

CHAPTER II

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF SELF

--An Investigatory Project--

Part I: Theoretic Overview

The experience of emotions and of the self is incredibly idiosyncratic. Few people will even describe the same emotion alike. The types of experience each might include in a self description would also differ widely. Last, the self that people disclose may bear little resemblance to the self they experience. In this chapter I will present a phenomenology of self that derives from my own and my clients' analyses. Since self is so personal and variable, I do not presume to talk for everyone. I will not try to present a universal self that a hypothetical person might experience. What I do want to show is that there is a way to conceive of, observe and experience the self, feelings and others that may be very different from the way they are normally experienced, and that close observation may reveal universal aspects of that experience, if not a universal self.

As stated in the introduction, my orientation is both that of a psychotherapist and of a Zen Buddhist meditation teacher. This combination of backgrounds results in a unique perspective on common experience such as feelings or body sensations. That experience and training has led me to investigate the both the structures of the personal self and the attributes of consciousness that underlie the self. Using the experiential "microanalytic" techniques of Buddhism I've investigated the "form" of "I-ness," and also the representational elements of self which are the objects of psychoanalytic research. While self-experience is idiosyncratic, I believe there is enough universality in aspects of that experience that a close investigation of one

person's experience will be understandable to another, especially if the self is comprised of universal dualistic states of consciousness.

The result of this approach is a different perspective on what constitutes self structure, self experience and the objects of self. I believe this research has just started and that experienced meditators of the future can expand this work to create a real science of subjectivity by discovering new microcomponents and linkages within our shared self experience. It is a belief of the East that the true nature of the self or any phenomenon is revealed only by getting very close to it. While I have my reservations about the "truths" inferred from observations arising in the altered consciousness states of deep meditation, I have no doubt that we must explore these "microanalytic" observations and determine their "real" meaning, even if that meaning turns out to be wish-fulfilling fantasy.

My contribution to this "phenomenological project" has been to take observational techniques used for thousands of years to investigate self and non-self experience, but used with the intent of proving that the "real" nature of the self we believe we have is illusory. This belief prejudiced the Eastern introspective projects. Emptiness or Atman (the Self as God)--both penultimate religious states--were the proper end of pursuing our self nature, not psychodynamic understanding. I simply have taken "microanalysis" into the realm of the personal self and used it to investigate the objects found there.

The result is a client centered introspection leading to a client centered language of subjective experience. In psychoanalysis, a patient may spend months or years just learning the therapeutic language and underlying concepts. James Grotstein calls this teaching the patient "Mandarin," or the special language of subjectivity of the analyst. Gradually the patient learns that language and can begin to apply it to his own experience.

The client centered introspections described here are less theory (meaning) oriented than psychoanalysis and more experience near. From the beginning the client develops his own private language of subjectivity which the therapist must learn. The effort for the therapist is a little harder, but the therapeutic effects of taking the time and effort are often worth it. The client feels the therapist come to his viewpoint rather than the obverse. Insights and therapeutic metaphors are immediately applicable because they occur within the client's meaning frame. This can prevent initial periods of confusion arising in psychoanalysis when the patient tries to adjust to the new therapeutic frame including its foreign language.

To make this project more comprehensible, we need to look at the wide disparity of self concepts, introspection types and therapies found in both Western and Eastern approaches.

INTROSPECTION TYPES AND PURPOSES

Modern psychotherapy is divided into many camps: psychoanalytic psychotherapy, existentialist-humanist, Gestalt, Reichian, cognitive-behavioral, rational-emotive and some newer "transpersonal" therapies. Each of these therapies has different assumptions about the self, approaches to therapy, and ways to work with the personal self. Each has made some attempt to explain emotions or the self in terms of other events and structures and each has a somewhat different use for introspection. Cognitive therapies for example, explain affect in terms of thinking, images and memories. Control these and you control feelings. Introspection is used to make conscious the verbalizations and images that triggered the target affect or state.

The types of introspection worked with in Eastern spiritual practices and Western psychotherapies are quite different. One common Eastern introspective approach is to

minutely examine every body, sensual, cognitive, and imaginary experience in detail in an almost pure phenomenological introspection. Minute elements of the body experience may be examined over a period of months. The sensation of breathing and the variance of that sensation as the body moves may also take months. Thoughts are watched as they arise and pass away into emptiness. The source of the sense of I-ness may be pursued for years as did the monk Bassui who looked for his true self.

Western introspection is less experiential and more meaning_oriented. For example, psychoanalytic dream work would relate present dream elements to internalized childhood relations with parents, and in other ways cognitively linking aspects of personal experience together. By personal I mean the aspects of I-ness that are tied to others, either as representation or real external object. Personal means "I related to Thou"--to another articulated self, also with an I, self representation and separate but dependent subjectivity.

The Eastern approach is impersonal, concretistic and is done with the intent of transcending or otherwise ending_the illusion_of_personal_self. The Western approaches are more personal and are done with the intent of healing_that_self. Introspection in the West emphasizes a therapeutic couple while the Eastern approach often avoids relationships in the spiritual endeavor, sometimes even with the Guru. The intents of the efforts are quite different, the experiences that are examined are quite different, and the way the introspections are done is quite different.

WHAT IS THE SELF?

What is self and what am I? This question motivates the most basic and universal of all Eastern spiritual practices: to delve into one's own experience to find the core of I-ness which is presumed to be either God (Hindu, Moslem) or emptiness (Buddhist). But the experience that an Eastern ascetic

delves into is not the experience of personal self and object relations. The Eastern ideal is of a spiritual hero who cuts his emotional attachments with mere people to find God or Truth. The I-ness and self he seeks is a pre-personal consciousness, a basic awareness before objects, either emotional objects or physical objects.

The Western attitude toward that same question may well be that anyone asking such a question must suffer from a self-disorder, and has serious identity problems. He is not "grounded," or he has a "weak" sense of self (Guntrip, 1969), or a blank self (Giovacchini, 1975). This type of self seeker would be viewed as someone running from that inadequate personal self into pre-personal self states, a symbiosis with God/mother/nature, or at least into an altered state of consciousness. It might also be regarded as marking a schizoid (Fairbairn's sense) withdrawal from object relations.

All of the Western notions of introspection involve observation of fantasy, memory, thinking and emotion. These Western introspections do not observe the basic nature of the self, itself, or of cognition itself or just the raw sensations themselves. Western introspection is of the mind's content, the internal phenomenal objects (of consciousness) known as representations, not of the subject, the I-ness core. Nor does this introspection imply the desirability of merger with that content or with the source of I-ness as in the Eastern emphasis on Samadhi and union.

From these various Eastern and Western perspectives I have abstracted the following four different meanings or levels of self definition: On the common sense level it means (1) my sense of self, as a person, in relationships to others, and with a personal history. Second, it means (2) my basic sense of I-ness that comes before the personality is added on. This is the subjective source of the everyday personal self. Around this I-sense are many elements habitually identified with the "core" of self and these elements vary between in-

dividuals and within the same individual over time. Typical core elements are a sense of security or insecurity, loneliness and neediness for another person, and a sense of groundedness in one's own body even if specific body sensations are not included in the self. This "I-sense" itself is probably a basic hidden structure within the field of consciousness that focuses attention. I-ness, in this interpretation is a singularity within that field having certain properties not elsewhere found, properties such as being a nexus of linkages holding the self and other realities together (See chapter IV).

According to Eastern traditions we can introspectively follow the pure I-sense (without core elements) to its roots resulting in either a self experience of identification with (3a) "God," or (3b) emptiness. This experience of "God" is called attaining "Big self" by several Zen masters and merger with "Atman" by Hindus. The experience varies with the practitioner, the discipline and the length of practice. Often it is an experience of oneness--of no boundaries--between the self and the rest of its experienced universe. I become one (merge) with everything. It is quite possible that this sense of self is an adult re-experience of the infantile undifferentiated experiential matrix (Hartmann, 1958). God may be the original, no-boundary experience of a newborn seen from the structured self perspective of an adult.

The second (Buddhist) resolution of self resulting from pursuing the I-sense (or more easily through observing the "objective" attributes of self [type 4 self]) is the attaining of the state of emptiness which is the claimed source of all experiential content. Phenomena arise from emptiness and return to it. Emptiness is the context of experience, the formless background. Yet emptiness too exists only with respect to the contents. In the Heart Sutra it is succinctly stated: Form is emptiness and emptiness form. Feeling, thought, touch, taste, smell and consciousness itself are no

other than emptiness and emptiness no other than form. Even I-ness, the source of personal consciousness comes from emptiness.¹

Finally we have everyday self as (4) representation and object, consisting of body feelings, certain emotions, self perceptions and images, self evaluations, self criticism and feeling good about oneself. All these are expressions that use the concept of self as object, both by phenomenologists and psychoanalysts. This type 4 experience itself has several levels of differentiation depending on how close we look and how long we pursue this investigation. The longer we look, the more refined, dispersed and elemental are the components we observe. The differentiation of and separation between the elements increases with the sophistication of our investigation.

We should note here that there are many kinds of subjective body, image, memory and emotional elements that are not considered self. Some of these elements are just random and others, though more lasting and constant just are not tied into the structures associated with core self. They are not part of the form or gestalt of self. The pain of a headache,

1. In the Zen literature, especially the work of my former master, Soen Sahn Sa Nim, there are explicit stage models of invariant states a student passes through on the way to enlightened ordinary mind. Bassui (Kapleau, 1966) and others (Chang, G.C.C., 1968) talk about Kensho, Samadhi and emptiness all arising from attending to the "Hua Do" or the source of I-ness.

From my own experience and theory, I cannot explain the attaining of emptiness through observing this portion of the self. I believe the attaining of emptiness arises from the "microanalytic" dispersion of objective elements of the self so that the "space" between these elements is observed. Samadhi, merger, usually never arises when the attention is focused on an element, but when attention is slightly off the center of the element. Perhaps concentrating on the I-source, which is very compact and filled with structures and elements very difficult to disperse, results in exposures of emptiness surrounding I-ness and a merger with that off-the-center-of-attention background field.

for example, is subjective but not-self, it happens to us but it isn't us. In a sense, this subjective experience is more "objective" than core-self experiences and perhaps even of 'self as object' experiences, but certainly less "objective" than the experience of a tree and perhaps even of our 'object representation' of another person.

If we take everyday self experience, we can divide it into two aspects, the core of subjectivity or I-ness with its core self attributes (type 2), and the objective and representational aspects (type 4). Again, these representational aspects form a spectrum of identification from those that are quite close to core self (personal feeling) to very external identifications with nation, politics and belief systems. From the Eastern perspective, introspective merging with the I-ness aspect supposedly results in oneness states of self with either the totality of the perceivable world (with God) or with the framework of this world (emptiness). From the developmental viewpoint (Kegan) investigated in the next chapter, witnessing that I-ness leads to a differentiation and objectification of portions of the self-core.

Observing (with both witnessing and merger aspects) the objective aspect of self (type 4) also produces either (a) a microanalysis and decomposition of the elements of that self into its subcomponents, and/or (b) a merger with any of those components. In psychotherapy, observing type 4 "objective" feelings (hitherto not part of the self) often results in a merger with those feelings--an experience of becoming that feeling as part of the process of bringing that not-self feeling (ego dystonic) into the self's core.

We ('I' as agent) can "aim" consciousness (merger aspect) either at the I-ness (again, the agent) part of personal self and attain a "centering" of consciousness in ourselves or even religious states of Samadhi, Kensho, etc., or we ('I') can aim that merger aspect at the objective portions of self and merge with subcomponents of the representational or sensational

self, such as an image of being small and helpless, the pain of a headache or a random memory. Or through ultimate analytic dispersion of those elements, the 'I' can then merge into the revealed emptiness background.

We (as agent) can also aim consciousness with its witnessing aspect at the objective or representational parts of personal self leading to differentiations of that experience, de-linking of subcomponents of that experience (atomization), and knowledge of the self as object. Pursuing a concentrated attention on those objective aspects of self eventually reveals an "empty space" between the experiential components--the Buddhist emptiness. We can also "aim" consciousness (witness aspect) at 'I-ness.' This kind of introspection is part of the process by which the self evolves through differentiation, articulation and transformation of implicit self structures as discussed in the next chapter.

The dual mind hypothesis suggests that consciousness itself has the dual aspects of merger and witness. We are here applying that assumption to explain the phenomena of the four-fold self found in religious and therapeutic literature, and also in the self-experience of a few clients for whom introspection has become second nature. If we assume the merger or Samadhi aspect of consciousness is used by the self on itself, the self in its dual aspects can merge with I-ness (on a spectrum of centering to attaining Big self). The self can also use the witnessing aspect of self to watch its own I-ness or its objective self-aspects reflexively, thereby differentiating out old implicit structures transforming "I" into "not-I," or representation. Hidden structures of subjectivity lie within that I-ness and the associated core self experience, and they become "objects" after a sustained, objectifying examination. This process of witnessing I-ness leads to an evolutionary structuring of self both as representation, and of the remainder of unobjectified I-ness (implicit structures) which is the agent or self-core. The agent thus be-

comes changed. In table II this is shown as elements of self moving from witnessed I-ness to the self representation or self-as-object area.

Witnessing of either aspect (I-ness or representation) of self experience leads to differentiating and articulating feelings and other poorly formed self elements. Often primitive emotions are part of the essential I-ness experience until psychotherapy separates and objectifies those feelings out from the "core" of self. These feelings, impulses or behaviors then become "ego dystonic" or foreign to the core sense of self. Yet witnessing alone is not enough. As we will see in the next chapter, structuring of the self requires a dialectical process of differentiation, fixing boundaries and then a remerger.

SEE TABLES I and II

Merger with either aspect of self can lead to "becoming oneself" by getting under defenses and resting in one's "being," or becoming a feeling, impulse, thought or image that had been ego dystonic until that moment of merger. Then the feeling is brought into the core of self. One example is to watch one's dependency feelings towards the therapist arise as they always do in relationships, then suddenly merge with that feeling for the first time instead of viewing them as disgusting and fearful invaders of the self. Merger "tacks" on to the existing core self new feelings, images or even body sensations. This is shown in table II as elements of self moving from the self representation area to the self core. This process is a variant of what psychoanalysis calls incorporation.

Realistically, the process in therapy is a witnessing of I-ness and representation which leads to an articulation of new feelings. Some of these feelings are eventually incorporated into the personal self through merger. Dependency

TABLE I--ELEMENTS OF SELF

PURE "I"		CORE SELF		SELF REPRESENTATION		NOT SELF
THE I Basic mechanism of attending.	transitional area	The elements vary, but often include a sense of security or insecurity, a body sense (Lowen), loneliness and neediness. Other elements are ideosyncratic, but bound by linkages into stable self	transitional area	Elements vary, but often include feeling good or bad "about" myself. Includes normal identifications, also linked into patterns and "ego states." Includes emptiness background.	transitional area	Random and unbound emotions, images, memories & ideas Emptiness

TABLE II--PROCESSES WITHIN SELF

CONSCIOUSNESS

	PURE "I"		CORE SELF		SELF REPRESENTATION		NOT SELF
CONSCIOUSNESS	Witness Aspect	Pure Reflexivity	Evolution of core self via dialectical processes. Implicit structures made explicit.		"Atomization" or objectification upon microanalysis. Refinement of explicit structures. Emptiness aspect revealed		Atomization, etc. Emptiness
	Merger Aspect	Samadhi, Kensho	Centering into the agency of self--the doer. Manifesting myself. Sometimes becoming an element of core.		Becoming an ego state or role, such as my vocational role. Manifesting as role. Becoming an element of representation such as bad or good self-referring feelings. Becoming emptiness background.		Becoming element such as headache or dystonic feelings & images Becoming Emptiness

feelings for example, can become incorporated into a schizoid personality's self-concept rather than being defended against, repressed or split off, allowing the client to eventually enter close personal relationships. Witnessing of other feelings or ego states that are the source of perennial problems, such as feelings of being abused or victimized, leads to a "disincorporation" of those states into encapsulated pockets that are no longer part of the core self or agent. This measurably decreases the impact of these states and feelings on everyday life.

A fully structured and functioning personal self has dependency and love feelings for others as essential elements within the I-ness sense. These object related feelings are part of the core of self making the person an interpersonal being. However, it is very possible by witnessing this I-ness sense to differentiate out object related feelings altogether in order to experience a pure I-ness state of identification with the merger aspect of consciousness. This is the religious ideal of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Type 1 self experience is both objective and subjective, and both intrapsychic and interpersonal. Pure type 2 experience, I-ness, and pure type 3 experience, witnessing or merger with I-ness, are subjective only and without a personal self or interpersonal connections. Returning to that type 1, common sense mode of self-interpretation, what is the self when one looks closely at this personal self independent of all theoretical understanding? What do I mean by "I" and "self" in everyday life and what do I experience as I and self when I begin to introspect? This last way is a first stage microanalysis, a type 4 self experience, of ordinary mind and ordinary self experience, and is basically objective and with the possibility of taking the subjective states, including I-ness, as objects.

Using this common sense, first level introspection of I-ness reveals "I" as a "feeling" of being myself. Certain

thoughts, images, feelings, activities, attitudes, body sensations, identifications with country, friends, career, knowledge and position all comprise this "myself" feeling. This sentence denotes some complicated relations. The initial "I" means, I am (identified with) the knower (witness). "Have" means an objectified knowing rather than an identification. "A feeling," means a witnessed connection; and "of being myself" means some specific identification (I am being) with experience.

The "I" feeling (type 2 selfness, above) is part of the common sense, everyday self (type 1) and also an object of the introspective endeavor. As part of everyday self, this I-ness is the agency of self, or self as subject. It is the decision maker and origin of our action. In a very real way it is the "essence" of our being lying at the core of self. From where does it arise, what is its origin?

I've been teaching classes on the psychology of spirituality at the UCLA Extension for eleven years now. For the last few years I've practiced an exercise with my class where I categorize certain kinds of experience, such as emotions and body sensations into sets, and ask the class to examine, emotion by emotion, and sensation by sensation, whether that specific set element is included in their perceived core of self or in their self-representation. I have them remember a time when they felt sadness, for example, and whether they included that feeling as essential to their feeling of self as experienced that moment in class. I later repeat that same examination with respect to their ideas of what is included as an essential identification of self. The almost universal experience of the class is of amazement that the other members' experience of self and what is included in their reported self-experience is so different from their own.

According to analytic theory, we can infer the following structures from introspection of type 4 self experience: a self-image (representation), a self-ideal (also a representation), an object-image and an object ideal. The ego has a self-image and the "superego" (a not-conscious implicit structure) supposedly contains portions of an "introjected" self-ideal as well as the comparison function which then rewards or punishes the self according to that internal comparison and according to whether the self has "behaved," thought, felt or imagined appropriately. In this framework, self is our representation of ourselves.

The type 4 self experience "area" of subjectivity also contains memories, images, not-I feelings, not-I body sensations, ideas and other subjective but not-I phenomena, such as the feeling of a sudden pain or a memory and connected affect of a chance meeting with an old girlfriend the week before. These subjective, not-I, not even objective self or object representation elements are a large part of our subjective life. These elements just "float" unconnected to the semi-permanent structures that comprise self and object.

Two existential realms of phenomena also impact on this type 4 self-ness: our idea or representation of other people and of the external world, and the external world itself. Unless we are in an altered state induced by psychotherapy, meditation or drugs, our idea of someone we love (object representation) is not included in our sense of I-ness. Nor is it contained in our idea of ourselves. The object representation and the self representation are separate. The differentiation between self and object representations occurs very early in life. Lingering mergers are usually taken to be indicative of some pathology arising in the separation process. In fact, a high percentage of the "normal" population are symbiotic to some degree.

Obviously, the external world is not contained within our I-ness or self representation either. The differentiation between self and world occurs even earlier than the self-object differentiations, or at least at the same time. Psychoanalysis and developmental psychology explore the processes of self and object representation differentiation. This representational area is a "transitional space" (Winnicott, 1971) where differentiations between self and object representations occur. Less effort is expended to understand the processes by which the infant's experiential world is divided into an external real world and an internal, subjective world. (See table III). Our emphasis in this chapter has been and will be to explore the distinction between aspects within the self, differentiating it into a subjective I-ness and a "more objective" representation. We are exploring a new transitional area containing the movement of phenomenal elements within the self between subjectivity and objectivity, between I and self representation.

This transitional area, like Winnicott's, is not fixed. Some days it is large and contains a great deal of activity, and aspects of both I and representation. Other days it may contain former elements of I-ness and still other days, only representations. As we will see in the next chapter, this transitional area acts as a permeable boundary by which elements of the various aspects of self become fixed through time by the dialectical movement of consciousness "across" elements within the transitional space that attaches them into increasingly fixed structures (Gestalten) either in the I or in the representation.

SEE TABLE III

TABLE III--THE "OBJECTIVE"

CONSCIOUSNESS

			OBJECTIVE	
SUBJECTIVE				
Witness Aspect	I & CORE SELF	SELF REPRES.	NOT SELF	
	SEE TABLE I			
Merger Aspect	SEE TABLE II			
			transitional area--traditional psychoanalysis	