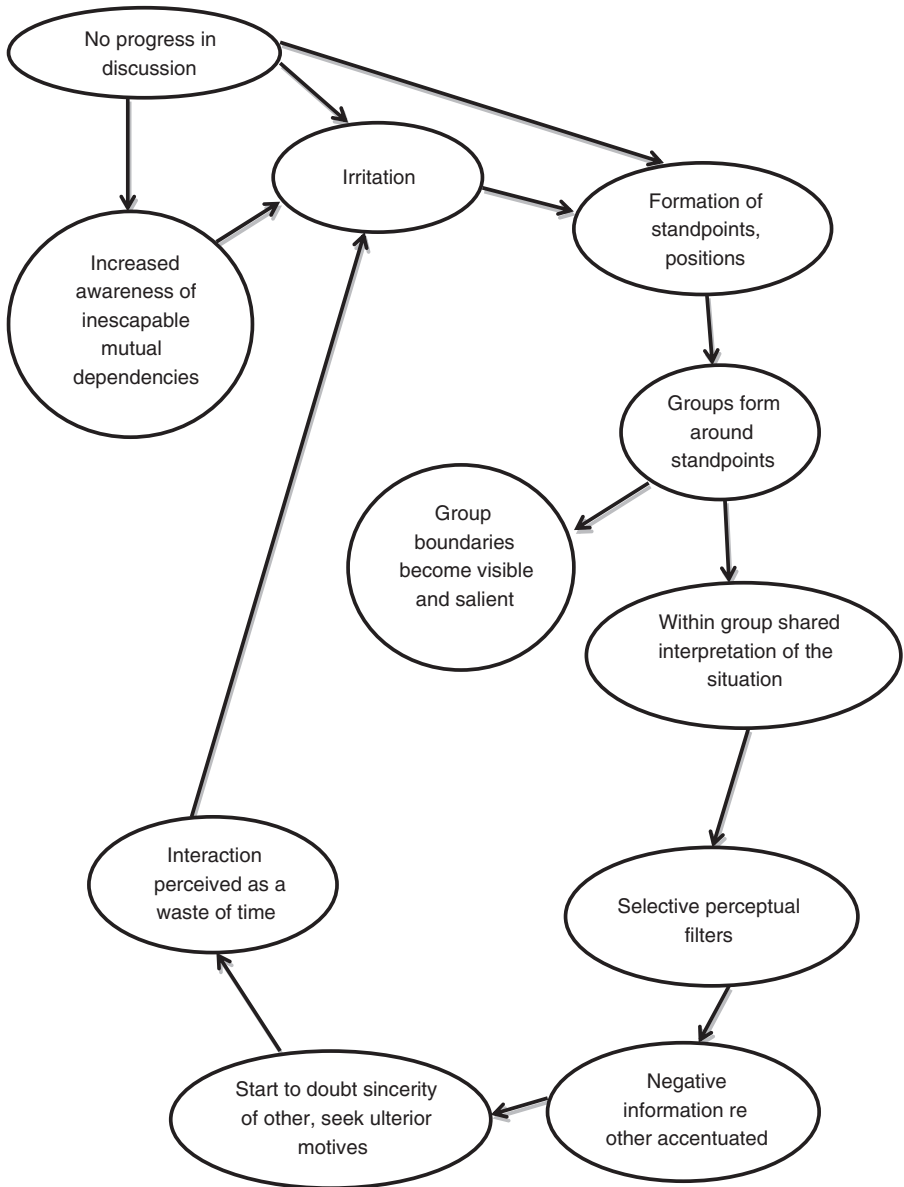
Maintaining attention on the issue at hand demands patience and skill. Absent these, irritation, as much as any basic incompatibility, leads to the circular reaction. Viewed in this way, it seems the simplest way to intervene in the process depicted in Figure One would be to reduce the level of irritation. If that can be achieved, the movement to fixed positions may be attenuated, along with the resulting impairment of communication between the parties. To illustrate the process of Stage One, consider the following scenario:

Paul banged his fist down on the pile of papers in front of him. The latest communication from the insurance company bulged from its envelope. Paper, paper, always more paper and never a decision! And all for a claim that should have been settled months ago! Nobody denied that his father's illness had left him in need of considerable assistance with daily living tasks; unfortunately his father — always stubborn — had, when speaking to the doctors, maintained that he could manage quite well "some days in the week." The insurance company had, in Paul's view, seized on this to avoid paying the full cost of daily care. Their offer of partial assistance he regarded as derisory and in several letters he had made clear that he was determined to hold out for the full amount. Anyone could see, he had maintained, that his father was in denial as to the full extent of his disability. The response from the company, now resting on top of the pile of paper, was a request for a full psychiatric evaluation. "They're trying to drown you in paper," a colleague at work said to Paul, "contact one of the consumer associations, they know how to deal with these people."

A Role for Mindfulness at Stage One

Mindfulness, whether in formal meditation or in daily life, does not mean escaping the present situation; on the contrary, it means being aware, in a

Figure One
Stage One of Glasl's Model of Escalation

No progress in discussion

Irritation

Formation of standpoints, positions

Increased awareness of inescapable mutual dependencies

Groups form around standpoints

Group boundaries become visible and salient

Within group shared interpretation of the situation

Interaction perceived as a waste of time

Selective perceptual filters

Start to doubt sincerity of other, seek ulterior motives

Negative information re other accentuated

nonjudgmental way, of the thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations that arise from moment to moment. If one feels irritated, for example, mindfulness would require examining that feeling without trying either to suppress or rationalize it. Pema Chödrön (2006) wrote that such feelings are painful, giving rise to "an enormous pregnant quality that pulls us in the direction of wanting to get some resolution" (2006: 141). Unfortunately, the most common way of achieving resolution is to develop a story we can tell ourselves, often a polarizing one that divides the world into good guys and bad guys. That story relieves the pain to an extent (because it provides some resolution to the tension), but it presages a hardening into positions in which there are winners and losers: a doorway to escalation.

An alternative is to simply be aware of the feelings, not to act from them nor use them as the basis for a story, nor to even judge ourselves for having them, but just let them *be*, but with awareness. Constant practice in monitoring our own psychological states "from a distance" makes it less likely that we will act them out inappropriately. With a bank of previous practice to draw on, this discipline may be possible even in the heat of conflict.[8]

Practicing this discipline can bring a new insight: how often we make the assumption that our negative feelings are caused by the bad behavior of others. Through meditation, a person may realize that some of her irritation (or anger, hostility, and anxiety) is homegrown, free-floating,[9] waiting for a frustration or an insult to latch on to. "The great discovery of the meditative journey is that all the forces for good and for harm playing out in the world are also right here in our own minds. If we want to understand the world, we need to understand ourselves" (Goldstein 2006: 121).

To recap: if their irritation and other similarly preoccupying feelings can be owned, observed, and allowed to be, parties may be able to react to their situation in more fitting and even productive ways.[10] If so, the first of Glasl's stages of escalation may be attenuated and better quality communication may be possible, and it is less likely that the dispute will escalate to Stage Two.

Stage Two
In Stage Two, discussion becomes verbal confrontation: rational argument gives way to rhetorical tricks, such as seriously exaggerating the other party's position in order to present it as absurd. In this stage, the parties move further from the original issue, "linking it to larger value considerations" (Jordan 2000: 2) so that the general position of parties rather than a specific issue is at stake. Furthermore, one party may attack the other personally in order "to achieve a weakening of its intellectual position" (Glasl 1982: 125) by using such phrases as "this issue is typical of you, you are unreliable." With such attacks, the parties' ability to separate the people from the problem (Fisher, Ury, and Patton 1991: 17) is impaired and the

chances are the discussion will become personalized. Such statements increase the size of the conflict, shifting the focus further from the original issue. The party's ego/self-image is at stake — whether that party comprises an individual, an organization, or a group.[11] Arguments become increasingly geared to defending that image and scoring points over the other party. Trust, already under strain from Stage One, is placed under further pressure. Parties' insecurity builds, and they compensate with increased efforts to save face and be the one who is strong and "in the right."

As shown in Figure Two, a key driver of the escalation process is the generalization and possibly even personalization of the dispute: when I find something wrong with your general position, it can be close to finding something wrong with *you*, your personality or identity. What becomes important to each party, above all, is not to appear weak for fear of strengthening the other party's position. The dispute becomes a defense of one's identity and not losing the argument takes precedence over understanding the meaning of the issue for the participants. And, as insecurity increases, it feeds back on itself to amplify the process.

An example: *The shift had started well enough, they were on their way to exceeding the production target, thought Peter bitterly, until the Auto Analyzer broke down again. The engineer's first words — when he finally arrived — were: "What have you guys been doing with my analyzer? That's the third time this month!" Before he could stop himself Peter had snapped: "Maybe if you people had fixed it properly the first time . . ." After that the usual questions and answers about when the problem had started and the exact nature of the malfunction seemed loaded with insinuations of carelessness on one side or the other. It wasn't helped when one of Peter's production crew quite audibly asked a colleague: "How many engineers does it take to change a light bulb?" Now the engineer was threatening to file a formal complaint with his manager.*

A Role for Mindfulness at Stage Two

As the disputants' awareness shifts from the issue that prompted the dispute to defense of the individual or group ego, a mindful approach would be to note that the ego's standard operating procedure is to interpret everything in terms of itself: all incoming data are filtered through that lens. As John McConnell put it, "Instead of true awareness of processes of consciousness, we substitute a self, pictured at the center of a world which is oriented around it" (McConnell 1995: 22). We are not always aware of the fact that this self is already the "object of a mental act" (McConnell 1995: 22) or, in more modern parlance, constructed. The construction helps us make sense of and manage our world. But it is an insecure construction, subject to attack from competing versions of reality that threaten not only disputants' self-images but the world constructed around them. Propping up the self-image can take significant emotional and mental effort that leaves little
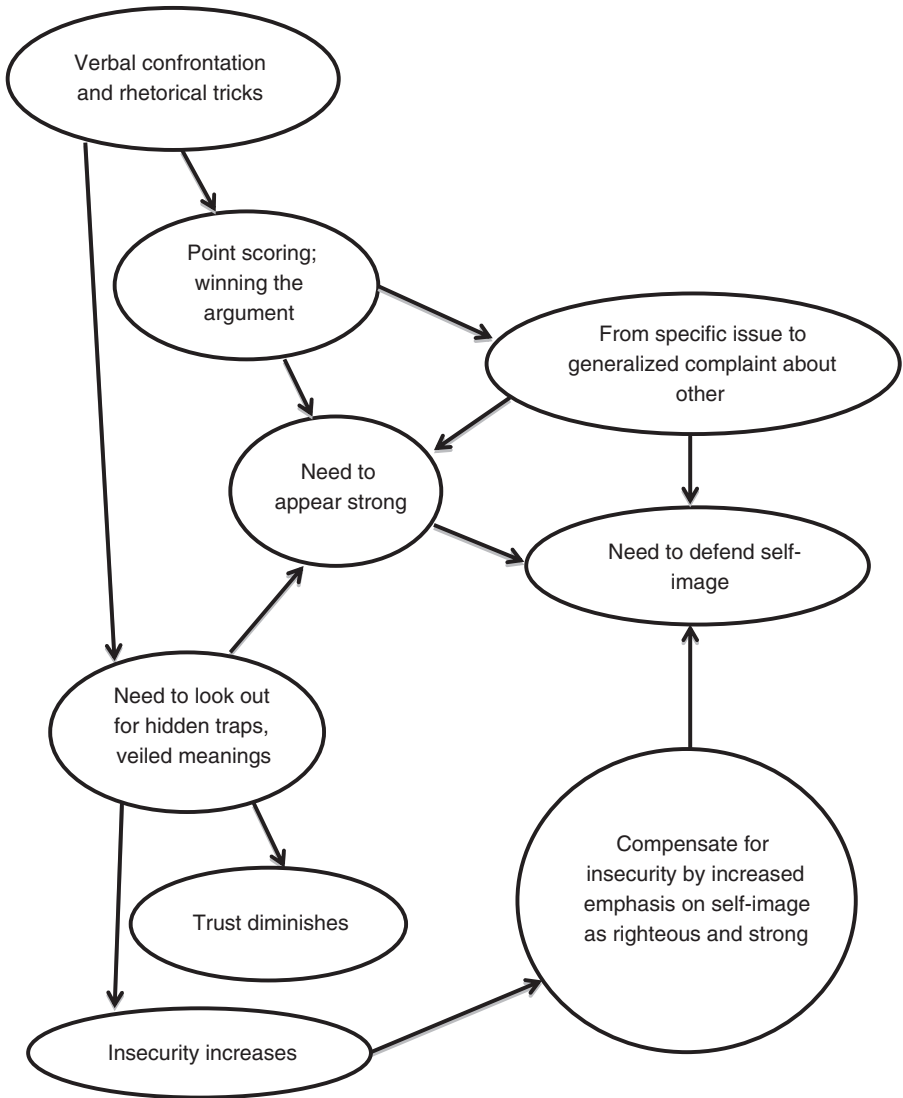
energy for considering the original issue that separates but binds the parties.

Mindful practice can enable parties to question the reality of that self-image or at least to avoid rushing to its defense. The first step is to

"create space" between thoughts, to find a wider consciousness. Again, I note that "thought" is shot through with emotion and sensation. When a person's sense of self is threatened he can be overcome by sensations, feelings, and thoughts that consume his consciousness.

Experience with formal meditation certainly helps in this process, as would learning informal techniques to interrupt the flow of thoughts with present moment awareness. For example, many people find that deliberately focusing on their breathing enables them to "view" their sensations, thoughts, and feelings with detachment rather than "be" inside them. Breathing in, a person may recognize the pressure she feels to respond to provocative statements, she may notice a building sense of panic, or perhaps have a flashback to previous unpleasant experiences. Breathing out, she can observe her sense of panic so that it does not take over her consciousness. Simply becoming aware of these feelings during a confrontational argument could reduce her need to act from them, to, in Leonard Cohen's words, "shoot somebody who outdrew you" (Cohen 2002).

This nonjudgmental attention can be difficult to sustain. The effort to win an argument can become all consuming, but winning the argument is rarely the same as seeing the problem in its entirety, and even more rarely as resolving it. In more competitive societies in particular, many people seem conditioned to the idea that failing to respond quickly and cleverly is to *lose* the argument. This preoccupying urge hinders deep comprehension.

Seneca reportedly said that we should train our minds to desire what the situation demands. Without going as far into Stoicism as that, we might at least start by clearing our minds to observe the situation calmly.[12] Often, however, the long-practiced reflex of swift riposte overcomes the discipline needed to listen. When parties realize that rhetorical sparring and point scoring is getting them nowhere, they conclude that talking is useless, and it is time for action, which can signal a move to Stage Three.

Stages Three and Four

Stage Three is characterized by a loss of faith in argument accompanied by an increasing conviction that progress is being blocked by the other party. Given their mutual interdependence, this can exacerbate each party's hostility toward the other. Communication is reduced to mostly nonverbal exchanges, including unilateral action. When groups are involved, unity within the group builds, based on shared predicament, and pressure to conform grows. This pressure can generate a common interpretation of the situation — but one that is often the least complex and nuanced understanding of the conflict, a sort of "lowest common denominator" of possible explanations. In tandem with the simplification, the parties can feel a growing sense of being held captive by external events.

Because the parties' perceptions are not being challenged by countervailing data arising from genuine communication, full-blown stereotyping of

the other is characteristic of Stage Four. The emergence of these negative stereotypes makes the environment seem more predictable — for example, "we know what to expect from people like that." But those images act as even more effective filters on any data contrary to the governing interpretation. Parties continue to generalize about the cause of the conflict: it is firmly rooted in the character of the other, consequently we have no alternative but to continue escalation, we are not responsible for it.

The first point to note from Figure Three is how damaging the restriction of genuine communication can be. The communication in Stage Two may not have been productive but at least it contained *some* possibility of altering the parties' mindset. The lack of genuine two-way communication in Stages Three and Four contributes to the gross over-simplification of the situation and the tendency to prejudge the other party. These in turn feed back to further restriction of communication, in a classic example of Maruyama's change-amplifying process.[13]

If Stage Two can be thought of as an aggressive debate, Stage Three can be thought of as symbolic wrestling. The difference lies in the transition to force because persuasion has not worked. The force at this stage is symbolic rather than physical. Consider the following scenario as an example:
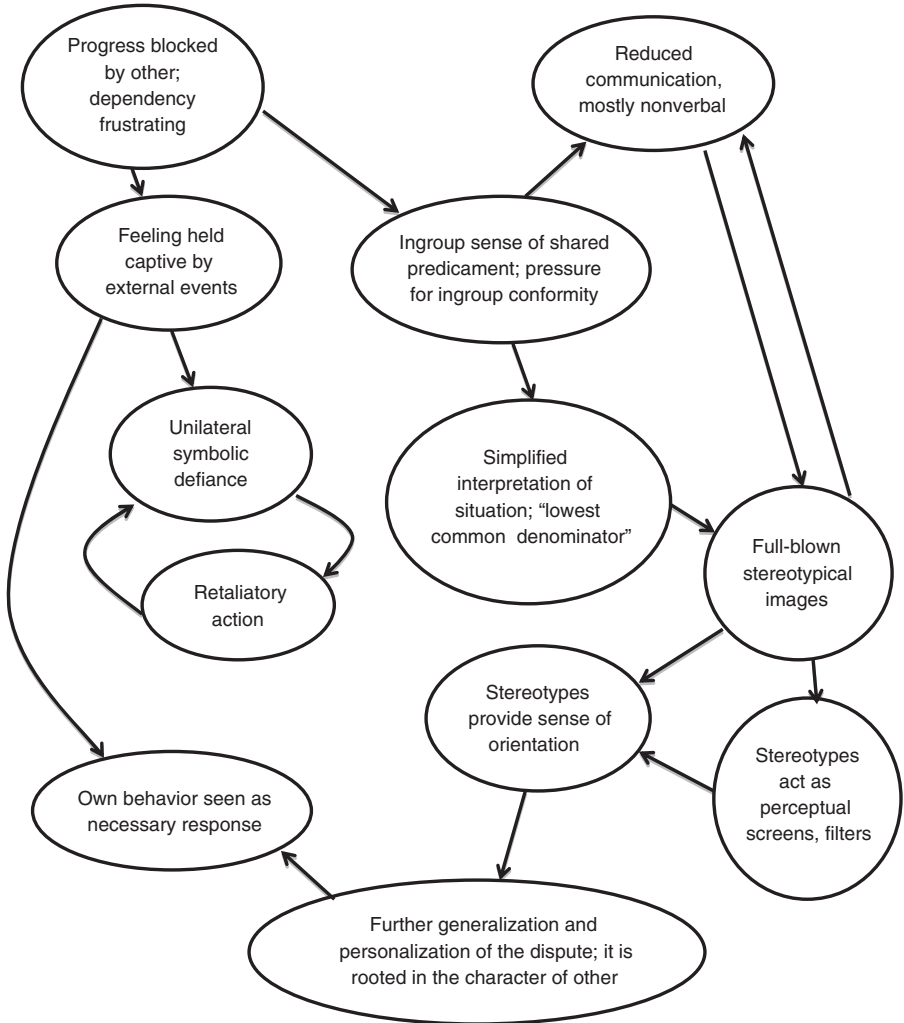
Christine stared in disbelief at the automatic teller machine. Never before had payment been refused when she inserted her card. The machine must be broken, she thought, but realized almost immediately that wasn't the case. Alex had been so angry at their last meeting, blaming her for the breakup, claiming most of the property should go to him. This was his doing, he must have deliberately cleaned out their joint account, the one they both contributed to. Christine's shock turned to anger. At a nearby café, she bought a coffee and gulped it while her mind raged at the injustice. Her stomach muscles tightened into knots, how dare he! Slowly a thought crystallized: his car insurance was on her insurance policy, they had done it that way because she had a better rate . . . let's see how he feels when I cancel his insurance, she thought.

An irony is that while the parties find their dependence on each other to be intolerable, their actions lead to an almost orchestrated dance of codependence. As the tempo of the dance increases with each action and counteraction, the parties indeed feel themselves held hostage by their situation.

When a party comprises a group, by Stage Four the group identity or ego is typically in the ascendant. Individual differences are ignored and "groupthink" develops, making it even more difficult for the party to clearly and fully consider all the issues and options for resolving them.

In the high stress atmosphere of Stages Three and Four, each party becomes preoccupied with making sense of the situation; it may even feel as if his or her world is falling apart. Holding it together is made easier by simplification — adopting the lowest common denominator explanation

Figure Three
Stages Three and Four of Glasl's Model of Escalation

Progress blocked by other; dependency frustrating

Reduced communication, mostly nonverbal

Feeling held captive by external events

Ingroup sense of shared predicament; pressure for ingroup conformity

Unilateral symbolic defiance

Simplified interpretation of situation; "lowest common denominator"

Full-blown stereotypical images

Retaliatory action

Stereotypes provide sense of orientation

Stereotypes act as perceptual screens, filters

Own behavior seen as necessary response

Further generalization and personalization of the dispute; it is rooted in the character of other

and the stereotypical assessments of the opposing party's character. With the environment thus starkly delineated, the world, and the experience of the self within it, makes a kind of sense.

> Depending on who I am, my definition of what is "out there" will also change. When I define self, I define "it," but to define it is also

to define self. Once I know who I am then I know what is out there. But the direction of causality flows just as often from the situation to a definition of self as it does the other way (Weick 1995: 20).

I suggest that the direction of causality at these stages is from the situation to the self. By defining the conflict and the other party in simplistic terms, each party defines himself, herself, or themselves as limited by their threatening environment. "You leave me no alternative but . . ." is typical of attitudes at this stage. Although genuinely felt, it absolves the party of responsibility for further escalation.

The Role of Mindfulness at Stages Three and Four

By Stage Four, the energy of the disputants is taken up by second guessing the other party's next move, planning a response, and waiting for news from "the front." Many people are made thoroughly miserable by these games; some seem to enjoy them; all are preoccupied.

In an acrimonious divorce, for example, every time the phone rings, one of the spouses may feel an immediate gut reaction: what on earth has s/he done now? This situation forces me to retaliate or be a victim. If the party has a previous bank of formal mindfulness meditation, she may draw on it at this time, focusing in a disciplined way on the details of the present moment: becoming aware of a clock ticking in the next room, of a dog barking in the distance, the gurgle of one's gut, thoughts of breakfast, the cramp in the instep, a sharp pang of guilt at past actions, the smell of bacon frying . . . each noted and let be, like passing clouds (Kabat-Zinn 1991).

With such a discipline as background, when the phone rings, an informal practice may kick in: the immediate panicky reaction of being submerged by the situation may be noted, allowed to be. If she accepts its presence, it does not define her, it is not her. Neither (if she can manage to stay alert) is she defined by her image of the other or of the codependent wrestling match they have become trapped in, nor by her fantasies of hurting him back, of his having an accident or simply disappearing. Her awareness is larger than any of these, an awareness that can note all these things and let them pass without drawing identity solely from them.[14] Unfortunately, the skill and patience needed may be beyond the capacity of parties in conflict and the conflict may escalate to Stage Five.

Stage Five

Glasl (1982) wrote that the transition to Stage Five is particularly dramatic. Parties make public attacks on each other's integrity: they are immoral and dishonest, they have plotted from the beginning, all their apparent gestures toward solving the problem were nothing but a cover for their real strategy. Public apologies are demanded. The disputants' perceptual filters are working harder than ever, and parties become increasingly

polarized, seeing the other as "an incarnation of moral corruption" (Jordan 2000: 4).

In extreme cases, the conflict is no longer about issues but about "holy values" (Jordan 2000: 4). Trust may have been destroyed completely and response to defamation becomes almost compulsive. Unfair attacks should not go unchallenged, but to answer them in a neutral, fact-based way is exceedingly difficult.[15]

The Role of Mindfulness at Stage Five

As Figure Four illustrates, the move to public condemnation is a key driver at this stage. The resulting pain can be so profound as to push the parties to demonize each other as evil, with evidence to the contrary ignored or dismissed. All their reactions are amplified: feelings of hurt, rage, and hatred may be accompanied by breathing difficulties, muscle contractions, and changes in heart rate. Each element of the sensation, feeling, and thought mix evokes and can even justify the other elements.

Parties may even feel compelled at this stage to revisit the sources of their anger over and over again, creating in the process an epic narrative of their unfair treatment, their judgment impaired both by their designation of the other as evil and of themselves as good. Their entire identity becomes bound up with these perceptions.
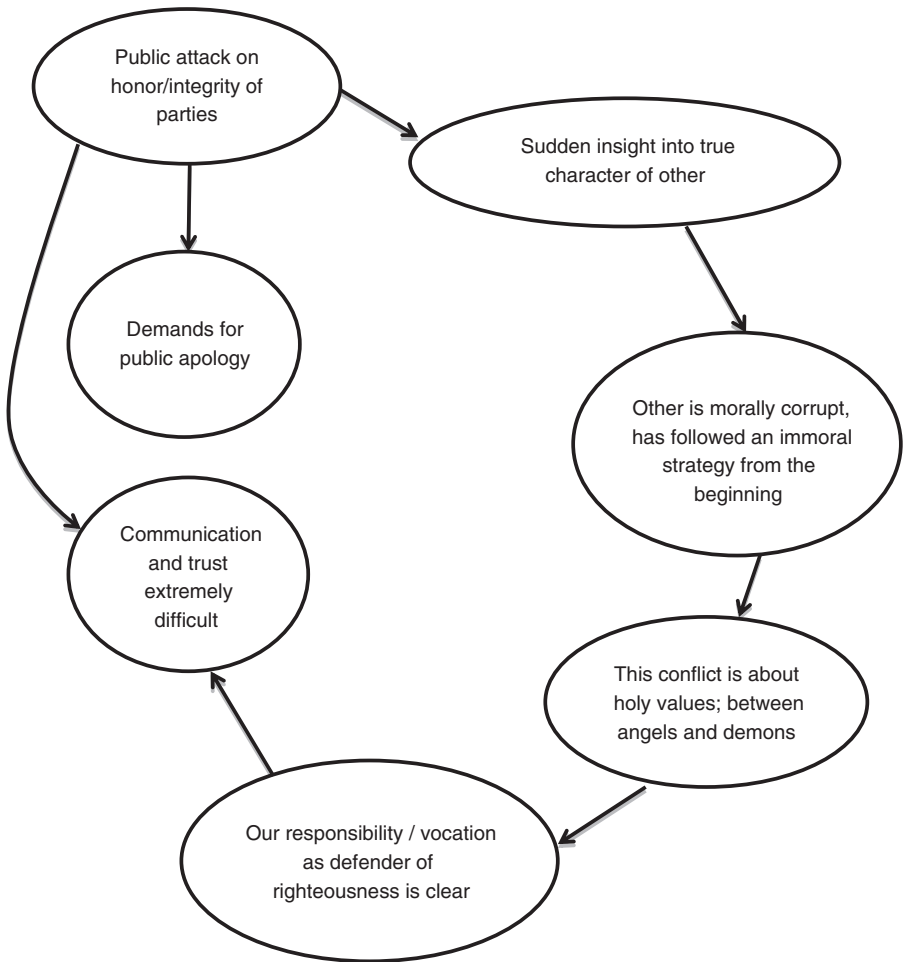
Consider this example from classic literature: *In Victor Hugo's* Les Miserables, *the policeman Javert spends decades in pursuit of Jean Valjean, a former convict, still technically wanted, but a man who has manifestly adopted a moral and compassionate life. Javert knows this but is blinded to it by his sense of himself as the embodiment of law, justice, and righteousness. When, as a result of external circumstances, the tables are turned and Valjean saves his life, the resulting dissonance is too much for Javert to bear and he commits suicide.*

John McConnell, referring to the analogy of the self-image as a lens, wrote:

> when we are unmindful we interpret reality through this lens. . . . mindfulness lets us be aware of the way the lens is shaping our understanding. That is, we are aware both of the action of the lens and of the picture it is projecting. This leads to a clearer understanding, which lets us take responsibility for the meaning-giving process rather than being simply its victim (1995: 89).[16]

This is not to underestimate the difficulty of becoming aware of how one's self-image has become identified with his role in the conflict. Glasl felt that when escalation has advanced, deep self-diagnosis is not viable. But it may be approached indirectly, perhaps with third-party assistance. It is, without doubt, a challenge: the more usual response is to issue threats. In that case, the dispute moves to Stage Six.

Figure Four
Stage Five of Glasl's Model of Escalation

```
┌─────────────────┐
│ Public attack on│
│ honor/integrity │────────┐
│   of parties    │        │      ┌──────────────────┐
└─────────────────┘        └─────▶│ Sudden insight into│
    │         │                   │ true character of  │
    │         │                   │      other         │
    ▼         │                   └──────────────────┘
┌─────────────┐│                           │
│ Demands for ││                           ▼
│public apology││               ┌──────────────────┐
└─────────────┘│                │ Other is morally │
               │                │ corrupt, has     │
               ▼                │ followed an immoral│
┌─────────────┐                 │ strategy from the│
│Communication│                 │    beginning     │
│  and trust  │                 └──────────────────┘
│  extremely  │                          │
│  difficult  │                          ▼
└─────────────┘               ┌──────────────────┐
        ▲                     │This conflict is  │
        │                     │about holy values;│
        │                     │ between angels   │
┌──────────────────┐          │   and demons     │
│Our responsibility│          └──────────────────┘
│/ vocation as     │◀─────────────────
│defender of       │
│righteousness is  │
│    clear         │
└──────────────────┘
```

Stage Six

In Stage Six, the parties resort to serious threats. Initially, the threats are issued to assert autonomy, to draw attention to demands, and to attempt to force concessions. If they fail, they become more concrete and unequivocal, and the party may publicly assert his commitment to carry out the threats. In doing so, he intends to limit the other party's freedom of action, but ironically limits his own as well. Finally, threats become ultimatums, forcing the other party into an either-or decision. The threatening party still sees

himself as acting in legitimate response to the other party's unwarranted actions. The latter rallies to issue a counterthreat. With so few options visible, both parties feel powerless. The situation is spinning out of control. In situations in which the parties comprise groups or in multiparty situations, splinter groups may split off from the main parties (see Figure Five).

From Stage Three on, parties' thinking has tended to produce actions that reduce the scope for subsequent actions. In Stage Six, this is almost inevitable: the parties feel bound to act but their range of alternatives has been circumscribed. They are immersed in a systemic trap, and the only way out is to jointly recognize the effects the system is having on them (Senge et al. 2004). But that is unlikely because their perception of threat has crystallized into polarities of domination and control.[17] In their preoccupation with taking action in such circumstances, the parties lose sight of *interaction* — that they themselves are creating this process.

The Role of Mindfulness at Stage Six

A possible contribution of mindfulness practice at this stage would be to help parties examine the idea of necessity. For example: *In the years following World War Two, a few visionaries began to reflect on the interaction between France and Germany. The two countries had fought in the 1870s, in 1914–18, and in the war just finished. Was it only a matter of time before another conflict erupted between them? Was this really necessary? Alternatively, if the economic interests of the two countries could be linked, might it be possible to create institutions that could resolve disputes through negotiation? Starting with cooperation in coal and steel, the idea developed to include other countries and eventually to become the European Union.*
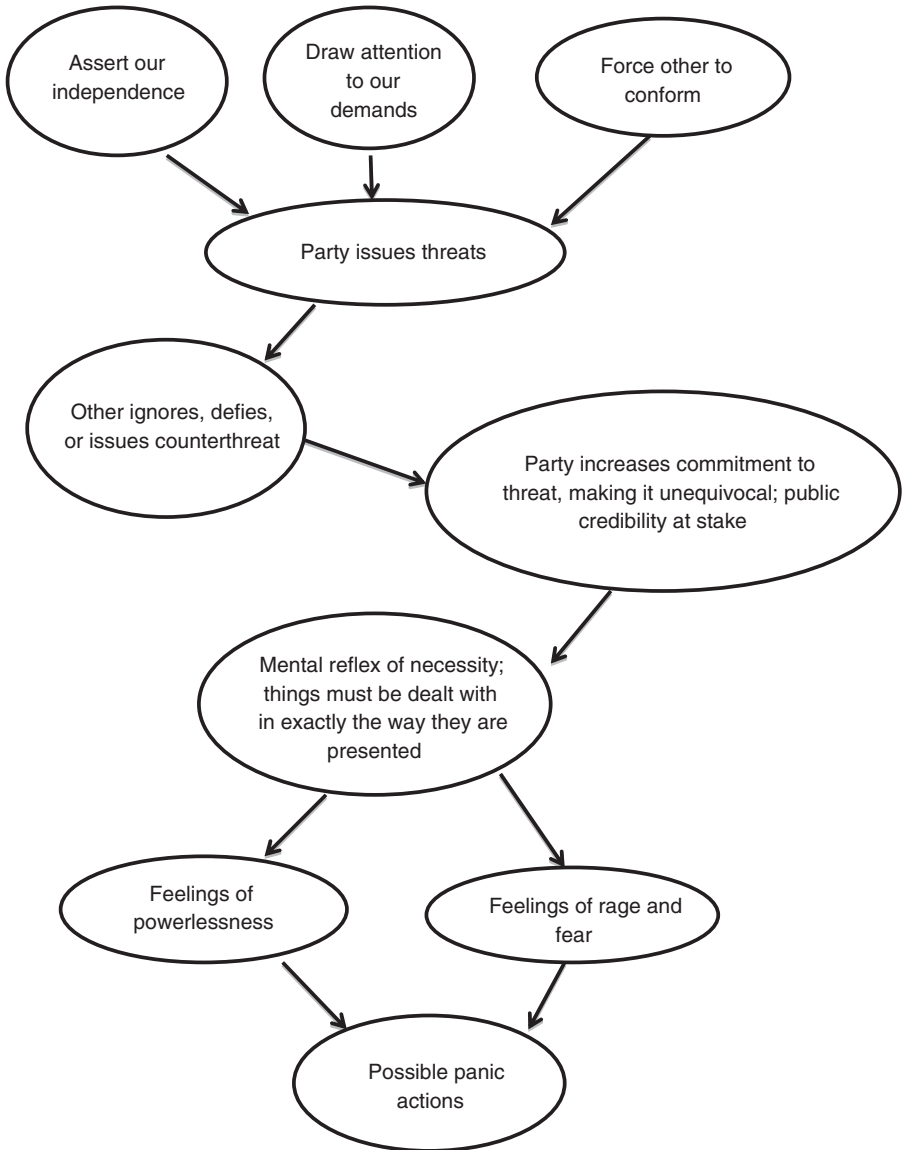
David Bohm (1994) discussed the idea of necessity as an unexamined mental reflex. Necessity is a force you cannot turn aside, necessity means things cannot be otherwise. He wrote:

> Wherever people are finding it hard to get along you will discover that they have different assumptions as to what is necessary. . . . One feels this is necessary and the other that, and they cannot turn aside. Negotiation is an attempt to make people turn aside for each other and to adjust and adapt, which admits that there is some contingency in what they thought was necessary (1994: 70).

Taking things to be necessary that may in fact be contingent is a characteristic of Stage Six. Glasl made the acute observation that parties at this stage insist that their "issues and standpoints must be dealt with in exactly the form they have chosen to present them" (Jordan 2000: 4).

This mental reflex of necessity excludes creativity, and creativity offers one of the greatest possibilities for conflict resolution. To be creative is to be less bound by what seems necessary. John Paul Lederach (2005) argued that

Figure Five
Stage Six of Glasl's Model of Escalation

Assert our independence

Draw attention to our demands

Force other to conform

Party issues threats

Other ignores, defies, or issues counterthreat

Party increases commitment to threat, making it unequivocal; public credibility at stake

Mental reflex of necessity; things must be dealt with in exactly the way they are presented

Feelings of powerlessness

Feelings of rage and fear

Possible panic actions

creativity challenges our epistemology, that is, our very way of knowing is at stake. This presents a significant challenge at the best of times, but in the superheated atmosphere of threat it becomes a profound one, as those who have tried to present alternative courses of action to war have discovered.

Both Bohm and Lederach suggest the model of the creative artist. For Bohm, creativity begins by appreciating contingencies in the situation; from this it may be possible to escape the old order of necessity and derive a new one, not absolute but with sufficient regularities of value or meaning to sustain a new creation. Lederach, speaking of artists, says: "They embrace the possibility that there exist untold possibilities capable at any moment to move beyond the narrow parameters of what is commonly accepted and perceived as the narrow and rigidly defined range of choices" (2005: 38).

Engaging in this kind of work demands a contemplative attitude. Like the sculptor who gets to know the block of stone intimately before "liberating the figure within," parties in conflict need to stand back, to observe, and to be still. This is challenging in the context of Stage Six, especially as the parties tend to add time pressure to their already circumscribed range of alternatives. In practical terms, reducing that time pressure may be crucial for releasing creativity.

Also, third parties (if they can manage to avoid the classic "if you are not with us you are against us" trap) may play a vital role in assisting reflection before action. Retelling the story may only reinforce it — a more creative approach might begin with telling it from a different perspective. Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen (1999) suggest beginning from the "third story"; for example, by imagining how a neutral third party might describe the conflict. Similarly, "frame reflection," as advocated by Donald Schön and Martin Rein (1994), could play a powerful role in shifting the story by allowing the parties to reexamine the meaning-giving frames on which the story rests. The particular contribution of mindfulness might be to legitimize periods of silence and stillness, making room to examining creative responses. Contemplative silence can be conducive to examining the interplay of necessity, contingency, and possibility, and perhaps even reaching to the restructuring of epistemology. Nonetheless, escaping from the compulsive preoccupation with threat and action is difficult, and the conflict could escalate to the next stage.

Stages Seven, Eight, and Nine

In Stage Seven, Party B has become an object without human qualities with which Party A can identify, an obstruction that must be eliminated. It is impossible to conceive of a solution that would include the other party. The conflict resembles a zero-sum game; both parties believe that the other's loss is their gain, even though, as Thomas Jordan (1997) pointed out, these losses do not give them any benefit whatsoever. Parties may defy a court order and go to jail rather than see the other party win. They may entertain

prolonged fantasies of the other party simply going away (or being removed). In this struggle, ethical norms need not apply. In an intercommunal or international context the potential for violence is very great.

By Stage Eight, inflicting damage is not enough, one party seeks total destruction of the other party, the "enemy." If the party is a group, it may attempt to fragment the enemy or destroy the legitimacy of its representatives and negotiators. Internal discipline tightens further and pressure for conformity increases, which may have the opposite effect, precipitating infighting and making the situation even less amenable to control.

The parties' only restraining factor is concern for their own survival. By Stage Nine even that has been abandoned: "in order to destroy the enemy they even take their own downfall into account; they triumphantly plunge into the fatal abyss once they are assured that the enemy is totally destroyed" (Glasl 2002: 28).

Figure Six illustrates the risks incurred when the parties' dehumanize each other. The other party has become an object of inherent antagonism between a rigidly separated subject and object. There is no restraining force of empathy. Ultimately, even self-preservation offers no restraining force because preoccupation with destruction of the enemy has become total. Glasl's image of the river current, sweeping the parties from one set of rapids to the next, portrays how difficult it is to reverse the momentum.
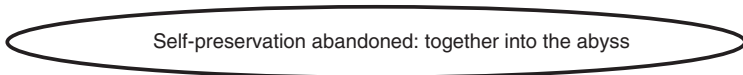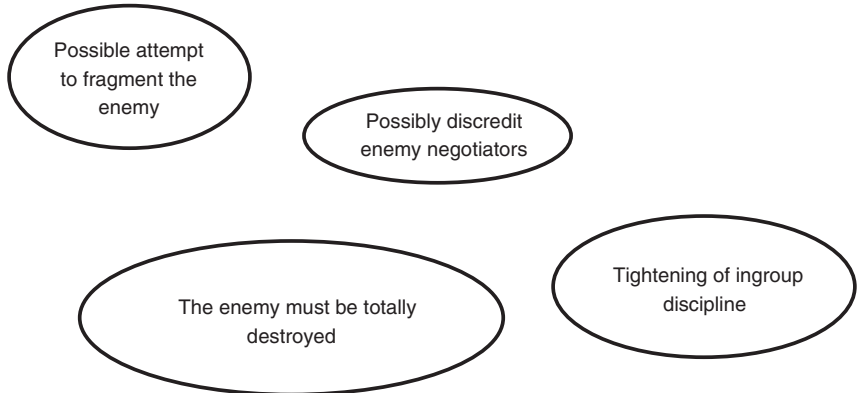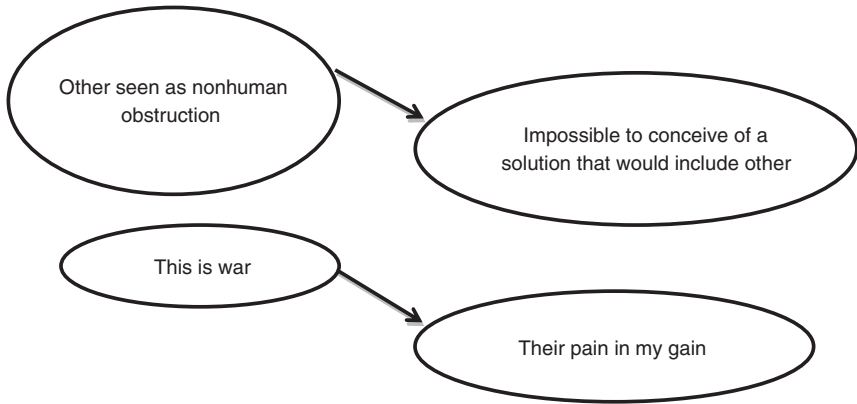
The Role of Mindfulness at Stages Seven through Nine
From a Buddhist perspective, the idea of separation is flawed at the foundation. Nothing exists in isolation, everything from the subatomic particle to the universe depends on, and in turn creates other entities. Relationship is the fundamental reality.

> The process of abstraction and of grasping "the object" — or "the party" in a negotiation or mediation setting . . . not only leads to shaping and grasping onto the object perceived and its definition, but it reflects on the perceiver as well. The perceiver is also shaped and seen as a separate firm entity, a self with similar characteristics. According to the Buddhist worldview, realizing the true nature of things demands the realization of relationality — a realization that all the conditioned things are always dependent upon other things, as well as the realization of the law of impermanence . . . (Kuttner 2010: 949–950).

Thus, the separateness in the minds of the parties that characterizes these stages is illusory — but this illusion has powerful associations: a longing to fix the problem with unilateral actions that will have no consequences; a vision of the future in which the other disappears; denial of their common humanity. These are all reflected in Figure Six in the driver: inability to conceive of a future that involves the other. Lederach (2005) is clear that conceiving of such a future is precisely what *is* needed.

Figure Six
Stages Seven, Eight, and Nine in Glasl's Model of Escalation

Other seen as nonhuman obstruction

Impossible to conceive of a solution that would include other

This is war

Their pain in my gain

Possible attempt to fragment the enemy

Possibly discredit enemy negotiators

The enemy must be totally destroyed

Tightening of ingroup discipline

Self-preservation abandoned: together into the abyss

The perpetration of violence, more than anything else, requires a deep, implicit belief that desired change can be achieved independently of the web of relationships. Breaking violence requires that people embrace a more fundamental truth: who we have

been, are, and will be emerges from and shapes itself in a context
of relational interdependency (2005: 35).

This remarkable statement, influenced by Lederach's Christian faith and many years confronting intercommunal violence, arrives at the same conclusion as, Ran Kuttner's (2010) explanation of Buddhist relationality: our model of separation is wrong.

Parties enmeshed in preoccupation with separation cannot bear the existence of relationship, even of a past relationship. The destruction of the Stari Most Bridge during the war in former Yugoslavia may be a case in point:

The bridge had stood for 427 years, linking the eastern and western sectors of the city of Mostar. The bridge had for generations symbolized a Bosnia that included Muslims, Jews, Croatian Catholics, and Serbian Orthodox (Dodds 1998). *Many commentators felt that destroying the bridge was a deliberate act designed to erase evidence of a shared cultural heritage and peaceful coexistence.*

But so ingrained is our belief in separation that coming up with a different model is likely to be no less a challenge than the heliocentric theory was for medieval mankind. When modern science has shown life on Earth to be far from inevitable, based rather on a whole set of shaky contingencies, when the distinction between organism and environment is itself seen to be arbitrary, can we continue to believe in the separateness of groups based on a self-serving social-psychological categorization? To be sure, boundaries between groups, whether psychological or geographic, can lead to conflicts of interest that require resolution. But resolution will come more easily if preoccupation with separateness can be contextualized, made less absolute.

Finding a common thread between the parties might start with something simpler than superordinate goals: an old jazz theme, a moment of theater, the thrill of sporting skill. The power of such shared feelings to short-circuit the mind-story of difference has been chronicled many times.[18] Of course, by Stage Nine it may be too late in the day to attempt such an effort. Nonetheless, developing an alert stillness, in which the self is seen as participant in a wider process, may provide some benefit. Letting go of the simplifications of Stage Four and the demonization of Stage Five is to let go of part of the separate, mentally constructed, self. "Letting go extends the dissolution of subject-object awareness . . . opening the way for a larger awareness, including, ultimately, a sense of what is emerging" (Senge et al. 2004: 97).

This "letting go" can be challenging and uncomfortable. The tradition of individuality can make it more difficult for people in Western cultures to accept relatedness as the basic reality.[19] Moreover, we are more accustomed to assigning blame than to recognizing contribution (Stone, Patton, and Heen 1999).[20] But by developing awareness of interconnection — "interbeing,"

to use Nhat Hahn's (1991) word — we can also develop a deeper sense of ourselves as participants in cocreation. This can engage our full human capacity for critical consideration and intuitive understanding, and possible routes to appropriate action may become more apparent.

Conclusion

In this article, I have explored the idea that preoccupation, by capturing disputants' cognitive and emotional attention, impairs their capacity to comprehend the totality of a conflict situation. The thoughts and actions that spring from such preoccupation can initiate a set of feedback loops that self-amplify or initiate a chain of unintended causal links resulting in escalation of the conflict.

In casting preoccupation as the villain, I began with the idea of balance between three elements of psychological operations: sensing, feeling, and thinking. In the simplest version of preoccupation, feelings dominate thoughts, resulting in anger-driven communication or action. The parties' abilities to fully and accurately perceive the situation may be further diminished by ego/ethnocentrism, the preoccupation intensifying the perception of differences between parties and diminishing their sense of shared humanity.

Balance has been an important concern in conflict resolution scholarship: between power bargaining and attitude change strategies (Walton 1965), between inter and intra-organizational bargaining (Walton and McKersie 1965), between creating and claiming value (Lax and Sebenius 1986), and between empathy and assertiveness (Mnookin, Peppet, and Tulumello 2000). In these cases, real dilemmas exist and managing them wisely is a fundamental challenge for negotiators. The very frames we use (Schön and Rein 1994) and the paradigms within which they are nested (Coleman 2004) often require revisiting (or, more likely, dredging up from layers of unconscious assumptions).

If balancing these competing values is important, then breaks in negotiations should be the norm rather than the exception. They can diminish preoccupation by helping parties focus on the broader context, especially if less interested or neutral third parties are available to provide honest, independent feedback. Describing the conflict in terms of Glasl's stages could be a useful technique for contextualization. Used as a diagnostic aid, reviewing the history of the conflict in this light could be a powerful way of inhibiting further escalation, particularly if the parties did it jointly. Even if they failed to agree on causation, the very use of a common language might be grounding, and the prospect of reviewing the concrete issues at stake might be enhanced. And, while the movement from one stage to the next can seem like a "ratchet" has been inserted, preventing a reversal of direction, this is not inevitable: perhaps apologies for past hurts or confidence-building measures may succeed in lifting the ratchet.

Cyberneticians, scholars of the science of control systems, have drawn attention to the principle of "requisite variety" (Ashby 1960): if an environment is complex and dynamic, then the internal diversity of a self-regulating system must be similarly so. A parallel version might be that a *complex conflict* needs to be appreciated with a *complex vision*. Parties may feel an existential imperative to act, and all actions have consequences, but at least an action taken with a wide comprehension will be nearer to wisdom.

What would a broader comprehension consist of? William Isaacs (1999) referred to the three domains spoken of in ancient Greece — the good, the true, and the beautiful. But these are not really distinct as the following passage from Arthur Koestler emphasized:

> Beauty is a function of truth, truth a function of beauty. They can be separated by analysis, but in the lived experience of the creative act — and of its re-creative echo in the beholder — they are inseparable as thought is inseparable from emotion. They signal, one in the language of the brain, the other of the bowels, the moment of the Eureka cry, when the "infinite is made to blend itself with the finite" — when eternity is looking through the window of time. Whether it is a medieval stained glass window or Newton's equation of universal gravity is a matter of upbringing and chance; both are transparent to the unprejudiced eye (Koestler 1966: 333).

To suggest that disputants contemplate stained glass windows in the middle of a conflict is a lot to ask, even metaphorically. On the other hand, resolving issues of global concern requires all the wise resources we can bring to them *before* they reach the level of crisis. Such an effort would draw on intuition, metaphor, and art as well as rational analysis. Further research on mindfulness may provide a gateway to this level of consciousness, rational but not confined to the manipulation of symbols, capable of focusing on concrete situations from a vantage point beyond the immediate.

NOTES

1. Glasl's detailed account of the stages of escalation is given in German in his book *Konfliktmanagement* (Glasl 1997). The accounts here are drawn from two of his English publications (Glasl 1982, 2002) plus two very fine summaries by Thomas Jordan (1997, 2000).

2. I am particularly indebted to Ran Kuttner, who shared with me his unpublished doctoral dissertation in which he discussed the parallels between Buddhist thought and Glasl's stages of escalation. Kuttner's comprehensive treatment of Buddhist philosophy is much deeper than that presented in this article, where my focus is a search for links between preoccupation, change-amplifying feedback loops, and practical applications of mindfulness disciplines.

3. In cybernetic terms, these are *negative* feedback loops, usually associated with control.

4. To be strictly accurate, positive feedback includes two possibilities: that an increase in A causes an increase in B *or* that a decrease in A causes a decrease in B. In Maruyama's illustrations, both of these possibilities can be drawn with a plus sign on the loop. In this article, I have simplified matters so that positive feedback is always used to indicate amplification.

5. Of those scholars who have pondered this idea, David Bohm expressed it most succinctly: "The very wish to think must come from an emotion or from an impulse to think" (Bohm 1994: 8). And again: "Similarly, thought is a system. That system not only includes thought, 'felts' and feelings, but it includes the state of the body; it includes the whole of society — as thought is passing back and forth between people in a process by which thought evolved from ancient times" (1992: 19).

6. The idea of mindfulness practice as an antidote to escalation was put forward by Pema Chödrön (2006) in an article entitled "The Power of Patience: Antidote to Escalation," in M. McLeod (ed) *Mindful Politics*, Wisdom Publications, Boston.

7. The idea that conflict starts with a specific issue is an over-simplification. Almost certainly there is a history to the interaction in terms of each individual's past experience, conditioning, perceptual acuity, etc., let alone their previous experiences with each other.

8. This is not to underestimate the depth of the challenge offered by provocation. James Forest (1991) describes an incident in 1968 when the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hahn was speaking in the auditorium of a church in St. Louis. "As always, he emphasized the need for Americans to stop their bombing and killing in his country. . . . A large man stood up and spoke with searing scorn of the 'supposed compassion' of 'this Mr Hanh'. . . . When he finished I looked toward Nhat Hanh in bewilderment. What could he — or anyone — say? The spirit of the war itself had suddenly filled the room, and it seemed hard to breathe. Then Nhat Hanh began to speak — quietly, with deep calm, indeed with a sense of personal caring for the man who had just damned him. The words seemed like rain falling on fire. . . . But after his response, Nhat Hanh whispered something to the chairman and walked quickly from the room. Sensing something was wrong, I followed him out. . . . He was struggling for air — like someone who had been deeply under-water. . . . Nhat Hanh explained that the man's comments had been terribly upsetting. He had wanted to respond to him with anger. So he had made himself breathe deeply and very slowly in order to find a way to respond with calm and understanding."

9. David Loy wrote: "The fact that we find life dissatisfactory, one damned problem after another, is not accidental or coincidental. It is the very nature of the unawakened mind to be bothered about something, because at the core of our being there is a free-floating anxiety that has no particular object but can be plugged into any problematic situation" (Loy 2006: 45).

10. "When you practice patience, you're not repressing anger, you're just sitting there with it — going cold turkey with the aggression" (Chödrön 2006: 143). William Ury's (1991) suggestion of "going to the balcony" and Stone, Patton, and Heen's (2000) advice to pay attention to the "feelings conversation" are two practices designed to achieve a similar result.

11. Loy (2006) maintained that the experience of the ego-self's ungroundedness, a sense of emptiness at the very core of our being, is paralleled by similar experiences in a group ego. "[A] collective identity is created by discriminating one's own group from another. As in the personal ego, the 'inside' is opposed to the other 'outside', and this makes conflict inevitable, not just because of competition with other groups, but because the socially constructed nature of group identity means that one's own group can never feel secure *enough*" (2006: 46).

12. Eckhart Tolle (2005) addressed the issue in a slightly different way. Emphasizing the importance of remaining nonreactive and absolutely alert when confronted with challenging people or situations, he said: "You would immediately accept the situation and thus become one with it rather than separate yourself from it. Then out of your alertness would come a response. . . . It would be powerful and effective and would make no person or situation into an enemy" (2005: 188).

13. Third-party facilitators could try to break this cycle by suggesting subgroup meetings, perhaps even one-on-one meetings, in order to free up the communication. Such an intervention would not be risk free; it can result in problems between subgroup members and the wider constituency but could be worthwhile if the conflict issues can be put on more solid ground.

14. The above idea is influenced by Thich Nhat Hanh's exercise for developing compassion for the person you hate or despise the most (1987: 93). Another of his suggestions that might be of help here is to think of yourself as a pebble falling through a clear stream. It sinks without guidance to a spot of total rest on the gentle sand of the river bed. Mind and body at complete rest. No thought of past or future can pull you away from this present peace and joy. This is a

particularly helpful image during times of escalation as it counteracts the sense of being whirled out of control. Glasl imagines escalation as a boat being swirled down river from one rapid to the next.

15. Also militating against dialogue might be an unconscious fear that touching evil is to be corrupted by it. Real dialogue involves listening; and listening, after all, is to allow something in.

16. It is well worth reading McConnell's example of this process (1995: 85–89).

17. Peter Coleman (2004) gives a masterly account of five paradigms for understanding intractable conflict. Unfortunately, parties at this stage will have difficulty in perceiving more than the *realpolitik* one.

18. See, for example, Lederach's account of music and dance in Northern Ireland (Lederach 2005: 152–154); Kolirin's film *The Band's Visit* (2007).

19. The idea of relationality as basic, deriving from the concept of dependent origination in Buddhism is hard for those of us raised in a different philosophical tradition. A homely example may help: the concept of intellectual property rights is well established in most legal systems. It assumes that an author, for example, owns the ideas and expressions in her work, having independently originated them. But most authors who reflect on this know it to be nonsense. There have been life-long influences, some conscious, others not, from parents, siblings, friends, enemies, teachers, fellow-students, books, art, dreams . . . the list is endless. All of us have stood on the shoulders of giants, a few have tried to cut the giants down to size . . . but when it comes to royalties, of course, we are all believers in intellectual property rights.

20. A similar point was made by the Buddha himself during the escalating conflict among the Kosambi monks. In John McConnell's account, the Buddha asked the monks to stop quarrelling, but they told him to leave them to sort out the matter themselves. "The Buddha left the temple, but before doing so gave the following teaching which is as true to situations of conflict now as it was then: When many voices shout at once, there is none thinks himself a fool; the Sangha [the community] being split none thinks I too took part, I helped in this" (McConnell 1995: 209).

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