JOINING WITH ALL MEMBERS OF A FAMILY SYSTEM: THE RHETORIC OF ANTILOGIC IN FAMILY THERAPY DIALOGUE*

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ABSTRACT: Family therapists face a significant rhetorical challenge in working with families that disagree about the problematic life-situation which brought them to therapy. Therapists must find a way to join with disagreeing family members and then find a way to engage in a therapeutically useful conversation with them. Thus, they must deal resourcefully with contradictions. This article explores the ways that the Sophistic rhetorical concept of antilogic may be employed in helping therapists join and then engage in a therapeutically useful conversation with families who hold contradictory views concerning the problem that brought them to therapy.

KEY WORDS: family therapy; communication; rhetoric; antilogic.

Although little attention has been focused on the rhetorical aspects of family therapy, recently several writers have specifically named and addressed rhetorical concepts that are employed in family therapy dialogue. Bertram (1993) focuses on the enthymeme as a useful rhetorical process in family therapy dialogue. Bertram, Hale, and Frusha (1993) discuss the usage of several rhetorical devices such as syncrisis and the parastasis catalogue in family therapy conversations and also mention how differing views of persuasive intention-

ality will shape the ways that therapists situate themselves rhetorically with families. Chenail (Rambo, Heath, & Chenail, 1993) specifically mentions four types of rhetorical devices, without labeling them as rhetorical. The fact that the rhetorical aspects of family therapy dialogue have not been widely explored and discussed is puzzling for two reasons: First, the field has embraced metaphors of communication, language, and narrative which all seem implicitly to invite an exploration of the rhetorical aspects of family therapy conversations, and, second, family therapists seemingly face a more difficult rhetorical task than do politicians, editorial writers, and others that are more traditionally identified with rhetorical activity. For example, politicians only interested in swaying the majority to win an election direct a message calculated to appeal to majority opinion. Editorial writers interested in persuading the reader that their views are the "correct" ones are not interested in talking about the issues in a way that will receive acceptance by all readers, regardless of their political stance on the issues.

Systemic family therapists, on the other hand, do not approach therapy from the standpoint that they have a correct view of the family's problem that they are going to persuade the family members to believe. They also face the task of not just trying to hear the privileged story, but of hearing the stories of each participant in the session. Each family member's story is considered important and a concerted effort is made to join with each family member.

Sometimes, hearing multiple perspectives concerning the problematic life-situation that brought a family to therapy can provide a number of challenges which are not present in the more traditional rhetorical situations mentioned above. For example, how does a therapist talk to one family member about that family member's particular view of the problem without simultaneously alienating another family member? How does a family therapist find a language for talking about the problematic life-situation in a way that addresses the concerns of all? Once having joined, how is a family therapist able to enter a therapeutic discussion with the family members without alienating some? All of these are rhetorical issues surrounding the family therapy joining process that have heretofore not been addressed from a rhetorical perspective. Further, these questions do not just address the process of joining, but also how therapists use language as a tool to bring about change.

In this article the ancient rhetorical concept known as antilogic is offered as a process description of the rhetorical aspects of joining and

dialoguing with family members who hold differing views of the problematic life-situation. It is this author's belief that the resourceful use of antilogic is a beginning point in answering the three questions given above. In order to introduce the rhetorical concept of antilogic, an overview will be presented of antilogic's usage in classical sophistic Greek rhetoric. Then, the author will demonstrate its usage in family therapy dialogue by offering several clinical exemplars of how this concept is resourcefully used in a consultation conducted by the earlier Milan team.

SITUATING ANTILOGIC IN A RHETORICAL CONTEXT

Antilogic is a term which has its origins in the rhetorical tradition of the ancient Sophists, who lived in fifth century BCE (Before the Contemporary Era) Greece. The Sophists' work predates that of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle and is epistemologically more akin to the positions taken by systemic family therapists. Just as many in the family therapy field have embraced ideas of multiple realities, uncertainty, radical constructivism, or social constructionism, and so on, the ancient Sophists looked at "truth" through a relativistic epistemological lens. Sophistic teachers taught their students to develop multiple ways of presenting ideas, for arguing the virtue of policies, and so forth.

In order to acquaint the reader with the historical context that surrounded the emergence of the Sophists, the following quotation from Kennedy (1991) offers a summary of the significant rhetorical events in fifth century BCE Athens:

> The study of rhetoric began in Greece in the fifth century BC Democratic government was emerging in Athens and some other cities, based on the assumptions that all citizens had an equal right and duty to participate in their own government. To do so effectively, they needed to be able to speak in public. Decisions on public policy under the democracies were made in regularly held assemblies composed of adult male citizens; and, as in New England town meetings, anyone who wished could speak. Not surprisingly, however, the leadership role in debate was played by a small number of ambitious individuals called rhetores, who sought to channel the course of events in a direction that they thought was best for the city or themselves. There were no professional law-

yers in Greece; if people wished to seek redress in the courts
for some wrong done them-and the Greeks were very fond of
going to law-or if people were summoned to court as defen-
dants, they were expected to speak on their own behalf.
There were other occasions for public address in connection
with public holidays or funerals, as well as more informal
discussions at symposia or private meetings (p. vii).

Undoubtedly, by now some readers are questioning the introduc-
tion of sophistic concepts into the field. Admittedly, the dominant
story concerning the Sophists is that they developed a superficial
movement more interested in using language for trickery and ques-
tionable arguments than engaging in matters of substance. This view
of the Sophists is portrayed in Plato's dialogues in the places that
Socrates confounds various Sophists through his rigorous question-
ing. It seems that this common understanding occurred because the
Sophists have long been viewed through their treatment in Plato and
Aristotle.

Recently, this view of the Sophists has been questioned. Jarrett
(1991), McComskey (1993), and Schiappa (1991) all call for what Mc-
Comskey describes as: "abandoning Platonic and Aristotelian termi-
nistic screens and approaching the sophists [sic] on their own terms"
(McComskey, 1993, p. 86). In approaching the Sophists on their own
terms, one begins to see that they embraced contradictory arguments
simultaneously. The Sophist named Protagoras' famous dictum, "man
is the measure of all things" as representative of their thinking. It
seems that the Sophists were saying that "reality" exists in the eye of
the beholder. It is a matter of opinion which can be shaped rhetori-
cally. It is an invitation to embrace contradictory logoi (arguments)
simultaneously. As Consigny (1993) notes, the Sophists rejected the
idea that "reality" can serve as a foundation for any logos (argument)
because it is within logos that people fabricate their conception of
reality.

It is not surprising that the Sophists are receiving a fresh read-
ing, given that in postmodernity the binary logic of Plato and Aris-
totle is called into question. The world of Plato and Aristotle was a
world that embraced certainty. It was a world in which Truth was
readily accessed through the rigorous methods of dialectical question-
ing.

Conversely, the world of the Sophists was much like the world of
the postmodernists. It was a world that was comfortable with allow-

ing contradictions to stand side-by-side. Sophistic thought embraced uncertainty and appreciated the multiple arguments that could equally make sense for advocating opposing policy decisions, legal decisions, and so forth. They truly appreciated the multiple ways of viewing any situation and were skilled in developing well crafted arguments that could address any side of an issue.

Since the rhetoric of the Sophists embraces uncertainty, and is comfortable with allowing multiple contradictory perspectives to co-exist without forcing a choice of one perspective as the true or correct one, it is a rhetorical theory that is very useful for addressing the multiple voices that are heard in a family therapy session. Family therapists sometimes find that there are as many initial problem definitions and descriptions of the problem as there are people participating in the session. Thus, a rhetorical stance of certainty, such as Plato's and Aristotle's, would only alienate those participants who view the problematic life-situation differently than the perspective chosen by the therapist. Consequently, a rhetoric of certainty would mean that therapists would become judges and once having chosen one side as the correct side, would loose the credibility and the interest of those whose positions were deemed incorrect. Conversely, a rhetoric of uncertainty and multiple perspectives, like the Sophists, allows the therapist to find ways of talking about the problematic life-situation to each family member without taking sides. It is a rhetorical theory that looks for ways to connect the multiple perspectives, while seeking to find means of talking about the problem in a manner that allows the perspectives of all to somehow be addressed.

The Sophists offer antilogic as a means for therapists to engage in a conversation with family members who hold vastly different views on the problematic life-situation, without taking sides or alienating some family members. Antilogic was a major teaching of the Sophists (Enos, 1976; Guthrie, 1971; Kerferd, 1981; Untersteiner, 1954). The concept of antilogic must be viewed through the Sophists' idea of logoi, which means an argument, or proposition. Basically, the Sophists recognized that conflicting arguments existed for virtually every subject. Protagoras argued that for every logos (argument) there was an equally valued opposite argument and that man was the measure of these (Kerferd, 1981).

Antilogic and dissoi logoi, which means double argument or two-fold argument, are interchangeable terms in the writings of the Sophists. In fact, there is a handbook on rhetoric, published by an unnamed Sophist, entitled *The Dissoi Logoi*. Guthrie's (1971) book

contains the extant fragment of this ancient writing, which appears to be a means of instructing students in how to present arguments that address multiple sides of an issue.

Kerferd (1981) maintains that antilogic is the cornerstone of sophistic rhetoric, a view embraced in the present study. It seems that most of the key points of sophistic thought are linked to their views concerning antilogic. This emphasis upon contradictory arguments existing side-by-side points to the sophistic epistemology and theory of language. The Sophists did not see reality as existing outside of language. Through the usage of language they could point to the possibilities that existed. For them, language was not an exact representation of an objective reality. Through the development of contradictory logoi (arguments), the Sophists were able to argue more than one side of any situation. Thus, the Sophists were equipped to produce arguments which would be timely for the present audience, would be appropriate for the situation, and would expose a world of possibilities.

It seems that family therapists, in order initially to join with their clients and then engage in a meaningful therapeutic conversation with them, must also be able to discuss more than one side of any situation, be able to produce stories which are timely for the family they are presently working with and are appropriate for the current situation the family is facing. Certainly, family therapists must engage in the conversation in a way that exposes the family to a world of possibilities.

CLINICAL EXEMPLARS OF THE USAGE OF ANTILOGIC IN FAMILY THERAPY SESSIONS

As mentioned earlier, antilogic is offered here as a description of the process of joining and then carrying on a conversation with family members who hold differing perspectives on the problematic life-situation which brought them to therapy. It appears that constructivist family therapists have been employing antilogic but have not labeled it as such. Through naming this process and then studying its rhetorical implementation in family therapy sessions, therapists are able to explore the numerous ways that antilogical processes are resourcefully conducted in family therapy sessions.

The exemplars are taken from the work of two members of the former Milan team. Although the Milan team is no longer together,

the case they named The Family With A Secret (Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman, & Penn, 1987) demonstrates many key elements of their work such as hypothesizing, circular questioning, and neutrality. It also demonstrates how Boscolo skillfully used antilogic throughout the session as a means of joining with the family and then carrying on a therapeutically useful conversation with the family members.

The case is interesting in that there is a family secret which the team decides not to address directly. Throughout the session Boscolo uses antilogic to talk with the family members about the problematic life-situation which brought them to therapy. This is done from the beginning of the case. The first question that Boscolo asks produces the father's initial view of the problematic life situation. The following excerpts are taken from the initial part of the session. Much of the dialogue has been omitted so as to highlight the usage of antilogic. The interested reader is encouraged to read the entire transcript so as to see the great amount of dialogue that has been edited out of the excerpts in this article.

Boscolo: . . . . .I would like to start by asking, what is the problem now?
Father: Everyone seems to want to fight with everyone else. . . . .
Boscolo: Do you agree with your husband?
Mother: No. There is a great deal of problems in our family. Some is the lack of communications, problems with the children, problems communicating, problems trying to get through to each other.
Boscolo: Between which of you is there a lack of communication?
Mother: There's no communication between me and my husband. Can't seem to talk to each other or try to understand each other, or you know, it's really. . . .
Boscolo: How is the communication with your daughters?
Mother: Well, lately there is no communication.
(Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman, & Penn, 1987, pp. 108–111).

In the above example it is easy to see that the father and mother have different definitions of the problem. The father says it is fighting, while the mother says that it is communication. Before hearing from the children, there are already two competing versions of the problem.

In order for Boscolo to effectively employ antilogic, he must find a way to dialogue with the family while tentatively holding the compet-

ing views. If he can do this, he will have joined with them and will be able to carry on a therapeutically useful conversation in which both parents will "feel heard." It is interesting that in the portion of the transcript that immediately follows the above excerpt, Boscolo questions the mother as to the communication between the daughters and the communication between the parents. Finally, as Boscolo addresses Dori (one of the daughters) he summarizes all that has been said in an antilogical manner which enables the daughters to either further elaborate on one, or both, of the arguments, or to offer new explanations as to what the problem is:

Boscolo: Your father thinks that there is a problem of communication and everyone fights with everyone else. Your mother sees the problem as a lack of communication between her and her husband. Let's start with you, Dori: What problem do you see in the family, now? [No answer.] Diane, what problem do you see? Do you agree with your father and mother?

Diane: I guess so. There is too much fighting.

Boscolo: Too much fighting between who? [No answer.] Dori?

Dori: There is too much fighting between Mom and Dad and Diane and me.

Boscolo: Diane and you. How about Lisa? [No answer.]

(Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman, & Penn, 1987, p. 117.)

It is significant though to note how Boscolo successfully used antilogic in the above exchange. He describes the father's view of the problem as being one of communication and fighting. Dad never described the situation as communication, Mom did. This was the way in which Boscolo was able to connect the contradictory problem definitions that were offered by Dad and Mom. When Diane spoke, she identified the problem as too much fighting, but refused to elaborate. Dori then offered an expanded explanation that the fighting was between Dad and Mom and Diane and her, but she would not comment on Lisa.

In the commentary between Hoffman, Penn, Boscolo, and Penn, Boscolo described himself as being stuck at the end of the above exchange. He and Cecchin described the stuckness as being related to the daughters' unwillingness to talk. Boscolo first addressed the unwillingness to talk by asking questions around how the problem had been getting worse in the last year. Then, after a break to confer with Cecchin, Boscolo explored the seeming unwillingness of the daughters' to participate in therapy. This lead into another usage of anti-

logic which seemed to help set the tone for a change in the problem
definition which allowed significant movement in the session:

Boscolo: Let me ask the question. You were saying that since a year
ago things were getting worse, especially the lack of commu-
nication with your husband, fights, and so on. And six months
ago Diane started also to fight with her father. Do you think
that this contributes to the fights between you and your hus-
band? If Diane would get along with her father better, would
you have more communication with your husband?

Mother: No not really. The problem isn't the communication between
Diane and her father. I think it's that he favored her and
babied her all her life. She could do no wrong. And this was
extremely hostile, in my mind. Why should one child be sin-
gled out and favored when he has two others? And Lisa was
the exact opposite. She was picked on her whole life. . . .

(Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman, & Penn, 1987, p. 122).

Boscolo's usage of antilogic in his questions to the mother demon-
strate how antilogic can be used while simultaneously embracing
more than just two ideas. Since circular causality is a key idea in the
Milan team's work, it is not surprising that Boscolo is able to converse
simultaneously about numerous ideas in his discussion with Mom.
Notice that in his summary statement, leading up to his two ques-
tions, Boscolo embraced the ideas concerning timing that had been
prevalent in the session. Boscolo noted that things have gotten worse
in the last year and that in the last six months Diane and Dad were
fighting. Boscolo also in the summary statement simultaneously ad-
dressed Dad's explanation that fighting was the problem and Mom's
explanation that communication was the problem. Then, he asked
Mom two questions that linked fighting and communication. Thus,
every key idea that had been advanced in the session was mentioned
by Boscolo.

With the smorgasbord of ideas linked and laid out in front of her,
Mom rejected them all and introduced a new idea that the problem
was not communication but that Dad had always favored Diane. This
new idea took the session in a different direction that resulted in
therapeutically useful movement.

The significant aspect of this to the present discussion of anti-
logic is that every participant's ideas had been heard and incorpo-
rated into the session by the therapist. Thus, when this new idea was
presented, the therapist could move in a new direction with the fam-

ily members knowing that their individual views had been heard and addressed by the therapist.

DISCUSSION

Although the exemplars were taken from the Milan team's work, the use of antilogic is applicable in any model that conjointly interviews families. Joining with people who differ, and then engaging in a conversation with the differing people, is indeed a difficult process. Successful conjoint family therapy seems to be conducted by therapists who are able to use the differences between people as a therapeutic resource. When therapists are unable to find a way to join and then carry on a conversation with all participants, the results are often less than satisfying.

In the exemplars presented above, Boscolo skillfully modeled the usage of antilogic in a family therapy session. In his summary statements, he consistently found a way to link the key ideas that were presented by the participants. He also asked questions that linked the key idea of one participant to those of another. It appears that all family members had a chance to present their views and Boscolo was able to simultaneously embrace those views, while looking for another way to talk about the life-situation that the family brought to therapy.

Hopefully, this article has invited readers to explore ways that antilogical processes can be resourcefully used in working with families. Admittedly, this is just an introduction to the sophistic concept of antilogic and further inquiry is necessary to more fully explore the utilitarian ways that these concepts may apply to therapy. Beyond this, the field seems to have largely ignored the rhetorical aspects of family therapy dialogue which has resulted in a large gap in the literature. Thus, much more research needs to be conducted into the rhetorical aspects of family therapy dialogue. In conducting future research, the writer suggests grounding it in the rhetorical theory of the ancient Sophists, since they share a similar epistemology with many present day family therapists.

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