

SOME ASPECTS OF THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE PERSONALITY

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First published *Psychologische Beiträge*, Band VI, Heft 3-4, 1962, S. 395-404

This paper was written when the author was a Fellow of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation

Professor KÖHLER (1947, p.3) has observed: "There seems to be a single starting point for psychology, exactly as for all the other sciences: the world as we find it, naively and uncritically." It needs hardly be mentioned that our own personality is an important part of this world as we find it. This paper will begin to apply to the psychology of personality the approach that Professor KÖHLER recommends as the starting point for psychology in general.

But as soon as we have formulated our task, a question arises: Is it not anachronistic to look for a starting point for a theory of personality? The widespread interest and vast accumulation of knowledge in this field are among the most impressive characteristics of the current psychological scene. And yet, personality theorists are not satisfied with the state of their science. "Not much, I believe, is known about man." wrote Gardner MURPHY in 1947 (p.IX). "It is precisely here" (in relation to the formation and development of human personality) "that our ignorance and uncertainty are greatest," ALLPORT said in 1955 (p. 18). "We are on the boundary of knowledge," remarks NOTCUTT, "and the hills are hidden in mist" (1953, p. 21). McCLELLAND points out that "We have very little available in the form of 'hard facts' or 'systematic knowledge'" (1957, p. 356). Most theories of personality "lack explicitness", state HALL and LINDSEY (1957, p. 15). BRUNER's remark (1956, p. 466) that FREUD's is a prototheory rather than a theory of personality might equally well be applied to other theories in this area.

There seems, then, to be room for an additional approach to the psychology of personality. It will be suggested below that a phenomenological method [As will be evident from the discussion, the term "phenomenology" is not used in the sense of HUSSERL's theory of intentionality, but rather to refer to a description of experience as naive and unprejudiced as possible.] may throw light on a number of still obscure problems in this field.

Since the naive experience of the self is the most obvious source of facts about the personality, its neglect by personality theorists is at first astonishing. The omission seems to be the consequence of the preoccupation of personality psychologists with unconscious processes, as well as of the preference of many theorists for behavioral data. An example to follow will, however, suggest that an implicit use of naive phenomenology underlies some theoretical formulations.

Let it be clear at the outset that the present approach is not to construct a psychology of consciousness only. It is merely suggested that, to start with, phenomenal data may be fruitful. As KÖHLER has shown in another connection, experience itself may refer to some "transphenomenal reality" (1938, pp. 113 ff.). That experience is incomplete is, in other words, itself a phenomenal

datum. A psychology of personality must encompass not only the phenomena, the facts of behavior and experience, but also the functional relations which are responsible for their occurrence and nature. These, to a large extent, transcend phenomenology.

It must also be understood that the purpose of this paper is not to make final and definitive statements about the experience of the self, but rather to explore an approach. The difficulties of naive phenomenal description are well known. The efforts of any one investigator need to be tested by others; and the statements about the phenomenology of the personality to be made below might perhaps best be regarded as hypotheses. And many problems remain that cannot be treated here: for example, the question of how far it is useful to carry the analysis to be begun here; or that of the conditions and criteria for checking such phenomenal descriptions.

The most obvious fact about the self as we experience it is the multiplicity of aspects it presents. We do not ordinarily appear to ourselves as an undifferentiated "I".

The experienced differentiation of the self is implicit in a remark that PLATO, in the Sophist, puts in the mouth of the Stranger: "Is not thought the same as speech, with this exception: thought is the unuttered conversation of the soul with herself?" (JOWETT trans., vol. 3, p. 504). MONTAIGNE likewise observes that "we have a soul that can turn upon itself, that can keep company with itself; it has the wherewithal to attack and defend, to receive and give..." (TRECHMANN trans., vol.1, p. 238). A more recent illustration is attributed to George Bernard SHAW: "On one occasion, when in debate a critic had said, "Mr. Shaw, you seem to talk like two people", Shaw answered, "Why only two?" (WALLAS, 1926, p. 164). Once more, HESSE remarks:

When Faust ... says: "Two souls, alas, inhabit in my breast!" he has forgotten Mephisto and a whole crowd of other souls that he has in his breast likewise. The Steppenwolf, too, believes that he bears two souls (wolf and man) in his breast and even so finds his breast disagreeably cramped because of them. The breast and the body are indeed one, but the souls that dwell in it are not two, nor five, but countless in number (1957, p. 81).

It is unnecessary to multiply examples, since the reader can easily confirm for himself the experienced multiplicity of the self (or usually, as will be indicated below, the experienced duality of the personality at any given moment). It is more important to begin to identify the aspects of oneself that present themselves for observation. What are the various meanings of the "I"? A simple method enables us to approach our problem. We may start with a number of commonplace sentences in which "I" or "me" is used:

"I think I dialed the wrong number."

"I blame myself for what happened."

"I don't know what got into me."

"I didn't let on how I was really feeling."

"I'll give myself ten minutes to get out of bed."

"That's an idea of mine I don't take particularly seriously."

"I wonder if I'm doing the right thing."

"I was lost in thought."

Even a hasty consideration of these sentences suggest that the repeated "I" does not refer to the same thing. It seems that even when we confine ourselves to what is phenomenally present, the self consists of a variety of functions. Let us begin to enumerate them. Although we often tend to personify them, actually they are functions, not entities.

Let us start with a very simple example: "I think I dialed the wrong number." The one "I" is clearly standing off and observing the other. The observing I is not entering into the action in this case, but simply watching it. We distinguish here between the observer and the actor.

One of the observer of this observer was THOREAU. He writes:

With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense ... I ... am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but a spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it, and that is no more I than it is you. When the play, it may be the tragedy, of life is over, the spectator goes his way. It was a kind of fiction, a work of the imagination only, so far as he was concerned. This doubleness may easily make us poor neighbors and friends sometimes (1950 ed., p. 122).

The observer may stand in any relation to the actor, from relative detachment to considerable involvement - precisely as we may relate to a work of fiction. Thus we say: "I watched myself as if it were a dream," or "as if it were somebody else." Or on the other hand, "I saw with dismay that I was doing so-and-so." Sometimes the actor steals the show during the action, and allows scope for the observer only afterwards, when we have the illuminating hindsight. In other cases it is the observer who takes over, paralyzing action and preventing the outward turning of interest, as THOREAU hints.

Closely allied to the observing aspect of the person is a critical one. While our observations of ourselves may be objective, non-evaluative and dispassionate, they are more likely to contain a critical note. T.S. ELIOT, in 'The Elder Statesman' (1959, p. 44), has Lord Claverton ask:

What is this self inside us, this silent observer,

Severe and speechless critic, who can terrorize us

And urge us on to futile activity,

And in the end, judge us still more severely

For the errors into which his own reproaches drove us?

In the course of observing and criticizing, we either accept or reject what we find in ourselves. "We

all have flaws," said the Duke, "and mine is being wicked" (THURBER, 1950, p. 114). Being human, he knows himself to be imperfect, but he can accept himself with his "flaw". On the other hand, we may reject, saying: "That wasn't like me," "I can't understand how I could say such a thing," "I'm not myself today."

Do we need to postulate additional functional variables with their phenomenal counterparts to account for such experiences? It may be that the rejection of aspects of the self is a function of the critic, while in acts of self-acceptance we get a first glimpse of the inner friend, who will be discussed below.

We may pause for a moment and consider that, without going beyond phenomenal experience, we have distinguished several functions of the self in addition to the actor: the observer, the critic, the friend, and possibly a functionally distinct rejecting aspect. These functions have already been brought to our attention in FREUD's concept of the super-ego. Our discussion suggests the considerable extent to which FREUD must have relied on phenomenal evidence in arriving at this concept. A quotation will confirm the impression that the super-ego is more a phenomenal report than a psychological theory:

One group of [psychotics] suffer what we call delusions of observation. They complain to us that they suffer continually, and in their most intimate actions, from the observation of unknown powers or persons, and they have hallucinations in which they hear these persons announcing the results of their observations: 'now he is going to say this, now he is dressing himself to go out,' and so on. Such observation is not the same thing as persecution, but it is not far removed from it. It implies that these persons distrust the patient, and expect to catch him doing something that is forbidden and for which he will be punished. How would it be if these mad people were right, if we all of us had an observing function in our egos threatening us with punishment, which, in their case, had merely become sharply separated from the ego and had been mistakenly projected into external reality? (1933, p. 85).

So far, then, we have not gone much beyond FREUD's phenomenal observations. And yet there are certain advantages to our more modest procedure. The functions mentioned above are separate, thought relates functions; this is clear since they may appear separately - the observer without the critic, etc. If we throw them all into a super-ego, it is more difficult to distinguish them. There may, indeed, be antagonisms among them, for example between the observer and the rejecting function; these are lost if we speak only of the antagonisms between the super-ego and other parts of the person. FREUD's super-ego neglects the positive accepting function. And most important, if we deal with the problem in the manner suggested here, it is much easier to see these functions for what they are, namely phenomenally present functions, not as hypothetical agencies of the mind.

To return to the inner friend, this function is phenomenally present whenever we find in ourselves a source of comfort or encouragement. Coming to a new understanding or reaching a decision is often preceded by real discussion within the self - an "inner dialogue", as JUNG calls it (e.g., 1960, p. 89). The gift to oneself likewise refers to the inner friend, since giving implies a duality, a donor and recipient, "a soul that ... has the wherewithal ... to receive and give," in MONTAIGNE's word. (Cf. JUNG on the friend, e.g., 1959, p. 133).

But the most significant of the inner friend has been mentioned above, that of self-acceptance.

Although it is not possible here to discuss this problem, its importance may be referred to by way of a remark of JUNG's: "Acceptance of oneself is the essence of the moral problem and the acid test of one's whole outlook on life" (1958, p. 339).

Phenomenally distinct from the aspects of the personality so far mentioned are various impulsive functions. We say: "I don't know what made me do it," or "I don't know what got into me." It is the observer or critic who raises the question, while the actor appears as the tool of an often unknown, but phenomenally important, impulse. Or else, the impulse may be clearly recognized, but still experientially distinct from the doer, for example the "irresistible impulse." It might be thought that we are now discussing the Freudian id. But it must be remembered that the id is unconscious, while we are dealing here with facts of conscious experience, facts which may, but need not, refer to transphenomenal data.

Another aspect of the experienced self is the facade, the front we present to the world. We say: "I could see I was making a bad impression." The critic is here not criticizing the innermost self, but rather the impression the self makes. The facade is what JUNG calls the persona (e.g., 1953, pp. 154ff.), again a phenomenal fact. We say somebody that he is a stuffed shirt, and we mean he is all facade with little of interest beneath. Facades present as great a variety as people do. Sometimes there is a considerable contrast between the real person and the front he presents, so that we occasionally have surprises when a person's situation changes. On the whole, though, the persona is an expression of the person himself; and like other expressions, it is characteristic of him. Like our clothes, the persona serves the functions of protection and adornment.

We see another dimension of the phenomenal self in the following example: "That's an idea of mine I don't take particularly seriously." Here we see the realist in conflict with the dreamer. Some of us have a more developed dreamer than realist, while with others the realist carries more weight. For example MINNIVER, who curses the commonplace, is letting his dreamer crowd out the realist. On the other hand, THURBER's man who "doesn't know anything but facts" might well allow more scope to his dreamer. The dreamer says: "I think I'll take a trip around the world," and the realist retorts: "Fine. And what will you use for money?"

Space does not permit a continuation of this analysis, though we have by no means exhausted the phenomenally distinguishable aspects of the personality. I will only add that, although conflicts are experiences, as in some of the examples given above, these experientially distinct aspects of the self work together, on the whole, in an organized manner, with reference to each other if not always in harmony. Furthermore, they are not all experienced together. Ordinarily, it seems, we divide ourselves phenomenally into two or possibly three at any given moment. The paradigm is the dialogue, not the mob scene.

It has been indicated above that an adequate psychology of personality cannot be limited to a psychology of consciousness. Of what use, then, is this kind of phenomenological study? First of all, this is an important source of facts about the personality, most of which have been neglected by current theories. In addition, several problems will be mentioned, to whose solution this kind of material might contribute.

1. As mentioned above, conscious experience itself points to a realm of existence that is not conscious (cf. KÖHLER, 1938). Whatever their disagreements, most psychologists of

personality are agreed on a role of unconscious processes in the determination of behavior and experience. But unconscious processes, by definition, cannot be known. Whatever their nature, however, a great deal of evidence suggests that they can find expression only in behavior or by way of conscious processes; and other kinds of cooperation between conscious and unconscious processes - ways of working with mutual reference to each other - also seem indicated. In the light of such considerations, it is a plausible hypothesis that conscious functions have their unconscious counterparts. Thus any useful new categories on the side of consciousness might yield avenues of approach to corresponding unconscious processes.

2. Another possible application of this phenomenological approach is to the psychology of interpersonal relations. As a starting hypothesis, it is suggested that the phenomenally present inner figures here described may give us a clue to the kind of person an individual seeks and the kind of person he is able to relate to outside himself. Thus we may seek the outer friend - or many outer friends - in place of the inner friend who is not sufficiently developed. Of course outer friends are essential, but they cannot replace the inner friend. In fact, without some development of the inner friend, it seems that we cannot relate to the outer one. If we do not like ourselves enough, we will not believe that the other likes us; if we do not accept ourselves enough, we will not let the other accept us. To take another example, the dreamer may seek his realist outside. Don Quixote had his Sancho Panza. But unless he has the experience of an inner realist, he will probably not be able to put up with the outer realist's lack of imagination, his soberness, his concern for pedestrian realities. And the realist who has not developed his inner dreamer may search for an outer one; but when he finds him he will be distressed by his flights of fancy, his impracticality, his inability to keep his feet on the ground or to look where he is going. Again, our relations with the outer critic depend to a large extent on the development of the inner one. If our inner critic is fair, objective and judicious, we will be able to accept outer criticism when it is warranted and objective, and profit from it. If the inner critic is harsh, unfair and without humanity, we will experience outer criticism also as attack, and we will run from it or counterattack. If our inner critic is undeveloped, so that we have not had the experience of good inner criticism, the chances are that we will be able to use little of the criticism we are offered so freely from outside. Then criticism is likely to be met with exaggerated resentment, and unwarranted criticism is likely to be attributed to hostility rather than to error.

It is perhaps unnecessary to add that the nature and development of our inner critic is important not only for how we take criticism, but also for how we give it to others. [Of course in all these cases we are dealing with a circular process. Not only do our relations with outer friends, outer critics, etc. depend upon the state of the corresponding inner functions; the development of the inner friend depends on significant outer relations, that of the inner critic depends on our experience with criticism offered from the outside, etc. Since developmental problems have not been discussed here, only the former set of relations has been considered.]

It was mentioned earlier that we often tend to personify the phenomenologically distinct functions of the self. The present discussion illustrates one sense in which we literally do this: the tendency so seek in other persons those functions insufficiently developed in us. But it has also been suggested that our relations with the individuals who personify these functions depend on our own inner development.

3. To continue with the uses of the present approach: developmental problems, as well as new approaches to individual differences, suggest themselves as a consequence of our phenomenological approach.

4. The present approach suggests a partial answer to the question of how it is possible to know oneself. When we become acquainted with any outside object, we stand apart from it and are thus enabled to examine it. In the case of knowing ourselves this essential condition of objectivity - the differentiation of subject and object, of knower and known - appears to be absent. [There are other difficulties in knowing oneself that are not relevant in the present connection] But if the self is not only single, but also dual or even triple at any given time, there is indeed a differentiation of knower and known, and we have the possibility of standing apart and observing. Knowing the self can now be seen to have something in common with knowing another person. It is not the actor who knows himself, but the observer who knows the actor, the realist who knows the dreamer or the actor, etc.

Corresponding to the various divisions within the person, we come to have a number of views of ourselves. For example, the views of the inner friend and the critic are likely to be different.

This divergence of opinion provides the possibility of a more balanced view of ourselves. Or, if we are less fortunate, one such partial view may become the dominant one. Or else, compartmentalization may occur: the dreamer is allowed his freedom, for example, so long as he keeps out of the actor's way.

This paper has dealt in a preliminary way with only a single problem in the phenomenology of the personality, namely that of the experienced multiplicity of the self. Many additional problems remain to be studied. Some attention has been given to the matter of ego boundaries, the question of how much of the phenomenal world is experienced as "I" and how much as "not-I". The boundaries of the "you" or the "he" present equally interesting problems. Many aspects of the phenomenology of motivation and of the emotions likewise suggest themselves as ripe for study.

Summary

This paper has dealt with a problem in the phenomenology of the personality, namely that of the experienced multiplicity of the self. We do not experience ourselves as a single undifferentiated "I"; rather, a number of distinguishable functions are phenomenally present. Several of these were discussed briefly; the actor, observer, critic, friend, impulsive functions, facade, dreamer and realist. These act with reference to each other, even if not always in harmony, and ordinarily no more than two or possible three such aspects of the self are experienced at any given moment. In addition to calling attention to a neglected body of data about the personality, this approach seems to clarify a number of problems in the psychology of personality.

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