

The Self, Perception of Oneself and Influence

By Benjamin Wagener, on Saturday March 1st, 2014.

There may be perhaps nothing more subtle in psychology than the Self. It is something that entirely founds the psychology of a person and that defines its personality. The Self enters in the definition of what we consider as being the psychological part of what constitutes ourselves and its complex functioning dictates deeply our behaviors. I integrate in the definition of the Self not only the conscious part of the personality but also all that is involved in what constitutes our psychological self and all the subconscious work that is behind because it is importantly involved in its structure and functioning. As such this is something very big from a psychological point of view, something enormous from an abstract point of view and something very different but anyway very big in each person taken on its own. Therefore I won't make any clear study of this question here which would require an intensive and extended work but I will discuss general concepts and ideas postponing such possible work for later. First I will state some general ideas about the self then I will discuss more medical issues.

What enters in the constitution of the Self? It seems first that there is interdependence between biological constructions that make the Mind and the influence of the exterior environment and of the relationships that naturally define a unique Self as a unique construction of the brain through the Mind. It seems that this uniqueness is very important and defines a person from a psychological point of view as well as the biology defines he/she from a physical point of view. This duality between the Mind and the Biology is by itself something especially important to consider with respect to the Human Being because this dual structure and its inter-relationship are perhaps the main aspect of our functioning. It is not so easy and perhaps very difficult to see precisely the role of consciousness in the constitution of the Self and in the subsequent psychological functioning. Nevertheless consciousness appears also as an open door to reality that for sure plays an important role.

The uniqueness above and the psychological consistency of its structure seem to be some of the main aspects of a sane psychology because beyond the specificities of a person and the absurd "normality", it means that the Mind works coherently whereas disturbances in the constitution of the Self or inner psychological conflicts or inadequacies may be the source of various psychological troubles.

The Self may be seen in two different ways depending on if we consider the self for oneself or the self from an outside point of view.

For oneself it seems to be closely linked to consciousness. More precisely it seems quite obviously that we have a consciousness of what we are psychologically. What we like or dislike, what we love or not, what we hate or not, etc..., may then be some of its elementary characteristics. On the other hand what one is really for his/herself is something important and self esteem is something that may influence ones mood. The way we place oneself with respect to another and the way another perceive or appreciate ourselves is something that is more or less the source of inner rewards whereas our behavior with respect to another and its consequences are important data for the self esteem. Such esteem seems to be something extremely important for a person and may also be seen as an important motor and motivation for our behaviors. We are not so realistic in the facts; we mainly react with respects to the rewards we may get from situations and each others. This question of "value" and the corresponding continuous estimates we do enter in a normal functioning of the Self.

Personality then plays an important role in the interpersonal relationship we have with respect to each other selves. It is a complex construction that makes the Self expressed and present to the others. This evolves progressively from childhood and structures itself in a way to be both rewarding and satisfying. This personality is integrally environment-dependant and normally evolves so that to be satisfying both for the person and for its environment.

The Self and Personality seen from the inside should then normally structure so that to satisfy oneself whereas seen from an outside point of view the Self and the Personality of someone else should satisfy us and may bring us something in order to appreciate the person. This duality plays an important role in the way we take our relative places in the Society.

The dialogue Self-to-Self is something that may look complex nevertheless we should notice that this dialogue is both natural and necessary in the constitution and functioning of ourselves. We need this dialogue to takes place in order for our Selves to find the corresponding alter-part that cannot be dissociate from them.

What is very clear is then that we have both an inner Self and an inner perception and conceptualization of our Self that depend a lot on the exchange with others. The Other has mutually its own Self, its own perception of itself and its own perception of one Self that interact and interfere with our owns. In this process one interfere with the other Self and its own perception as well as it interfere with ones. This interference makes the Self and its inner perception evolve dynamically.

The question of how this is influencing between each other is interesting. We all have a lot of experiences with the others, either good or bad, that have been especially

influencing. Some influences may be positive, constructive, one-sided and mutual other may be more destructive. Some person may have a strong constitution and may be more likely to influence the others other may be more likely to be influenced by the others. This is also something quite normal in the Society and people find a way to satisfy themselves either by being leaders whereas other are more satisfied by being lead. This mutual influence is important and can be very deep. Somehow the Self is structured as being both completely depending of the others and as being completely personal and independent.

From a medical point of view this is something very interesting because it may be the proper place where psychology in a large sense takes place. Large classes of mental diseases are specified as been "disorder of the self" or "personality disorder" the nuance between those being very vague. They are related to troubles with social adaptation and with the relationship with the Other, for a clearer view, the DSM, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, offers a broad view. Normally, for such a diagnose, a clear pattern should appear and be recurrent that for the validation of the diagnose should cause a serious problem for the person itself. The lack of social adaptation and relationships is therefore not at all sufficient. In some cases the disorder can be severe and can cause serious problems to the person and to the society which is a situation that can be encountered in criminal behaviors.

It is therefore interesting to look for the reasons of such disorders and for which are the real elements that enter in their appearance. Because of the essential role that plays the self and the personality in our psychology it is obvious that some trouble can take place in this context. The reasons for a person to have difficulties to adapt to its social environment and to have difficulties in relationships may be very diverse but we can see perhaps a common frame: for some reason the person has an inappropriate perception of the Other. Very often we can observe by example that in a sector of the population that is especially depreciated some adverse and sometimes violent reactions appear. As such it has quite almost nothing to do with a real disorder because it is a cultural mechanism but we can see in it a common reason for antisocial behaviors. There is anyway something that is almost always present in such disorder it is that the adaptation difficulties are recurrent, lasting for a long period of time and expressing a real dysfunction in the conception of oneself and in the relation to others. This is a difficult question in Psychiatry because there is no obvious symptom appearing it is more a question of global behavior and personality traits that for many of them may look more or less as normal.

Suspicious thinking by example is something more or less common, we are all concern about the other and about the risk they may represent for each of us but in some cases it can become a symptom of a paranoid personality disorder. On the other hand satisfying our self esteem is also something very normal but that can become a recurring pattern in a narcissistic personality disorder or the look for satisfaction through others is also something normal to some extent but that can become symptomatic histrionic or dependant

personality disorder. On the other line the borderline type personality disorder is marked by instability and obsessive-compulsive type is marked by perfectionism and control. All those aspects are therefore traits of a normal personality to some extent but that are exaggerated and become symptomatic in such disorder. For such reasons it also appears that personality disorders may be more common in the population and this is supported by the fact that the Self and Personality plays such a subtle and essential role in Psychology.

From a health care point of view such disorder may appear both less acute and more delicate than other disorder. Less acute because in many cases the disorder doesn't affect the person consciousness or everyday life too deeply and more delicate because there is no medication that could do something for it and because the disorder is often deeply inscribed in the patient personality which make a therapy difficult to manage. The disorder moreover directly affects the therapy and the therapist therefore it is difficult in such a context to have a positive influence on the symptoms.

Nevertheless a global therapeutic scheme in which the therapist would point out the various sides of the patient's personality and then would make the patient aware of those specificities, of how it influences its social behaviors and relations, would then make the patient able both to realize it for him/herself and then to adapt it. It may not be so easy but this is something many therapists should be able to do.