

Self-Analysis

PSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL

I believe that as an individual I lack a full and truthful knowledge of the person I am. As a consequence, it could be said, that I am missing a part of my being. This 'missing' part of myself is not really absent, it is simply not known truthfully. It is known not 'in itself', but by its effects.

"Jesus said, 'That which you have will save you if you bring it forth from yourselves. That which you do not have within you will kill you if you do not have it within you.'"
[*"The Gospel of Thomas", 70*]

Fundamentally, the effects of this 'missing' part are the methods, strategies, and tactics employed to *not* know the truth about this missing part. Thus, a range of avoidance techniques will be used to turn conscious attention from within a person, where the truth about oneself is to be found, outwards to the 'world'.

Thus, a person will look for distractions to avoid looking within, in such things as reading, listening to the radio, watching television, performing some task (useful or otherwise), playing sport and games, or any of a whole host of 'external' occupations. There is nothing wrong in these occupations except where they are a substitute for a truthful knowledge of oneself.

"'The Kingdom of God is within you' says Our Lord. Turn to the Lord with all your heart, forsake this sorry world, and your soul shall find rest. Learn to turn from worldly things, and give yourself to spiritual things, and you will see the Kingdom of God come within you."[†]
[Thomas À Kempis, *"The Imitation of Christ"*, Book 2, Chap 1]

Without the external world to distract us we become 'bored'. Boredom is simply an anxiety caused by a desire to avoid looking at the truth within.

As well as looking to the external world to distract us there are other effects of lacking a truthful knowledge of oneself. Instead of finding value and fulfilment from *being* oneself, one's worth is measured by comparison with others. Thus, one may, at different times, feel inferior or superior to other people. Inferiority and superiority are two sides of the same coin and stem from a lack of true knowledge about oneself. We project outwards those things that we cannot face within.

"Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but you do not notice the log in your own eye?"
[Matthew 7:3]

The *good news* is that this situation is resolvable. It is hard to resolve, but not impossible.

[†] For 'God' / 'Lord' / 'Christ' / 'Father' / 'Holy Spirit' read 'Truth' / 'True Self'

PHILOSOPHY

In order to gain the missing part of oneself, one must search for it, know it truthfully, and accept it, taking responsibility for the person one is. The missing part of a person consists of thoughts and feelings. One must come to know these hidden thought patterns and feelings, and accept them as part of oneself. Self-knowledge is all-important, as is a thirst for Truth and a desire to have best for oneself no matter how much suffering this may entail.

"Knock on yourself as upon a door and walk upon yourself as on a straight road. For if you walk on the road, it is impossible for you to go astray... Open the door for yourself that you may know what is... Whatever you will open for yourself, you will open."

[*"Teachings of Silvanus"*, See Elaine Pagels, *"The Gnostic Gospels"*, p136]

"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

[Matthew 7: 7-10]

"Jesus said, 'Recognise what is in your sight, and that which is hidden from you will become plain to you. For there is nothing hidden that will not become manifest.'"

[*"The Gospel of Thomas"*, 5]

One is able to discern the truth about oneself despite the fact that one can also have a false conception of reality. The technique of self-analysis relies on the fact that one can uncover and challenge the erroneous image of oneself by discovering hidden thoughts and emotions. It is important to be truthful. It is only by truthfully acknowledging that you are far away from your goal that you will know when you have reached your destination.

"Similarly, consider how the soul is a living spirit, immortal and invisible, with power in itself to see and know supreme Truth and to love supreme Good, which is God. Once you have grasped this, you will have some understanding of yourself".

[Walter Hilton, *"The Ladder of Perfection"*, Book 2, Chap 30]

The principle of self-analysis is to become one's True Self, an undivided person, a whole person, a holy person, by revealing the falsity of one's self-image. The changes brought about by self-analysis are not simply the removal of certain character blemishes, but a change in the *state* of mind of a person.

"...a man should stand and be so free of himself, that is from selfhood, I-hood, me, mine and the like, that in all things, he should no more regard himself, and his own, than if he did not exist."

[*"Theologia Germanica"*, Chap 15, See *"Mysticism"*, p58, p296]

The aim is not to 'beat oneself up', or to make oneself miserable. The aim is to discover one's True Self, both for its own sake and because it is the only thing that will make one truly happy.

Discovering the truth about oneself will entail challenging any thoughts and feelings that you are in any way superior to anyone else. Challenging these thoughts in an honest way will, for

a while at least, lead you to believe you are the worst of all people, and inferior to others. The aim of exposing these false beliefs about oneself is to remove them, and feeling inferior is the necessary antidote to the original, deep-seated feelings of insecurity, masked by thoughts of superiority.

"He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be the last of all and servant of all.'"

[Mark 9:35]

These are not *forced* thoughts and feelings, falsely generated to 'get into Heaven' or to elevate oneself with spiritual pride. These are genuine beliefs about one's own sorry state brought about by looking truthfully at oneself.

On a higher level, believing the person you think you are (or at least, thought you were) to be the worst of all creatures gives you a great deal of self-respect. This is respect for the person you are becoming by exposing and removing your erroneous self-image. You become a new person, or are 'born-again', by ditching the old self. The truth is that you are not better or worse than anyone else, you are yourself, valuable in your own right and not justified by comparison with anyone, or anything else.

"Consequently, he considers himself equal to everyone, maintaining his own independence of anyone else's authority: 'And he is patient with everyone; he makes himself equal to everyone, and he also separates himself from them.'"

[Elaine Pagels, "The Gnostic Gospels", p139]

In order to expose all untrue images one has about oneself it is necessary to remove all distractions that prevent true self-knowledge. Thus the saints always insist on the necessity of removing all attachments to sense objects, whether they be people or things.

"One can hardly read a page of the writings of the great contemplatives without finding a constant reiteration of the necessity of renunciation, detachment, and self-mortification, if any progress towards illumination and union is to be made."

[F.C.Happold, "Mysticism", p58]

Self-denial is the key. Deny the false self all it needs to survive and it will die. This will allow the True Self to take over; a state that I believe can be called the 'Kingdom of Heaven'.

"Jesus said, 'If those who lead you say to you, 'See, the Kingdom is in the sky', then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea', then the fish will precede you. Rather, the Kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will realise that it is you who are the sons of the living Father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty.'"

[*"The Gospel of Thomas"*, 3]

THE TECHNIQUE

The process of self-analysis has the following stages:

1. Identify some thoughts and feelings that cause you problems. They may be thoughts that make you feel embarrassed, desires that look externally for satisfaction and are thus never completely satisfied, feelings of inferiority or superiority which demean you, or anything which you find difficult to accept within.

It is important not to bite off more than you can chew. Thus, to start off with, choose something fairly innocuous, such as something that causes you slight embarrassment. The really difficult emotionally charged aspects of one's self can only be dealt with by progressing from the less intractable sources. This may take a considerable length of time and this task should be considered a life's work.

2. I always go through a stage of preparation. This is where I consider the particular aspect I want to work on fairly superficially. It does not dominate my time. I do the various things that I would normally do. However, it is in my mind that there is something I must work on. At the same time I judge just how much emotional content there is to the particular aspect of myself that I will be dealing with. You can become quite skilled at judging the emotional content of something by monitoring such things as breathing, and other physiological signs.
3. When you feel you are ready to tackle the problem the next stage is to try to 'look at' the particular aspect of yourself.[†]

What you will find is that you will 'push away' what is unpleasant to 'look at'. This is where the desire for Truth is important. Without the desire for Truth you will not persist in the process. The last thing in the world that you want to do is actually to look at the cause of your unhappiness. So long as you have an honest, sincere, and genuine desire to know the Truth and are prepared to suffer the price of gaining it, then you will succeed in this process.

You will try to escape the pain and discomfort by resorting to the habitual techniques of distraction. However, if you do not succumb to these temptations and instead persist in the process you will slowly gain a degree of 'self-mastery'.

"... by withdrawing his joy from sensible things, a man is restored from the distraction into which he had fallen through excessive use of his senses. He becomes recollected in God and conserves the spirit and virtues he has acquired. These virtues increase and the soul advances."

[St. John of the Cross, "The Ascent of Mount Carmel", Book 3, Chap 26 (2)]

After a period of sustained effort you will feel you have gained some hold of the issues you are confronting and they will not appear so big and insurmountable. Once you can feel some progress you will be less inclined to give up. You may also experience a degree of momentum where it is easier to carry on struggling against these forces than it is to give up and go back to your old ways.

[†] When I need to concentrate on the issue in hand I normally sit in a reasonably comfortable chair with my hands either side of my face. After some time concentrating I will sit quietly, or do some light physical work, whilst still thinking about the issues I am working on.

4. With continued effort you will suddenly realise that you are able to 'look at' the particular aspect 'full in the face'. The particular thing that you concentrated on is no longer a problem to you. You will have unlinked the emotional content. The thought patterns will still exist but they will be devoid of the previous emotional content.

"For the sake of further clarity in this matter, we ought to note that this purgative and loving knowledge or divine light we are speaking of, has the same effect on a soul that fire has on a log of wood. The soul is purged and prepared for union with the divine light just as the wood is prepared for transformation into the fire. Fire, when applied to wood, first dehumidifies it, dispelling all moisture and making it give off any water it contains. Then it gradually turns the wood black, makes it dark and ugly, and even causes it to emit a bad odor. By drying out the wood, the fire brings to light and expels all those ugly and dark accidents¹ which are contrary to fire. Finally, by heating and enkindling it from without, the fire transforms the wood into itself and makes it as beautiful as it is itself."

[St. John of the Cross, "The Dark Night", Book 2, Chap 10 (1)]

Around about this time you may feel sad for not having resolved the problem sooner. After a short time even the thought patterns burn themselves out. You are then left with the thought: "What was all the fuss about? It was not that difficult."

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

[Matthew 11:28-30]

¹ In philosophy, an 'accident' is a quality which is not essential to the individual or thing. Aristotle regarded 'being musical' as accidental, but that 'being rational' and 'being an animal' are not. [See Ted Honderich, "The Oxford Companion to Philosophy"]

Fundamental characteristics of one's True Self are essential; fundamental characteristics of one's false self are accidental. Thus, 'ugly and dark accidents which are contrary to fire' are corruptions of one's True Self that are manifested as characteristics of one's false self. In their pure (non-corrupt) form they are essential characteristics of one's True Self (that is represented here as 'fire').

THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

This spiritual journey is depicted in various ways.

St. Teresa of Avila likens it to watering a garden. At the beginning a person draws the water up from a well. This is hard and laborious. In the next stage a device is used to get the water. This makes the job easier. After this stage the task gets easier as the garden is watered from a flowing stream or spring. The final stage is where the rain falls and there is no effort required at all. [See "Mysticism", pp 342 – 354]

Although this is a description of the whole spiritual journey, it is also, in macrocosm, representative of each small step.

St. John of the Cross draws a picture of a mountain to be climbed. [St. John of the Cross, "The Ascent of Mount Carmel"]

In Zen Buddhism there are the Ox pictures. [See Katsuki Sekida, "Zen Training", pp223 – 236]

Spiritual writings often look hard and unpleasant, written by people who want to make you miserable. This is not so. They want to liberate you. They are hard and uncompromising because the reality of this life is that you cannot gain freedom, from all that enslaves you, without going through pain and discomfort.

*"To reach satisfaction in all
desire its possession in nothing.
To come to possess all
desire the possession of nothing.
To arrive at being all
desire to be nothing.
To come to the knowledge of all
desire the knowledge of nothing.
To come to the pleasure you have not
you must go by a way in which you enjoy not.
To come to the knowledge you have not
you must go by a way in which you know not.
To come to the possession you have not
you must go by a way in which you possess not.
To come to be what you are not
you must go by a way in which you are not."*

[St John of the Cross, "The Ascent of Mount Carmel", Book 1, Chap 13 (11)]

The end result is good and pleasurable, a deep respect for Truth and yourself.

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