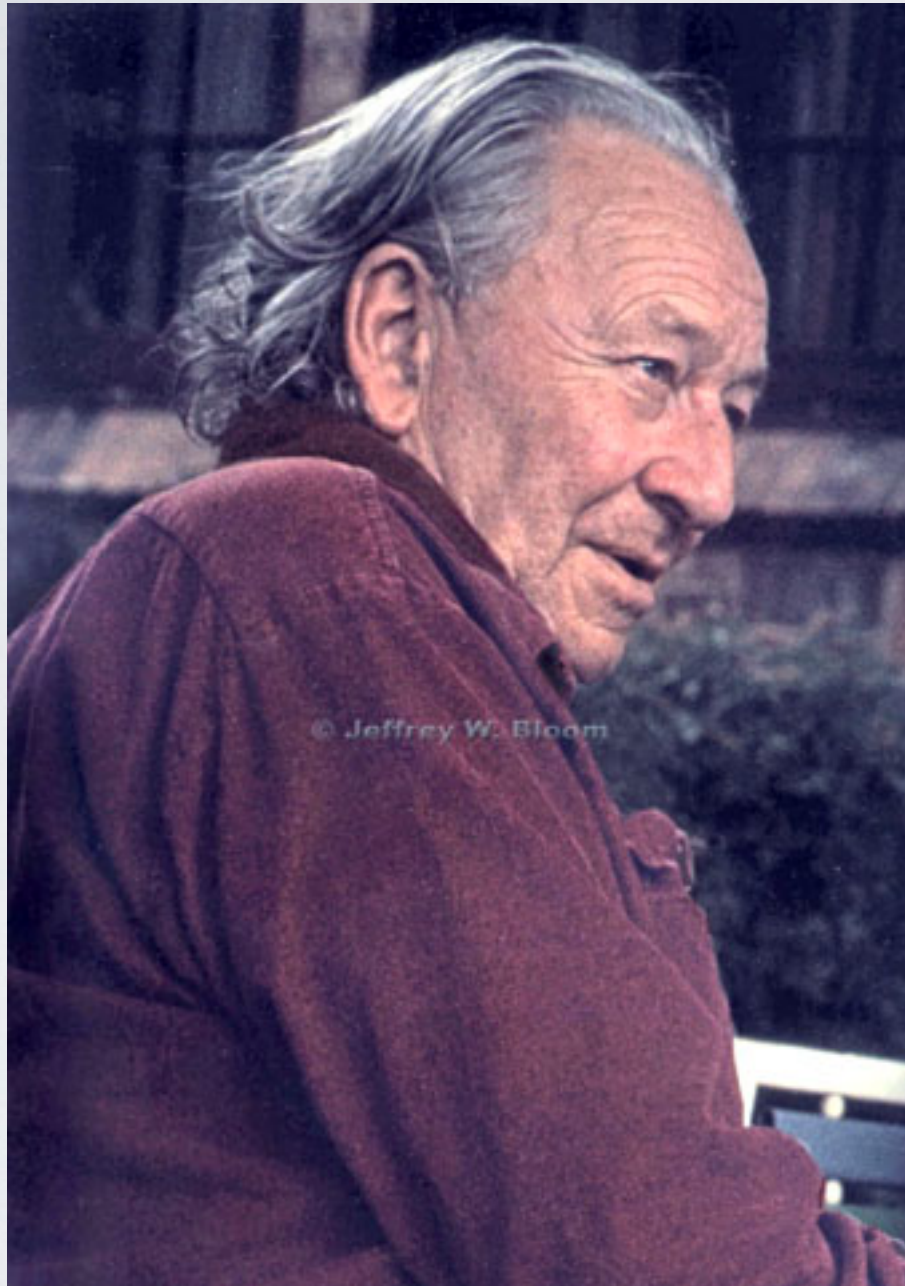


# Paradoxes And Double-Binds

Gary S. Metcalf, PhD

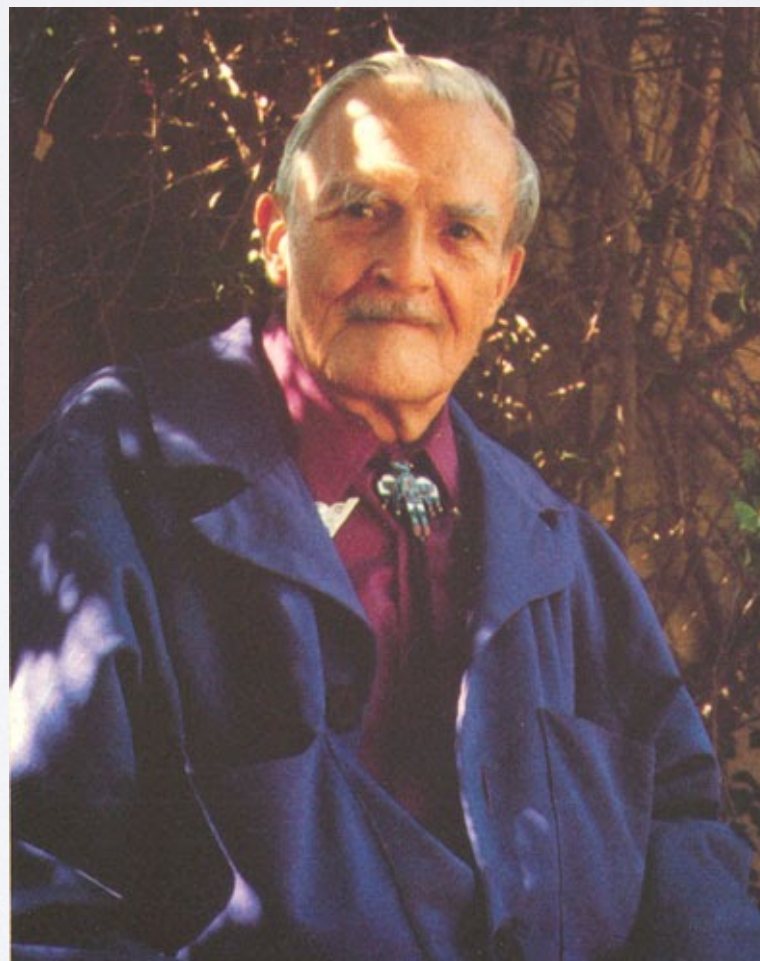




Gregory Bateson



Jay Haley



Milton Erickson



# Gregory Bateson

- Anthropologist: New Guinea and Bali (with Margaret Mead)
  - Studied trance states in Bali (see *Trance and Dance in Bali*, filmed around 1937-1939)
- Macy Conferences on cybernetics (1942)
- VA Hospital in Palo Alto (1949-1962)
- Saybrook University (late 1970s)

# Palo Alto

- Bateson given grant to study “the role of the Paradoxes of Abstraction in Communication”
- Jay Haley - research assistant with Bateson
- Milton Erickson - hypnotherapist Bateson had consulted about trance states in Bali
- Haley, J. (1973) “Uncommon Therapy: The psychiatric techniques of Milton H. Erickson”



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Group dynamics

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Shelters

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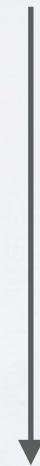
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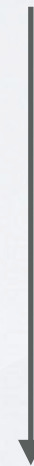
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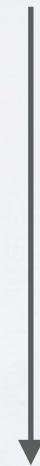
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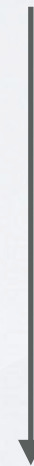
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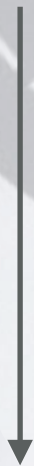


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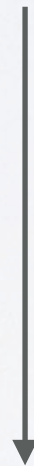
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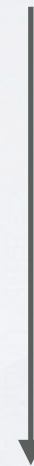
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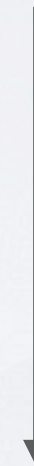
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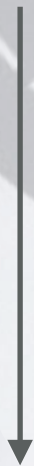
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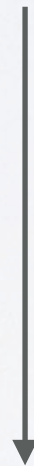
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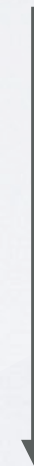
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“The hypothesis depends upon the idea that this structured context also occurs in a wider context - a metacontext, if you will - and that this sequence of contexts is an open, and conceivably infinite, series.”

– “Minimal Requirements for a Theory of Schizophrenia,” in “Steps to an Ecology of Mind” (Bateson, 1972, p. 245)



“The organism is then faced with the dilemma either of being wrong in the primary context or of being right for the wrong reasons or in wrong way.

This is the so-called double bind. We are investigating the hypothesis that schizophrenic communication is learned and becomes habitual as a result of continual trauma of this kind.”

– Bateson, 1972, p. 245

“There was only one catch and that was **Catch-22**, which specified that a concern for one's safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he were sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to, but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to.”

— Joseph Heller, “Catch-22” 1961, Chapter 5, p. 56



“In human relations another sort of complexity may be generated, e.g. messages may be emitted forbidding the subject to make the meta connection. An alcoholic parent may punish a child for showing that he knows that he should look out for storms whenever the parent gets the bottle out of the cupboard.”

– Bateson, 1972, p. 248

“The phenomenon of hitting bottom is complexly related to the experience of double bind... ‘*the obsession of the mind*’ that compels us to drink and ‘*the allergy of the body*’ that condemns us to go mad or die.’”

From Dr. William Silkworth, physician to Bill W., co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous

– Bateson, 1972, p. 331



“Anybody watching the transactions which occur between the members of a family containing an identified schizophrenic will perceive immediately that the symptomatic behavior of the identified patient fits with this environment and, indeed, promotes in the other members those characteristics which evoke the schizophrenic behavior.”

– Bateson, 1972, p. 260

“The whole is always in a metarelationship with its parts.”

– Bateson, 1972, p. 267



Jay Haley & Milton Erickson

“The hypnotist *directs* another person to *spontaneously* change his behavior. Since a person cannot respond spontaneously if he is following a directive, the hypnotic approach is a paradox. Two levels of message are simultaneously being communicated by the hypnotist. He is saying ‘**Do as I say**,’ and within that framework he is saying ‘**Don’t do as I say, behave spontaneously**.’ The way the subject adapts to such a conflicting set of directives is to undergo a change and behave in a way described as trance behavior.”

– Haley, 1973, p. 21



“As the word ‘hypnosis’ is used here, it does not apply to a ritual but to a type of communication between people. Milton Erickson has explored an almost infinite variety of ways of inducing hypnotic trance.”

– Haley, 1973, p. 20.

“At the most general level, the goal of a hypnotist is to change the behavior, sensory response, and consciousness of another person. A subsidiary goal is to extend that person’s range of experience: to provide him new ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Obviously, these are also the goals of therapy.”

– Haley, 1973, p. 21



# The Power Of Paradox

**I can't**

**I must**



System  
(Individual)

**I can't**

**I must**

System  
(Individual)

**I can't**

Environment

**I must**



System  
(Individual)

**I can't**

Autonomy  
(Agency)

Environment

**I must**

System  
(Individual)

**I can't**

Autonomy  
(Agency)

Environment

**I must**

Heteronomy



**I must**

**I can't**

System  
(Individual)

**I must**

**I can't**



System  
(Individual)

**I must**

Environment

**I can't**

System  
(Individual)

**I must**

Autonomy  
(Agency)

Environment

**I can't**



System  
(Individual)

**I must**

Autonomy  
(Agency)

Environment

**I can't**

Heteronomy

System  
(Individual)

Environment

**I must**

**I can't**

Autonomy  
(Agency)

Heteronomy

Homonomy



System  
(Individual)

Environment

**I can't**

Autonomy  
(Agency)

Heteronomy

Homonomy

System  
(Individual)

Environment

Autonomy  
(Agency)

Heteronomy

Homonomy



System  
(Individual)

Environment

**I can choose**

Autonomy  
(Agency)

Heteronomy

Homonomy

Why do double-binds and paradoxes work?