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The Self, Emptiness, and Awareness

Decisions Beyond the Ego

Abstract: *In this exploration of self-identity, I argue that the self is not a standalone entity but an integral part of a broader consciousness. Deep meditation reveals the self as a construct beyond egoistic confines, interlinked with the external world and others' experiences. Decisions arise from an awareness that transcends individual ego, suggesting that our sense of self is an inexhaustible center of dynamic consciousness rather than an ultimate emptiness.*

Who are we? Where are we going? *Why* are we going there? These kinds of questions have been with us for thousands of years. And somehow they all seem to be related to what we call the self: the feeling of being a specific, distinctive individual. Whether I am doing something for myself or for someone else, *with* others or alone, it is always *me* who is acting or acquiescing.

But opinions differ as to who or what this "I" actually is. We can see our face in the mirror, but not the original. We can think about our mind, but not about the one who thinks. We may be able to switch between the observer and the observed, but obviously we can never grasp the whole. This difficulty, the so-called infinite regress of the observer, has led some philosophers to abandon the constant back and forth and to claim that we are simply who we are. Period. They speak, for example, of the self as a "blind spot" in consciousness, the point that cannot become aware of itself and yet is always present no matter what point of observation we take.

In fact, in deep meditation we can experience a fundamental identity, the sensation of which is independent of any external perception and remains intact even after meditation. Its most popular interpretation is that we do not have a self at all, but that everything we think we have is just a construction of our restless mind. If we *existed* independently of all perceptible structures, we could not "possess" a *distinguishable* identity. Have we found the philosopher's stone?

It is certainly true, for example, that we make decisions without reflecting each time on whether the realization of this or that possibility would be good *for us*. We act out of a free awareness of the whole situation, which includes our more or less authentic sense of identity. This situation includes subconscious impulses and conscious ideals, as well as mutually exclusive alternatives, activities from other sources, and... But wait! According to the above interpretation, *others*, i.e. differences, should basically not exist, at best illusions of differences. But then why do we *decide* at all? Why don't we sit down and freeze? Or evaporate into emptiness? Does the illusion have a meaning?

We experience a world of physical and mental figures that behave quite idiosyncratically. The individual also constantly chooses different situations, thus changing the *individual experience* to a certain extent, but within the framework of this change he believes to remain a constant. He experiences a *center*. But this center is at least interwoven with the differences of the world, reflects them and is reflected in them. In this way it experiences "itself" or a *concrete* self - and all the more richly, the more (mirror) images it appears in. A core emerges from the unconscious, which is circumscribed by an increasing number of conscious focuses. A self *without* this would actually be nothing...

Please note that we have not yet moved beyond the immediate relationship between self and environment. We are still embedded in individual experience. Rather, the self *condenses* within a mutable whole.

Going one step further, the self can observe itself from different points of view. It is only now that classical self-consciousness, reflective self-observation, develops.

Strictly speaking, however, I summarize the focuses of consciousness I have passed through as a dynamic diversity, as *individuals*, in the form of an awareness of different centers of experience *culminating* in my present one. I therefore perceive a hierarchy of attitudes between which I have chosen or can choose (again). I am only self-aware of my individual peak position in it, more of a point reached than an object.

We can also extend this awareness to "distant" individuals by putting ourselves in their points of view and returning from them; we see through the eyes of our fellow creatures and integrate their view into a new one of our own. Such a perception cannot be primarily ego-oriented, since it is *composed* of the worlds of experience of others - albeit to an ultimately more diffuse result. What causes harm to others, for example, is directly harmful to one's own sense of well-being. Or to put it another way: We recognize subliminal aspects of ourselves in others.

We have thus attained an attitude toward reality that frees us from the much-maligned egoism-without in any way denying our individuality. Even though the individual may at some point break out of his previous range of motion, he does not lose himself. He merely recognizes that his individuality has deeper roots than he had assumed. Can such roots lead nowhere? Hardly. Yet it is equally implausible to speculate that they will lead to absolutely solid ground. Like the path on which we learn, the dynamics of the focus of consciousness should continue into the subconscious (not unconscious) interior. There it may coagulate into an object or form an infinitesimal peak - we certainly do not encounter a final bottom. In this respect, the theorists of the ultimate emptiness of the self are right. But emptiness without structured experience and *essential* awareness is meaningless.

Can awareness explain why we pursue certain goals? If we are not necessarily fixated on an objective ego, what drives us? Where do the impulses and ideals we follow come from?

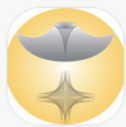
As I explained in my book [How Consciousness Creates Reality. The Full Version](#), they arise from the dynamic interlocking of innumerable attitudes of consciousness that long for an addition to their always one-sided experience that enriches both the totality and each individual. This loving value fulfillment (Jane Roberts) is its own purpose and can certainly include an ego object as a symbol of one's own individuality. It is only when this ego claims dominance that it disproportionately restricts awareness, distorts the original impulses, and sometimes transforms disappointed expectations of love into hatred.

Let us summarize: The self is not necessarily an object, but the perceived center of a series of individual standpoints in which it transcends itself. Accordingly, we choose certain ways to experience ourselves in new ways. However, if these choices are egoistically motivated, we *limit* our goal and thus ourselves. The individual is not limited by nature and certainly not empty: it is inexhaustible.

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