

"THE UNPRIVATE SELF"¹

Southern California
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by

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This paper is a philosophical examination of the relationships between men, whether true understanding and sharing of another's burdens is possible or even essential to being a man, and whether or not the self is truly a private and differentiated entity.

It is disturbing to see isolation of the individual developing as a way of life in western civilization. This phenomenon has roots in protestantism, the doctrine of individual gain, and the atomistic emphasis on the single individual. A student recently asked, "If all individual beings are unique, how can we communicate?"

Psychoanalysis shows that the real self is a hidden one, and Freud exposed the private inner-life to the light of day. Insight is really more a bringing into the open of things, rather than strictly a looking within. Psychoanalysis is based on uncovering and weaving the uncovered material into the real world. We bring private things into the open, but this is only done through communication with another person, rather than in isolation.

Other philosophies have agreed that there was a need for an interpreter or confessor as an assist in obtaining self-knowledge. This includes Catholicism, Judaism and Buddhism.

1. Summary of a paper presented at the Milton Lester Memorial Meeting of the Southern California Psychoanalytic Society, February 15, 1963.

Self-consciousness comes through communication with others.

Psychoanalysis is related to philosophy and ancient wisdom. In art, the artist probes the inner-life, which may be disturbing but is unique and leads to an encounter between the onlooker and the artist's inner-life. Ideally, a sense of empathy or mutuality of experience develops where the unique inner-world of the artist becomes now an unprivate and shared experience.

In the relationship between therapist and patient, the therapist shares empathically, in a controlled way, the feelings and experiences of the patient, and the patient shares the ego and the super-ego of the analyst. The psychic boundaries are constantly shifting, merging and re-establishing themselves.

The self can merge with other selves and is the key to acceptance and love. Acceptance is not necessarily approval or even liking the other person. It is, rather, to be open to the sharing of the experiences of the other. Thus, the therapist takes the patient into himself in a limited way and tastes the quality of the patient's experience. He then judges the patient's experience with his own ego. Jesus Christ could accept but not necessarily approve. It is a relationship sometimes called "dispassionate compassion." By moral love, in a religious sense, is meant not necessarily fondness or romantic love, but again, the ability to accept and empathize. We are all brothers under the psychic skin.

The self is not intrinsically private or cut off. Linguistic analysis shows that there is no concept of the idea of the self without a sense of others. Thus, the meanings of words like "my" and "mine" are as nothing without a reference to others. There cannot be a self or self-awareness, strictly speaking, in isolation. The analyst must be able to discriminate between himself and the patient's self. The patient begins to see others realistically; for instance, the analyst, as the transference is resolved. In this way, he learns to know himself realistically.

What are the pre-conditions for any sense of self to arise? Does mutuality of experience come first, or does human existence occur before there is any concept of any identifiable self? Is there an amorphous totality of human experience without differentiation into separate selves?

The ego, it now appears, has a constitutional core like that postulated for the id and is not limited purely to a post-natal development. Freud postulated the presence of an archaic heritage in the unconscious, which caused considerable controversy, but now there seems to be more evidence for such a psychic entity. There is surprisingly complex organized behavior which seems inborn in animals, like an archaic memory.

Work with subliminal perception has shown that many things can be perceived without conscious knowledge of the perception, indicating there is an incredible amount of material perceived by the human being. Our awareness of other persons

and things is very rich in content and does occur prior to and is essential to the emergence of individual selves. Thus, witness precedes self.

In view of this, how about the sense of privacy which adult humans seem to feel? The self is private in two senses; one psychopathological, and the other, quite different. In situations where there has been an inability to surrender an attachment to fantasy figures from childhood and to deal with real people, there may be isolation. Thus, there is a preoccupation with a residue of a once-real child's world, which now leads to repeated stereotyped maneuvers and a blindness to the real world of the present.

There is also a privacy in a loneliness which comes with maturity and dealing with the public, living present-day reality, which does not allow for stereotyped repetition. Mature adults thus can distinguish their own thoughts from those of others and have given up the dependence on the fantasied omnipotent helper. We live among our fellows, but each alone, living his own life. There are times of crises where another human being is needed to stand beside us, but to continue to let us be ourselves. In this sense, man is the analyst and the physician for man.

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