

David Bohm

Self and Self-Image

with Michael Mendizza

Assumed Reality

B: The problem with the self - there is an assumption or concept which, if it were real, would be extremely important, would be the highest value of all things. Just think of the word, 'self,' its basic meaning is the quintessence, the essence of all essences and that would, of course, have supreme value. Now, if we assume there is a self, this stirs up the whole mind and brain inside so it feels, just from that assumption, that something is going on inside which corresponds to this assumed self and gives it an apparent reality. Now, once it has been assumed that this self is real and not merely an image, its attributed reality, it takes first priority and everything else comes second, so everything is distorted.

For example, if somebody tells you that the self is bad, this will create a disturbing feeling inside this image and therefore there will be a very powerful move to change that, to falsify, to say instead that you are good, as an example - this sort of distortion becomes universal.

B: The main point is that we don't really understand the nature of our thought process; we're not aware of how it works and it's really disrupting, not only our society and our individual lives but also the way the brain and nervous system operate, making us unhealthy or perhaps even somewhat damaging the system.

Krishnamurti recognizes that thought, rational, orderly, factual thought, such as in doing proper science, is valuable but the kind of thought that he has in mind is self-centered thought.

At first sight one might wonder why self-centered thought is so bad. If the self were really there then perhaps it would correct to center on the self because the self would be so important, but if the self is a kind of illusion, at least the self as we know it, then to center our thought on something illusory which is assumed to have supreme importance is going to disrupt the whole process and it will not only make thought about yourself wrong, it will make thought about everything wrong so that thought becomes a dangerous and destructive instrument all around.

Powerful Defense Mechanism

B: Because this illusory self, which is really an image, is regarded as all-important, whenever anything about it appears to be threatened, the brain develops a very powerful defense mechanism to try to prevent this from taking place. You can see this in an elementary way if somebody says, "You're an idiot," the image of yourself as an idiot is painful and there is an automatic response to accept assumptions proving you're not an idiot and somebody else is an idiot, but that's a minor point; the major point is that if somebody says something that threatens the reality of this whole structure itself, then it's as if your life were at stake, the brain--all stops are pulled out and the brain responds with the instinct of self-preservation, it absolutely prevents you from considering it.

It may just dull the mind or transfer attention somewhere else, or make you forget about it or make you find yourself thinking of something else--any number of defenses. And, you see, it's clear that when somebody like Krishnamurti comes along and says that this is an illusion or this isn't that real, that this defense mechanism is going to be provoked into action and this, then, becomes the principal difficulty in listening to the communication.

B: Part of the defense is to make us unconscious of it. The major form of defense is simply concealment of what's going on, because if we could see what's going on it would be obvious it's an illusion; it's like seeing through the trick of the magician. So all the ways I've described, such as forgetting, and zapping your mind, or jumping to something else, are modes of concealment. You may also conceal by just denying that it's so, and asserting something else. Therefore, we are not conscious, certainly of the defense mechanism, because this process of concealment itself has to be concealed in order to make it effective, and therefore, the major part of defense consists in making the whole process unconscious.

B: Krishnamurti is suggesting, proposing, even saying that the self is not the source of thought but rather, thought is the source of the self.

Now that may seem paradoxical to our ordinary experience, but at least we can make it reasonable. You see, we are saying that the assumption of the self creates, inside, a kind of image of the self, corresponding to that assumption, with great power. That image is attributed reality and (you) get a feeling that it's real; therefore you assume the assumption that there the self was the thinker, the source of thought, and there is that which he is thinking about and besides that there is the thought which is produced by the thinker, which refers to what he is thinking about, right?

Therefore, the things which really are solidly existent in that view are the thinker and what he is thinking about; thought is a very ethereal, almost non-existent thing. But, what is being suggested instead is that the thought process is real, it's going on in the brain and nervous system, and this thought process contains in it the assumption of a thinker who produces thought, so it is, as it were, producing a television program of a thinker producing thought and the mind is watching that program so intently that it takes that to be the reality. Therefore, thought now says, "I am very modest; I am serving the thinker," but in fact it is serving itself because it is always - it produces this thinker and then does what this thinker wants.

Irrational Attachments

B. When I first met Krishnamurti's work in *First and Last Freedom*, one of the things that most intrigued me was his statement, the observer and the observed are one and this reminded me of my work in quantum theory where the observing instrument as observer cannot be separated.

Later I could see that that meant really the same as the thinker and the thought are one, but what also seemed important to me was that Krishnamurti was looking at things in a rational, factual, orderly way, just as in science and it seemed to me that that was very crucial to apply this orderly way to the psychological question. In fact, he was looking at thought, itself, in this way and looking at the self in this way.

I had not ever seen this done before and I thought it was crucial because up 'til now I had thought the self was the one thing you could never look at in such an orderly, rational, factual way and that this was the key to all our problems. So that is really what, as a scientist, attracted me to K.

One point is that he brought in the notion that the religious mind, meaning by religion, I think, the emphasis on wholeness and he said the scientific mind can be part of the religious mind - the scientific approach - and I said, if you could do this then you would have removed the principal objection to religious which was that it tended to be very irrational and attached to all sorts of arbitrary preferences of the self.

Conditioning

B. Krishnamurti talked a great deal about conditioning and he admitted that certain kinds of conditioning are necessary, such as learning to do things, but there is a kind of conditioning around the self which is extremely strong because it contains assumptions of absolute necessity. You see, the self is considered to be something supremely important and whatever it needs is regarded as absolutely necessary, which means that it cannot be otherwise, it cannot yield and therefore it takes first priority and pushes everything aside, including even the requirement that thoughts should be correct and true and therefore it immediately starts self-deception going and that is why thought becomes dangerous, because if thought deceives itself it is really very dangerous.

B. Krishnamurti avoided the word "I" as much he could because the word "I" means this entity which is all important, and so on. The mere use of the word must already be associated with that meaning, unconsciously and powerfully, so it already sets all the machinery in motion in the listener and therefore he has got another job which is to watch out for all that machinery which gets in his way, so in order to help, I think Krishnamurti tried to minimize the use of the word, "I," using instead the words, "the speaker," so that this machinery wouldn't be set in motion, so you could listen more effectively.

Thinking & Thought

B. Thinking is something that takes place that is not entirely automatic, it may have some fresh content, but thought, you can see thought is the past participle of 'to think,' you see. That suggested, of the past. I say that basically, while you are thinking you make assumptions. Each assumption implies a disposition to act. For example, if you assume you are walking on a level road, your body is disposed accordingly and if you see pot holes you've got to change.

These assumptions and their dispositions are recorded, as on a tape, and when some new situation comes up that record acts, you see, with the disposition so that in reality you are hardly conscious that it is happening. And it reacts with the reaction that comes from the past which may not be appropriate in the present--it may or it may not.

Now, thinking tries to take the actual fact into account and I could give here the example of Newton--in the time of Newton, people had developed a lot of evidence that the ancient view - there was an ancient view that celestial matter is different from earthly matter.

There was a lot of evidence had accumulated that they are not different, but people still went on taking it for granted, unconsciously, in their minds that they were different so nobody asked, for example, why doesn't the moon fall, because it would stay up in the sky where it belongs, you see.

Now, Newton, according to the legend, was watching the apple fall and suddenly the question must have occurred, why doesn't the moon fall, so that freed him from the assumption that the two forms of matter are different and from then on he could just do reasonable thinking; he could think that all matter is the same. If the apple falls, the moon falls, everything must be falling and there must be universal gravitation. Now that was a new thought that had never been thought before, you see. Of course, people could - from then on it became thought and anybody could just use it, right?

Is Thought Intelligence

B. I would say that thought in itself is not intelligent because it is restricted to being the response of past assumptions and dispositions that may no longer be relevant and those assumptions and dispositions are not capable of questioning themselves because they are rather like a computer program and something more is needed to become aware that the program is inadequate and to question it.

We could call that intelligence. I don't think science has much to say about that today; some people are talking about artificial intelligence but that's something they hope for in the future. I think Krishnamurti is suggesting that intelligence is of a different quality from thought, does not even originate in the brain; it originates somehow in some very subtle reality which we cannot locate in space or time (but it) acts within the brain to do these - to actually - to -- one of its actions is to question the assumptions and dispositions that we are - in thought, right?

B. I think he meant that the action of intelligence really acts physically on the brain cells to remove the destructive conditioning. Let me remind you that this conditioning around the self is very powerful and it leaves a real physical change in the brain.

As Krishnamurti put it, this takes root in the brain so that, for example, that even though you may see that it's foolish and false, it still goes on, it has taken root, it just doesn't go. And the way we would understand that is to say some change in the brain cells has occurred so it's not enough just to see it's false; and the ordinary thought process, or thinking process cannot handle this because it is far too difficult--it can't get at the structure of the brain because it's controlled by the structure anyway.

Krishnamurti said that this action of creative intelligence can really touch the brain cells physically and we could think of it removing the program, you see and leaving the brain free of that kind of conditioning which is destructive.

The Nature of Insight

B. The word, 'insight' is hard to define, but I would think an action of creative intelligence and the way I would understand that, if you think of awareness and attention, the attention, in a way, gathers the whole condition of the brain and focuses it in a form in which creative intelligence can act and creative intelligence then acts toward that condition, not on the image but on the brain cells themselves.

It's like saying that if there's a fault in the television set, you don't act on the image but you act on the set. Now, the insight is then both the perception of that state of the brain and the action toward it, which are not separate and this insight can then be said to alter the brain cells and remove the kind of conditioning that is around the self-centered thought.

B. I think the ultimate purpose of K's work was stated very early in his life in his work, which was to free humanity from the destructive conditioning we've been talking about; that is, this conditioning around the self-centered thought is really an enslavement to absurdity, to destruction, to unhappiness, sorrow, and no other kind of freedom means anything unless we are free from that. And, therefore, I think that he felt that once man was free from that then the way would be open to creative unfoldment in all sorts of directions.

B. I think that human consciousness is basically not different from what it was in the stone age, except that civilization has made life very complex so that that kind of mentality is no longer adequate and that is our crises. Whereas hostile impulses in the Stone Age were not terribly dangerous, now they can destroy everything, you know. Also, we are in danger of ecological destruction, many other kinds and in addition we have tremendous conflicts going on in human consciousness because of the - this mentality is not adequate to the situation in which human consciousness has itself brought about, so it cannot be solved within this old form of consciousness and some radical change is needed and I think we are saying the basic cause of the trouble is this conditioning around the self-centered thought which is so irrational. What we need now is a highly rational, orderly way of thought to organize society. That would be a tremendous change in consciousness.

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