THE SELF AND THERAPY

Integration

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It has been a long journey. For you, for me, and for the self. The self has evolved in two senses: the self itself has probably changed over historical time, and our understanding of the self has evolved. There is a dialectical relationship between the two. If the self did indeed change in the course of history, mankind's understanding of that self necessarily changed also, and at the same time, the historical change in the understanding of the self changed the self itself. Since the self is, in at least one of its aspects, an experience, it like all experiences is partly constituted by our anticipations and our conceptualizations. As Wordsworth (1850/1910) puts it, "the world [including the self] is half-created and half-perceived." There were probably two changes in the nature of the self in the course of history. Both involved an increase in interiority, in the experiential insight that I have an inner life that is constituted by awareness and is private. Jaynes (1976) postulated the first change as an owning of what had been "experienced as voices," experienced as coming from the environment, from an animistically perceived world. That owning moved the voices of the gods from the outside to the inside. The voices were experienced in much the same manner as the schizophrenic experiences command hallucinations. Jaynes cited literary evidence in his analysis of the *Iliad,* the Bible, and primitive myth, as well as interpretations of the meanings of archaeological artifacts to support his contention that man had evolved from a bicameral creature who experienced his own subjectivity as external into a creature with a subjective mode of inner experience, usually called consciousness. He sees consciousness, experienced as self-consciousness rather than as sensory awareness, as coming into being in relatively recent historical times, and tries to demonstrate this change in his analysis of later Greek literature and the cultural products of other peoples. This increase in awareness of consciousness as self-consciousness and its resonance "within" was certainly a self-experience, and the change, if there was one, was certainly a change in the self. Now there was a me who was something more, or something different than, a body who perceived.

Socrates and Plato increased the interiority of selfhood, paradoxically by developing a notion of discovery of self interpersonally through dialogue, through what Plato called dialectic. The Delphic "Know Thyself" meant know thyself in relation to the cosmos; the self of Platonic philosophy always has

relatedness as well as inwardness. Augustine deepened this inwardness, giving it a new narrative dimension through autobiography. Separateness and the anxiety of separateness is increasing, as is the disharmony, the conflict, or the awareness of it, within the self. At least that would appear to be the historical development.

Any development has both continuity and discontinuity. Within the continuity, there are moments when something new comes into being. Rene Spitz (1965), who did some of the initial infant observational research, saw this in individual development in which new "organizers of the psyche" came into being as sort of quantum leaps during the first year of development. Something similar happens in historical development, and Taylor (1989) highlighted the next quantum leap of self, the emergence of a greater and socially more widespread sense of individuality and apartness in the 17th century. The Renaissance, the Reformation, the breakdown of belief in the great chain of being, and increased privacy all played a role in yet another increase in the interiority of self. Perhaps there is no more eloquent expression of this interiority than the Shakespearean soliloquy, which is roughly contemporaneous with these developments. The Cartesian self, the *cogito,* is, of course, the philosophical expression of this new self. Real selves live in real worlds, and I am sure that what self is, as well as how self is understood, continues to evolve and is always, at least in part, conditioned by culture, by technology, by intellectual development in general, and by ideology. The degree to which the self is a we-self rather than a me-self is indubitably contingent upon culture, and the self of the West, with its strong sense of autonomy and strong sense of alienation and estrangement, is not the only possible self-experience. Not only historically, but contemporaneously, not only across time but across space, different cultures produce different selves, although that is not to deny the indubitable commonality and universality of some aspects of self.

Whatever the historical and cultural variations in the self, there are always two poles, those of isolation and relatedness, aloneness and connectedness, to be dealt with, experientially and theoretically. Some of our theorists—Descartes, Kierkegaard, and Sartre—have emphasized almost to the point of exclusiveness the pole of aloneness. Others—Meade, Cooley, Winnicott, and to a lesser and more conflicted extent James and Heidegger—have emphasized the relatedness, the we-ness of the self. The psychoanalytic accounts of self, more than any of the others, have tried to provide a bridge between aloneness and connectedness through the notions of internalization (which is itself problematic; it's a

great word but what, if anything, does it denote?) and of object-relatedness, particularly the interpersonal and intrapsychic relationship of mother and child.

Although I am not enough of an historian to be sure, it appears that the self, as well as the understanding of the self, has changed across time, and is probably still changing, and it also appears to be the case that the self varies across contemporaneous cultures, and these variations in the self itself account for some of the controversy and disagreement among our theorists of self. However, there are also conceptual difficulties and disagreements that do not arise from the possibility of the self changing over time or being different in different places. How are we to account for these controversies? Partly on the basis of differing temperaments and basic assumptions and of the intrinsic difficulty of the questions raised by "self." However, I am not sure that these conceptual difficulties are all real. On the contrary, they are importantly semantic: theories of the self are in disagreement because theorists are talking about different things.

I do not believe the self is one thing, so that it cannot be any other. Rather, our different theorists are really talking about different things, each of which has to be considered in its own right. What are the different meanings of self? Can these semantic confusions be sorted out? I am not sure, but I am going to try. In what follows, *self* means the word *self* and self is what is denoted.

Self sometimes means a *soul,* or something like a soul.

Self *sometimes means a* substance, *or an* underlying substrate.

Self sometimes means an *activity,* self as an organizer, organizing experience, consciously or unconsciously; and self as that which performs the synthesis that gives cohesion and continuity.

Self is sometimes an *explanatory hypothesis* rather than something ontological. Self here is a construct.

Self sometimes means a *cognitive structure,* as in the psychoanalytic notion of self-representations.

Self sometimes means a *verbal activity,* here self is either an index word locating experience or a narrative.

Self sometimes means an *experience:* conscious or unconscious experience of differing degrees of cohesion, continuity and agency.

Self sometimes means a *process:* the flow of experience.

Self sometimes means something *normative,* as in "the more consciousness, the more self," "the realization of self is the task of the second half of life," or "where it was, I shall be." Here the self is something to be attained, with the theorists usually enjoining us to attain it.

Let us look at each of these meanings of *self* and see what seems useful and valid in each.

The self as soul—the Atman, the "eternal" within, the rational part of the psyche (Plato), the *Logos* within (the Stoics), and its variations in both Eastern and Western religions—is an enduring, ever-resurfacing conceptualization. I do not judge it, but neither do I choose to use the word *self* to denote any of these understandings of soul. I think it is better to make a distinction here and have a different signifier for the eternal part, if there be one, however understood, of human beings, and for the experiential interiority and individuality of human beings. The first is best denoted *soul* and the second *self.*

What about the self as substance, as an enduring substrate? I think Hume, James, the logical positivists, and Whitehead, among others, have taken care of this one. It adds nothing but mystification to our notion of self; empirically you can't find it and conceptually there are better ways to account for the continuity of self-experience.

Our next meaning of *self* is self as activity: activity as organizer or as agent. There are two notions here: one, the self as doer, as a center of initiative, and two, the self as organizer. I think both are useful and meaningful uses of *self.* We do experience ourselves, one hopes, as agents capable of initiating action, quite apart from whether or not we in reality have free will. But to call this agency the self, rather than to see it as an aspect of self otherwise construed, seems limiting. The other meaning of *self* as activity is self as synthesis and synthesizer. This meaning seems highly salient. Here *self* means both the organizing and the organizer. The experience of continuity, of ongoingness, of going-on-being, is accounted for by it. How the self brings this about is, however, far from clear. Locke's attributing this

synthesis to memory makes some sense, but his insistence that this task is exclusively a function of consciousness is untenable. For all the mystery here, I do opt for the legitimacy of self as activity in both of the above senses. However it does it, self *is* self-constituting—in a sense, the self *selfs*—and it provides us with our sense of continuity in time. Ontologically there may be something illusionary here; experientially there is not.

The self as explanatory hypothesis is up for grabs. I can see no reason why a thinker cannot use self as a theoretical construct as long as he or she is clear about what is being done. Often theorists are not, and there is a confusion in a given thinker between construct and something substantive or something experienced. Both Kant's transcendental unity of the apperception (I have trouble with this phrase because I always think of an Isaac Bashevis Singer short story in which an overly serious, rather pompous, scholarly recluse is in a rage because the typesetters have mixed up his manuscript for a philosophical journal with copy for a lurid tabloid, and "The janitor got drunk and raped his daughter" appears where "the Transcendental unity of the apperception" should appear. Perhaps I identify) and James's Pure Ego, in one of its aspects, are such explanatory hypotheses, or at least they can be understood as such. They are postulates of thought. The "I think" that accompanies (not necessarily consciously) every thought (act of mentation) is a construct. Hume's account of the unfindability of the self is here irrelevant. This self isn't an empirical discoverable; it is an explanatory hypothesis, and according to Kant a logically necessary one. As such, it needs to be judged pragmatically and instrumentally. Does it help "save the phenomena," that is, give an account of what needs to be explained? In this case, it does: both Kant's transcendental unity and James's pure ego work, as long as they are understood as being what they are rather than as thinglike substances. Other uses of *self* as explanatory hypotheses need to be clarified and judged for their utility on a case-by-case basis. Here is one place where semantic clarification of *self* really helps.

Self meaning cognitive structure makes sense to me. It certainly isn't the only useful way of regarding self, but the various accounts of self-representation, their development out of innate templates, out of undifferentiation, or out of symbiosis, in interaction with the environment, resonate. They too can be regarded as theoretical constructs rather than as entities, but either way they entail activity, processing, assimilation, and sorting of experience into me and not-me. The empirical psychological notion of the self-concept is less dynamic, but also makes sense. *Self* as a cognitive structure is a necessary

feature of any account of self. Here the inadequacy of Locke's reliance on consciousness becomes even more clear; perhaps memory is the synthesizer, but self-representations are not always conscious, yet they always influence behavior, affect, and mood. Here, for once, we have empirical evidence.

Self meaning a verbal activity makes perfect sense. I have no problem with the usage, but I do have trouble with the positivists' exclusivity when they maintain that this is all self meaningfully means and that all other usages are meaningless. Self can usefully be understood as *I* used as an index word that locates and sorts out experience into mine and thine, but other usages are clearly possible and meaningful.

That self is also that which is constituted by an internal monologue—by the story I tell myself about who I am, who I was, and how who I was became who I am—is indubitable. We all do it, and self is indeed constituted, or, following Stern, one of our selves is constituted, by this narrative, this secondary revision of the dream that is life. In fact, there is an infinitude of narratives I can tell myself about myself, and one of the most profound ways in which I can change myself is to change the story I tell myself about myself. Psychotherapy is importantly about facilitating changes in this narration by making more material available for storytelling and by changing perspective.

Self meaning experience, or an experience, is to me the single most salient connotation of self. It is less problematic, less metaphysical, and closest to what is actually lived than any other meaning of *self.* The trouble with some accounts of self is that they are actually talking about the self as experience but confuse it with self as something substantive, freezing and concretizing experience. We have reviewed many accounts of self as experience, some emphasizing anxiety and dread and some emphasizing connectedness, centeredness, and ongoingness. How adequate any account of self as experience is, is an empirical question.

Self can mean process; self as experience and self as process overlap. *Self* is usefully understood as process; many conceptual difficulties in accounting for the self come from mistakenly looking at it in cross-section and wondering how these slices connect and flow into one another, when the flow is the actuality and the slice is an abstraction. Both James's "stream," in which each succeeding segment encompasses the preceding segments and represents all the others, and Whitehead's "objective

immortality," in which the past is prehended by the present, are illuminating accounts of the self as process. There is no reason there cannot be other accounts of self so understood.

Finally, we come to *self* meaning an injunction to value or do something, a normative statement. I have no quarrel with this usage of *self,* except when a thinker confuses *is* with *ought.* Kierkegaard, Jung, Heidegger, Sartre, and perhaps Freud do this, although some of them deny that that is what they are doing. I too believe that the integration and owning of that which is denied, repressed, disavowed, or projected is desirable and that increasing one's sense of continuity, centeredness, initiative, ongoingness, self-awareness, cohesion, and differentiation is desirable. In fact, my professional activity is to help people move in these directions. But to denote these value judgments *self* is only to cause confusion. *Is* and *ought* are best kept conceptually apart.

Our understanding of self is undergoing yet another revolution; there is currendy a very active pursuit of a new understanding of the self through cognitive psychology, neurophysiology, and cybernetics. Exactly what notion of self will emerge from these new sciences and new conceptualizations is not yet clear; however, there is probably something exciting in the horizon of our understandings of self.

Dennett (1991), a leading cybernetic theorist, makes a first approximation to such an understanding when he defines self as a biological self that is prewired to distinguish between self and world, inside and outside, and a "narrative center of gravity," which is an abstraction in the same sense as a physical center of gravity is an abstraction. Dennett's center of gravity self is reminiscent of Stern's averaged selfrepresentations. It is the center of multiple narratives that *spin us.* Dennett is anxious to avoid a ghost in the machine that does the narrating. Rather, his notion is that of multiple perspectives generating multiple narratives—narratives without a narrator. So to speak, words create the self. His is a formulation that is, as he says, counterintuitive.

I turn from the theoretical to the personal. Certain kinds of experience increase my sense of ongoingness, of continuity in time, of being the same self now as I was then. I enjoy those experiences; they feel good. I value them and find that experiencing myself more integrally is intrinsically worthwhile. Writing this book gave me such an experience; it integrated many of my interests, and much

of what often feels like disconnected aspects of my life, disconnected over time and disconnected in the moment, came together. So many disparate activities, so many episodes and experiences stretching back at least to adolescence integrated and felt both one and mine as I pursued this task. Certain kinds of aesthetic experiences, the ones I go back to again and again, also give me a feeling of cohesion and continuity. Rereading or reseeing Shakespeare, Chekov, and Freud; rehearing Beethoven, Mozart and Verdi; and looking at certain pictures gives me the feeling that I am the same person, that I have been here before, and that I have endured, and at the same time give me the sense that I have changed, that I am understanding, hearing, or seeing differently. I like that feeling. The last time I felt it really strongly was looking at a Rembrandt self-portrait in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was wonderful—both the portrait and the sense that I was the same person I was the first time I visited the Philadelphia Museum of Art at 9 or 10, but somehow different. Nature can give me the same feeling. Walking in the mountains, in certain moods especially, gives me an indelible feeling of being one with the child who wandered the hills of upstate New York. That too feels good. All of these experiences are self-conscious ones, yet I wonder about the paradox that I am, and I am sure that you are, as well, most myself, most centered, most there, when I am least self-conscious. I know this is so, but I don't understand it. It is a mystery. Perhaps the self-conscious sensations through memory of continuity and sameness induced by art, by nature, by a feeling, or by a person have to do with ongoingness, with development through time, while the un-self-conscious feeling of being here now has to do with uniqueness of the emergent moment, with the eternal now. I value them both.

If certain kinds of self-experience seem good to me, can I provide them for my patients? How does psychotherapy strengthen the self? I believe that everything that happens in dynamic psychotherapy contributes to a better self-experience: derepression and integration into consciousness of the disassociated, disavowed, or projected aspects of self increase its integrity and extensiveness; putting people in touch with their feelings increases their sense of continuity because affect is an experience that remains essentially the same throughout life; the holding environment of the therapeutic session and "holding" by the therapist give the patient the experience of being treated as integral, bounded, ongoing, worthwhile, alive, and capable of initiative, all which is potentially internalizable, just as it ideally should have been early in life; and finally, the construction of new and more comprehensive narratives about self enriches self and increases the capacity of the self to synthesize. The new memories uncovered

by de-repression provide new material with which the narrator enhances continuity. Here *self* is normative, a decision that all of the above is valuable and worthwhile.

What finally have I come to believe about self? Self is *developmental*; self is *emergent*, emergent from an innately programmed template and from experiences of merger; it comes out of a preselfhood; self is *affective;* self is *not body but not disembodied;* self is *conflictual,* in conflict with various components of itself and with the environment, but not only conflictual; self is *object-relational,* coming into being through interaction with others and always mediated by such interactions; and self is *constitutive,* a synthesizer and a synthesis.

Self is experienced as, and indeed is, an interaction between innate potential and environmental response. Feelings of aliveness, cohesion, agency, continuity (ongoingness), and self-worth come from both within and without. I agree with Winnicott's and Kohut's beliefs that the feelings of being coherent, enduring, and worthwhile, indeed of existing, come, at least in part, from the outside. I become a self by being treated as a self. I learn who and what I am by the ways in which I am treated. Self is both organizer and organization. It always has an affective quality; it is never purely conceptual; it encompasses verbal and preverbal levels;

it is more or less consistent and coherent (the degree of which can only be empirically determined); it is unconscious as well as preconscious, and less frequently conscious; it is a construct and a synthesis; it is a fiction (narrative) and a reality (experience); it is a dialectic of conflict and reconciliation with others and with itself carried out by projection, identification, and introjection; it is partly dependent on memory; it evolves over a lifetime; and it is subject to injury. If you wish to "tune in next week," those injuries, narcissistic wounds, and their treatment will be the subject of my next book.