

The Ego and False Autonomy

²⁴ Bill has asked lately how the mind could ever have made the ego. This is a perfectly reasonable question; in fact, the best question either of you could ask. There is no point in giving an historical answer, because the past does not matter in human terms, and history would not exist if the same errors were not being repeated in the present. Bill has often told you that your thinking is too abstract at times, and he is right. Abstraction DOES apply to knowledge, because knowledge is completely impersonal, and examples are irrelevant to its understanding. Perception, however, is always specific, and therefore quite concrete. Perceptual distortions are not abstractions. They are merely confusions.

²⁵ Each man makes one ego for himself, although it is subject to enormous variation because of its instability, and one for everyone he perceives, which is equally variable. Their interaction IS a process which literally alters both, because they were not made either BY or WITH the unalterable. It is particularly important to realize that this alteration can and does occur as readily when the interaction takes place IN THE MIND as when it involves physical presence. THINKING about another ego is as effective in changing relative perception as is their physical interaction. There could be no better example of the fact that the ego is an idea, though not a reality-based thought.

²⁶ Your own present state is the best concrete example Bill could have of how the mind could have made the ego. You DO have real knowledge at times, but when you throw it away it is as if you never had it. This willfulness is so apparent that Bill need only perceive it to see that it DOES happen. If it can occur that way in the present, why should he be surprised that it occurred that way in the past? All psychology rests on the principle of continuity of behavior. Surprise is a reasonable response to the unfamiliar, but hardly to something that has occurred with such persistence. An extreme example is a good teaching aid, not because it is typical, but because it is clear. The more complex the material, the clearer the examples should be for teaching purposes. (Bill, remember that for your own course, and do not avoid the dramatic. It holds the student's interest precisely because it is so apparent that it CAN be readily perceived.) But, as we have said before, all teaching devices in the hands of good teachers are aimed at rendering themselves unnecessary. I would therefore like to use your present state as an example of how the mind can work, provided you both fully recognize that it need not work that way. I NEVER forget this myself, and a good teacher shares his own ideas, which he himself believes. Otherwise, he cannot really "profess" them, as we used the term before. With full recognition of its transitory nature, (a recognition which I hope you both share), Helen offers a very good teaching example of alternations between Soul and ego, with concomitant variation between peace and frenzy. In answer to Bill's question, it is perfectly apparent that when she is ego-dominated, she DOES NOT KNOW her Soul. Her abstract ability, which is perfectly genuine and does stem from knowledge, cannot help her because she has turned to the concrete which she cannot handle abstractly.

Being incapable of appropriate concreteness perceptually, because her ego is not her natural home, she suffers from its intrusions, but NOT from complete lack of knowledge. The result is a kind of "double vision", which would have produced an actual dyplopia, if she had not settled for nearsightedness. This was an attempt to see the concrete more clearly through the ego's eyes, without the "interference" of the longer range. Her virtual lack of astigmatism is due to her real efforts at objectivity and fairness. She has not attained them, or she would not be nearsighted. But she HAS tried to be fair with what she permitted herself to see. Why are you surprised that something happened in the dim past, when it is so clearly happening right now?

27 You forget the love that even animals have for their own offspring, and the need they feel to protect them. This is because they regard them as part of themselves. No one disowns something he regards as a very real part of himself. Man reacts to his ego much as God does to His Souls, - with love, protection, and great charity. The reaction of man to the self he made is not at all surprising. In fact, it duplicates in many ways the way he will one day react to his real creations, which are as timeless as he is. The question is not HOW man responds toward his ego, but only what he believes he IS.

28 Again, belief is an ego-function, and as long as your origin is open to belief at all, you ARE regarding it from an ego viewpoint. That is why the Bible quotes me as saying, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." Belief DOES apply to me, because I am the teacher of the ego. When teaching is no longer necessary, you will merely know God. Belief that there IS another way is the loftiest idea of which ego-thinking is capable. This is because it contains a hint of recognition that the ego is NOT the self. Helen always had this idea, but it merely confused her. Bill, you were more capable of a long-range view, and that is why your eyesight is good. But you were willing to see because you utilized judgment against what you saw. This gave you clearer perception than Helen's, but cut off the cognitive level more deeply. That is why you believe that you never had knowledge.

Repression HAS been a stronger mechanism in your own ego defense, and that is why you find her shifts so hard to tolerate. Willfulness is more characteristic of her, and that is why she has less sense than you do. It is extremely fortunate, temporarily, that the particular strengths you will both develop and use are precisely those which the other must supply now. You who will be the strength of God are quite weak, and you who will be God's help are clearly in need of help. What better plan could have been devised to prevent the intrusion of the ego's arrogance on the outcome?

Undermining the foundation of an ego's thought-system MUST be perceived as painful, even though this is anything but true. Babies scream in rage if you take away a knife or a scissors, even though they may well harm themselves if you do not. The speedup has placed you both in the same position.

29 You are NOT by any means prepared, and in this sense you ARE babies. You have no sense of real self-preservation and are very likely to decide that you need precisely what would hurt you most. Whether you know it now or not, however, you both HAVE willed to cooperate in a concerted and very commendable effort to become both harm-LESS and help-FUL, two attributes which MUST go together. Your attitudes, even toward this, are necessarily conflicted, because ALL attitudes are ego-based. This will not last. Be patient awhile, and remember what we have said once before; the outcome is as certain as God! Helen used to perceive the quotation "To him that hath shall be given" as a paradox that bordered on the ironic. She also had a similar reaction to another related one: "Faith is the gift of God." We have reinterpreted both of these statements before, but perhaps we can make them even clearer now.

30 Only those who have a real and lasting sense of abundance can be truly charitable. This is quite obvious when you consider the concepts involved. To be able to give anything implies that you can do without it. Even if you associate giving with sacrifice, you still give only because you believe you are somehow getting something better so that you can do without the thing you give. "Giving to get" is an inescapable law of the ego, which ALWAYS evaluates itself in relation to others' egos, and is therefore continually preoccupied with the scarcity principle which gave rise to it. This IS the meaning of Freud's "pleasure principle." Freud was the most accurate "ego psychologist" we ever had, although he would not have preferred this description himself. His ego was a very weak and deprived concept, which could function ONLY as a thing in need.

31 The "reality principle" of the ego is not real at all. It is forced to perceive the "reality" of other egos, because it CANNOT establish the reality of itself. In fact, its whole perception of other egos AS real is ONLY an attempt to convince itself that IT is real. "Self esteem," in ego terms, means nothing more than that the ego has deluded itself into accepting its reality and is therefore temporarily less predatory. This "self-esteem" is always vulnerable to stress, a term which really means that a condition has arisen in which the delusion of reality of the ego is threatened. This produces either ego-deflation or ego-inflation, resulting in either withdrawal or attack.

32 The ego literally lives by comparisons. This means that equality is beyond its grasp, and charity becomes impossible. The ego NEVER gives out of abundance, because it was made as a SUBSTITUTE for it. This is why the concept of GETTING arose in the ego's thought-system. All appetites are "getting" mechanisms representing ego needs to confirm itself. This is as true of bodily appetites as it is of the so-called "higher" ego needs. Bodily appetites are NOT physical in origin, because the ego regards the body as its home, and DOES try to satisfy itself through the body. But the IDEA that this is possible is a decision of the ego, which is completely confused about what is really possible. This accounts for its essential erraticness. Consider the inevitable confusion which MUST arise from a perception of the self which responds: When I was completely on my own I "had no idea what was possible."

³³ The ego DOES believe it is completely on its own, which is merely another way of describing how it originated. This is such a fearful state that it can only turn to other egos, and unite with them in a feeble attempt at identification, or attack them in an equally feeble show of strength. The ego is free to complete the stem: "When I was completely on my own" in any way it chooses, but it is NOT free to consider the validity of the premise itself, because this premise is its FOUNDATION. The ego IS the belief of the mind that it is completely on its own. The ego's ceaseless attempts to gain the Soul's acknowledgement and thus establish its own existence are utterly useless.

³⁴ The Soul in its knowledge is unaware of the ego. It does NOT attack the ego. It merely cannot conceive of it at all. While the ego is equally unaware of the Soul, it DOES perceive itself as rejected by something which is greater than itself. This is why self-esteem in ego terms MUST be a delusion. The creations of God do not create myths, but the creative efforts of man can turn to mythology, but only under one condition. What man then makes is no longer creative. Myths are entirely perceptions and are so ambivalent in form, and so characteristically good and evil in nature, that the most benevolent of them is not without fearful components, if only in innuendo.

³⁵ Myths and magic are closely associated, in that myths are usually related to the ego origins, and magic to the powers which the ego ascribes to itself. Every mythological system includes an account of "the creation," and associates this with its particular perception of magic. The "battle for survival" is nothing more than the ego's struggle to preserve itself and its interpretation of its own beginning. This beginning is always associated with physical birth, because nobody maintains that the ego existed before that point in time. The religiously ego-oriented tend to believe that the Soul existed before, and will continue to exist afterward, after a temporary lapse into ego-life. Some actually believe that the Soul will be punished for this lapse, even though in reality it could not possibly know anything about it.

³⁶ The term "salvation" does NOT apply to the Soul, which is not in danger and does not need to be salvaged. Salvation is nothing more than "right-mindedness" which is NOT the one-mindedness of the Soul, but which must be accomplished before one-mindedness can be restored. Right-mindedness dictates the next step automatically, because right perception is uniformly without attack, so that wrong-mindedness is obliterated. The ego cannot survive without judgment, and is laid aside accordingly. The mind then has only ONE direction in which it can move. The directions which the mind will take are always automatic, because they cannot BUT be dictated by the thought-system to which it adheres.

³⁷ Every thought-system has INTERNAL consistency, and this does provide a basis for the continuity of behavior. However, this is still reliability and NOT validity. Reliable behavior is a meaningful perception, as far as ego thinking goes. However, VALID behavior is an expression which is inherently contradictory, because validity is an END, and behavior is a MEANS.

These cannot be combined logically, because when an end has been attained, the means for its attainment are no longer meaningful. Test constructors recognize that there are different kinds of validity, and also that they are of different orders. This means that they do not mean truth and do not pretend to mean it. Test validity can be judged by logic, by theory, and by practice, each being regarded as a different dimension. In each case, the amount of confidence is expressed in some form of percentage, either quantitatively, or merely in terms of "high," moderate, and low.

³⁸ But a hypothesis is tested as either true or false, to be accepted or rejected accordingly. If it is shown to be true it becomes a fact, after which no one attempts to evaluate it unless its status AS fact is questioned. EVERY idea which the ego has accorded the status of fact is questionable, because facts are in the realm of knowledge.

³⁹ Confusing realms of discourse is a thinking error which philosophers have recognized for centuries. Psychologists are generally quite deficient in this respect, as are many theologians. Data from one realm of discourse do not mean anything in another, because they can be understood only WITHIN the thought-systems of which they are a part. This is why psychologists are concentrating increasingly on the ego, in an attempt to unify their clearly unrelated data. It need hardly be said that an attempt to relate the unrelated cannot succeed.

⁴⁰ The more recent ecological emphases are but a more ingenious way of trying to impose order on chaos. We have already credited the ego with considerable ingenuity, though not with creativeness. But it should always be remembered that inventiveness is really wasted effort, even in its most ingenious forms. We do not have to EXPLAIN anything. This is why we need not trouble ourselves with inventiveness. The highly specific nature of invention is not worthy of the abstract creativity of God's Creations.